Arabic Loan Words in English Language

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Abstract: *This is a survey article of the English loan words from Arabic language. The article begins with different conflicting views regarding the term "loan words" and the amount of the Arabic loan words in English from both points of views the English and the Arab linguists'.Then, a historical preview from the first Arabic words in Old English till the latest few words in the last decades is displayed considering the factors involved in borrowing from Arabic to English. Finally, there is a recommandationfollowed by a conclusion.*
Key words: *Loan Words; Arabic; English Language; borrow words.*

I.   Introduction

There is no doubt that loaning words is a very common phenomenon and no language is entirely free of borrowed words (Jesperson, 1922). There are about 7000 languages spoken all over the world. It has been discovered that when languages come into contact, there is transfer of linguistic items from one language to another due to the borrowing of words (Kachru, 1989).

English language has been described by Crystal (2010: p. 267) as an "insatiable borrower". More than 120 other languages have served as sources for the contemporary vocabulary of English. Similarly, Klein (1966) states that 30% of English words are native. In spite of this small number, they are being used frequently in the English language. Furthermore, these words have a wide range of lexical and syntactic structures.

Q: What do you notice about the following conversation?

- Would you like **coffee** with **sugar**, or with **syrup**, or **sherbet,lemon**, or **alcohol**?
- No, thanks. I'd rather sit on the **divan**, in the **alcove**, and read the **magazine** about the **Arsenal** football match in **Gibraltar**.

A: All the above nouns are derived from Arabic (Bale, 2006).

II.   On The Term "Loan Words"

It is considered quite normal for languages to borrow words from other languages. When a language takes words from other languages, these "new arrivals" are usually called borrowings or loan words. According to Bynon (1977), this term is a loan translation of German '*lehnwort*' whereas AbdelRahman (1991) thinks that this term is misleading and unsatisfactory,but he disagrees with Banyon who believes that the donor language does not get its borrowed word back.

In his book"*Arabic words in English*", Taylor (1933) notes that English Language borrowed about a thousand word from Arabic and there are thousands of derivatives from these words.Based on this book, AbdelRahman (1989) argues that the word 'cable', the Anglicized form of the Arabic word '*habl*' "rope", which was included into English according to Oxford English Dictionary in 1205, has been taken back in its new form. Also, the English word 'algorithm' was taken from the Arab scientist 'AL Khwarizmi', who founded this science; and this word is used nowadays in Arabic as *'Lugaritmat'*. Arabic also has taken back the word '*sakk*' "cheque" which was used in 1706 and is used nowadays in Arabic as 'Shaik'. Consequently, the donor language may get its borrowed back.

III.   Why Loaning?

Fromkin (2003) believes that borrowing words is important especially when the giving language adds new words or morphemes to the other language. The pronunciation of the borrowed item is often changed to fit the phonological system of the borrowing language. The borrowed word, of course, remains in the source language so there is no need for its return. Ngom (2002) also mentions that speakers sometimes borrow words that are not in their own language so that they can express an idea or a concept. In addition, they may borrow a word that gives them prestige though they have equivalent words in their own language.

It is believed that the main reason of loaning is the need to acquire new vocabulary or lexical items for new places, things and concepts. Langacker (1967) argues that loaning existing words from another language is easier than creating ones. The cultural influence plays an important role in the path of borrowing words. This seems clear with many of the English words in Arabic, such as "kilowatt and telephone". The great majority of Arabic words in English are connected with the realm of science. This is quite apparent in words like "zero,

algebra, alcohol, nadir, cipher and alkali". These words prove the Arabic influence in mathematics and science during the medieval times as said by Langacker (1967). This view is supported by Sapir (1921) who states that there are only five languages that have had a significant influence because of culture. They are classical Chinese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek and Latin.

Languages vary to the amount of the borrowed lexical items. English is considered one of the languages that have borrowed heavily from other languages. To explain this phenomenon, Sapir (1921) asserts that the psychological attitude of the borrowing language itself towards linguistic material has much to do with its receptivity to foreign words. Langacker (1967) highlights the reason for borrowing to historical and cultural reasons not mainly linguistic.

During the Norman Conquest to England in 1066, English borrowed some French lexical items in areas such as law, religion, military and government. E.g. the borrowed words from military matters are war, enemy, battle, guard and admiral.

IV. The Scope

Shipley (2001) claims that the most important factor of borrowing words from other languages is an automatic transfer of words during the contact period with other languages. It is a natural phenomenon that the users of the English language take and adapt the words of other languages unconsciously while interacting with other people. It is noticeable that the reference books, devoted to tracing the English words borrowed from Arabic, are rare. Most these books-the most recent is about forty years ago- reached to the finding that the English borrowed from Arabic. One of the latest is James Peters' and Habeeb Salloum's book (1973) '*Arabic Contributions to the English Vocabulary'.* Two other useful titles are: *A History of Foreign Words in English* by Mary S. Serjeantson (1935) and *Arabic Words in English* by Walt Taylor (1933).

Serjeantson (1935) is considered a significant witness of the impact of the Arabic language in English; she argues, from Arabic, English borrowed a large number of words ; she estimated the number of these words to be about three thousand words supplied by the largest dictionaries of English language; those words were borrowed from Arabic either directly or indirectly. Differently, Professor Taylor (1933) claims that about one thousand words in Arabic entered the English language; two thirds of these words are rare, and the remaining third are technical. As result, 260 of the thousand are in everyday use. He also gave the date of each word first use according to Oxford English Dictionary. In contrast, Abu Ghoush (1977), an Arab scholar, states that English has 10,000 loan words from Arabic, but he does not provide any dates or the time these words first cited in English.

Historically, many linguists, such as Crystal (2010), Campbell (2006) and Crowley, et al. (1997) believe that English and Arabic belong to entirely different language families: one Semitic and the other is Germanic. In contrast, Jassem (2012 a-h ; 2013 a-h) contested such taxonomy in his studies saying that Arabic, English and European languages are dialects of the same language whose differences are because of natural and probable causes of phonetic, morphological and semantic change. He rejects classifying Arabic, English and all European languages as different members of the language families. But he puts Arabic at the top of such languages. Jassem believes that the lexical root theory derives its name from using lexical roots in tracing genetic relationships between words in world languages. On the lexical level, Jassem published fourteen studies on the Arabic origins of English and European languages , such as "numeral words, common religious terms, "water and sea" terms, "air and fire" terms , family terms ...etc. Jassem concludes that all such terms have true Arabic cognates, with the same or similar forms and meanings. However, the different forms are displayed due to the natural and possible causes of linguistic change. For example the English and French word 'approach' comes from Arabic *qareeb* 'near, approaching' via reversal and changing /q/ to /ch/; For example, English, French, and Latin observe comes from Arabic *baSar*, *abSara* (v) 'see' via reordering and replacing /b & S/ by /v/; for example, English 'sheep' comes from Arabic *kabsh* 'male sheep' where /k & sh/ merged into /sh/.

V.   History Of Arabic Loan Words In English

Through history, the Arabic language has contributed hundreds of words to the English language by many different routes. But in the progression of adoption and assimilation, some changes have happened in the pronunciation of loan words due to linguistic and phonetic limitations. In some cases, this change in pronunciation is so drastic that it has become very difficult to recognise the original words.

The early loaning

Wilson (2001) notices that by the eighth century in North Africa, Arabic had ousted Latin as the dominant language; by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Arabic civilisation had fully spread through Spain. In fact, even by 724, John, bishop of Seville, was translating the Bible into Arabic.

Serjeantson (1935) claims that the first English word loaned from Arabic is 'mancus' which originates from the Arabic word '*manqūsh*' which means 'to sculpt, engrave, inscribe', which was often related to coins context to mean 'struck'. After its first appearance in the 770s, the word 'mancus', spread quickly in Italy, and moved forward to reach England by the 780s. A letter written in 798 to King Coenwulf of the Mercians by Pope Leo III refers to a promise made in 786 by King Offa to send 365 mancuses to Rome every year.

On the contrary, Breeze (1991) claims that the first known Arabic loanword to English is '*ealfara*', that means "pack-horse". It is taken from the Hispano-Arabic word '*sal*-fara' "the horse". It first appeared in the 11th century in " Letter of Alexander to Aristotle," and a similar word (as auferan) is found in Old French as Serjeantson (1935, p. 214) notes, "It is possible that French [borrowing through Arabic] was the direct source of the English word". Yet, Breeze (1991) opposes saying that the translator of Alexander's Letter to Aristotle may have recognised the word *'ealfara'* from an independent Spanish source.

Middle English ' the Age of Loaning'

During the Middle and the Renaissance Ages, English speakers came into contact with the prestigious intellectual centres of the Arab world. This contact led to a flow of borrowings from Arabic into English, primarily in the fields of chemistry, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, optics, physics, botany, literature, religion (chiefly Islam), music, warfare, shipping, trade, architecture, geography, government and sovereignty (Daher, 2003).

Chaucer's use of Arabic words

Wilson (2001) said Chaucer was the first to use twenty-four new loanwords from Arabic (loaned primarily through French). According to Cannon's Historical Dictionary, no other British author of the Medieval or Renaissance period (including Shakespeare) employed an Arabic loanword for the first time. Arabic loanwords first recorded in Chaucer's works include:
* (of astronomy) Almagest, almanac, almucantar, almury, Alnath, nadir
* (of chemistry) alkali, azimuth, borax, tartar, amalgam (as a verb)
* (of clothing) satin, gipon
* (of the military) lancegay, jupon
* (of games) fers, checkmate
* (miscellaneous) Damask, Sarsenish, fen, ribibe, carrack, dulcarnon

On the contrary, Abdul-Latif (2008) traces the Arabic lexicons in Chaucer's Works;he finds out that these loans are more than nine hundreds, not 24 as it was believed. Furthermore, he extended to include all Chaucer's 'oeuvre'.

According to Smith (2007), Arabic learning was widespread in medieval England from the 11th to the 13th century, and indeed beyond. Abelard of Bath, then one of the foremost scholars in Europe, translated the astronomical tables of al-Khwarizmi from Arabic into Latin in the early 1100's. Two common mathematical terms entered the language in this way: algebra and algorithm. The word alchemy, which entered English in the 1300's, comes almost unchanged from theArabic '*al-kimya'*, which itself is derived from Greek.

Alkali, algorithm, alembic and almanac entered the English lexicon almost at the same time. Smith (2007) says "we owe the decimal system of computation to Arab mathematicians, based as it is on the Indian concept of zero—a word that, like its synonym cipher, comes from the Arabic '*sifr*' meaning empty; moreover, hundreds of stars' names derive from Arabic: Altair, Aldebaran, Betelgeuse, Vega, Rigel and Algol, to name a few". Beyond star names, many astronomical terms, among them zenith, nadir and azimuth, also derive from Arabic. Likewise, Smith (2009) observes that the word 'alcohol' is derived from '*al-koh*l', the fine black powder which was used in the Middle East as a kind of medicinal eye shadow.

In medieval times, then, it was largely through French that Arabic words entered the English language. The word 'admiral' appeared in 1205, probably loaned out from the Old French '*amiral*' or directly from Arabic '*amir al*', meaning "commander of" as stated by Langacker (1967) according to Oxford English Dictionary. Similarly, the word 'lute' (13th century) comes from Old French '*lut*' which is itself from the Arabic '*al-ud'* (the oud). The oud is transformed into a 'lute' due to this unwitting adoption of the Arabic article (Oxford Etymology Dictionary).

Early modern English

Smith (2007) said, by the time of Elizabeth I (1533–1603), English merchant seamen were discovering the world beyond the boundaries of Europe and bringing back rich and exotic objects, materials and customs from the Middle East and beyond. Significantly, many of the Arabic words that travellers brought back with them at this time suggest a gracious, even luxurious style of living. Sugar, syrup, julep, sherbet and marzipan are all Arabic in origin. Coffee comes from the Arabic '*gahwah*', which originated in Yemen, and mocha from the

Yemeni port city. Added to this are the fragrant spices caraway, saffron, and cumin, all of which have Arabic names.

Modern English (1776–present)

The nineteenth century saw the beginning of European domination of Arabic-speaking lands.Thus, the direction of borrowing has reversed: Yet, English language borrowed a few Arabic words, such as Bedouin, gazelle, giraffe, hashish, minaret, mosque, sultan, vizier, bazaar, caravan …etc.

Food words that have more recently come into English usage as seen in COCA (THE CORPUS OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ENGLISH) are the following Arabic words:

falafel / falafal – Oxford English Dictionary (OED) 1951

fattoush – OED 1955

shawarma – OED 1953

tahini / tahina – OED 1950

tabbouleh – OED 1955

It seems that the 1950's was when either Arab cuisine was introduced to English speaking people or that it started to become a trend and gained popularity at the time.

Other interesting Arabic words in recent years have to deal with war, terrorism and religion. Some of these are the following:

al-qaeda / al-qaida / al-qa'ida – OED 1996

intifada (the uprising)- OED 1985

niqab (head covering)– OED 1936

VI. Recommendation

A comprehensive list of Arabic words in English can be found in the following website and in Taylor's Book which contains most of the Arabic words in English till the beginning of the 20th century. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_words_of_Arabic_origin_%28K-M%29.

VII. Conclusion

Words travel by sea, by railway, by air, in a horse and on foot; by mail, by phone and by wire. Contact between cultures leads to loaning between languages. Over time, English and Arabic languages were in a close contact. In fact, there are hundreds of Arabic loan words in the English language. Though some of them have entered directly, others have come disguised as French, Spanish, or Latin words. In some cases the English word is as identical to its Arabic original though others differ in sound or meaning. I think the argument is about the scope of Arabic words in English. In my viewpoint, that scope was highly exaggerated by Abou Ghoush (1977) as he did not provide any evidence or dates ; in addition, the deep study is ignored by the majority of English linguists except a few of them, such as Serjeanson and Taylor.

The process of loaning words can go in both directions between English and Arabic languages when they are in contact. However, there is an asymmetry where more words go from one side to the other. Based on the previous history of loaning, there are many factors that influence the matter of loaning; these factors could be cultural, scientific or political.

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