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RENDÓK: A YOUTH SECRET LANGUAGE IN SUDAN

RENDÓK: UNA LENGUA SECRETA DE LOS JÓVENES EN SUDÁN

STEFANO MANFREDI*

Abstract

This paper aims at providing a linguistic overview of Rendók, an Arabic-based secret language developed by the urban youth of Northern and Central Sudan. Generally speaking, Rendók does not represent a coherent linguistic entity; it rather constitutes a large set of encrypting strategies that vary a great deal in accord to the sociolinguistic background of its speakers. Nonetheless, in the last twenty years a “standard” Rendók has gradually developed by resorting to metathesis and other formalized morphophonemic procedures. The present study is focused on this heretofore un-described countrywide variety of Rendók as spoken in Khartoum and in Kadugli (Southern Kordofan State).

The first part of the paper deals with the socio-historical circumstances that led to the development and diffusion of Rendók in urban Sudan. A detailed morphophonemic description of encrypting procedures follows. Besides and beyond, the morphological analysis delves into the relation between Rendók and Sudanese Arabic morphology with reference to both the formation of new lexemes and to the productive integration of borrowings. In the last part of the paper, the semantic aspects of Rendók (polysemy, homonymy, metaphors, metonymy) are analyzed. In this regard, it is noted that, in the most recent forms of Rendók, semantic abstraction surpasses morphological encoding as an encrypting strategy.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo proporcionar una aproximación lingüística al rendók, lengua secreta de origen árabe creada por la juventud de las ciudades del norte y centro de Sudán. En líneas generales, el rendók no es una entidad lingüística coherente, sino más bien consiste en un amplio conjunto de estrategias de codificación que varía dependiendo del entorno sociolingüístico de sus hablantes. No obstante, en los últimos veinte años, se ha formado gradualmente un rendók “estándar” que recurre básicamente a la metátesis y a otros procedimientos morfonéticos

* Stefano Manfredi: D.S.R.A.P.A. Università degli Studi di Napoli “L'Orientale”.

E-mail: stef.manfredi@gmail.com

formalizados. Este estudio se centra en una variedad rural no descrita del *rendók* hablada en Jartum y en Kadugli (sur del Estado de Kordofan).

La primera parte del trabajo trata de las circunstancias socio-históricas que condujeron al desarrollo y difusión del *rendók* en entornos urbanos de Sudán. Continúa con una detallada descripción morfonética de los procedimientos de codificación. Seguidamente, el análisis morfológico analiza la relación entre el *rendók* y el árabe sudanés en relación con la formación de nuevos lexemas y la productiva integración de los préstamos. La última parte se dedica a aspectos semánticos (polisemia, homónimia, metáfora, metonimia). En relación con ello, se ha observado en las formas más recientes del *rendók* que la abstracción semántica se ha impuesto a la codificación morfológica como estrategia de creación de lenguaje críptico.

Keywords: Sudanese Arabic, structural secret language, notional secret language, youth speech.

Palabras clave: Árabe sudanés, estructura de la lengua secreta, noción de lengua secreta, argot juvenil.

1. Introduction¹

This article aims at drawing a preliminary analysis of *Rendók*, an Arabic-based secret language developed by the urban youth of northern and central Sudan. The primary function of *Rendók* is to make communication unintelligible to the dominant linguistic community. At the same time, this secret language plays an important role in marking the group identity of its urban young speakers. Thus, *Rendók* may also be described as a cryptic sociolect. The secrecy function of *Rendók* is performed through the morphological manipulation of the Sudanese Arabic (henceforth SA) lexicon. In this regard, *Rendók* represents a “structural” secret language (Youssi 2008: 156) whose most pervasive encrypting procedure is metathesis. Actually, the name *rendók* itself finds its origin in a partial consonantal metathesis (see 3.2) of the word *ruṭāna*² subsequently modified by the suffix *-ōk* (see 3.4).

ruṭāna > **runāḍa* > **runḍ-ōk* > *rendók*

Apart from the various morphological strategies, *Rendók* makes also use of metaphoric speech in order to dissimulate its semantic references. Moreover, the

¹ This article is a revised version of the paper “A preliminary analysis of *Rendók*: a Sudanese secret language” presented at the 8th AIDA Conference, 28-31 August 2008, Colchester, University of Essex.

² In SA *ruṭāna* means “tribal language” and by extension “any language other than Arabic” (this not applies to European languages which are referred to as *luyā* “language”). In Modern Standard Arabic *raṭāna* generally refers to an “unintelligible language” and it is synonym of “jargon, gibberish” (Bergman 2008: 469). In both cases, the term *ruṭāna/raṭāna* alludes to a socially restricted linguistic medium and to its incomprehensibility to outsiders.

semantic adaptation of western borrowings, together with a high degree of synonymy, contribute to the “notional” characterization of this secret language (Youssi 2008: 157).

The following analysis is mainly based on a selected corpus of spontaneous recordings. Besides, I also refer to an elicited list of Rendók lexical items joined with their metalinguistic representations. In order to analyse the variation affecting Rendók, the data were gathered in the two different environments of Khartoum (the Sudanese capital) and Kadugli (the capital city of the Southern Kordofan, located 900 km south-west of Khartoum). In the following pages, I first present a brief socio-historical introduction to Rendók in terms of its gradual diffusion, then I describe the main morpho-syntactic and lexical features of this Sudanese secret language.

2. Socio-historical background

It is reasonable to state that Rendók arose in consequence of the first massive urbanization that affected Khartoum during the 1970s. In this period, the arrival of a huge number of rural migrants from various parts of Sudan led to the expansion of peripheral quarters such Takāmūl, Umm Badda and Ḥājj Yūsuf that were characterized by a high degree of linguistic heterogeneity because of the presence of numerous regional languages. Over the years, this multilingual situation was progressively normalized by the diffusion of Arabic as urban *Lingua Franca*, as well as first language of the second generation migrants born in the Sudanese capital. Consequently, the various regional languages that had been imported in Khartoum started to lose their vitality and began to be not spoken by the youngest urban population (see Miller & Abu Manga 1992). If the acquisition of Arabic was due to the necessity to find a medium of communication among people with different ethno-linguistic backgrounds, Rendók came to existence because of the conscious attempt made by its young speakers to encrypt their communication and to stigmatize themselves within the Arabic-speaking community. In addition, this new linguistic tool should have reflected the urban identity of the second generation migrants in contrast with the rural (non-Arabic) model of their parents (Manfredi 2009: 103). The wish for deviance finally resulted in a morphological deconstruction of the prestigious urban norm represented by SA. Although, during this initial phase, Rendók was just a assemblage of different encrypting strategies highly affected by individual variation. The ensuing phase of the development of Rendók corresponded to a second and stronger urbanization flow that interested the whole Sudan during the late 1980s and the 1990s. More to the point, the conurbation of minor towns, together with the higher extent of population mobility between Khartoum and relatively peripheral regions, made Rendók spread in all the urban centres of the arabophone Sudan. The geographic diffusion of Rendók went hand in hand with a normalization of its rules that finally resulted in the choice of metathesis as the basic encrypting strategy. Actually, in spite of the fact that Rendók is still subjected to a considerable structural variation (see 3.6), metathesis is generally recognized as the “standard” procedure for the creation of new templates, insomuch as at the present time the variety of Rendók based on

metathesis is told to represent the “Clear Rendók” (*ar-rendók aṣ-ṣafīh*) or the “National Rendók” (*ar-rendók al-national*).

3. Phono-morphological sketch

The spontaneity of word formation in Rendók and the variation affecting the structures of this secret language may lead to think that there are no linguistic principles governing the rearrangement of the Arabic morphology. On the contrary, the cryptic function of Rendók is always performed in accord with linguistically relevant generalizations.

3.1 Metathesis

By and large, metathesis may affect all the lexical inputs of Rendók. Here, I deal with two basic kinds of metathesis: backward and consonantal metathesis. The application of backward rather of consonantal metathesis does not depend on syllable position, because it is exclusively determined by the presence of syllable-internal clusters. Notwithstanding, it should be remarked that open (*v*)-*Cv*-*Cv*-(*Cv*) sequences can be modified both backward and consonantal metathesis. As far as backward metathesis is concerned, this procedure consists in reversing the order of the whole Arabic lexical input. Backward metathesis typically modifies mono and disyllabic items presenting linear *Cv*(*C*) sequences as in the following examples.

- (1) $Cv\bar{v} > (C)v\bar{v}C$
fī > *if* invariable existential copula
ma > *am* negative marker
ḥa > *haḥ* “he came”
da > *yed* “this”
lē > *hēl* “to”

- (2) $C_1\bar{v}C_2 > C_2\bar{v}C_1$
zōl > *lōz* “person”
fūl > *lūf* “ground nuts”
bōl > *lōb* “urine”
xāl > *lāx* “mother’s brother”
fōg > *gōf* “on, above”
wēn > *nēw* “where?”

- (3) $C_1vC_2vC_3 > C_3vC_2vC_1$
ḥilid > *diliḥ* “skin”
walad > *dalaw* “boy”
kuluḥ > *ḥuluk* “father”
digin > *nigid* “beard”
baḥar > *raḥab* “river”
ḥanak “palate” > *ganaḥ* “language” (see also 5.1.)

In example (1) we can observe that the inversion of open *Cv* monosyllables may determine the creation of *CvC* templates in Rendók. In fact, the need for a syllable onset often induces the insertion of a prosthetic consonant whose nature depends on the surrounding segments. In the majority of cases, the new onset is represented by a voiceless glottal fricative *h* or by a palatal glide *y*. In this regard, it should be noted that alike in SA, also in Rendók the glottal stop *ʔ* is not realized in initial position. Notwithstanding, the etymological status of this phoneme in SA can be testified by Rendók templates in which it appears in inter-vocalic position as in the case of *(ʔ)ana (C₁vC₂v) > naʔa C₂vC₁v* “I” (1SG). Backward metathesis can also encrypt polysyllabic lexemes presenting syllable-external clusters. In this case, metathesis affects only the syllable whose coda corresponds to the first consonant of the cluster.

- (4) $(C_1vC_2)_1(Cv)_2(Cv)_3 > (C_2vC_1)_1(Cv)_2(Cv)_3$
madrasa > damrasa “school”
karkadé > rakkadé “hibiscus”
muṣṭafā > ṣumtafā “Mustafa”
muḥkila > ʃumkila “problem”

Thirdly, backward metathesis may occur in correspondence of syllable-external clusters of quadriliteral roots formed by the reduplication of two-consonant sequences. Here, metathesis acts separately on each syllable.

- (5) $(C_1vC_2)_1(C_1vC_2)_2 > (C_2vC_1)_1(C_2vC_1)_2$
waswas > sawsaw “whisper”
sīwsīw > wiswis “chick”
ʃakʃok “shaking” > *kaʃkōf* “women’s speech”

Consonantal metathesis, for its part, consists in a random reorganization of the Arabic consonantal roots and it is specifically used for encrypting items presenting syllable-internal clusters. Consequently, consonantal metathesis affects all the heavy monosyllables and disyllables that cannot be modified by simple backward metathesis.

- (6) $C_1v\bar{v}C_2C_2 > C_2v\bar{v}C_1C_1$
ʕidd > diʕʕ “grandfather”
ḥagg > gaḥḥ possessive particle
bitt (OA **bint*) > *tibb* “girl”
dāmm > mādd “blood”
ḥāʕʕ > ʕāḥḥ “old man”

- (7) $C_1vC_2C_2v > C_2vC_1C_1v$
barra > rabba “outside”
marra > ramma “time”
sawwa > wassa “he did”
kabba > bakka “he poured”

dagga > *gadda* “he beat”

(8) $C_1vC_2C_3v > C_3vC_2C_1v, C_2vC_1C_3v$

faṅṭa > *ṭanfā* “bag”

bukra > *kubra* “tomorrow”

furṣa > *ṣufra* “chance”

(9) $C_3vC_1C_1\bar{v}C_2, C_2vC_3C_3\bar{v}C_1 < C_1vC_2C_2\bar{v}C_3$

giddām > *miggād* “in front of”

gaddūm > *maggūd* “mouth”

dukkān > *kunnād* “shop”

The change of the consonantal order can also intervene in open disyllabic items. Actually, $CvCvC$ and $CvCv$ verbs, active participles of the form $CāCi(C)$, adjectives of the form $CaCīC$, and singular and plural nouns with at least one long vowel are commonly modified by consonantal metathesis.

(10) $C_1aC_2aC_3 > C_2aC_3aC_1$

darab > *rabad* “he beat”

$C_1iC_2a > C_2iC_1a$

liga > *gila* “he found”

$C_1aC_2iC_3 > C_2aC_3iC_1$

kabīr > *barīk* “big”

$C_1aC_2ūC_3 > C_2aC_1ūC_3$

zabūn > *bazūn* “shopkeeper”

$C_1uC_2ūC_3 > C_2uC_3ūC_1$

rufūz < *zurūf* “circumstances”

In all the previous examples, we can observe that the application of metathesis does not affect vowel quality/quantity. This is because vowel quality is necessary for the recognition of the grammatical values expressed by vowel alternance such the opposition between active and passive verbs *xarab* > *raxab* “he destroyed” vs. *xirib* > *rixib* “it was destroyed”. At the same time, vowel quantity is indispensable for determining stress position which is an important perceptive factor that simplifies the spotting of a given lexeme. Actually, alike in SA, also in Rendók stress position is grammatically and lexically distinctive and it is never modified in consequence of metathesis. For example, the interrogative pronouns *fen-ú*, *fun-ú* > *unúf* “what(-M.SG)?” and *min-ú*, *mun-ú* > *umún* “who(-M.SG)?” are always stressed on the last syllable, even if they went through a significant morphological reorganization ($CvC-ú > vCúC$). In addition, we can note that if the last consonant of a Rendók template is elided (see 3.5.), then the preceding long vowel may be reduced to a final acute stress as in *mitēn* > *timé* “when?”.

A final observation regards the continuous renewal of the Rendók lexical items. When a Rendók template is integrated by the wider linguistic community, a doubly

encrypted form is created in order to preserve the communication secrecy. A good example is that of the lexeme *rendók* that, once became of common use in Khartoum, underwent the following double consonantal metathesis *rendók* > *dernók* > *gernót*

3.2 Phonotactic restrictions

It is common for consonants displaced by metathesis to be affected by phonotactic restrictions. In Rendók sonority seems to be the most relevant factor concerning consonant allophones because it determines acceptability as new onset or coda. Even though, the distribution of consonant allophonic realizations is quite controversial. If we take a look at plosive consonants, Rendók confirms that low sonority makes a good onset, as Clements claims in his Sonority Theory (1990: 67).

$$(11) C_1vC_2vC_{3+son} > C_{3-son}vC_2vC_1$$

talab < *balad* “country”

$$C_1vC_{2+son}v > C_{2-son}vC_1v$$

keda > *tika* “this way”

Although, initial velar plosives can be voiced when occurring before an open vowel.

$$(12) C_1vC_2vC_{3+son} > C_{3+son}vC_2vC_1$$

ḥanak “palate” > *ḡanaḥ* “language”

Besides, we can observe that in the case of $C\bar{v}C$ monosyllables the degree of sonority depends on the nature of the vocalic nucleus rather than on consonant position. Back vowels, for example, tend to voice both the consonants surrounding the syllable nucleus.

$$(13) C_{1-son}\bar{v}C_{2-son} > C_{1+son}\bar{v}C_{2+son}$$

sūk > *ḡūz* “market”

Front vowels, on the contrary, tend to voice the onsets and to devoice the codas of monosyllabic items. Here, it is plausible that perceptibility likeness overcomes sonority in determining the nature of the final consonant. Besides, it should be remarked that final devoicing occurs on a regular basis all thorough Sudan.

$$(14) C_{1+son}\bar{v}C_{2-son} > C_{1+son}\bar{v}C_{2-son}$$

zēt > *dēs* “oil”

Also vowel realizations can be affected by the displacement of consonants, but the distribution of vowel allophones is exactly the same of SA. For instance, alveolar segments give rise to a more closed articulation, while sonorant segments induce a centralized realization (Dickins 2007: 62-63). In line with the totality of

Arabic dialects, supra-segmental emphasis causes the backing of the vowels adjacent to pharyngealized consonants.

- (15) *walad* > *dalaw* ['dɛlɔw] “boy”
hena > *neha* ['niha] “here”
fāḍi > *dāfi* ['d^ʕɑːfi] “empty”

3.3 Prefixation

Another important encrypting strategy in Rendók is prefixation. This procedure consists in the use of a shared set of prefixes that are intended to make Rendók more unintelligible to the outsiders. This means that prefixation is not grammatically productive nor semantically restricted, thus prefixes can be indifferently attached to noun, adjectives, verbs, adverbs without changing their meaning. I was able to isolate three basic prefixes in Rendók: the consonant prefix *s-* which induces the insertion of an epenthetic vowel, the prefix *ḡes-* which always correlates with consonantal metathesis, and the prefix *tu-* which is associated with the singular pattern $C_1aC_2iC_3(a) > tu-C_1C_2āC_3i$. This latter prefix probably finds its origin in the To-Beḡauye definite article *tu-*.

- (16) $C_1(v)C_2vC_3 > s-(v)C_1C_2vC_3$
f(i)lim > *s-(i)flim* < “movie”
ḡ(e)luw > *s-(e)lḡuw* “beautiful, sweet”
m(o)bāyl > *s-(o)mbāyl* “mobile phone”
ḡes-
barra > *rabba* > *ḡes-rabba* “outside”
māḡa > *fāma* > *ḡes-fāma* “he went”
ḡāli > *lāḡi* > *ḡel-lāḡi* “Ali”

- $C_1aC_2iC_3(a) > tu-C_1C_2āC_3i$
fanīla > *tu-fnāli* “singlet”
fagīr > *tu-fgāri* “poor”
gamīs > *tu-gmāsi* “shirt”

ḡes- is indubitably the most common prefix in Rendók and it can also undergo metathesis independently from the lexeme to which is attached.

- (17) **ḡes-** > **se(n)ḡ-**
ḡabōba > *baḡōba* > *ḡes-baḡōba* > *senḡ-baḡōba* “grandmother”
ḡa > *haḡ* > *ḡes-haḡ* > *seḡ-haḡ* “he came”

It is not rare to find sequences of two or more items modified by the same prefix.³

(18) *as-sān yet ɕes-lam-ú ɕes-diy-ēn-u ɕes-lāʕm-īn arfa yedik*
 \ *an-nās da mà-l-ú id-ēn-u ʕāml-īn rafa dik* \

DEF-man this what's_up_with-3SG.M hand-DU-3SG.M doing-PL itch that "Why are this man's hands scratching like that?"

If the previous ungrammatical prefixes have no relation with the Arabic morphology, in Rendók is also found the prefix *m(u)-* which probably derives from to the Arabic **mu-* used for derived participles. In truth, *m(u)-* does not introduce any verbal feature in Rendók, but it is always attached to nouns bearing human references. From a morphological point of view, *m(u)-* optionally occurs in combination with metathesis.

(19) *ṣābi > bāṣi > mu-bāṣi* "young person" *fakí > mu-fakí* "learned man"
ustāz > m-utsāz "teacher"

3.4 Suffixation

Ungrammatical suffixation works in the same manner of prefixation, but it is comparatively rare. I was able to isolate only two suffixes in Rendók. The first one is *-ōk*, which is the same suffix that has been agglutinated in lexeme *rendók* (see 1.). The suffix *-ōk* is particularly interesting because it gives evidence for the only case of affix grammaticalization in Rendók. The suffix *-ōk* apparently finds its origin in the English borrowing "ok" which has been integrated with an adjective meaning of "good, fine" as in the following example.

(20) *liḥḥa-t-na liḥḥa-t al-ōk wa ar-rēx*
 \ *ḥilla-t-na ḥilla-t al-ōk wa al-xēr* \
 quarter-F-1PL quarter-F DEF-fine and DEF-well
 "Our quarter is the good quarter".

Only in a second phase, the adjective *ōk* has been reduced to an suffix adding a general positive meaning to the items to which is attached.

(21) *nizām* "order" > *nizām-ōk* "good situation"
nās "people" > *sān* "man" > *sān-ōk* "sharp man"
rendók "the fine language" (?)

The suffix *-īs*, for its part, represents a minor encrypting morpheme that I found only in Kadugli. Probably, *-īs* results from the borrowing of the English third person copula *is*, but differently from *-ōk*, it does not exhibit any semantic value. It

³ In the following syntactic examples I give a broad reconstruction of the SA sentences in the second line highlighted by backslashes \ ... \.

should be noted that the suffix *-īs* is the only morphological feature that Rendók shares with a young cryptic variety based on Juba Arabic (Miller 2004: 80).

- (22) *baggār-īs* > *baggār-īs* “cattleman”
xawāḥ-i > *xawāḥ-īs* “western man” (*ḥawāx-i* in Khartoum)

3.5 Minor encrypting strategies

In Rendók are also found less formalized procedures that sometimes intervene in combination with metathesis. These minor encrypting strategies include:

- (23) metathesis + reduplication - *fen-ú* > *unúf* > *unúf-unúf* “what?”
 metathesis + apocope - *ṣabūn* > *baṣú* “soap”
 metathesis + insertion of dummy vowels - *koss* > *osokk* “vagina”
 apheresis + apocope - *bantalōn* > *toló* “trousers”

3.6 Phono-morphological variation

As previously stated Rendók is characterized by an high degree of variation since it is constantly renewed by different peoples, in different times and in different places. Thus, it is not surprising that its structures give evidence for both diastratic and diatopic variation, as well as for diachronic change. With regard to the diastratic variation, during the last decade Rendók faced a rapid social expansion and gradually became an urban transversal register. On the one hand, Rendók started to be widely used by the educated middle-class youth. On the other hand, it is still spoken by socially marginalized groups such the so-called *Šammāsa* (*Šammāša*) who identify the young sub-proletariat living in the streets of the main Sudanese towns. If the middle-class youth makes use of Rendók only for excluding adults from discussions concerning socially sensible arguments, *Šammāsa* link a strong class-consciousness to Rendók and they use it as a sort of first-language. As a consequence, the different social functions expressed in speaking Rendók are reflected in the specificity of its encrypting strategies. For example, *Šammāsa* speakers usually prefer syllable insertion to the more common backward metathesis.

- (24) *ḥanak* “palate” > *ga-tta na-naḥ* “language”
balad > *ba-nna ta-lad* “country”
ḥāmīd > *ḥa-tta na-mīd* “good” (Rendók lexical innovation, see 5.2)

Looking at the diatopic variation, it does not influence the application of metathesis, but it is related to phonological variation due to the influence played by different Sudanese dialects. More in detail, in comparing Rendók as spoken in Khartoum and Kadugli, I noticed different consonant realizations having reference to the opposition between Eastern (ESA) and Western (WSA) Sudanic dialects.

(25) ESA > Khartoum Rendók
fūf > *fūf* “see” IMP.SG.M
ʕirif-ta > *faraʕ-ta* “I knew”
ʕabana > *baʕʕana* “coffee jar”

WSA > Kadugli Rendók
fif > *fif* “see” IMP.SG.M
 (?)*irif-ta* > *faraʔ-ta*, *farā-ta* “I knew”
ʕabana > *bajana* “coffee jar”

Lastly, as far as diachronic change is concerned, it does not only pertains the renewal of the Rendók templates (see 3.1.), but it also regards the increasing of complexity in the morphological manipulation. This is particularly clear in Kadugli, where the affirmation of metathesis in Rendók can taken as a proof for the shift of Arabic from the status of *Lingua Franca* to that of mother-tongue language. Here I list four variants of two local toponyms coupled with the meta-linguistic representations given both by former and present-day Rendók speakers:

(26) *Miri Juwa, Miri Barra*

- a) *miri biri, mara barra* (most archaic variant)
- b) *s-ibiri miri, s-amara barra* (archaic intermediate variant)
- c) *reymi woʕʕa, reymi rabba* (recent intermediate variant)
- d) *s-irmi s-oʕʕa, s-irmi s-arba* (most recent variant)

The list shows that there is a common tendency in considering metathesis as a relatively recent procedure in Kadugli (variant **c**). This meta-linguistic representation may find a linguistic explanation in the fact that metathesis is a comparatively difficult change that requires a mother-tongue skill in order to be applied. Likewise, simplest phono-morphological procedures such vowel alternance and simple prefixation (variants **a** and **b**) represent earlier procedures adopted when Arabic was still a predominately vehicular language in Kadugli. Thus, it is only recently that Rendók speakers started to combine metathesis with prefixation (variant **d**). As a further matter, it should be noted that the choice of certain consonantal orders in Rendók can have a reference in the ethnic affiliation of its speakers. For example, among Nuba speakers in Kadugli the template used for the lexeme *ʕarab* “Arab” is *ba(ʕ)ar* ($C_1vC_2vC_3 > C_3vC_1vC_2$) while the majority of speakers adopt the order *baraʕ* ($C_1vC_2vC_3 > C_3vC_2vC_1$). If we consider that in SA *baʕar* means “dung”, the distinct morphological outputs can be easily explained in the light of the ethnic tensions between Nuba and Arabs characterizing the Nuba Mountains area.

4. Morpho-syntactic features

Alike other secret languages developed in largely monolingual settings, Rendók just provides a vocabulary to be used with the morpho-syntax of the majority language. However, Rendók speakers may also encrypt some SA idiomatic sentence, showing that the border between syntax and phonology is quite fleeting in perceptibility terms.

(27) *bi-l-lēl* > *s-ilbēl* “by night”
ma-gūl-a > *gamūla* “really”
ma-l-ú > *lam-ú* “what’s up with him?”

In other cases, morpheme boundaries are not modified in Rendók. For example, a morpheme inversion is preferred to the common metathesis for encrypting the negative existential copula *ma-fi* NEG-EXS > *fi-ma* EXS-NEG “there is not” (not **ifam* nor **fam*). Moreover, syntactically functional morphemes such the definite article *al-*, bound pronouns, gender/number suffixes, prefixed/suffixed pronominal subjects and preverbal markers are in no case displaced by metathesis.

(28) *al-šasa*
 \ *as-saša* \
 DEF-watch
 “The watch”.

famē-t
 \ *ma/fē-t* \
 go-1SG
 “I went”.

sinī-t-ah
 \ *nīsī-t-ah* \
 forget-1SG-3SG.F
 “I forgot it”.

b-i-lūk
 \ *b-i-gūl* \
 IMPF-3SG.M-say
 “he says”.

xā-y
 \ *āx-i* \
 brother-1SG
 “my brother”.

dusān-i, dusān-i-ya
 \ *sudān-i, sudān-i-ya* \
 Sudan-M.SG Sudan-F.SG
 “Sudanese”

ramma nāti-ya
 \ *marra tāni-ya* \
 time second-F.SG
 “Another time”

Moreover, we can note that number/gender suffixes and suffixed/prefixed pronominal subjects are productive in the integration of English borrowings.

- (29) *man* > *men* “man”, *men-a* “woman”
this is > *disís* “good”, *disís-ín* “good-M.PL”
missed call > *maskal-ta* “I sent a missed call (mobile)”

Looking at the verbal derivational stems instead, the Arabic morphemes *it-*, *-ta-* and *ista-* used for intransitive/reciprocal and reflexive verbal forms are not displaced by metathesis.

- (30) *it-kayyaf* > *it-fayyak* “rejoice in”
is-ta-lam > *im-ta-las* “obtain”
it-kallam > *it-mallak* “speak”
ista-ḥamma > *ista-maḥḥa* “wash”

An important characteristic of Rendók as compared to other structural secret languages is that, apart from the previous functional morphemes, everything can be modified by metathesis. If in French Verlan prepositions and negative particles are typically not inverted, in Rendók there are no restrictions to the modification of morphologically independent items (Manfredi 2008: 110).

- (31) *nim al-ḥabāš am din-í yi?a yuluf*
 \ *min aš-šabāḥ ma šand-í eyy fuyul* \
 from DEF-morning NEG at-1SG any work
 “I have nothing to do since this morning”.

Notwithstanding, every Rendók template can also appear in the etymological form depending on its syntactic prominence within the sentence. For example, the demonstrative *da* is inverted when is in adjective position, but it appears in the Arabic form when it represents the subject of a NP.

- (32) *al-gerńót al-deḡíd yet*
 \ *ar-reńdók al-ḡedíd da* \
 DEF-Rendók DEF-new this
 “This new Rendók”.

- da al-hafam lokko*
 \ *da al-faham kullu* \
 this DEF-matter all
 “That’s all”.

Lastly, we can note that, in order to retain an apparent syntactic coherence, coordination and subordination markers are not modified at all.

- (33) adversative *lakín* “but”
al-ḡawāx-āt yurāš lakín sār-hum b-i-nūk barík
 \ *al-xawāj-āt šuyār lakín rās-hum b-i-kūn kabīr* \
 \

DEF-western-PL.F small\PL but head-3PL.M IMPF-3SG.M-be big
 “Western people are tiny but they have a big head”.

Subordinator *ʃaʃān* “in order to, so as to”
kiff-ah ʃaʃān ta-hiḡi hēl-ak
 \ *fikk-ah ʃaʃān ta-ḡi lē-k* \
 release\IMP-3SG.F in order 3SG.F-come to-2SG.M
 “Release it in order to make it come to you”.

Subordinator *innu* “that”
b-i-tfayyak innu bi-t-mallak amāʕ-u
 \ *b-i-tkayyaf innu bi-t-kallam māʕ-u* \
 IMPV-3SG.M-rejoice that IMPFV-2SG.M-talk with-3SG.M
 “He is glad that you are talking with him”.

5. Vocabulary and semantics

5.1 Metaphors and metonymies

Rendók is also characterized by a large use of metaphors which grant an uncommon expressive potentiality to its lexicon. The occurrence of metaphors generally varies in accord with the evocative ability of each speaker, although there are some metaphoric expressions that have been definitely integrated in the Rendók lexicon.

(34) *hanak* “palate” > *ganaḥ* “language, tongue, speech, matter”
ḥāḡa “thing, stuff” > *ḡāḥa* “girl”
ḥāḡḡa “make the Islamic pilgrimage” > *ḡāḥḥa* “womanize”
kaffaf “see trough” > *faffak* “look at”
duxxān “smoke” > *xunnād* “marijuana”
gadaḥ “bowl” > *gadaḥ* “market”
naṭṭa “jump” > *naṭṭa* “refuse”

In other cases Rendók draws its metaphoric expressions on other cryptic varieties as in the case of the verb *bārak* “bless”, used with the meaning of “shadow someone” as in the Sudanese police jargon.

5.2 Synonymy and polysemy

Rendók lexicon is also characterized by a high degree of synonymy concerning a number of common semantic references. In most of cases, synonymy is due to the co-occurrence of Arabic lexemes and borrowings from both European and African languages covering the same semantic field.

(35) “girl, woman”
ḡāḥa, *loggo-ya* (COLL *loggó*), *madám* (PL *masmasén*, French *madame*, vulgar English *mazmazēn*), *babūr* (SA “power engine”, French *vapeur*) *ciks* (COLL

English *chicks*), *fara*, *rama* (*s-arma*), *xuṣna* “food”, *aylayk* (English *I like*), *cuma*, *kokók*, *ḡampám* “house”, *tēb*, *kontar* (English *container*), *kakar*, *wakar*, *kōx* (MSA *kūx* “hut”), *santa* (English *center*) “money”, *Jerōga* (SA *gurūf*), *kalasa*, *taḡdir*, *robṭa* “good”, *disīs* (see paragraph 4.), *ḡāmid*, *ṭibbi* (*biṭṭi*), *diḡdiḡ*, *ṣāli*, *bādīs*

Polysemy is quite rare in Rendók and it is always induced by metaphoric speech. For example, the lexeme *sámxa* carries two different meanings. The first is that of the numeral “five” (*xamsa*) from which it derives. The second is that of “anus” which, for its part, finds its origin in a figurative metaphor related to the numeral symbol ٥ for “5”. Apart from the kinky sense of the metaphor, this case of polysemy is important because it shows how the written medium can interfere with the development of a very spoken language.

5.3. Semantic bleach

A final remark concerns the semantic bleach that characterizes the most recent varieties of Rendók. When Rendók speakers have exhausted all the possible morphological options for encrypting a certain lexeme, they substitute the original lexical referent with etymologically unrelated templates. This procedure obviously produces a weakening of the relation between the phonetic representation and the semantic referent. Even though, Rendók speakers generally seek for a broad assonance with the Arabic form so as to give a phonetic reference for the semantic recognition. Semantic bleach mainly modifies nouns, but it can also intervene with functional morphemes and some idiomatic sentences.

(36) *māhi ad-dīn* “Mahi ad-Din” (given name) > *ḡammid an-nīl* (a Sudanese Sheikh)

ma-fi “there is not” > *fi-ma* > *fombastik*

ma-l-ák > *lam-ák* > *salam-ák* > *islām-ak* “what’s up with you?”

6. Conclusion

Rendók displays the typical features of numerous youth secret languages all around the world. From a structural point of view, Rendók presents common strategies of phono-morphological manipulation such metathesis, phonotactic adaptations, ungrammatical affixation, and word truncation (Kiessling & Mouse 2004). From a sociolinguistic perspective instead, Rendók provides a tool for expressing the specificity of the urban youth culture by means of an innovative lexicon. In truth, Rendók is particularly interesting if compared with other Arabic-based secret languages. For example, alike Rendók, also the Moroccan Ghuz (Berjaoui 2008) makes a large use of metathesis. But, if in Rendók functional markers cannot undergo metathesis, in Moroccan Ghuz bound pronouns and gender/number suffixes are considered part of the lexical input and they are always displaced. Another interesting point is that, differently from an Arabic “cant” diffused in the Gulf area (Searjeant 1948), Rendók does not develop new morphological forms but it always reproduces the SA root/pattern schemes. Thirdly, I showed that syllable insertion in Rendók represents a marginal strategy used only by *Shammasha* speakers. On the contrary, this procedure is very

common in other Arabic-based cryptic varieties such the secret language of the ‘Abbadi Sheiks in northern Sudan (Vycichl 1959: 225; Youssi 2008: 159). Looking at the “argot” based on Juba Arabic, this variety is mainly characterized by neologisms and metaphors and it presents very simple morphological manipulations (Miller 2004: 85). As observed above, the only feature that this Juba variety shares with Rendók is the ungrammatical suffix *-īs*. The absence of other procedures characterizing Rendók gives evidence for the different historical development of the two linguistic varieties. The fact that Juba Arabic is an expanded pidgin (that it is spoken as both first and second language) undoubtedly limited the complexity of the cryptic strategies adopted in Southern Sudan.

All things considered, Rendók provides food for thought for conceptualizing the different roles played by the root/pattern morphology in the development of structural secret languages in Arabic. Besides, the study of Rendók can also bring out important reflections in historical linguistics because of the rapid expansion of its lexicon. In this article I tried to present only the basic features of Rendók, further research would be needed for analyze how the different Sudanese dialects influence the structures and the lexicon of this secret language.

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