

Arabicization a Method Nourishes Arabic Language and Plays Role in Translation

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ABSTRACT

Since the issue of Arabicization has become an integral part of Arabic language, this study aims to discuss the issue of the process of Arabicization in the Arab World. It focuses on the language of journalism mainly and discusses some of the methods that are adopted by researchers and academics in order to address this phenomenon. The issue of the existence of influence of Western culture and the borrowing of foreign words into Arabic is part of the study too. The study also sheds light on some of the solutions that have been put forward by the Arab academies and the academics in order to activate the movement of Arabicization.

Keywords: Translation, Arabicization, word-formation methods, terminology, foreignization.

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1 – Introduction

Due to the fact that there are some linguistic differences among languages, the rendering process of the new concepts embodied in new terms has always been a challenging issue in some ways in the process of the translation. No one can deny that the English language has become the most important medium of science and technology. As a result, it has dominated all the other languages of the world, including the Arabic language. In fact, the technical terms and concepts are translated mainly from English into other languages such as the Arabic language. Because of the foreignness and unfamiliarity of these terms in Arabic, the Arabic Language Academy has always attempted to coin these terms in order to domesticate and naturalize the foreign terminology into Arabic.

In order to be able to achieve the desired goal, translation strategies, as well as Arabic word-formation techniques such as derivation and composition have been employed by the Academy. Among the Arabicization methods, one can refer to the process of the outright phonetic borrowing of the English term via transliteration into Arabic sounds and characters. This translation and Arabicization method has also been used by the Academy in its terminology work. The main goal of the paper is to refer to the strategies of Arabicization used by the Academy in its terminology work. In this respect, some descriptive and comparative analyses of ten English scientific and technical terms with their translational and Arabicized equivalents were analyzed and discussed. These terms were translated and Arabicized. The Arabicization methods included outright phonetic borrowing, loan

translation, derivation, and composition. The findings of this paper suggest that some of the methods that have been implemented so far in translation have focused on the issue of the Arabicization and its efforts to delimit the foreignness of English terms. As a result, these terms were properly domesticated into Arabic.

2 - The Process of Arabicization in Translation

One of the most common methods or strategies used in order to render the foreign terms into Arabic is called “Arabicization”. It is a method which is based on the outright phonetic borrowing of the English term via transliteration into Arabic sounds and characters. This translation and Arabicization method has also been used by the Academy in its terminology work.

2 - Arabicization is a practical method of creating Arabic neologisms

Before going deep into the details of the process of Arabicization and its relations with translation, it is better to go through the term Arabicization itself. There is always a neologism, “a word that is new in a given language at a given moment in time” (Rey 1995: 75). The strategy of Arabicization sometimes constitutes an outlet for Arabic users in general and Arab journalists in particular when there is a need to talk about new English technical terms, for which there are no Arabic equivalents. As a result, Arabicization, as Elmgrab (2011: 499) notes, “has also served Arabic as one of the most practical method of creating Arabic neologisms and terminology since

the beginning of the nineteenth century when the role of Arabic as a transmitter language began to decline.” Even when there is a new invention whose name is mainly coined in English and there is no Arabic word which refers to the name of that invention, Arabic terminologists can make their decision whether to coin a new Arabic word to that invention or to Arabicize the English name and use it in the Arabic language.

Arabicization serves to bridge the lexical gap that has existed between English and Arabic due to the former’s abundant neologisms and the latter’s lack of equivalents of these neologisms. Given this round-the-clock technological development in non-Arabic language, Arabic has been overwhelmed by a huge number of neologisms that need to be coped with. Arab linguists and lexicographers are doing their utmost to keep up with these worldwide developments.

The role and objectives of Arabicization are summarized by Elmgrab (2011) as follows:

Arabicization is considered to be the most appropriate technique in creating and introducing foreign neologisms in Arabic and it can fulfill the following objectives: (i) to preserve the purity of Arabic and considered as a means of developing Arabic in terms of vocabulary; (ii) to standardize the scientific and technical terminology and (iii) to revive the Arabic-Islamic cultural heritage.(p. 496)

Coinage of new words, expressions, and technical terminologies, according to Hameed (2009: ii), enhances the development of any language “since they are important mechanisms for generating new lexemes that cater for terminological evolution. Neologisms ensure that languages

develop in lively and effective ways in order to cope with the needs of different language communities”.

3- Arabicization nourishes Arabs’ strong attachment to their language

Arabs are emotionally attached to their language, which is the vehicle for their divine scripture, the Qur'an. Although most native speakers of languages always cherish their respective languages and each group deem their native tongue to be the best or the purist of all languages, there is no language, as Hitti (1958: 90) argues, “capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic.” There is no people in the world, who “manifest such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and are so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs”(mention the source and page number).

The Arabs highly esteem their language because of a number of religious reasons. Arabic is the language in which the Qur'an was revealed. It is the language that God has guaranteed to preserve till the Day of Judgment. Therefore, the Arabs’ attachment to their language, as Al-Abed Al-Haq (1998: 22) highlights, “springs from the strong link between the Arabic language and Islam and its Book, the Qur'an”. The Arabs’ belief in the divinity of Arabic has made them strive to keep it in conformity with the language of the Qur'an, thus paying considerable attention to Arabicization.

4- Arabicization helps Arabic regain its leading status

Some researchers confirm that opting to the strategy of Arabicization is sometimes necessary to restore the status of Arabic as a vehicle of communication for the world community that is rapidly becoming Westernized, technological, urbanized, and industrialized. It is a process through which Arabic has proved itself to be flexible, adaptable and able, over the centuries, to absorb words, terms, and ideas from many peoples (Chejne 1969 quoted by Al-Abed Al-Haq (1998: 22).

In a similar vein, Almgrab (2011: 496-497) reiterates that Arabicization enriches language and is “a means through which Arabic can regain its pioneer role in the modern world of today.” As most new inventions and technologies are produced in the West and exported to the East, there is a great need to coin new Arabic names and/or expressions or even to Arabicize English names and/or expressions to give the Arabic language the chance to keep in touch with the other dominant languages.

Since lexical borrowing among languages is a natural and unavoidable process, all living languages cannot dispense with borrowing from one another. A living language, as Mencken (1919: 49) notes, “is like a man suffering incessantly from small hemorrhages, and what it needs above all else is constant transactions of new blood from other tongues. The day the gates go up, that day it begins to die”. Eastman (1983: 175) holds that “as economic growth is cumulative, so, too, is vocabulary development; thus 'borrowing' aids growth by eliminating the need to wait for vocabulary to 'evolve’”.

Thus, Arabicization, which can be subsumed under the concept of borrowing, as Elewa (2016: 7) argues, “could be a savior of the Arabic language and an effective way for modernizing it.” Arabicization is one of the most important factors which contributed to the rapid modernization of the Arabic language via the assimilation of vocabulary of foreign origin (Elmgrab, 2011, p. 496).

Arabicization is defined by many linguists as an advantageous process that can enrich or modernize the Arabic language. Alnaji (1999: 390) states that “Arabization is the most noticeable change that indicates an ‘ethnic revival’ since independence.” In this sense, Agius (1996: 1) defines it as “a process of adopting Arabic as a language or dialect which was socially and economically advantageous at the time”.

5- The Cons of Arabicization

The rising need for Arabicization and whether it is a necessary process to be adopted have provoked long debates and controversy in Arab countries. A group of Arabic linguists maintain that there are many disadvantages of adopting the process of Arabicization. Those linguists refuse the process of Arabicization depending on the justification that Arabic is a rich language and can suit any type of developments and technologies by itself without resorting to Arabicization.

A major disadvantage of Arabicization is that it undermines the purity and integrity of the Arabic language through borrowing a large proportion of foreign vocabulary into Arabic. Arabicization, as Elmgrab (2011: 496-497) states, “may dilute the language with foreign terms.” As a result, it

will be noticed after sometime that the Arabic language abounds with much foreign vocabulary. To anti-Arabicization scholars, using foreign words or terms in Arabic, as Elewa (2016: 5) observes, “is a threat to the Classical Arabic, the language of the Qur’an that is preserved by God to the Day of Judgment.” Therefore, those who argue against Arabicization “voice national concerns lest their long standing language would be forced underground through the course of time” (mention the source and page number). They are apprehensive that “the purity of Arabic and its magical effect may be forfeited” (mention the source and page number).

This anti-Arabicization school rules out the necessity of depending on Arabicization. Rather, they insist on depending on “the method of derivation from Arabic roots or at least any of the other methods, alleging that any method of derivation other than Arabicization is the only sure way to safeguard the purity and integrity of the language” (mention the source and page number). For them, Arabicization means resorting to some Arabic processes of derivation of already existing native vocabulary elements, or the revival of old vocabulary.

To overcome the threat of Arabicization to the purity of Arabic, the strategy of Arabicization should be the last resort. It was highly recommended that Arabicization, as Hameed (2009: 42) suggests, “was to be used as the last option when all other procedures fail and to use the Arabicized words for a short period until some other native terms can be created”.

6-Language domination and loss of identity

Since language is closely connected with identity, any nation or indigenous community is keen on revitalizing their own traditional language. Identity is at the heart of the person, and the group; it, as Edwards (2009: 2) notes, is “the connective tissue that links them”. People are in need of some psychosocial ‘anchors’ that bring them together. A powerful factor that highlights people’s identity and culture is their language. Joseph (2004) rightly observes that

Any study of language needs to take consideration of identity if it is to be full and rich and meaningful, because identity is itself at the very heart of what language is about, how it operates, why and how it came into existence and evolved as it did, how it is learned and how it is used, every day, by every user, every time it is used. (p. 224)

It is language that encodes the perceptions and cultural beliefs or values of a society. This is the reason why the mother tongue of a society should be preserved and kept pure and should not be replaced by another language.

The nation’s language, as Bunge (1992: 377) argues, “is a system of thought and expression peculiar to that nation and is the outward expression and manifestation of that nation’s view of the universe”. Therefore, there exists an intimate link between a specific language and a specific identity and culture. This, as Owen (2011: 17) observes, suggests that “ethnic

identity is somehow rooted in the language traditionally associated with that group”.

Nevertheless, the topic of the relationship between language and identity is a controversial one that has received heated discussions and debates. Scholars have different views regarding the status of language as an identity factor and whether it is an essential or a subordinate maker of identity.

The first view maintains that a particular language is fundamental to a particular ethnic or cultural identity, because it is language that conveys and represents peoples’ culture and tradition. The second view holds that language is not an essential element of identity. Rather, it is “a contingent marker of identity or even that it is simply a surface “behavioural” feature, so that a specific language is easily replaceable by another with no change to the underlying or “primordial” aspect of that identity (Cf. Owen (2011: 1 - 2). Proponents of this view find the arguments of the first view as absolutist, essentialist and “incompatible with the non-fixed and multifaceted nature of identity”. They “reject any forms of ‘rooted’ identity based on ethnicity, nationality and language” as these “are branded with the negative characteristics of essentialism ... and conflict” (Owen (2011: 17). They also accuse them of “romanticising the importance of languages and especially mother tongues” (Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010: 38).

In other words, proponents of this view hold that language may indeed be an important symbol of collective identity, but it does not matter in the end *which* language is used or associated with which group. Eastman (1984: 261) argues that “when we stop using the language of our ethnic group, only the language use aspect of our ethnic identity changes; the primordial sense of who we are and what group we think we belong to for the remainder remains intact”. For

them, language is a superficial feature of identity and the notion of rootedness in a particular language is rejected.

These two views go to extremes in addressing the issue of language-identity relationship. Owen (2011: 19) holds that neither of the views “is appropriate” and “need not be perceived as mutually exclusive.” He rejects that “the language/identity link can be adequately characterised in such black-and-white terms” (mention page number).

Moreover, there is a third view that adopts a more middle-of-the-road approach acknowledging that language as a cultural marker may be experienced to varying degrees among different groups. They hold that although language is an obvious and powerful pillar of identity, the maintenance of collective identity is not necessarily dependent on the continuation of a particular, traditional or ancestral language. This is a much more balanced approach (Owen (2011: 19 - 20).

It could be argued that these three views correspond to the three schools emerged in response to the Arabicization process in the Arab world. The first view has to do with the first school which is generally opposed to Arabicization due to their national concerns that the overflow of foreign words into Arabic will “ultimately do violence to the language and overwhelm it” (Cf. Chejne (1969) cited in Al-Asal and Smadi 2012: 31). Proponents of this view of language and identity and that school of Arabicization adhere to the same principle of the preservation of the mother tongue because it is the symbol of our identity. In a similar vein, Fishman (1991) states that

Language which has traditionally been linked with a given ethnoculture is, at any time during which that linkage is still intact, best able to name the artifacts and to formulate or express the interests, values and worldviews of that culture, (p. 20)

The second view that considers language as a subordinate factor in the representation of peoples’ identity corresponds to the second school of Arabicization that favours

“the indiscriminate use of foreign words in the original form, arguing that this procedure has the advantage of guaranteeing more surely the preservation of their intended meaning” (mention the source and page number). The proponents of this school have “serious reservations about relying wholly on old methods”. They recommend using English or any foreign language in addition to the native language on the grounds that “this process can greatly facilitate and enhance terminology acquisition in particular and language acquisition in general” (Cf. Al-Asal&Smadi, 2012, pp. 32 - 33).

In addition, the third balanced view corresponds with the third school of Arabicization that has not taken the issue to extremes. This school “takes a rather moderate stand” and “insists that foreign words can be accepted only as a last resort after every effort has been made to find their equivalents in Arabic by any of the other methods” (mention the source and page number). The methodology of that school is the one adopted by Arabic language academies of Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad which “have closely adhered to this principle” (Cf. Chejne (1969) (cited in Al-Asal and Smadi 2012: 33).

7 - Language: loss of identity

It could be argued that the third school of Arabicization tries to strike a balance between modernizing the Arabic language to cope with neologisms and preserving its purity so that the Arabic language and the Arab identity would not be lost. They strive to safeguard Arabic from being dominated by English.

The Arabic history shows that Arabic came into contact with other languages in the past and proved to be strong enough to absorb and influence them. Elmgrab (2011: 492) reports that Arabic faced major challenges when the Arabs expanded the area of their empire outside the Arab Peninsula,

before the end of the first Islamic century, to include the major centers of civilizations of the time. Arabic had to compete with well-established languages such as Greek and Persian. Arab scholars and scientists came into contact with these languages through translation as they were rendering medical, scientific and technical books from Greek and Latin into Arabic. As a result, new expressions and new technical terms started to penetrate the language because of the transference of these sciences. This was the golden age of the Arabs and their language.

In the modern age, English is the universally dominating language. It holds such a unique status that it may endanger other languages, including Arabic. It is the international language of science, technology, research, and economy. English, as Al-Asal&Smadi (2012: 32) observes, “continues to be an exclusive medium in medicine and engineering because it is the language used all over the world, whereas Arabic is spoken only in some countries”. Moreover, “most of the books, periodicals, papers, and electronic databases essential for the intensive and extensive study of an academic subject are written in English”. Today, English maintains itself as the language of science and technology worldwide.

In addition, many of the new technical terms are the products of the West, i.e. they stand for products invented in Europe or America which made it easier for the inventors to name them either after their own names, or resorting to European languages instead of Latin or Greek. For instance, the word ‘*Watt*’ is an eponym that stands for the electric current unit which is named after the person who invented this unit of measurement and the term ‘*pasteurization*’ which refers to a method of sterilizing, especially milk, devised by the French scientist Louis Pasteur (Elmgrab, 2011: 492).

Arabic, which was the language of science and technology during the middle ages, as Elmgrab (2011: 492) notes, is now “trying to resume its position in order to regain

its role in disseminating civilization and to take advanced steps towards modern science and technology”

Given these linguistic positions of both English and Arabic in modern times, the advocates of Arabicization voice their concerns that the overuse and misuse of the strategy of Arabization in transferring English words, expressions, and technical terms by Arabic-language users in general and Arab journalists in particular may make the Arabic language prone to be dominated by the English language. Tsuda (2002: 19) argues that under such circumstances “it can be simply expected that the English language is going to dominate the Arabic language leading gradually and finally to the loss of some aspects of the Arab identity”. Tsuda (2002) also makes the point that

Because it is the most dominant, English is also the ‘hegemonic’ and ‘neocolonialist’ language, creating not only the structure of linguistic and communicative inequality and discrimination between speakers of English and speakers of other languages, but also indirect rule over many aspects of their lives (p.19).

8 - Arabicization preserves Arabic language and identity

In order to avoid being endangered and dominated by English, Arabicization should be understood in the terms of who defines it as referring to “the cultivation and extensive use of Arabic as the language of all Arabs, and their official means of oral and written communication. It covers broad issues such as language and nationalism, language as a medium of instruction, scientific research and administrative and social activities” (p. 21).

One of the steps taken to preserve Arabic from being dominated was the establishment of the Arabic Language Academies in Damascus in 1919, in Cairo in 1932, in Baghdad in 1947, in Rabat in 1967, and in Amman in 1975. These

Academies were founded to enable Arabic to compete successfully in the modern age and to preserve it from corruption and degradation by ill-considered, hasty and improvident changes and excessive borrowing from foreign tongues. The following are some of the main goals of these institutions.

- 1- To regenerate or revitalize the Arabic language so that it would become a viable means of communication in a modern scientific and technologically-oriented world.
- 2- To create, through various linguistic methods, a new body of terminology which would facilitate the rendering of usable, comprehensible (both for the elite and for the general literate public) scientific and technological material in Arabic. The academies were interested not only in creating new words from existing Arabic roots, or Arabicizing certain terms when necessary, but also in reviving old classical words whose meanings might be applied to modern needs.
- 3- To preserve the essential purity of the language. This entailed careful scrutiny of all proposals for change to ensure compatibility with the phonological, syntactic and morphological structure of Arabic.
- 4- To preserve classical works, and to reprint and publish them for modern use.
- 5- To encourage the production of new works by Arab scholars, including translations of foreign books into Arabic.
- 6- To preserve the curricula, textbooks, and teaching methods of the Arab universities from foreign languages to Arabic. (Cf. El-Khafai (1985: 40 - 43).

To meet the challenge of language and identity loss, these academies should vitalize their activities. For instance, there should be, as Al-Asal&Smadi (2012: 33) emphasize, “an open channel of communication among Arabic language

academies to coordinate their efforts to unify and standardize the use of Arabic terminology in all fields”. A unified Arabic information bank or a unified Arabic center for translation should be established. It must include specialists in the field for rendering the new scientific terms to cope with the enormous flow of scientific and technological terms that need Arabic equivalents (Al-Asal&Smadi, 2012, p. 33).

An issue of interest in this regard is the use of Arabic in our education as a medium of instruction and a tool of expression. Al-Asal&Smadi (2012: 32) quote the UNESCO stating that “every effort should be made to provide education in the mother tongue”. They encourage the use of vernacular languages in Education. There are many advantages of using Arabic as a medium of instruction. These advantages can be summarized in discussing rationales of the proponents of Arabicization as follows:

- 1- It is a national obligation embodying nationalistic and psychological elements and reflecting one's love of his country and language to use Arabic in teaching subjects at the secondary and university levels.
- 2- Teaching sciences in Arabic at the university level enhances communication among graduates of different Arab universities and between university graduates and common people.
- 3- The fact that Arabic is the religious language of all Muslims of the world presents an additional motive for wanting to preserve and enrich it.

To conclude, Arabicization in the sense of using Arabic as a means of instruction in all domains, especially the scientific ones, such as medicine and engineering, safeguards the Arabic language as well as the Arab identity from being lost or endangered. It also can counterbalance the dominating status of English over Arabic.

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