

Dominance of Foreign Words over Arabic Equivalents in Educated Arab Speech

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates educated Arab's preference for using foreign words in Arabic oral discourse. A corpus of commonly used English/French words was collected. A sample of language and translation students and faculty was tested and surveyed to find out whether they were familiar with the Arabic equivalents to foreign words commonly used, reasons for preferring to use foreign words, although Arabic equivalents exist, and the effects of this phenomenon on Arabic and education. Results showed that instructors identified 56% of the Arabic equivalents to foreign words on the test, whereas students identified 52%. Students gave more accurate Arabic equivalents. The participants gave historical, sociolinguistic, technological and globalization factors that affect the preference of foreign words to Arabic equivalents, in addition to brevity, poor knowledge of Arabic equivalents, especially new coinages. They think it is more prestigious to use foreign words, "*everybody is doing it*" and "*it's a habit*". Foreign words attract customers' attention more than native words, and more customers can be reached worldwide.

Keywords: *Arabic equivalents, user preference, English as an international language, instructors' preferred words, students' preferred words, preference for loan words, borrowings, loan words, dominance of English.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic is the native language of more than 300 million and the official language of 22 countries spreading across the Middle East and North Africa. In the first half of the 20th century, Arab countries were mainly colonized by the UK and France, and English, and French became the dominant languages especially in education and business. As most Arab countries got their independence in the 1950's, 1960's and few in the 1970's, the cultural and linguistic influence of those colonizers continued. Alongside the liberation and independence movements, most Arab countries advocated Arabic as a national language and as the language of education and business. Arabization became a widespread endeavor. Despite that, English became the dominant second/foreign language in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt and Sudan, and French became the dominant second/foreign language in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Syria especially in the past decade or so with the advent of the satellite T.V., mobile phones, Internet and social media. A new linguistic phenomenon has appeared. Many educated Arabs prefer to use the English or French loan words in their daily speech and on T.V. shows. One would hear *mobile, brochure, alcohol, laptop, break, chat, coffee shop, comment, project, hashtag* in spoken Arabic although Arabic equivalents to those foreign words exist.

This phenomenon of code-switching (CW) and/or code-mixing (CM), i.e., mixing two or more languages in the same conversation or even the same sentence has been the subject of many studies. Jaran & Al-Haq (2015) found that university students in Jordan mix

colloquial Arabic with terms and expressions from English. Mustafa & Al-Khatib (1994) noted that mixing Arabic and English in science lectures at Jordanian universities is a prominent feature of the lectures. In Lebanon, faculty working at an American-style institution are unaware that they code-switch contrary to what non-participant observations showed. Instructors code-switch in class and students code-switch to learn better (Bahous, Nabhani & Bacha, 2014).

Furthermore, a review of the literature showed that bilingual speakers code-switch for several purposes. They mix the languages available to them as a social class identity, education and modernization marker (Kamwangamalu, 1989). Mauritians code-switched due to lexical deficiency in their native language. Mauritians with low native-language fluency code switched more than those with high native language fluency (Sounkalo, 1995). Tenth-grade Palestinian female students' Language-switching, attitudes, and linguistic identity were influenced by current political, social, and ethnic conflicts. They use English, Hebrew or Arabic based on issues of hegemony and social influences (Olsen, Kristen; Olsen, Holly, 2010). In Pakistan, university students considered CW an effective strategy that facilitates communication (Abbas, Aslam, Rana, 2011). In Malaysia, English and science teachers in secondary schools use CW to facilitate learning. They use it for reiteration and quotation, i.e., to bridge comprehension gaps, to mark salient information and instructions, to reiterate messages in Bahasa Malaysia, and incorporate student input and text information into the lesson (Then & Ting, 2011).

In their review of research, Bahous, R., Nabhani & Bacha (2014) pointed out that code-switching (CS) code-switching has become the subject of much concern in Arab academic contexts as it is negatively affecting students' language use and learning. It has been a subject of concern in Arab print media as this phenomenon has spread to literature, commercials and T.V. shows and others. Although, this concern is increasing, no rigorous studies were conducted in Arabic academic contexts to find out the reasons for CM. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the phenomenon of code-switching by educated Arab speakers, specifically inserting foreign words that have Arabic equivalents while speaking Arabic. It aims to answer the following questions: (i) Are instructors and students familiar with the Arabic equivalents to loan words used in Arabic spoken discourse? (ii) Why do educated Arabs prefer to use foreign words, although Arabic equivalents exist? (iv) Does CM have any negative effects on the Arabic language and young generation especially children? (v) How can the CM problem be alleviated and reduced?

2. DATA COLLECTION

A sample of 600 loan words that are commonly used in T.V. talk shows, social media and daily conversation in informal settings was collected. Each loan word in the corpus has an Arabic equivalent. The sample was verified by 4 professors of Arabic and applied linguistics.

3. SUBJECTS

A sample of 150 students from COLT and A sample of 60 faculty with a B.A. and M.A. degree in English, Literature, linguistics and translation from 3 universities in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia participated in the study.

4. INSTRUMENT

A translation test was given to the student and instructor samples. There were for parallel versions of the test, each of which consisted of 50 loan (foreign) words. The subjects were asked to give the Arabic equivalent to each foreign word. Foreign words were given in Arabic script.

In addition, the students and instructors answered a questionnaire-survey consisting of open-ended questions to find out why Arabs prefer to use foreign words when they speak Arabic although Arabic equivalents to those exist.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Students and instructors' correct responses were computed and converted to percentages. Students and instructors' responses to the questionnaire-survey are reported qualitatively.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Familiarity with Arabic equivalents:

Results showed that the instructors identified the Arabic equivalents to 56% of the items on the test (range 22%- 62%) compared to 52% by the students (range 11%-82%). These results reflect lack of proficiency in L1 (Arabic). The subjects do not know the Arabic equivalents to *Nanotechnology, brochure, poster, clinical* and others. They are not familiar with equivalents coined by Arabic Language Academies such as الشابكة، الناسوخ والماسحة الضوئية والشنكيوتي. Many do not read in Arabic, do not watch the news on Arabic T.V. which is broadcast in Standard Arabic. They do not search for Arabic equivalents. As in Soukalo's (1995) study, this study reflects native-language lexical deficiency. Unlike Kamwagamalu's (1989) study in which use of CM in bilingual communities in Zair did not reflect symptoms of linguistic incompetence, because bilinguals resorted to CM even when the message they conveyed through CM could also be expressed in one language only.

6.2 Acceptance of Code-switching

Results of the survey showed that 15% of the participants do not like inserting foreign words in Arabic speech. *"Although I am English major, I do not like to mix English and Arabic as it distorts and weakens Arabic"*, Amal said.

6.3 Reasons for Preferring Foreign Words to Native Equivalents

Both students and instructors gave numerous factors that affect Arab preference for loan words over Arabic equivalents. These are briefly given below.

Personal Factors

The participants indicated that inserting English words in spoken Arabic discourse is just a habit as they are language and translation major. Use of foreign words is due to the use of English in the workplace. English words are more accessible since English is the medium of instruction in their college and since instructors communicate with foreign colleagues in English. Maha said: *"It is very common nowadays to speak this way. Everybody speaks like that."* Noura added: *"In college I use English all the time. I unconsciously insert English words when I speak Arabic."*

Social Factors

In this day and age, it is more prestigious/glamorous to use the foreign word such as: *Mobile, Stade, Mondial, break, hashtag* in their Arabic speech. Some feel that English and/or French are of a higher status than Arabic with English being the international language. Dalal indicated that some students like to show off and brag about knowing English and would like to give others the impression that they are high class, educated and civilized. *"Knowing English is prestigious in our society"*, Sara said. People like to imitate T.V. anchors, artists and singers. This finding is consistent with findings of a study by Kinzler, Shutts & Spelke (2012) which found that children preferred English to Xhosa as English conveyed a higher status in the children's society.

Psycholinguistic factors

The subjects indicated that Arabic users do not like the newly-coined Arabic equivalents: رائي، شابكة، مرطاب، ناسوخ. Such words are not commonly used and if they use them, listeners may not understand them. In addition, some foreign words are characterized by brevity and conciseness, whereas Arabic has a long or explanatory equivalent as in: *HTML لغة ترميز النص التشعبي* and *Tele-money* which requires an explanatory equivalent. They asserted that students do not learn the Arabic equivalents to Facebook and Twitter terminology in school.

Pragmatic factors

The subjects pointed out that English words are used as a marketing tool to attract customers' attention as in *Aljazeera Mobile, media, multimedia*. They think it is more glamorous for customers to use foreign names for stores, hotels, movies, literary works, T.V. programs and so on. In the workplace, most doctors and company employees use English, as many customers do not speak Arabic. They continue to use English after their working hours.

Historical Factors

Translation errors made by students and instructors showed lack of historical linguistic knowledge of English and Arabic borrowings. The English words *admiral, Trafalgar, Toledo, alcohol, algorithm* and others were originally adopted by English from Arabic. Those borrowed words underwent phonological changes when used in English. Then Arabic-speakers re-adopted them (*vis alcohol and algorithm*) from English, and they underwent some phonological changes when re-borrowed in Arabic. Arabic speakers do not

relate the loan forms *alcohol* and *algorithms* to the original forms الغول والخوارزميات which were coined during the Abbasside Period in the 8th century. Furthermore, some loan words such as *Internet, fax, radio, television, scanner* entered the Arabic language first and were widely used by Arabs long before Arabic Language Academies coined Arabic equivalents (الماسحة الضوئية، الرائي، المذياع، الناسوخ، الشابكة). Meanwhile, those foreign words became deeply-rooted, and continued to be used.

Role of Arabic Language Academies:

Arabic Language Academies have no power over the media, higher educational institutions, research centers and the public to impose the use of newly coined Arabic equivalents. In addition, no law from Arab Ministries of Information has been passed to mandate the use of Arabic only and ban the use of foreign words on T.V.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mixing foreign words with Arabic in spoken discourse is a serious issue in Arab societies, media and academic institutions. Code-mixing is annoying to the listener. It distorts the Arabic language especially when users apply Arabic inflectional and derivational morphology such as tense markers, plural and feminine suffixes to foreign words (كومننات،) حنأيدنتفائي. In some T.V shows, more English content words are used than Arabic words which hinders listening comprehension especially in listeners who do not know English or do not know English car or real estate terminology when they listen to a commercial about cars or real estate. Children exposed to this hybrid language, i.e., CM, will learn a distorted language that will affect their linguistic development. They will learn to speak using CM without acquiring important Arabic words. Children need to build their lexical repertoire in Arabic. If adult students get into the habit of code-switching, Arabic words substituted by foreign words will die.

To help educated Arabs maintain their Arabic language and to counteract the phenomenon of CM, students should be encouraged to watch Arabic T.V. news channels as they use Standard Arabic and make lists of words and their Arabic equivalents (glossary). Schools and universities should raise students' awareness of the importance of using Arabic equivalents by holding campaigns, symposia and contests that encourage the use of Arabic only. The Arabic language curricula should be restructured and updated in terms of content and language. To raise students' awareness of Arabized words, special Facebook pages, Twitter hashtags, websites, blogs, online discussion forums, T.V. shows, newspaper pages/article may be used to familiarize them with Arabic equivalents to foreign words commonly used. An Arabization Center with online dictionaries can be established to help users find Arabic equivalents to foreign words. Arab governments and Ministries of Information should pass laws to protect and preserve the Arabic language and reduce the use of foreign words in the media, street signs, store names, billboards and others. Finally, families and teachers should encourage young people to use Standard Arab on social media.

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