

English Infiltration into Arabic in Lebanon: Necessity and Conflict

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Introduction:

The Arabic language in Lebanon is subjected to critical changes in regard to both colloquial and written dialects. Lebanon is known as a bridging country between East and West. Hence, the Lebanese people are very keen to accept the majority of new - fashioned inventions.

In the current epoch of globalization, science, communication and advanced technology, we cannot imagine the Lebanese population isolated and far from the modern pace of advancement.

The language is a part of the culture and the heritage. The Arab world has always looked at the language as the “overarching benchmark of identity in the Middle East and the assumed cement and nimbus of Arabism and Arab nationalism” (Salamah, 2010, p. 4), but this stance towards the language is not fully obeyed in Lebanon. While walking on the streets of Beirut, or any other Lebanese city or town, one may hear several dialects and a colloquial Arabic, which is mixed with French and English words.

In my article entitled “English Infiltration into Arabic in Lebanon: Necessity and Conflict”, I will shed light on the infiltration of English into Arabic in Lebanon, not only in regard to the educational system, but also in regard to the different aspects of daily life, and I will discuss the social and religious reactions toward English terminology. Accordingly, this paper is divided into two parts: “The Necessity of New English Terminology in the Arabic Language in Lebanon” and “The Argument about the Infiltration of English in the Lebanese Dialect”.

1- The Necessity of New English Terminology in the Arabic Language in Lebanon:

In an era of technology and industrial motion, the Lebanese people have found themselves poor with technological inventions. The producers of new technology in the USA, Europe, Japan, South Korea and China use the English language as a common means of communication in advertisements, media promotion and machinery labeling. For this reason, the English language has become richer and loaded with a huge quantity of new terms in the fields of computer technology and science.

It is now obvious that the English language has become a vital part of our life and the Arabic language does not possess the tools needed to shield itself from the invasion of modern terminology. One may ask the following questions: Why do some Arab scholars consider their own language as a part of their sacred heritage? Is it true that a language should remain immaculate and free from foreign elements? and what is the critical impact of new terminology on a language?

Any language is formed by a large group of words and is similar to a huge dictionary, and every time we decide to reprint this dictionary, it seems essential and logical to add the amount of new terms that have emerged following the boom of all areas of science, philosophy, literature, industrial activities and technology. This

process of reshaping the language does not seem dangerous or destructive, but is in fact, an enriching operation that makes the language more flexible and affluent.

The Arabic language had to embrace, in the past, many terms from other languages such as Persian, Turkish, Greek, and Syriac. The Arab people have already extracted words like *mihrajan* (festival), *bazinjan* (egg plant), *sharshaf* (quilt), *rosenamah* (calendar) from Persia. They have also adopted *seesh barak* (kind of food), *baklawah* (kind of sweet) and *sheesh kabab* (kind of food) from Turkey, and *bahar* (pepper) from India and *courtas* (notebook) from Greece. Anees Frayha argues that a huge number of words that we use in our daily life are of non-Semitic origin, such as Persian, Turkish, Greek, Latin and modern European languages (198، 1995).

On the other hand, many English words have been derived from the Arabic language such as *artichoke* (أرضي) (شوكي), *sugar* (سكر), *giraffe* (زرافة), *cotton* (قطن), *camel* (جمل), *jar* (جرّة) and *ghoul* (غول). These Arabic words have been infiltrated into English through different kinds of contact: Trade, wars, tourism and translation... Some other Arabic words have been transformed into English after the Arabs' invasion of Andalusia. The Arabs ruled Spain between (711-1492). Following the retreat of the Arabs from Spain, they left their monuments and their linguistic traces that are today obvious in the Spanish language.

Iffat Al Kadi Pasha entered 834 words that have been transferred from Arabic into English (ص 7-6، 2000). This process of exchange is natural and a result of interaction between different civilizations.

It is normal to have many English words in our culture. In Lebanon, for example, people utilize, in their daily life, a big quantity of English words to replace their parallel Arabic colloquial words such as *football*, *tennis*, *volley ball*, *excuse me*, *hi*, *sorry*, *thank you*, *man*, *bro*, etc. Some of the Arabic words that are synonyms of these words have been forgotten and are almost completely unused. It is largely believed that the colloquial language is more flexible and can embrace English terminology, while the formal language is somehow related to education and literature. In other words, a teacher or an intellectual may prefer the usage of pure, formal Arabic, while a normal person is free from any linguistic control. A teacher may ask his student to use the word *hatef* for telephone, but ordinary people usually use the word *telephone*, and the word *hatef* seems like a dead word in the popular dialect. Mansour Eid describes the colloquial language as more pragmatic than the formal language, for it is attached to the man's daily life and his relentless development (ص 95، 2003).

The situation in Lebanon concerning the use of English terminology in the colloquial dialect is not different from the situation in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, especially when young people who go to an English school read English books, watch English movies and deal with Indian taxi drivers, Indian home servants and restaurant workers, who speak only English. Furthermore, if we walk into a Lebanese shopping mall, we read the shops' names written in English, such as McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Derby, Good Morning Shoes, Waiting Angels for Mum's Dress, Burger Station and Daily Press Library. People would usually use common English words in their colloquial dialect such as *mall*, *shopping center*, *shopping*, *special*, *cash*, *check*, *coffee shop* and *station*. Tourists who visit Lebanon can rarely bump into Salma's Shop, Fatima's Ice Cream Factory or Jamil's Shopping Mall. The same situation applies to the large commercial billboards that are located on roadsides. It is evident that people prefer to display English names above their shops instead of Arabic names.

Furthermore, the Lebanese speaker reshapes some English words to be used as Anglo- Arabic verbs such as:

Youcancel: To abolish (from cancel).

Youshannej : To change the taxi or the hotel (from change).

Youshayyik : To check up (from check).

- Youmassej*: To send a message (from message).
Youtalfen : To make a phone call (from telephone).
Yousayyive: To save money or documents (from save).
Youfaqqis: To send a fax (from fax).
Youdabris: To suffer from depression (from depression)...

In the media, the usage of English terms is also large and alarming. Some radio and television stations have established English news and programs beside Arabic ones. Almustaqbal Television broadcasts daily news every day in English. Programs are loaded with English songs and gossip about American and English celebrities. Even the names of some Arabic television stations are pronounced in abbreviated English: MTV, OTV, NBN and LBC. Also, some Lebanese television programs have English themes like Double Click, Butterfly Effect, Transit (Future TV), Offside, Dunk (New TV) Reflex and Puzzle (LBC International). Shaaban states that 37% of television programs in Lebanon are broadcasted in English while only 7% of such programs are screened in French (ص 35-34، 2000). Furthermore, many news readers and program hosts insert English expressions into their Arabic programs during their show broadcasting like *break*, *news*, *program*, *traffic*, *transmitter*, *media*... In the Lebanese cinemas, the great majority of movies are imported from Hollywood and loaded with Arabic subtitles (ص 35-34، 2000، شعبان).

There is no doubt that the most prolific source of English words that are pumped into Arabic is the Internet. If we read the translation of the term *internet* in Arabic, we discover how silly it is to try to translate an English word that has no roots in the Arabic language. The translation of *Shabaka A'ankaboutia* which literally means "spider web" has nothing to do with the internet, while English words like *byte*, *cyberspace*, *Ethernet*, *Java*, *USB* and *modem* are left without a translation. Hence, people prefer to pronounce these terms in English. This also happens in academic studies that are concerned with computers and the internet. In his PhD thesis, Ali Mohammad Rahouma writes many technical English words in Arabic such as *internet*, *web*, *multimedia* and *hypertext* (2005) .

In the educational field, the majority of schools in Lebanon teach English. Many private schools are called "International Schools", while more than 40 universities teach English and several of them are following the American system. Researchers in these universities use APA, MLA and Chicago citation systems. The old Arabic system of reference and footnotes has been eliminated in the majority of universities. Even the names of faculties, departments and classrooms are written and pronounced in English only. Furthermore, "The Lebanese university students valued English as an essential language to know, mostly because of the importance of English as an international language rather than any affiliation with American or British culture." (Diab, 2009, p. 116)

The domination of the English language came after a long competition with French since the middle of the 19th century when "French Jesuits and American Protestants established several schools in the country, exposing the Lebanese to Western cultures and languages." (Diab, 2009, p.102) The Jesuits struggled to impose the French culture on Lebanon, while the American Protestants showed their enthusiasm towards English.

Between 1920 and 1943, Lebanon was under the French mandate and the French language was classified as the second language behind Arabic. According to Diab, "French was taught in all schools and was the medium of instruction for sciences, mathematics and social studies at all levels of education." (2009, p. 102)

The first written Lebanese Constitution that emerged in 1926, assured that the French language was the official language beside Arabic (ص 23، 2000، شعبان), but during that period, the English language was not an essential language to be taught or to be largely spoken. Speaking French was an elite practice for many families. Expressions like *bonjour*, *bonsoir*, *au revoir*, *merci monsieur* and *merci mademoiselle* were very common in the

Lebanese society. Gradually, English became more required, especially for Lebanese people who had to travel to USA, Australia, Canada, Africa or other English - speaking countries. Furthermore, English started to become vital for businesspersons who had to travel to America, Europe, India, China and Russia, where English is considered a bridging language that can help facilitate communication between a Lebanese merchant and another business partner. Hence, English advanced from being the third spoken language in Lebanon to a more commonly spoken language that is now considered more important than French in many social, commercial and even academic societies.

According to Shaaban, the most important foreign language in Lebanon is English. 49% of the Lebanese people consider English as essential and 30% regard French as essential (298 ص، 2000).

This preference of English occurred after English became an international communication tool. Crystal writes: "The British Empire may be in full retreat with the handover of Hong Kong, but from Bengal to Belize and Las Vegas to Lahore, the language of the scepter isle is rapidly becoming the first global lingua franca." (2003, p. 1) The French language is no longer an international need, and people who used to spread out French through Francophone culture did not know that they were living in a critical period between two eras, and that the cultural change will be overwhelming until another incursion occurs, which is the incursion of the English language (347، 2008، كالفى).

We can say that the Lebanese people have finally accepted the English language as a necessary part of the educational system with the eruption of the Lebanese War (1975) when the public schools closed their doors and private schools started to teach English. One of the most important aspects of that critical change was the founding of schools that teach English. Many private schools embraced the English language as a third language, following Arabic and French, starting from grade 3, because these schools assessed the importance of English and realized the needs of students who vowed to continue their further education in English and in American system universities. Furthermore, the Lebanese University opened several departments that teach many topics in English. (30 ص، 2000، شعبان) Nowadays, a number of private universities have been operating in Lebanon, most of them following the American system such as Notre Dame University - Louaize (NDU), American University of Technology (AUT) and Lebanese American University (LAU).

A survey which was conducted by the writer on November 2, 2011 involving 30 students from Different faculties at Notre Dame University - Louaize in Lebanon revealed the following findings:

30 students out of 30 know the English language.

28 students out of 30 can use English as a means of communication.

30 students understand English.

30 students consider English as essential.

28 students believe that English is important for dialogue between different civilizations and cultures.

28 students consider English as more important than French.

19 students believe that English is a threat to Arabic.

27 students write SMS in English.

26 students write SMS in Arabic, but use English letters and English numbers which replace certain letters that are exclusive to Arabic such as:

2 for ء

3 for ع

7 for ح

6 for ط

25 students use English words while talking colloquial Arabic.

25 students do not require a translation when watching English movies.

The survey shows that 296 answers were positive towards English in comparison with only 34 answers that were negative. The score, which is 89.7% against 10.3 %, reflects the importance of English in the daily life of NDU students.

2- The Argument about the Infiltration of English in the Lebanese Dialect:

Before the industrial revolution in Europe, the usage of English in Lebanon was not very significant, for the Arabic language was then sufficient to cover almost all areas of social, political, religious, cultural and economic activities. But when hundreds of new words rapidly emerged, mainly in the West, due to the revolution in science and technology, the Arabic language found itself unable to follow the speedy motion, despite the desperate attempts that have been shown by translators to transform the newly emerged words into Arabic. Some Lebanese scholars argue that the Arabic language is capable of embracing new expressions, and coping with the quick movement of the new technological gear, for this language is a language of derivation, interaction with other living languages, analysis, adaptation and the Koran's inspiration. This language is in fact able to hold the seeds of modernization and renovation (عطوي، 2003، ص 102).

Several other researchers and scholars have spoken loudly about the necessity of developing the Arabic language by linking it to English, for the new communication techniques have emerged, expanded and imposed their organic relations with foreign languages (البساط، 2003، ص 37). Baydoun describes the new form of the Arabic language in Lebanon as a mixed blood language that is condemned and mocked by some people, but it is in fact a high standard of reshaping and developing the language. Hence, we are on the correct road towards founding a final language, which is derived from two or three languages (ص 1، 2012). On the other hand, some other language scholars express their fear about the current situation of the Arabic language in front of the invasion of globalization, for this language cannot resist the impact of the fast moving era and the scientific thoughts that may dominate the nation and its heritage (ص 1، 2003، المغوش).

It is not logical to deny the necessity of the English language as a second language that has become an essential element of education and communication. This act of transformation from pure Arabic to a cocktail of terminology is not bizarre or something to deny. In other words, extracting terms from another dialect is usual, and the interaction between different cultures, either during the periods of peace or times of war, is necessary to facilitate communication and science.

The West has generated a large quantity of technological words, while the Arabic language does not have the mechanism to find appropriate synonyms for those new words. This inability of producing suitable Arabic synonyms has created what we can call a "translation crisis".

The Arab translators use generally two different ways of word translation from English into Arabic:

1- A translator can produce a pure Arabic translation such as *hasoob* for computer, *mizia'* for radio, *khayal* for cinema and *ra'i* for television. The word *hasoob* is related to *hisab* (calculation), which is related to arithmetic more than to computers. The word *mizia'* means "the device that broadcasts", while the third word *khayal* refers to "shadow or imagination" and not to cinema. The word *ra'i* means "the one who looks". We can notice that Arab translators can create a good word like *mizia'* for radio, and some arbitrary words like *khayal* for cinema and *ra'i* for television.

2- A word can be converted into Arabic by partly preserving its original English pronunciation such as *tilfaz* for television and *battaria* for battery.

Meanwhile, a device's name can be translated either by preserving its original English root such as *tilfaz* for television or by creating a pure Arabic word such *ra'i*. The usage of *ra'i* for television is very rare and one can find it only in professional dictionaries.

Here, one may ask a critical question: How do people choose the appropriate word and use it? The answer is that the selection depends on their taste. The pronunciation can be simple, easy and acceptable or can be harsh, weird and undesirable. For this reason, people prefer to use an English word instead of an Arabic word. The terms *computer*, *television*, *video*, *camera*, *telephone* and *fax* are widely used in the Lebanese dialect, while some Arabic words like *hasoob* for computer and *khayal* for cinema are omitted, not only from the daily language, but also from literary activities, and even from the media. People prefer to use the term *mobile phone* rather than *mahmool* which literally means *carried*, and *dish* rather than *sahn* which literally means *plate*. The word *mizia'* for radio is not used in the Lebanese colloquial dialect. Instead, people prefer the word *radio*, while the term *iza'a* for radio station is widely used. Furthermore, hundreds of technological words are somehow left without translation. Professional linguistic bodies like the Arabic Language Council in Cairo and the Office of Translation Coordination in Rabat find themselves puzzled in front of a huge number of new words that cannot be translated into Arabic. Ameen Albert Rihani criticizes the insistence of Arabs to translate English words into Arabic and he calls them to immediately adopt the imported European idioms without any change. Rihani realizes the almost impossibility of translating all English words into Arabic, while there is no way to resist the huge number of English terms that are sweeping the Arabic language day after day (ص36، 2003).

Abd Al Hassan Al Hussaini wrote a dictionary of expressions used in the field of technology and communication. He counted 20,000 English words or expressions that are used by Arabs. He claims that there is no solution but to employ those words, for today's technological revolution is not only an extension of the continuous development of technology, but also a complete change process which covers culture, translation and social life (لا تاريخ، 1050).

Al Hussaini gives several examples from Africa and South East Asia, where the thinkers of developed countries recognize the necessity of technology and information as a means of advancement and development, that can help them to jump over what he calls the "industrial century" (لا تاريخ، ص 1050).

We cannot deny reality. The Arabic language has gradually become packed with English terms and this situation has made fundamentalists worried about the future of our language. They look at the language as their own child who should be protected from foreign harm.

We all know that there are strong bonds between the Arabic language and the Koran. Some conservative scholars refuse to accept the foreign dialect into the Arabic language in order to protect the *turath* (heritage). Hence, conservative nationalist scholars and religious leaders believe that the Arabic language is sacred and is the language of the Paradise occupants, and God promised to protect it. According to the Koran, "Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian." (Surat Al-Hijr: 15:9)

This strong bond between the Arabic language and heritage makes some people believe that the Arabic language should reject new words in order to avoid what some scholars call "heritage deformation". For this reason, a number of activists established a group in Lebanon called The Group of Arabic Language Protectors (مجموعة حُماة الضاد في لبنان). The secretary of the group, Thuraya Khalil, criticizes the providers of mobile phones in Lebanon who offer the majority of SMS services in English. The group founded a taskforce regarding the English names above the restaurants' doors. They realized that some owners do not use Arabic even when they display their menus. Some eatery owners agreed to add Arabic to their menus, while others falsely promised to do so. (حماة الضاد في لبنان، 2011، ص 1)

Conclusion:

In a new world of globalization and technology revolution, where distances have become closer, communication has become easier and smart inventions have emerged quickly, it seems that there is no tool to reverse the haste movement and one cannot urge people to stay away from it in order to protect the heritage from danger and foreign invasion.

The indigenous thoughts that aim for insuring the sanctity of the past and the foolishness of the present and future are senseless, for nothing is immobile in our universe and every single element is moving by a certain sophisticated mechanism, and so languages act and react. English terminology has steadily become a small part of the Arabic language. English is now spoken in schools, universities, internet activities, communication and business. English is also a means of contact in hotels, airports, shopping centers and even in buses and taxis.

This new situation should not make us scared and depressed. On the other hand, the Arabic language is now taught in the American educational system and thousands of American students write, read and speak Arabic. In 2006, the number of enrolments in Arabic class in America jumped 126.5% (Knapp and Seidlhover, 2009, p. 254)

Furthermore, Arabic is now an important language in the Australian educational system. The majority of Arab students learn Arabic as a second language in Australian schools. We did not hear Australian scholars calling to protect the sanctity of English and resist the "horrible cultural invasion".

Modernity is not a destructive practice, but it is an interaction between the past and the present, and it is based on the mixture of experience and future deeds. People should be able to accept this mixture in their life (بارت) (27-15 ص، 1982، وندو، and should not feel guilty every time they use a modern language that includes intruding words, for the language of the Koran will stay unchanged, while the language of technology and development is mechanical and is always subject to change. Hence, there is no need to ask students and internet addicts to use only Arabic terms. Thousands of technological words have no synonyms in Arabic and the translators could not find translations of these words. Marzari states: "If Arabs only used the words given in their dictionaries, when it comes to modern life, they would have to walk speechlessly through the streets and sit silently in their schools and homes." (2006, p. 30)

It is true that the Arabic language is now slow and tardy. This is due to globalization that has thrown Arabic to the back row, away from its communicational and functional role, to be limited into the tight space of vocal contact (ريمان ودرويش، 2008، ص 21).

In order to conclude the argument positively, we should respect the freedom of all people to choose the language they like, for freedom is also sacred. Ameen Albert Rihani urges the Arab society to believe in a continual linguistic process that may free our language and release it in the open space to obtain the different aspects of knowledge and advancement (31 ص، 2003).

Rihani does not call for the destruction of the Arabic language and the usage of a foreign language instead. He also does not want to replace the Arabic letters with English letters. He only calls to embrace new terminology in our language. This call seems realistic, because panic would limit our capability of positive reaction, enrichment and advancement. In other words, we must accept the new generations of science and technology without marking these generations with political and ideological labels.

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