The arabized and the intruder: A survey of Arabic linguists' efforts

Saad Maqdadab | Nidal Al-Shamali

Abstract This study aims to illuminate the endeavors of ancient Arabic linguists in the surveillance and classification of words falling into the categories of "Arabized" and "intruder," and to demonstrate the impact of the inclusion of these words on the enrichment of the Arabic language. It further seeks to identify the methodologies employed by scholars in addressing these lexical components. Employing a descriptive and analytical approach, this study elucidates the repercussions of incorporating Arabized and foreign words on the evolution and vitality of the Arabic language. The findings of this study affirm the Arabic language's capacity to subject foreign and extraneous terms to the morphological and phonetic conventions of the Arabic linguistic framework. Moreover, it reveals a consensus among scholars regarding their approaches to handling Arabized and intruder words, with an overarching commitment to preserving the essence and integrity of the Arabic language in accordance with its established norms and standards.

Keywords: Arabized, intruder, Arabic language, scholars

1. Introduction

Dictionaries have been intertwined with the Arabs since the pre-Islamic era, driven by political, commercial, and social imperatives. This amalgamation yielded a proliferation of words from foreign sources, which found their way into the lexicon of the cultured. Hundreds of terms from diverse languages were assimilated into Arabic, spoken by Arabs, and celebrated by eloquent speakers in their discourse. Poets immortalized these borrowed words in their verses, and the Arabic language bore the influence of Persian, Abyssinian, Aramaic, and various other linguistic traditions.

The phenomenon of lexical borrowing between languages is a natural consequence of physical and cultural interactions, resulting in the cross-pollination of languages. As Massoud Bobo aptly elucidated concerning the intrusion of foreign words into our Arabic language, "Our Arabic language is not an island unto itself in the sea of languages. Its custodians were not estranged from mingling with neighboring communities, nor were they immune to the influence of foreign languages or devoid of susceptibility to such influences... Scientific inquiry has revealed that Arabic bestowed upon these nations, especially after the advent of Islam, much more than it appropriated from them. Some of these cultures even adopted Arabic script symbols for their own written languages, which they continue to employ to this day, in addition to incorporating Arabic words..." (Boubo, 1982).

Massoud Boubo expounded upon the borrowing of Arabic words from other languages, emphasizing the connection to material and industrial matters. The Arabs' need for foreign terminology was dictated not by the shortcomings of their language, which possesses semantic and structural richness, but by the cultural deficit inherent to their way of life.

There are several factors that contribute to this phenomenon:

1. Linguistic factors, such as the euphony, resonance, impact, or acceptability of a word among the populace.
2. Social factors, rooted in the nature of reciprocal interactions between Arabs and other nations. Arabs adopt foreign words as expedient means for facilitating communication and comprehension.
3. Material or specialized factors, which pertain to the quality, form, and attributes of the item in question. Variations in preference among different populations lead to the adoption of either the Arabic or foreign term, depending on its perceived superiority and quality.
4. For some individuals, pronouncing foreign terms might serve as a display of sophistication, albeit superficial, enhancing their breadth of knowledge and expertise, garnering admiration, trust, and a receptive audience.
5. Notably, historical scrutiny reveals that a portion of these Arabic equivalents is not of ancient Arabic origin but rather ad hoc names formulated on the basis of presumed resemblance or likeness to their foreign counterparts..." (Boubo, 1982).

Regarding the concept of the intruder in language and idiom, it is encountered within the writings of linguists and lexicographers. Ibn Faris (d. 395 AH) provided insight into the origin of the term "intruder," stating, "Dal, kha, and lam constitute a stable root, which denotes access. It is said: income signifies entry... and 'the sons of so-and-so in the sons of so-
and-so are an outsider: if they belong with them, and 'your intruder' refers to one who interferes in your affairs" (Ibn Faris, 1972).

The intruder, therefore, signifies the introduction of an individual of foreign origin into a distinct cultural context that contradicts their own. In this regard, its connotations are contingent upon the context in which it is employed.

In the language of Arab linguists, there isn't unanimous consensus on the precise term "intruder" as we now understand it. Instead, they referred to the foreign vocabulary incorporated into the Arabic language as "Arabized and the intruder." In classical Arabic, the intruder was commonly associated with the foreigner, the Arabized, and the native. Massoud Boubo shed light on the nomenclature of the intruder, stating: "Al-Ajami (non-Arab) was a term used by the ancients to distinguish non-Arabs from Arabs. The Ajam were so named because they did not articulate their words and lacked the expressive abilities attributed to the Arabs. An intruder, regardless of its foreign origins, was thus initially characterized by the fact that it did not articulate itself. However, those who underwent Arabization acquired new attributes as Arab speakers and linguists applied their expertise. Without this process of Arabization, their contributions would be nullified, and they would undergo changes in form, tone, and perhaps even in meaning. Hence, they do not remain stagnant" (Boubo, 1982).

The dual nomenclature stems from two primary considerations. First, linguists have a linguistic rationale based on the derivation's origin, "Ajam," and "Ajamah," signifying the dumb or mute, which was applied to those who couldn't articulate their words. Secondly, it extents to the broader linguistic interpretation of the term "intruder." Modernists accepted it as an alternative to "foreigner" due to their belief that foreign speech could be comprehended and foreign tongues deciphered (Boubo, 1982).

The linguistic usage of "Ajam (non-Arab)" and "Al-Dakhil" (the intruder) to describe foreign vocabulary's inclusion into Arabic does not fundamentally misrepresent the facts. It can also accept an extension to include "Arabized," either through generalization or preference (Boubo, 1982). Massoud Boubo explained the distinction between the two terms, stating, "While it is undeniable that an Arabized term originates from foreign sources before it is expressed, two critical factors emerge. First, the Arabization process imparts new attributes, transforming the previously foreign term into a characteristic of Arab language and culture. This transformation alters its form, tone, and possibly its meaning. Second, linguists have coined a new term to identify this phenomenon, providing contemporary understanding and evidence that distinguish it from the intruder as perceived by earlier scholars" (Boubo, 1982).

The term "Arabized" denotes a word transferred to Arabic during the early era of Islamic propagation. It is invoked in the Holy Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet, or in the speech of revered Arabs. The distinction between the Arabized, the intruder, and the native is a complex matter beyond the scope of this discussion.

In summary, the term "intruder" encompasses a broader spectrum than "Arabized." The Arabized term, before expression, originates from foreign sources, while the intruder encompasses all foreign language entries into Arabic, whether during the early Islamic era or afterward, whether subject to Arabization in terms of sound and structure or not, whether approached from a standpoint of denial or knowledge. Hence, Al-Khafaji titled his book: "Healing Al-Ghaleel in the words of the Arabs from the intruder," encompassing the Arabized, the Mawlid, and the Ajami (non-Arab).

Linguists have actively developed general rules and guidelines for identifying foreign words. Al-Suyuti quoted Abu Hayyan, who categorized foreign terms into three sections: those that assimilated into Arabic and adhered to its linguistic structure, those whose form was considered in their original language but lacked weight in Arabic, and those that remained unchanged, unassimilated into the Arabic linguistic framework. For instance, Khorasan is an example of the first category, which cannot be validated by two effective linguistic forms. Khurram, an example of the second category, adheres to Arabic grammar, while turmeric, also belonging to the second category, lacks such conformity (Al-Suyuti D.T).

Recent elucidation of evidence concerning the intruder, as explained by Massoud Boubo, has shed light on the influx of words from other languages into Arabic. When words of foreign origin found a place in Arabic discourse, people recognized common characteristics such as changes in pronunciation, steady features, deletion, weight alterations, phonetic variations, or additions. In response, these words were subjected to a uniform classification or included within a distinct category identified as the intruder. Subsequently, it became a precondition for the inclusion of similar foreign terms within the Arabic language (Boubo, 1982).

Distortions inflicted upon Arabized foreign words can primarily be attributed to alterations in pronunciation, including letter substitutions, omissions, or additions, as well as distortions in word structure. In many cases, foreign words underwent several of these alterations. Al-Jawaliqi (d. 540 AH) described the process of changing the pronunciation of Arabized words, stating: "Frequently, when they dared to employ foreign names, they altered letters that were not native to their language to the closest approximation. Sometimes, they even went beyond mere approximation. Such substitution was deemed necessary to prevent the incorporation of non-native sounds into their speech. They may have altered the foreign structure to conform to Arabic conventions, either by substituting one letter for another, increasing or decreasing a letter, replacing one movement with another, substituting a movable structure, or changing a consonant. Occasionally, they left the letter unchanged, as it was in the foreign language" (Al-Jawaliqi, 1966).

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Linguists and Arabists endeavored to conform foreign words adopted into Arabic to the phonetic rules of Arabic pronunciation, especially if these words possessed a structure and letters similar to those used in Arabic. They focused on ensuring that these words complied with Arabic pronunciation standards, including factors like definition and Tanween. Sibawayh (d. 180 CE) pointed out, "They would alter foreign letters that were not part of Arabic's phonetic inventory. Sometimes, they incorporated these foreign letters into their speech structure, but at other times, they refrained from doing so" (Sibawayh, 1988). Sibawayh also made efforts to devise acceptable templates and formulas for Ajami (non-Arab) words in line with Arabic rules.

The approach to Arabization of foreign words, based on the statements of linguists, revolves around modifying sounds not native to Arabic to the closest approximation to avoid introducing foreign phonetics. This may involve altering the structure of the borrowed word to conform to Arabic conventions or, if the foreign pronunciation aligns with Arabic phonetics and word structures, leaving it unchanged. Among the criteria established by linguists to identify the intruder, there is the presence of two disparate letters not found in Arabic speech. For instance, if the Arabic language lacks the combination of Jeem and Qaf in a word, it is considered Arabized, as exemplified by words like Glubq, Jerndaq, choir, ugliness, and man hollow. Similarly, if Arabic words do not feature Al-S and Jim, words such as plaster, cymbals, and mace are deemed intruders (Al-Jawaliqi, 1966).

The intruder may also consist of letters that, while found in Arabic words, adhere to a specific order. Deviation from this order in a word signifies its foreign origin. Al-Jawaliqi provided examples of this category, stating, "There is no word in Arabic with a noun following Dal; if such a structure is encountered, it indicates foreign origin. Examples include words like Al-Hindaz, Al-Muhammadz, and words with Zai Sina, such as 'The engineer.' The lightest letters are the letters of the dhalqa, which include Raa, Nun, and Lam from the tip of the tongue, and Faa, Baa, and Meem from the lips. If a word lacks one or two of these letters, it is not of Arabic origin. Examples include 'Aqjash, Hazaj, and others" (Al-Jawaliqi, 1966).

Linguists have aimed to differentiate foreign words and classify them, with some even writing dedicated works on the subject. The inception of this field of study can be traced back to the time when linguists began dealing with Arabized words in the Noble Qur’an. Subsequently, they extended their investigations to encompass Arabized words throughout the Arabic language, rather than restricting themselves solely to Qur'anic Arabizers. Linguists granted significant attention to Arabized words in their writings and linguistic encyclopedias, dedicating specific chapters to them in their books and dictionaries. For instance, Abu Ubaid al-Qasim singled out Ibn Salam (d. 224 AH), who dedicated sections of his book "Al-Gharib Al-Musanna" to the topic of Arabization. Similarly, Ibn Qutayba Al-Dinuri (d. 276 AH) included a chapter titled "What the public spoke of foreign speech" in his book "The Writer's Literature." This trend of authorship continued, leading to the development of Al-Jawaliqi’s (d. 540 AH) work, “Arabized from foreign speech on the letters of the lexicon,” which stands as the first specialized book on Arabization. Notably, Al-Jawaliqi attributed many of the words in his book to foreign languages based on the statements of his predecessors, such as Abu Ubaidah, Al-Asma'i, Ibn Al-Skeet, Ibn Qutayba, Ibn Duraid, and others.

In this section, we aim to explore the influence of commentators on this issue by studying how Arabized words are treated in commentaries. We will elucidate the methods employed by commentators when dealing with these words and address the question at hand: Can foreign terms integrated into Arabic be considered a form of linguistic development, particularly based on the evidence provided by commentators of the Fasyh Book?

2. Discussion

2.1. The Arabized and the Intruder at the Commentators of the AlFasih Book:

The AlFasih book was approached by commentators through various methods and approaches in dealing with the eloquent material. However, the existence of commonalities among commentators in addressing the annotated material and explicating its content concerning Arabization or the presence of intruder words in the language should not be dismissed. Perhaps the objective of these esteemed commentators was to underscore the dissemination of such words, be they Arabized or foreign, within the discourse of eloquence. Their efforts aimed at contributing to the language’s enrichment and expansiveness, as language, akin to a living organism, undergoes continual development.

After a thorough examination and scrutiny, it becomes evident that a common approach is employed by the commentators of eloquence:

1. The Arabized word should be mentioned by the commentator along with its origin in the language from which it was Arabized, its pronunciation in that language, and its meaning. This is exemplified by Ibn Darstawayh’s statement: "The term 'Arabon' is derived from the Persian word 'Rabban,' which has been Arabized. Its original Persian roots are 'Armon' and 'hormone.' Some also Arabized it as 'The deposit is like the sparrow...’’” (Ibn Darstwayh, 1975). Similarly, Aljabban noted: “It is led by conquest, although some argue that it is Persian and has been Arabized. In Persian, it is 'Arzis...’” (Aljabban, 1991). Al-Harawi further explained: "Regarding 'Khosrau,' it signifies the greatest king among the Persian kings, particularly the Persians' interpretation of it as 'Khusraw.' The inclusion of 'Bakha' and 'Waw' at the end are distinctive features. It has also been suggested that its original form was 'Khosra,' with an inadvertent omission of 'Alwaloo...’” (Al-Harawi 1999). Ibn Hisham al-Lakhami
2. The commentator may choose to mention the Arabized word without referencing the language of origin, as Ibn Darstawayh’s correction highlights: “For instance, ‘The chick is for these mosquitoes.’ In Arabic, it is referred to as ‘Al-Mosquito,’ whereas ‘Al-Qarqas’ is an Arabized non-Arab term” (Ibn Darstawayh, 1975). Aljabban’s commentary also states: “It denotes an ellipse, being an Arabized foreign term...” (Aljabban, 1991). Al-Zamakhshari concurred: “... ‘Beaver’ in Fath al-Seine is a well-known term for this animal, and its origin is foreign...” (Al-Zamakhshari, 1996). Al-Lakhmi clarified that ‘the sock’ signifies the footwear worn for protection against the cold and is an Arabized foreign term...” (Al-Lakhmi, 1988).

3. The commentator may opt to mention the Arabized word along with its language of origin but refrain from specifying its precise origin. For instance, Ibn Darstawayh noted: “The term ‘spindle hook’ refers to a fine iron tool with a hooked head and has been Arabized from Persian...” (Ibn Darstawayh, 1975). Aljabban expounded: “Regarding ‘Sahriz’ and ‘Shahriz,’ both featuring Sin and Shin, they denote a type of date. Some claim these terms are Persian and have been Arabized...” (Aljabban, 1991). In his work, al-Harawi commented that “traitors” refer to those upon whom food is placed, and it is an Arabized Persian term...” (Al-Harawi, 1999).

4. The commentator may detail the phonetic and morphological alterations undergone by the Arabized word. For instance, Ibn Hisham al-Lakhmi explicated: “‘Baghdad’ is an Arabized Persian name that contains linguistic variations such as ‘Baghdad,’ ‘Baghdz,’ ‘Baghdan,’ and ‘Feeder.’ These variations arise from the substitution of ‘Baa’ with ‘Mima’ or ‘Ba’adhin,’ resulting from the omission of ‘alif’ after ‘bagh’ and its replacement with ‘dhal.’ This is not linguistically consistent within the same language...” (Al-Lakhmi, 1988).

The extent to which the languages of the Arabs and foreign words have been subjected to phonetic conjugation, adhering to the rules of Arabic and its methods of speech, is observed from the previous statement. Moreover, the articulation of the foreign pronunciation, both before and after Arabization, along with its meanings, is undertaken by the commentator. This also includes the elucidation of the Basrians’ perspective without any indication of bias towards their viewpoint, signifying a sense of neutrality on this contentious matter. This neutrality pertains to the common characteristics shared among the commentators of eloquence regarding the incorporation of Arabized or intruder terms within the language.

However, this does not imply that some commentators did not distinguish themselves on specific issues. For instance, Ibn Darstawayh categorically regarded certain words as purely foreign, dispelling any notion that they were Arabized. He articulated, “As for the ring, it is unequivocally Arabic, originating from their expression: ‘I sealed the bag and the book; I seal it with a seal...’” (Ibn Darstawayh, 1975). Likewise, he contended, “As for watermelon, it is a fruit, and its structural alteration, achieved by breaking the first and the second letters, conforms strictly to Arabic morphology...” (Ibn Darstawayh, 1975).

Another facet of the treatment of Arabized and intruder words is reflected in the explanation of the changes and conjugation experienced by these words. An example is found in al-Harawi’s interpretation of the word “Baj,” where he stated, “It has been Arabized, originating from Persian, specifically ‘Sakbaj.’ In Persian, ‘Sak’ denotes vinegar, and ‘Baj,’ upon Arabization, entailed the transference of ‘Waw’ and ‘Haa’ to ‘Baa,’ ‘Jim,’ and ‘Hamzat,’ which the Arabs employed in its composition...” (Al-Harawi, 1949). The choice of ‘Baa’ and ‘Jeem’ over ‘Waw’ and ‘Haa’ may remain unexplained, but it is plausible that ‘Waw’ in Persian corresponds to ‘Baa’ in Arabic, and ‘Haa’ may correspond to ‘Jeem’ in Arabic.

To demonstrate the extent to which the Arabs have been influenced by neighboring nations, especially with regard to dictionaries, resulting in the adoption of certain words into common usage among both natives and foreigners, a necessity arose. This necessity dictated that these words conform to the rules and structures of the Arabic language, while also considering the principles of influence and assimilation. This process aimed to enrich the Arabic language with new vocabulary, enhancing its utility.

Upon conducting a thorough examination and research into the commentaries, it becomes evident that some of the eloquence commentators presented a critical perspective. They expressed unique opinions, setting themselves apart from their peers. Additionally, these commentators endeavored to trace the languages of the Arabs, investigate dictionaries, and delve into the process of Arabization or conjugation, all within the framework of grammar.

Al-Zamakhshari stands out with distinctive linguistic views in this regard. For instance, in his explanation of the term “Musk,” he deviated from the majority consensus. While most asserted it to be a genuine Arabic word denoting musk, as it conveys the essence of fragrance, he challenged this view. According to Al-Zamakhshari, “Musk” originally came from Persian, specifically “Mishk.” The Arabs adapted it by replacing the Persian “Shinh” with the Arabic “Sina,” signifying skin. This linguistic transformation did not inherently suggest an Arabic origin since they also use expressions like “Bakht and Bakht...” (Al-Zamakhshari, 1996).

Remarkably, none of the other eloquence commentators, especially in terms of this specific interpretation and analysis, made any reference to this viewpoint. This leads us to conclude that Al-Zamakhshari’s perspective was remarkably
accurate and aligned with the evolving linguistic landscape. He exhibited an unwavering commitment to exploring the origins and usages of language, aligning his approach with the majority of linguists and grammarians (Miqdad et al., 2022).

An essential aspect of our examination of Arabized terminology through the lens of eloquence commentators is to elucidate the influence of Arabization on linguistic development. We seek to understand the opinions of scholars regarding this impact and its significance for the Arabic language.

Throughout our study of the eloquence commentaries, it becomes evident that the Arabic language contains an abundance of Arabized and foreign words. Some commentators explicitly addressed the evolution of these words, whether in their morphological or phonetic structure, often adhering to the principles of Arabic grammar. After presenting a comprehensive overview of how eloquence commentators approached Arabized and intruder terms, and acknowledging variations in their treatment of certain words, we can conclude that the commentaries provided insights into linguistic development. This encompassed changes and developments experienced by certain foreign vocabulary subjected to the rules of Arabization in Arabic, as exemplified by words like "Baghdad," "Khosrau," "Musk," and others.

Hence, the Arabizer and the intruder can indeed be viewed as catalysts for linguistic development, as demonstrated in this study. This conclusion aligns with our initial objective, and we hope to have convincingly substantiated this notion.

3. Conclusions

The Arabized and the intruder represent a form of linguistic development within the Arabic language. Several Arabic language texts have demonstrated the linguistic richness of Arabic by incorporating Arabized and foreign words from other languages.

Various linguists have elucidated the morphological and phonetic alterations that have taken place in certain Arabized and foreign words.

The approach to Arabizing foreign words, as guided by the statements of linguists, entails modifying sounds that do not align with the phonetics of Arabic, ensuring that elements foreign to the language do not find their way into Arabic speech. Alternatively, this process may involve adapting the borrowed word's structure to conform with Arabic conventions, or retaining the foreign pronunciation if it harmonizes with Arabic phonetic, formulaic, or structural principles.

Arabic borrowed words from other languages, especially those related to materials and industrial matters. This borrowing was primarily driven by the Arabs' need due to the characteristics of their culturally specific lives rather than inherent deficiencies in the language itself, whether semantically, structurally, or in terms of its overall construction.

Ethical Considerations

Not Applicable.

Conflict of Interest

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