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INTEGRATION OF ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN ARAB ONLINE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This paper examines English loanwords that have penetrated the lexicon of Arabic youth and views their significance in Arab online communication. Loanwords are regarded as linguistic expressions adopted from one language into another. This study aims to analyze the main tendencies of integration of English loanwords that have entered the Arabic language due to the rise of online communication. In addition to the linguistic description of the obtained data, the extralinguistic reasons for word borrowing are analyzed. The paper considers recent research related to loanwords in Arabic. The research materials (a list of popular English loanwords) are extracted from popular messaging apps: Viber, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. Our observations are based on a questionnaire, specially designed for native Arabs. The reasons for the use of loanwords by native Arabic speakers are analyzed. In the course of this survey, the most common and less frequent loanwords are determined. The paper reveals possible reasons for their appearance, peculiarities of the use of certain words, possible variations of their replacement with Arabic words. Our study showed that Arabs tend to insert English loanwords in their online communication. The results of the survey reveal the preferences of Arabic-speaking users in choosing the appropriate alphabet for typing the English loanwords.

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Keywords: English loanword, integration of loanwords, online communication, social networks, Arabic language.



1. Introduction

This paper examines English loanwords that have penetrated the lexicon of the Arabic youth and views their significance in Arab online communication. As soon as modern smartphones became convenient instruments for instantaneous transfer of information, online communication became available across the globe and has allowed users to make intercultural contacts. As a global language, English has become the most frequently used language for online communication. The process of intercultural communication involves the interaction of cultures and languages. Thus, when two or more languages interact with each other, they are likely to influence each other in various ways. From the linguistic viewpoint, when a language lacks expressions to denote new concepts, it borrows words from another language. These linguistic expressions which are used to fill the gap are called "loanwords" or "borrowings".

As Crystal (2010) states, words are usually borrowed when two different cultures encounter one another. This happens as a result of immigration, trade, fashion, food, technology, wars, or colonization. Historically, borrowing occurred for political, educational, cultural, scientific, economic, and technical reasons. As Poplack (2018) notes, speakers acquire "borrowing behaviour" through the social worlds in which they participate, rather than resort to it simply as "a function of lexical need" (p. 13). The meaning of linguistic features influences the way that people switch between languages and the way that they are used by speakers. Social meaning is important for understanding loan borrowings and phonological adaptations (Babel, 2016). Socialization influences code-switching, which depends on nonlinguistic factors.

The use of code-switching is supported by long-term exposure to English and bilingual code-switching that is linked to education in schools with instruction in a foreign language (not necessarily English), living abroad and the family's linguistic behavior, or more generally, the speakers' social background (Kniaż & Zawrotna, 2018).

As a result of recent technological and cultural developments, which caused the transferral of many technical concepts from various spheres into Arabic, a great number of foreign terminology has appeared in Arabic (Al-Athwary, 2016).

Trask (2003) indicates three basic requirements for borrowing: novelty, prestige, or to fill a gap to meet urgent needs. According to Khrisat and Mohamad (2014), in the Arab world, some people speak foreign words like English to feel competent and classy. Hazaymeh, Almutlaq, Jarrah, and Al-Jawarneh, (2019) discovered that Jordanian Arabic speakers use English loanwords as euphemisms to avoid direct declaration of taboos and harmful expressions.

A loanword (or lexical borrowing) is defined by Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009) as 'a word that at some point in the history of a language entered its lexicon as a result of borrowing (or transfer, or copying)' (p. 36). They also note that the phonological, orthographic, morphological and syntactic properties of the source words in the donor language often differ from those of the recipient language. These differences require loanword adaptation (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009).

Loanwords in Arabic have been studied in different papers, including investigation of different gender and number markers used to mark English loanwords in Jordanian Arabic (Al-saidat, 2011); analysis of the phonological, morphological and semantic features of English Loanwords in Hadhrami Arabic (Bahumaid, 2015); investigation of phonological modifications made to English loanwords in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) (Al-Athwary, 2017); study of morphological and phonological modifications of English loanwords used in Spoken Iraqi Arabic (Salman & Mansoor, 2017); phonological analysis of English loanwords inflected with Arabic morphemes in urban Jordanian spoken Arabic (Zibin, 2019); and a study of English loanwords in Saudi Colloquial Arabic (SCA) with the purpose of investigating the frequency of English loanwords in the speeches of male and female speakers and describing the morphological adaptations used by male and female speakers (Omar, 2018).

Recent investigations were devoted to the interface between speakers (the social dimension) and language (the linguistic dimension) with regard to lexical borrowing, and the influence of language regard and speaker identity on the use of loanwords (Zenner, Rosseel, & Calude, 2019), to the dynamic processes and innovations that Anglicisms are involved in after entering the recipient language lexicon (Peterson & Fägersten, 2018). Ilić (2017) conducted a descriptive and taxonomic research of pragmatic Anglicisms in Serbian and analyzed their formal and functional characteristics, as well as sociolinguistic, sociopragmatic and sociocultural aspects of their use.

According to Albalooshi, Mohamed, and Al-Jaroodi, (2011), the challenges and obstacles of using Arabic on the Internet can be grouped into three categories: Technologies and Applications, Arabic Content and Material, and Education System. A number of technical words related to computers, Internet and mobile phones have been borrowed from English and become part of the language used by Iraqi Arabic speakers. However, these loanwords have been assimilated to fit into the morphological and phonological systems of spoken Iraqi Arabic (Salman & Mansoor, 2017). As Al-Athwary (2017) noted, most of the regular adaptations at syllable level are motivated by the linguistic peculiarities of the phonological system of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) rather than by extra-linguistic factors.

2. Problem Statement

Our analysis of the integration of English loanwords in Arab social networks aims at solving the problem of codeswitching within intercultural communication. Interaction between cultures is likely to influence the exchange and borrowing of new words by a recipient language. Although previous investigations include a thorough analysis of the structural modifications of English loanwords in the Arabic language, the use of modern English loanwords in Arab online communication remains insufficiently explored.

3. Research Questions

This research paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most common and less frequent English loanwords in Arab online communication?

2. Why do Arabic speakers use English loanwords in their social networks?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to analyze the main tendencies of the integration of English loanwords that entered the Arabic language due to the rise of online communication. In addition to a linguistic description of the data, the extralinguistic reasons for borrowing words are analyzed.

5. Research Methods

The research materials (a list of popular English loanwords) were extracted from popular messengers: Viber, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. The observations are based on a questionnaire, specially designed for native Arabs.

First, a list of 20 popular loanwords was collected from the aforementioned messengers. Second, we designed a questionnaire with the help of Google Forms in order to ask respondents about their reasons for using the English words and the most common words they use. Third, Arabic social network users participated in the questionnaire. Finally, the results of the questionnaire were calculated. The results show the most common and less frequent English loanwords in Arab online communication and the reasons why Arabic speakers use English loanwords on social networks.

The questionnaire included 11 questions which can be divided into two groups: general and specific. The general questions asked the participants information about their age, gender, native language, and level of English. The specific questions were aimed at obtaining particular responses on their preferred social networks, reasons for using social networks, the use of English words in these messaging applications, the choice of English or Arabic alphabet for spelling English loanwords, reasons for including English words in online communication, and the most common English words.

Overall, 70 respondents completed the questionnaire. Almost all of them (94%) are native Arabic speakers. Most of them (79%) are male, 21% are female. About half of the respondents (34 people) are between 24 and 36 years old. 17% are between 18 and 23, 26% - 37 and 45, and 8% - over 45 years old. Most of the respondents have an excellent command of English with 16% speaking at an intermediate level, 32% - upper intermediate, 32% - advanced, and 16% - Proficient. Only 4% claimed to speak English at a pre-intermediate level.

6. Findings

A closer look at the responses reveals that the most popular social networks among the interviewees include Facebook (76%), WhatsApp (58%), and Instagram (52%). About a third of the responses mention Viber and Telegram as preferred networks (27% and 35%, respectively). Twitter and Google, in contrast, are the least popular messengers, mentioned by only two respondents.

The questionnaire included four options concerning the reasons why the respondents use social networks: 'to chat with your foreign friends', 'to chat with your friends from the same city', 'to chat with your relatives', and 'to chat with your colleagues, business partners or other formal acquaintances'. An empty box was provided for the respondents to provide their own answers. The respondents were able to

choose multiple answers. According to the results of our questionnaires, slightly more than a half of the respondents use social networks to chat with their foreign friends (40 responses), to chat with their friends from the same city, and to chat with their colleagues, business partners or other formal acquaintances (37 responses). 31 respondents (46%) use social networks to speak with relatives. In addition, one of the participants added that he makes purchases on Facebook and Instagram.

The questionnaire also asked the respondents if they use English words in their online communications in Arabic. The majority of responses (89%) were positive. The next question revealed that 40% of participants use both Arabic and English alphabet for typing English words, 37% use only the English alphabet, and 20%—only Arabic. For the remaining 3%, the answer was not applicable.

The list of 20 popular English loanwords for the questionnaire includes: *ASAP (as soon as possible)*, *IMHO (In my humble opinion)*, *LOL (Laughing out loud)*, *OMG (Oh, my god)*, *avatar*, *device*, *gadget*, *cool*, *laptop*, *meme*, *selfie*, *smiley*, *tweet*, *follower*, *hashtag*, *email*, *flash disc*, *message*, *download*, *like*. The choice of the English words used by Arabic speakers in their social networks is presented in Figure 01. According to our data, the most common words are *OMG*, *message*, *Like*, *LOL*, *email*, *download*. Less frequent are: *cool*, *selfie*, *tweet*, *follower*, *hashtag*, *laptop*, *ASAP*. The least frequent words include: *device*, *smiley*, *IMHO*, *avatar*, *flash disc and gadget*. Respondents also added some other words which were not mentioned in the list: *Hi*, *Ok*, *wow*, *thanks*, etc.

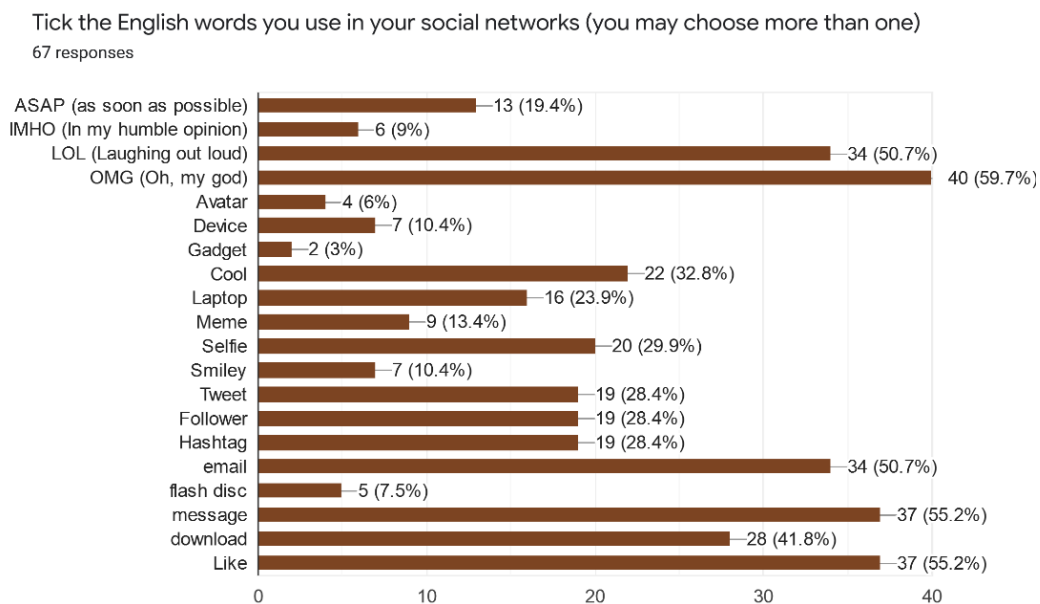


Figure 01. The reported use of English words in online conversations in Arabic

Our questionnaire also asked respondents their reasons for using English words in Arabic online communication. The most common response (57%) was that English words are easier to use. Less than a third of respondents think that Arabs prefer to use English words in their online communication because there are no suitable Arabic equivalents for new concepts, and people want to appear fashionable. Among

the other reasons are the desire to attract attention to their opinion and to demonstrate their knowledge of English. The responses are shown in Figure 02.

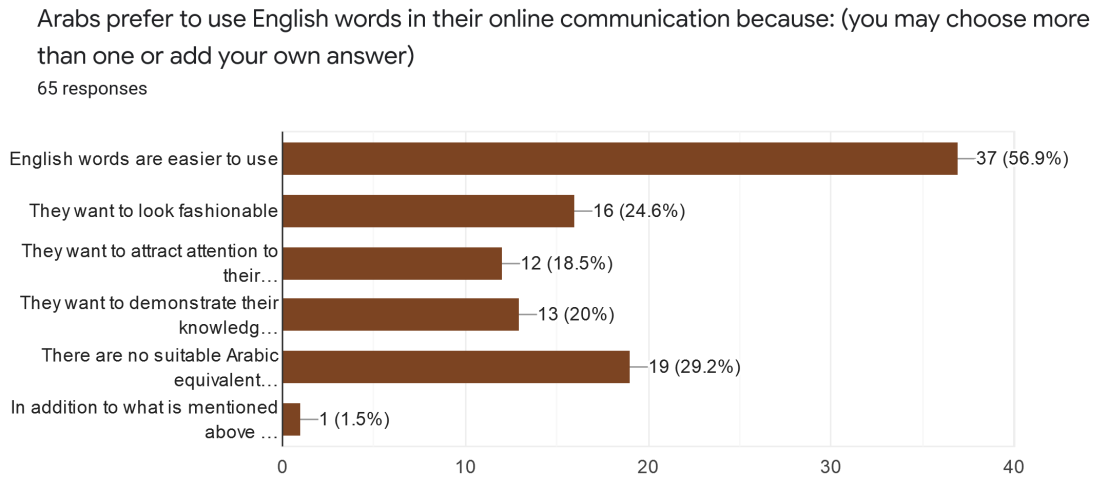


Figure 02. The reported reasons for using English words in Arabic online communication

7. Conclusion

Our study showed that social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, are very popular among young Arabs from 24 to 36 years old. Via these messengers, they chat with their foreign and local friends, colleagues, business partners or other formal acquaintances, and relatives. As most of the respondents have a good level of English, sufficient for everyday communication, they tend to insert English loanwords into their Arabic chats. They are likely to use both Arabic and English alphabet for typing English words, or only the English alphabet, and few of them use only Arabic. Our findings suggest that the most common English words used in Arab online communication are *OMG, message, like, LOL, email, download*. Less frequent are: *cool, selfie, tweet, follower, hashtag, laptop, ASAP*. The least frequent words include: *device, smiley, IMHO, avatar, flash disc and gadget*. According to our respondents, the integration of these loanwords in Arab social networks can be explained by the fact that English words are easier to use. In addition, Arabs prefer to use English words in their online communication to fill the gap if there are no appropriate Arabic equivalents for new concepts. It also helps them to look fashionable, to attract attention to their opinion, and to demonstrate their knowledge of English.

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