

A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF LEXICAL BORROWING IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Needless to say that borrowing is a very common linguistic phenomenon and that no language is completely free of borrowed forms. It is also obvious that languages vary drastically as to the number of borrowed elements comprised therein. However, apart from providing some extra-linguistic remarks e.g. nationalism and religion, no linguistic study has, to the best of my knowledge, been devoted to account for this phenomenon. The researcher, therefore, suggests some linguistic factors which determine to a great extent, the proportion of foreign elements in a given language. Some critical remarks of borrowing in general are also made. In discussing foreign elements in Arabic, the researcher makes an appraisal of Arthur Jeffery's *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (1938). The researcher comes to the conclusion that the scope of foreign elements in the Holy Quran is much less than that assumed by Jeffery. An appraisal is also made of the Arabic words in English some of which are recognized by prominent linguists. I have noticed that some linguists estimate the number of Arabic words in English in thousands, while others advocate an extreme view whereby English is traced to Arabic. The researcher, however, totally disagrees with the above mentioned views. Instead, he suggests, in the light of modern linguistic research, that the existence of thousands of so-called Arabic words in English cannot be accounted for in terms of borrowing. We have noticed that thousands of words in Arabic and English are similar both formally and semantically and that they are not the type of words likely to be borrowed by either language. An attempt has been made to account for this phenomenon linguistically.

On the term 'borrowing' or 'Loan-words'

Needless to say that borrowing is a very common linguistic phenomenon and that no language is completely free of borrowed forms. The term 'borrowing' or 'loan-word', according to Theodora Bynon (1977 : 217) is a lone translation of German *lehn-wort*. While the writer agrees that the above mentioned term is misleading or not altogether satisfactory, he tends to disagree with Bynon who thinks that the donor language never gets its 'loaned' or 'borrowed' word back. A glance at Taylors book *Arabic Words in English* (1933 : 567) in which he states:

There are about a thousand main words of Arabic origin in English, and many thousand derivatives from those words.

Shows that the word 'cable', the Anglicized form of the Arabic word *habl* 'rope', which was incorporated into English, according to Oxford English Dictionary (OED) in 1205, has been taken back in its new form and its technical sense. The English word 'algorithm', which is an *antonomasia* deriving from the Arabic 'al-khawarizmi', the founder of that branch of science, is used nowadays in Arabic as 'luyaritma:t'

This shows an ignorance of the etymology of the word on the part of the Arab linguists, especially that an etymological dictionary of the Arabic language is yet to be compiled. Arabic has also got back the Anglicized form of the Arabic /SAKK 'cheque, adopted in 1706 so that nowadays it is commonly used as //aik /.

Causes of Borrowing

It can be assumed that the main cause of borrowing is the need to find lexical items for new objects, concepts, and places. Langacker

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