

# Mutual Linguistic Borrowing between English and Arabic



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By

Ahmed Abdullah Alhussami

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This book is dedicated with gratitude to the soul of the deceased,  
the late president of Yemen, Ibraheem Al-Hamdi



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## ABSTRACT

This book comes to light after a long period of investigation and as a result of deep experience of research in the field of language borrowing. In the first part of this book, I study some aspects of Arabic loanwords in English with special reference to how they entered the English language and the semantic changes that these words have undergone. Out of approximately 650 words that I have discussed, only 231 went into English directly from Arabic into English. Some words went into English through classical languages such as Greek and Latin and some through old and medieval French. Most of these words went into English via Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Turkish. Some Arabic words were borrowed via Persian and some via Hindustani (i.e. Hindi – Urdu). A few Arabic words were borrowed via Swahili, an African language. In view of the various routes through which Arabic loanwords have travelled to English, I find it interesting to explore the reasons why they followed these routes. To know the routes is significant, especially in cases where an Arabic loanword has a meaning different from its original meaning. (E.g. *fakir* means ‘a poor person’ in Arabic, but it refers to a ‘Hindu ascetic who lives on alms’ in English. This is because the word went into English via Hindustani, in which language *fakir* was used in that specific sense.)

Most of the Arabic loanwords in English belong to the following semantic fields. 1- Flora and fauna; 2- Food and drink; 3- clothes and cosmetics; 4- scientific and mathematical terms; 5- navigation and military terms; 6- administrative terms; and 7- cultural and religious terms. Some of these terms were borrowed during the earliest phase of the medieval period, some during the early modern English period and some during the colonial era of British history. In this book, I propose to examine the significance of these borrowings with a view to finding out whether they were borrowed because there was no adequate English equivalent for them or whether they represented concepts and objects which were new to speakers of English. It is most likely that some of them were borrowed because they provided local colour to the written works in English involving the Arab world. Some recent borrowings (e.g. *jihād*, *fedayeen*, *mujahedeen*) have become popular in English, outside of their original sense in Arabic. Their popularity refers to one aspect of modern history

while the shift in their original meaning speaks of the cultural prejudice of the borrowers.

Through deep investigation of the process of borrowing, we come to know that the process of borrowing among languages is a phenomenon that does not occur among speakers of the same language families; instead, it occurs among speakers of different language families. For example, English has borrowed words and expressions from the Scandinavian languages, from French, Latin, Greek, and even from languages of different families like Arabic and Hebrew. In the same way, Arabic has borrowed from languages like Persian, Hindi, Greek and Latin. In fact, speakers of these different languages are involved with each other and interact under specific conditions, creating the way for word borrowings. This can be clearly seen in the case of borrowing between Arabic, which belongs to the Semitic family, and English which belongs to the Indo-European family. Increasing trade with the Levant brought England into more immediate contact with the Arabic-speaking peoples of North Africa during the latter part of the fourteenth century, and in the sixteenth century trade and exploration further east gave us a new source of Arabic loans: the Arabic element in the dialect of India.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides a general survey on the process of borrowing in general and in English and Arabic in particular. It presents the scenario of Yemeni Arabic and how English is taught in Yemen. The methodology and significance of the study are all presented briefly in this chapter. It also sheds light on a review of the literature on borrowing. Chapter 2 gives background about borrowing in Arabic in general and about the English loanwords in Arabic in particular. It presents the semantic changes that English loanwords in Arabic have undergone. It is because of these semantic changes that English loanwords in Arabic have been studied under three headings:

- i. English words that retain their English meaning in Arabic such as words like *akademyah* or *akademik* ‘academy’, *bastrah* ‘pasteurization’, *sandwetch* ‘sandwich’, etc.;
- ii. English words that have a narrower meaning in Arabic than in English like ‘bank’, ‘bachelor’, *haon* ‘horn’, ‘garage’, etc.;
- iii. English words that have a slight semantic change in Arabic like *bedrom*, ‘bedroom’, *shamli* ‘chimney’, *freem* ‘frame’, ‘service’, etc.

Chapter 3 investigates the borrowing of words into English from other languages in general and from Arabic in particular. It gives a general survey on the semantics of Arabic loanwords in English. The semantics of Arabic words in English are discussed under four heads.

Chapter 4 explains the words borrowed between English and Arabic phonologically and morphologically. In the case of phonological changes, we have tried hard to explore to what extent the difference in language phonology has affected the borrowed words either in English or in Arabic. In the case of English loanwords in Arabic, we have found that the difference in phonological level in both English and Arabic has affected and brought about changes in the way English words in Arabic are pronounced. For instance, the English phoneme /p/ in words like program, par, aspirin, amplifier, etc. gets changed into /b/ in Arabic because Arabic does not have the /p/ sound in it. So, the above words are pronounced as *brogram*, *bar*, *asbirin* and *amblifir* respectively. Similarly, the English consonant sound /v/ is not there in Arabic, so the English words in Arabic like 'virus', 'villa', 'visa', and 'vitamin' are all pronounced in Arabic as *fairoos*, *filla*, *fizah* and *faitameen* respectively. Morphologically, English loanwords in Arabic have been discussed in terms of number, gender, case and article. The English words in Arabic and the Arabic words in English have undergone a comprehensive study to show how English and Arabic speakers subdue the borrowed words into their native rules.

Chapter 5 classifies the English loanwords in Arabic and Arabic loanwords in English into sets according to their semantic fields such as: religious, cultural, scientific, political and administrative, navigational, academic and educational terms.

Chapter 7 recapitulates the main points in the thesis and presents the findings and the generalizations drawn from the study.

The two kinds of words, Arabic borrowed into English and English borrowed into Arabic, have undergone the same investigation. They are discussed phonologically, morphologically and semantically. Two charts of consonant sounds of the two languages, English and Arabic, are presented to show the phonological differences between them. Semantically, the Arabic words in English have been discussed under four heads to show how each word got changed in meaning when borrowed from Arabic to English.

The book ends with the classification of English loanwords in Arabic and Arabic loanwords in English. Borrowed words in both English and Arabic are classified into different semantic fields.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Borrowing: A Significant Step in Lexical Enrichment

Edward Sapir rightly assumes that languages, like cultures, are rarely sufficient by themselves. The necessity of intercourse brings the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighbouring or culturally dominant languages. This may involve the field of business and trade, or the world of knowledge comprising art, science, technology, religion, culture and philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Like cultures, languages come into contact with and enrich one another. Because of an urgent need to communicate, speakers of one language come into contact with speakers of another language. It is impossible for people of different nations or even people of the same nation to live in isolation; especially nowadays, because of globalization. As a matter of fact, language is the most useful tool for the purpose of communication among human beings. It is natural for the speakers of a specific language to find themselves in need of being in contact with those of a neighbouring or culturally dominant language, directly or indirectly.

Historically, it is true that there are hardly any languages in the world which have existed in isolation from the beginning. The primitive tribes might have lived in isolation in a pre-historic age; but their numbers were often so small that their members had intermarriages with members of other tribes who spoke different languages or different dialects of the same language. Consequently, they brought about changes in their native dialects. Factors like intertribal trade also led to the exchange of vocabulary within or outside a language community. We have seen people of different languages and of different cultures living together peacefully and normally. It is because of their urgent need to communicate that

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<sup>1</sup> Wajih Hamad Abderrahman. "A Linguistic Study of the Impact of English on Arabic Word-Formation". *Islamic Studies* 34: 2 (Summer 1995) 223.

speakers of a language come into contact with speakers of other languages. When two languages co-exist, there is a possibility of mutual borrowing. As some languages are more dominant and have greater prestige than others they become a source of borrowing for the latter, as is the case with English. Because of the need to exchange ideas and enrich one's thoughts and knowledge, the interaction between speakers of different languages leads to the phenomenon of borrowing among languages. The process of communication creates an environment in which languages influence one another. That is why Haugen defines borrowing as "the attempted reproduction in one language of patterns previously found in another".<sup>2</sup>

Nancy Armstrong considers borrowing to be "one of the ways in which a language renews its lexicon. The translation of a borrowed term may also facilitate interlingual communication. In fact, borrowing is not a new phenomenon in the history of language contact. History tells us that five languages have played a significant role in the development of human cultures; they are classical Chinese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek and Latin."<sup>3</sup>

Generally, the process of borrowing does not take place among speakers of the same dialect or language; it occurs among speakers of different languages and dialects. This can be clearly seen in the case of borrowing between Arabic, which belongs to the Semitic family, and English, which belongs to the Indo-European family. For example, English has borrowed words and expressions from Scandinavian languages, French, Latin, Greek, and even from languages of different language families like Arabic and Hebrew. The increasing trade with the Levant brought England into more immediate contact with the Arabic-speaking peoples of North Africa during the later fourteenth century CE, and in the sixteenth century trade and exploration further east gave the Arabs a new source of loans into Arabic: the Arabic element in the dialect of India.<sup>4</sup>

A good and deep survey of the history of the Arabic language shows that Arabic displaced Latin as the dominant language in North Africa. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE, Arabic civilisation had spread not only through the Middle East and North Africa, but also into Spain. During this period, Islamic armies invaded many countries and established Islam as a

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<sup>2</sup> Bates L. Hoffer, "Language Borrowing and Language Diffusion", *Intercultural Communication Studies* (X1:4. 2002) 1

<sup>3</sup> Hoffer 2.

<sup>4</sup> Mary S. Serjeantson, *A History of Foreign Words in English* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1968) 213.



new world religion. The Muslim rule over Spain influenced medieval European scholars who began to take an interest in learning Arabic. They adopted scientific Arabic terms, especially in the field of mathematics and astronomy. Their intimate contact with Arabic culture aroused their interest in it, which resulted in the borrowing of words from Arabic to European languages. Many Arabic words of different semantic fields like food, spices, clothing, navigation, religion, etc. entered the vocabulary of English during this period. It is worth noting that Middle English borrowed most of its Arabic words through French, since French was the language of the most educated class of people in England in those days.<sup>5</sup>

Generally speaking, Arabic loanwords in English are many and cover almost all semantic fields. On the other hand, Arabic daily newspapers, magazines, periodicals, TV and radio broadcasting provide us with hundreds of words of English origin, which we use in everyday life. These words are used by Arabic speakers without their being aware that these words are of English origin. Some of these words are borrowed by Arabic speakers because they do not have equivalent words in Arabic. For instance, the English word 'fax' has no Arabic equivalent. This word is frequently used in Arabic even by those who are illiterate. As mentioned, borrowings have enriched both Arabic and English, and it will be interesting to explore the extent to which they have taken place and the impact they have left on each other.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study aims at understanding the significance of borrowing in general and borrowing in English and Arabic in particular. It will identify and analyse the nature of Arabic loanwords in English and English loanwords in Arabic. As a matter of fact, loanwords in different languages depend on the nature of contact between their speakers and on convergence between the two languages. Loanwords function like a mirror that reflects the circumstances in which two different cultures coexist and impact one another. This study will also focus on identifying the semantic change that a word may have undergone when borrowed from one language to another. As Hock<sup>6</sup> points out, when a word is borrowed from one language to another, in so far as the semantics of the borrowed words is concerned,

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<sup>5</sup> For more details, see Habeeb Salloum and James Peters *Arabic Contribution to the English Vocabulary*.

<sup>6</sup> For more details see *Ahmed Al-hussami: Arabic Loanwords in English*, Diss. Taiz University, Taiz, Yemen, (2007) 13.

it has one of the three possibilities: its original meaning is (a) completely retained, (b) expanded or (c) narrowed. We will keep these points in view while examining the English loanwords in Arabic. For instance, the English word ‘bank’ in Arabic means a financial establishment in which both people and the government deposit money for investment, exchange or other use. However, in English the word ‘bank’ means:

An organisation where people and businesses can invest or borrow money, change it to foreign money, etc., or a building where these services are offered, as in:

1. High street banks have been accused of exploiting small firms.
2. I need to go to the bank at lunch time.
3. I had to take out a bank loan to start my own business.

It also means a bank of something, such as blood or human organs for medical use, or a place which stores these things for later use, as in: a blood bank; a sperm bank. The homophone word bank refers to sloping or raised land, especially along the sides of a river, as in:

By the time we reached the opposite bank, the boat was sinking fast. These flowers generally grow on sloping river banks and near streams.<sup>7</sup>

In short, the word ‘bank’ is borrowed into Arabic from English only in one sense, i.e. a financial organisation, and it especially refers to the organisation’s building. The semantic as well as the phonological and morphological changes in loanwords between Arabic and English are the most important aspects of the present study. The other aspect is to explore the main reasons behind this borrowing. Is it because there is no adequate native word in Arabic for ‘bank’ to denote such an organisation? Or, is it because of the fact that the language from which the word is borrowed is economically, politically and technologically more powerful and dominant than the recipient language? In Arabic, the English word ‘radio’ is commonly used by Arabic speakers in spite of the fact that there is an equivalent newly coined Arabic word *methṛā* (radio). Similarly, the English word ‘telephone’ has the Arabic word *hatef* as an equivalent, but the English word is commonly in use even in the mass media. Even very recent English words in Arabic, like ‘mobile’, ‘internet’, ‘laptop’, etc.,

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<sup>7</sup> Judy Pearsall. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford/Delhi: Oxford University Press, (2002) 135.

have newly coined Arabic equivalents, *naqal*, *shabkah almalomat*, *mahmol* respectively, but the English forms are still in use.

The English word 'fax' is frequently used in Arabic because there is no equivalent Arabic word for it. Some similar words are borrowed to fill in a specific gap in colloquial Arabic. It is because of the lack of adequate native words that Arabic has welcomed hundreds of English words like 'Facebook', 'battery', 'telegraph', 'twitter', 'u-tube', 'fax', etc. Generally speaking, borrowing words from English to Arabic is the most dominant feature that manifests the impact of English on Arabic in modern times. Because of acute linguistic needs, an Arabic speaker is obliged to borrow some modern English words to enable him or her to cope with modern life. The Arabic speaker borrows words from different languages, especially English, if there are no equivalents in his/her native language. He makes phonological accommodation to make them closer to his native language at all linguistic levels. For example, the English word 'computer' is borrowed into Arabic as *kambuter*. In English, it is pronounced as /kəm'pjʊ:tə/, however, in Arabic, it is pronounced as /kæmbu:ter/. The English sound /ə/ has become /æ/ in Arabic. The English sound /p/ changed in Arabic to /b/ because the Arabic speaker is not familiar with the English sound /p/. The English sound /p/ is not used in Arabic. At the morphological level, the English word 'stereo' has the plural form as 'stereos'; but, in Arabic, it becomes *stereoahat*. The details of the phonological and morphological changes will be discussed in Chapter Four.

This study aims at understanding the kind of mutation that a word may undergo when it is borrowed. As observed earlier, when a word is borrowed from one language to another, some sounds of the borrowed word may be difficult to pronounce for the speaker of the language which borrowed it, because languages do not all have the same sound system. It is because of this variation in the phonetic system that a language faces problems of pronunciation while borrowing words from other languages. Nevertheless, people are obliged to borrow the words of other languages and overcome this shortcoming by making phonetic adjustments according to their own sound system. Either they borrow some sounds from the source language or they replace the unfamiliar sounds with sounds that resemble them approximately in the recipient language. For example, the English word in Arabic 'vanilla' has its pronunciation, which is a little bit alien to speakers of Arabic. In Arabic, it has partially lost its original pronunciation and become /fanilla/. The sound /v/ changes into /f/ because there is no /v/ in Arabic. Similarly, the English word 'vitamin' is pronounced

*/fi:ta:mi:n/* in Arabic; the English sound */v/* is replaced by Arabic */f/*. It is therefore necessary to investigate and identify such changes in borrowed words.

The study tries to find out whether factors such as trade, travel, colonisation and language contact facilitate borrowing. It will not only investigate the interaction between these two languages but will also provide evidence for the cultural links that have existed for centuries between their speakers. The cultural divergence between Arabic and English can be seen in the adaptation of some Arabic words in English: for example, the English word ‘assassin’ is from the Arabic word *hashish*. In English, it means “the murderer of an important person in a surprise attack for political or religious reasons”.<sup>8</sup> However, in Arabic, the word *hasisi* (which literally means hashish-eater) refers to a cutter, collector, seller or smoker of hashish. In Arabic, it does not refer to murder, but in Latin it means so. Similarly, the Arabic word *Quran* means the Holy Book of Allah, and Allah’s speech and Prophet Mohammed’s action in Arabic. However, this meaning is reduced in English to “the Islamic sacred book, believed to be the word of God as dictated to Mohammed and written in Arabic”. The word ‘believed’ in the English meaning of the word *Quran* creates a kind of suspicion as to whether the *Holy Quran* is Allah’s book; or not. This difference in meaning is caused due to cultural and religious differences between the speakers of Arabic and English.

Trade with Arab merchants may be one of the causes responsible for borrowings such as ‘carat’, ‘sugar’, ‘coffee’, ‘cotton’, ‘tariff’, etc.<sup>9</sup> from Arabic to English. Because of the expansion of Islam into Europe, some Arabic words such as *sultan*, *halal*, *haji*, *haram*, *mujahedeen*, *Quran*, *waqf*, *zakat*, etc. found their way into English. We will try to find out the reason behind the influx of English words into Arabic in the modern time. This study will investigate whether the advent of radio, TV, newspapers and the internet has introduced words associated with them. Cultural contact between speakers of the two languages made it necessary to adopt such words to facilitate communication. It may also be true that globalisation of markets for products from around the world has resulted in making Arab speakers familiar with foreign names because of this advertisement and adoption by others. These facts on word borrowing will be taken into consideration while trying to look at the causes behind the borrowing of English words into Arabic and Arabic words into English.

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<sup>8</sup> Pearsall 100.

<sup>9</sup> Serjeantson 217.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims at identifying the Arabic loanwords in English and English loanwords in Arabic. It will try to explain the reasons for the mutual borrowings between Arabic and English. Explanations for this will be sought against the historical background of Arabs and English speakers. The study will try to explore the rationale behind and the scope of borrowing between Arabic and English. The factors leading to the borrowing of words from Arabic into English are slightly different from those leading to the borrowing of English words into Arabic. The first Arabic loanwords in English may be due to the expansion of Islam, trade and travelling and the migration of Arabs from their own homeland to other parts of the world. As Arabs were well known for travelling, they went to Spain, India and China in the early phase of Islam. Because of the spread of Islam, which was a new religion, Arabic language also spread. This is why Arabic had a great influence on other languages, especially on the people of other countries who converted to Islam. In the case of Arabic loanwords in English, the researcher will try to find out whether they went into English directly or through a third language (e.g. Latin or French).

This study will explore the kind of semantic changes that Arabic loanwords in English have undergone. It will try to examine English loanwords in Arabic in terms of their forms and functions. It will try to find out the range and nature of the borrowing from English into Arabic. In addition, it will try to investigate the phonological, morphological and syntactic changes that some English words in Arabic have undergone. For instance, the English word 'electronic' occurs in Arabic as an adjective as *electronyah*. Similarly, the English word 'strategies' occurs in Arabic in the singular as *stratege* and in the plural as *strategyat* (i.e. the Arabic plural suffix *-yat* - is used). The English word 'programme' has the same form in both masculine and feminine. However, in Arabic, the borrowed word 'programme' has two distinctive forms; *parnamag/j*, and *parmag/jah*. The first (i.e. *parnamag/j*) refers to a plan or instruction that makes a set like a computer work properly. The second (i.e. *parmag/jah*) is the process in which we set a programme to a computer, telephone, etc.

Arabic is the language that is used in all of the countries of the Middle East. It is the official language of 26 states and Modern Standard Arabic largely follows the grammatical standards of the Quranic Arabic; it uses much of the same vocabulary. It is the language of the *Holy Quran* and its standard form is used in news broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, books and in official documents. It is widely taught in schools and universities,

and used in varying degrees in workplaces, government and the media. Words like ‘biology’, ‘body’, ‘cable’, ‘capsule’, ‘CDs’, ‘cigarette’, ‘cinema’, ‘computer’, ‘doctor’, ‘electronic’, ‘Facebook’, ‘fax’, ‘film’, ‘flash’, ‘genes’, ‘Google’, ‘group’, ‘iconic’, ‘internet’, ‘lamp’, ‘laser’, ‘liberal’, ‘logistic’, ‘machine’, ‘mobile’, ‘mouse’, ‘net’, ‘oxide’, ‘professor’, ‘programme’, ‘strategy’, ‘telephone’, ‘thermometer’, ‘tire’, ‘twitter’, etc. are modern borrowings from English into Arabic. These and hundreds of other words of English occur repeatedly in official Arabic media and official documents. An attempt is made here to find out whether Arabic loanwords in English are used widely or in restricted contexts.

## 1.4 The Importance of this Book

This study aims at identifying the nature and patterns in borrowing between two languages: Arabic loanwords in English and English loanwords in Arabic. It explains the reasons for borrowings between the Arabic and English languages. Explanations for this are sought in the historical background of Arab and English speakers. The study will be able to refer to the historical period in which Arabic and English came closer and influenced each other. It will undergo a kind of comprehensive investigation in terms of the phonological as well as the morphological aspects of the change in borrowed words. As English and Arabic are two languages of different language families, their phonological as well as morphological rules are different from the points of view of gender, number and case in terms of their structures. For instance, the English number system has only singular and plural but Arabic has singular, dual and plural. For example, the English word ‘book’ is singular and ‘books’ is plural. However, its Arabic equivalent *kitab* has the three forms; *kitab*, *kitabān* and *kotb* as singular, dual and plural respectively.

In English, the existence of a verb in a sentence is a must, but in Arabic a nominal sentence can have no verb. For instance, the Arabic sentence *Algo gamil* (i.e. the air is wonderful) has no verb. In addition, these words will be examined carefully from the semantic point of view to know how their meanings have undergone any change.

## 1.5 Socio-Cultural Significance of Loanwords

One of the significant points about loanwords is that as words are borrowed from one language to another, they carry their nuances to the recipient language. A word does not carry only its denotation from the donor language, but it carries also its connotation that reflects its cultural

background. Inevitably, borrowing from Arabic to English and vice versa is a good example to prove this claim. For example, when the Arabic word *kat* went into English as ‘khat’ it carried the social habit of Yemeni people who waste several hours a day chewing it and gossiping in a *kat* session. The English reader may draw a social image about the society that practises this habit. The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (henceforth, NODE) defines it as:

- (i) the leaves of an Arabian *shrub*, which are chewed (or drunk) as a stimulant, or infusion and (ii) the *shrub* that produces these leaves, growing in mountainous regions and which is often cultivated.<sup>10</sup>

This denotation may arouse the curiosity of an English researcher to investigate the cultural background of Yemeni Arabs who have this habit of using it daily. He may go further and deeper to investigate its history and how it grew and its significance in such a society.

Similarly, the Arabic word *Makha*, which went into English as ‘mocha’ means “a fine-quality coffee and a soft kind of leather made from sheepskin”.<sup>11</sup> It carries a sense of social background that this finest quality of coffee and leather is confined to a particular region in the Arab world that is called Mocha. This connotation may create a cultural connection with the homeland of the finest quality of coffee and its sophisticated producers and users.

In addition, Arabic religious words like, ‘Allah’, ‘Quran’, ‘hajj’, ‘haji’, ‘Mecca’, ‘Ramadan’, ‘halal’, ‘Eid’, etc., carry religious and social overtones that are unique to Arabic speakers. The word ‘Allah’ is referred to as “the name of God among Muslims and Arab Christians”.<sup>12</sup> However, the *New Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (henceforth: *ODI*) explains it as “God, worshiped by Muslims, Christians, and Jews to the exclusion of all others.”<sup>13</sup> It further states that ‘Allah’ is defined in the *Quran* as “the creator, sustainer, judge, and ruler of the material universe and the realm of human experience”. Such aspects of meanings are related to the religious background of both donor and recipient language. According to our religion, ‘Allah’ is the only God who controls and holds the whole universe. ‘Allah’ is supposed to be the only one who is worshiped by all human beings all over the world all the time. However, in English it does

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<sup>10</sup> Pearsall 1005.

<sup>11</sup> Pearsall 1187.

<sup>12</sup> Pearsall 44.

<sup>13</sup> ODI 16.

not carry that unique meaning; it simply means “the name of God among Muslims”.

Similarly, the English word ‘hajj’, which is from Arabic *haj/g*, carries a religious and cultural meaning, which is confined to Muslims alone. The Arabic speaker does not accept the English word ‘pilgrimage’ to replace the Arabic word *haj/g*, because the Arabic word *haj/g* refers only to one of the six pillars of Islam, the commandment to visit Mecca at least once in lifetime. However, in other cultures, people may visit their statues, the tombs of adored saints, temples, etc., as a part of their ritual purposes. The Arabs call such a visit a pilgrimage rather than ‘hajj’.

In the same way, the English word ‘Ramadan’ is from Arabic *Ramādan*. In English, it refers to the ninth month of the Muslim year, “during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset”<sup>14</sup>. The core of the reference in this word lies in the fact that fasting for 30 successive days is only confined to Muslims.

Similarly, the English word ‘halal’ is from Arabic *halaal*. Its dictionary meaning refers to “meat preparation as prescribed by Muslim law (e.g. *halal* butchers), religiously accepted in Muslim law: halal banking, halal meat”.<sup>15</sup> The Arabic word *halaal* cannot be replaced by the English word ‘permissible’ because the Arabic word has the religious connotation permitted in the name and praise of Allah. In other words, it is permitted from the religious point of view rather than from the point of view of the law. Its antonym in Arabic is ‘haram’ - ‘forbidden’ - i.e. strictly prohibited by the religious text.

Arabic words in English like ‘*fedayeen*’, ‘*jihad*’, ‘*ghazi*’, etc. have an Islamic cultural dimension. For example, the word ‘*fedayeen*’ means “Arab guerrillas operating especially against Israel”.<sup>16</sup> In Arabic, it refers to the person who fights and sacrifices himself for the sake of Allah and his country. Thus, its English meaning is confined to a part of its Arabic meaning. In other words, the Arabic cultural nuance is lost while using this word in English. The word ‘*jihad*’ means “a holy war undertaken by Muslims against unbelievers”.<sup>17</sup> This meaning carries with it the Islamic concept of the type of war and how it is restricted and related to Islamic norms. The Arabic word *jihad* cannot be replaced in English by the

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<sup>14</sup> Pearsall 1533.

<sup>15</sup> Pearsall 827.

<sup>16</sup> Pearsall 671.

<sup>17</sup> Pearsall 982.



English word ‘war’ because the word ‘war’ can refer to only political clashes. It is only when you fight for the sake of Allah that you can use the Arabic word *jihad*.

The same situation occurs in the case of English loanwords in Arabic. Some English words in Arabic reflect the influence of Western culture. The English word ‘beer’ went into Arabic as *berah*. The word ‘beer’ has a western cultural connotation. When an Arab drinks beer, it gives him a kind of stimulus, which is different from the stimulus caused by chewing ‘kat’. The Arab addicted to this drink tries to have it clandestinely because drinking goes against Arabic or Islamic culture. Even shops in Arabic and Islamic countries are not officially allowed to sell this forbidden drink. The phrase ‘beer and skittles’ means, in English, ‘amusement and enjoyment’ but it is not known to Arabs.

The English words ‘sandwich’ and ‘hamburger’, which are called ‘fast food’, carry with them western cultural norms. When an Arab tries to have such dishes, he/she comes closer to western culture. In Arabic culture, people used to have beans, eggs, milk, etc. for their breakfast, but now they are used to western dishes like sandwich and hamburger. In Arabic culture, such dishes symbolize a new style of food habit. In addition, foods like caramel, jelly, cream, jam, ice-cream, pizza, etc. are all new to Arabic culture.

English words like ‘shorts’, ‘boot’, ‘blouse’, ‘shampoo’, ‘pantaloon’, ‘sandal’, etc are all essential parts of English clothing and cosmetics. Words like ‘game’, ‘volleyball’, ‘basket’, ‘tennis’, ‘basketball’, ‘jazz’, ‘tango’, etc. have a western background. Arabs of old were not familiar with them. It is under modern globalisation that Arabic culture has got mixed up with European culture.

## **1.6 Arabic Language in Yemen**

### **1.6.1 Historical Review**

Arabic is a member of the Semitic language family. Some of the languages that come under this language family are Akkadian (believed to be the oldest Semitic language and spoken in Mesopotamia between 2500 and 600 BCE), Hebrew (the language of the Jewish Bible, 1200-200 BCE), Aramaic (first millennium BCE and spoken in Syria from the tenth century

BCE onwards), and Ethiopic (also called Ge'ez), the language of the Empire of Aksum (first centuries CE).<sup>18</sup>

John B. Watson states that the language spoken in the south of the Arabian peninsula was Epigraphic South Arabian. The first ever chronicle in the Arabic language is the poetry of the pre-Islamic era (around the sixth century CE), and of course there is the *Holy Quran* (or *Quran*), produced more than 1400 years ago. Arabic has two main varieties – the Quranic, better known as Classical Arabic (henceforth C A), and the colloquial variety. One of the most distinctive features of the Arab World is that C A coexists with such national vernaculars as Egyptian, Syrian, and some other varieties of Arabic used in the Gulf countries and so on. Classical Arabic is sometimes referred to as *al-lughā al-'arabiyya al-fushā*, 'the eloquent Arabic language'. However, the national vernaculars are referred to as *ammiyya*, 'the common', or by names referring to specific geographical regions, like Egyptian (*masri*), Syrian (*shami*), and so on. Some linguists consider the coexistence of Arabic and its variants in the form of national vernaculars such as Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian, etc. a distinctive feature of the Arabic language. This can lead us to observe that Arabic presents a diglossic situation. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines the term diglossia as:

a situation in which two languages (or two varieties of the same language) are used under different conditions within a community, often by the same speakers. The term is usually applied to languages with distinctive 'high' and 'low' (colloquial) varieties, such as Arabic.<sup>19</sup>

The Arabic diglossic situation has a high variety (H) (i.e. C A) that is very prestigious and a low variety (L) which has no official status. The (H) variety is the language of the *Holy Quran*, which was codified in the eighth century CE. It is always referred to as prestigious. It is used in diplomacy and international dialogues when Arabs are a part in such treaties or pacts. As the literary form of the Arabic language, it is used in books, newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, religious discourses, public announcements, notices, contracts, political speeches, programmes, etc. As a medium of communication, the (H) variety displays the respect and tact of its speaker. People sometimes use it to show their educational status or superiority. In mosques, schools, universities and all other academic

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<sup>18</sup> Tawfeek Al-Shar'abi, *Prosody and Morphology as Mutually Interacting System: The Case Study of Yemeni Arabic*. Diss. English and Foreign Language U, Hyderabad, (2010) 16.

<sup>19</sup> Pearsall 516.

institutions (H) is used as an instructional medium. Arabic speakers consider it an essential part of their vast literary and religious heritage. The (H) variety is considered the standard form of the Arabic language. This standard language has not changed in terms of its syntax and morphology. However, there has been a shift in the lexicon: loanwords from western and other cultures have enriched its domain.

However, the low (L) variety or what is called colloquial Arabic is always called *ammiyya* ‘common’, or *sukyah* ‘market language’. This form of Arabic is not given enough space by different media. Some countries like Iraq, Syria, Palestine, etc. do not allow the (L) variety to be published in newspapers so that it cannot harm the (H) variety or replace it. In Yemen and some Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, the (L) form is allowed to be used in written public communication and its folk poetry. This variety is used by people in their everyday normal conversation, in markets, on buses and in public buildings, even though it is held in low esteem.<sup>20</sup>

Generally speaking, the distinct functions for (H) and (L) are as follows:

The (H) variety has a literary heritage, which (L) does not have. It is the (L) variety that children acquire naturally, but they acquire (H) through education. The (H) variety has a well-established orthography and vocabulary. However, the (L) vocabulary is still in the process of evolution.

After a deep investigation based on the study of four speech communities; Arabic, Modern Greek, Swiss German and Haitian Creole, Charles A. Ferguson defines diglossia as:

A relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superimposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learnt largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kees Versteegh. *Arabic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press (1997) 195.

<sup>21</sup> William Downes. *Language and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1998) 75.

C A was usually used in the pre-Islam era. It was approved by classical Arab grammarians that the Arabic language is divided into three varieties mainly spoken in the centre and north of the Arabian peninsula: *Hejaz*, *Najd*, and the language of the tribes in neighbouring areas. The Arabic spoken by the people of Hejaz is the purest of all. From the very beginning, C A has been the language of literature, education and administration, whereas vernacular has been the medium of oral exchange, non-print media, and everyday speech. As C A is the language of the *Holy Quran*, it is the language of sermons in mosques all over the world. With the advent of Islam, by the end of the seventh century CE Islamic rule had spread rapidly over and beyond the Arabian peninsula. As Islam spread through invasions and conquests, the Arabic language also spread alongside it. During that time, Arabic became the official language of the conquered territories, either in the form of C A or in some other vernacular forms.

The source of C A is said to have developed from the Arabic used during the pre-Islam era. Arabic linguists support their claim that the *Holy Quran* used the same case system and the glottal stop that were in the dialect of *Qurysh*, i.e. the tribe of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) (henceforth, pbuh).<sup>22</sup>

As cited in Al-Shar'abi, C A developed out of the pre-Islamic literary variety of Arabic. The literary variety has taken most of its characteristics from the Arabic dialects of Qurysh, along with the clearest sounds/forms from other Arabic dialects. Al-Shar'abi adds that C A has enjoyed such an exalted state that outstanding poets and orators of various Arab tribes indulged in intense literary rivalry during the regularly held *aswaak* (i.e. markets) in Mecca. In fact, the literary dialect was used by famous poets at that time to glorify their tribes, leaders and their epic deeds, especially the victors in the battlefield in the early dawn of Islam. With the increasing influence of modernisation, decolonisation, independence and political pluralism during this century, it is being realised that Classical Arabic is incapable of responding to modern needs. As an essential ingredient of Arab identity regardless of religion, and as a language that ensures a specifically Muslim identity, gradually reliance on colloquial/regional Arabic is increasing.

Because of the Turks the prestige of C A decreased during the Ottoman occupation of the Arab world (1516-1918 CE). The Turks were driven

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<sup>22</sup> Al- Shar'abi 4.

away when the West invaded Egypt and other Arab countries. The colonialists, along with the Orientalists, convinced the educated people that C A was capable of tackling the needs of the modernised and industrialised Arab civilisation. Up to the middle of the twentieth century the language retained its position as the only medium of instruction in the Arab world. Undoubtedly, C A has been the language of the *Holy Quran*, pre-Islamic and post-Islamic literature, philosophy, theology, mathematics, science and so on. From this glorious language arose what is called Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth, MSA). As Haeri mentions:

the prevalence of views that characterize Classical Arabic as the most “correct,” “powerful,” and “beautiful” form of the Arabic language is inseparable from the fact that it has been the language of the most significant texts of Islam civilisation, including religious, literary, legal, and scientific works.<sup>23</sup>

It is MSA that is used by Arabic media: TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, etc. It is also the medium of teaching and religious sermons. Though MSA is the direct descendent of C A, some changes can be pointed out between the two. In the case of lexicons, many words which were in circulation in the pre-Islamic period have dropped out of use, and many new and Arabicised words have been integrated into MSA. MSA is further broadened because words from different colloquial dialects have been incorporated and are used in this language, spoken as a mother tongue by various communities in the Arab world. Colloquial Arabic is a cover term for everyday speech throughout the Arab world. These dialects are in common use by those who are not educated, or even by those who know MSA but feel free to use common language. However, the other dialects outside the Arabian peninsula share some characteristics, which are somewhat different from C A. This causes some scholars to postulate the existence of a prestigious *koine* dialect. In the Arabian peninsula, we find different varieties, which share a large number of features with C A. This can be attested by data from dialects of the Gulf area, from Al-sham (i.e. Iraq, Syria, Jordan, etc.), Egypt and so on.

It is remarkable that the Arabic renaissance that started in Egypt and spread to other Arabic speaking regions is considered to be the real dawn of the modernisation of the Arabic language. It was after six centuries of stagnation that the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt left its intellectual, social and political impact on the Arab world. Among the remarkable

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<sup>23</sup> Niloofar v. “Forms and Ideology: Arabic Sociolinguistics and Beyond.” *Annu. Rev. Anthropolgy* (2000) 68.

contributions of this expedition were the introduction of the printing press to Egypt and the translation of a significant sample of western literature into Arabic. It was also during this period that aspects of Arab culture began to be admired in Europe.

It was Mohammed Ali, an enlightened modern ruler of Egypt, who was committed to the modernisation of Egypt and started sending Egyptian students to France and other European countries to study different fields of science.<sup>24</sup> They came back to Egypt to teach and write in various disciplines in Arabic. This group of scholars was able to enrich Arabic with new vocabulary, especially scientific terms. In addition, the Arabs who emigrated to the Americas brought back the impact of western education on the Arabic language. They brought not only new ideas into Arabic writing, but also new techniques. This group of Arabic scholars was able to make the first attempt at translating some textbooks into Arabic, especially in medical and scientific fields. According to Abu-Absi, author of *The Modernisation of Arabic: Problems and Prospects*, the two important institutions of higher learning which trained generations of Arab leaders and intellectuals are both located in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. Though C A is considered to be the language of the *Holy Quran*, it is a fact that it lacks the necessary scientific vocabulary. Some scholars have criticised the scientific stagnation and the inadequacy of modern expression in C A. One solution that was offered was the replacement of C A with a regional colloquial variety. Another was the replacement of the traditional writing system with the “Roman” type alphabet and the opening of the door for free and extensive borrowing from variants of the western languages.

In short, Arabic is a language the history of which goes back to the pre-Islamic period. The two distinctive forms of Arabic are C A and colloquial Arabic. The first has developed into Modern Standard Arabic, which is used in modern media like TV and radio, newspapers, books, magazines, official documents, political speeches and religious sermons. The latter has developed and been moulded into different varieties related to social or regional requirements. It is a medium that is continuously used in everyday speech situations.

Historians and scholars consider Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula to be the original Arabs. The Arabian culture was developed by tribes of

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<sup>24</sup> Samir Abu Absi. “The Modernization of Arabic: Problem and Prospects”. *Anthropological Linguistics*. 28:3. (1986) 373-48.