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The impact of Arabic on the English lexicon since 1801

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ABSTRACT

Arabic borrowings which were introduced into English during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have as yet been relatively neglected in previous investigations. The present paper will analyse the influence of Arabic on English vocabulary since 1801. The results presented in this study rely on a comprehensive lexicographical sample of 302 nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabic borrowings collected from the *Oxford English Dictionary* Online. The Arabic-derived words under consideration will be divided into various subject areas and spheres of life (such as the fine arts and crafts, gastronomy, politics, Islam) in order to give a rounded picture of the fields from which Arabic borrowings were adopted into English during the last two centuries.

Keywords: lexicology, language contact, Arabic influence on the English vocabulary, online dictionaries in lexicological research.

1. Introduction

1.1 Previous studies of Arabic influence on English vocabulary

There are very few studies of the Arabic influence on the English lexicon. Kaye's (1992) essay, for instance, concentrates on the orthographical variation of a number of widespread Arabic words and names which occur in English texts, such as the phrase *Allahu akbar* and its spelling variant *Allaho akbar*, the meaning of which can be paraphrased as 'God is great'. Kaye (1992: 32) outlines that

With the Middle East, the Arab world, and much of the rest of the Muslim world being so conspicuous in the news since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the many forms in English print for some Arabic loanwords further prompt a study of such variations.

In addition, the work entitled *The Arabic Contributions to the English Language: An Historical Dictionary* (1994) by Cannon – Kaye should be mentioned here, as it is a large collection of words and phrases taken from Arabic throughout the centuries. Numerous major English dictionaries were surveyed in order to collect both direct and indirect borrowings from Arabic, comprising, for example, the second edition of the *OED* (1989), and dictionaries of new words, such as Ayto's *Longman Register of New Words* (1989, 1990) and Tulloch's *Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (1991). The number of borrowings examined by Cannon – Kaye amounts to 2338 lexical items arranged in alphabetical order in the dictionary section. The book also encompasses three articles: the first article offers a rounded picture of the chronological distribution of the borrowings adopted from Arabic. Furthermore, the words and phrases under review are grouped into 46 semantic areas, ranging from agriculture, botany, music, literature, military to politics and sociology, so as to provide an overview of the various domains from which Arabic borrowings entered English through the ages. The focus of the second article is on grammatical assimilation, and that of the third is on the phonological assimilation of the words of Arabic provenance. This investigation gives significant insights into the contact between Arabic and English in many regards. Still, it does not include an in-depth analysis of the manifold areas from which Arabic borrowings were introduced into English during the last two centuries. The present paper will offer a more up-to-date examination of the semantic areas which have been influenced by Arabic since 1801.

The reader may notice that Cannon – Kaye consulted a new type of dictionary in order to collect Arabic borrowings. That is, a dictionary of new words similar to others like Tulloch's *Oxford Dictionary of New Words* published in 1991. There are also dictionaries concentrating on foreign lexical items which have become part of the English language, including Bliss's (1966) *Dictionary of Foreign Words and Phrases in Current English*. Durkin, the deputy chief editor of the *OED*, draws attention to the fact that the lexical items which are recorded in these dictionaries will be listed in the *OED* if they correspond to the necessary inclusion requirements¹. He states that "the most important of these dictionaries have been read (or "carded") for *OED*'s files, and all of

¹ Durkin, p.c. in email dated 9th February 2010.

them are available for consultation by *OED* editors”². The *OED* thus serves as the main source of the Arabic-derived words presented in this paper.

In his study *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English*, Durkin (2014: 384-385) summarizes the development of Arabic influence on the English language over the centuries and the proportion of borrowings recorded in the *OED* as follows:

The number of direct loanwords from Arabic reflected by the *OED* is relatively small, but there is an unusually large number of indirect loans via other languages. [...] It is uncertain whether there are any loanwords directly from Arabic before 1500; apparent cases, such as the star name *Aldebaran* (a. 1393), probably just reflect a gap in the historical record for the language of transmission (in this case, like most others, probably Latin or French). However, many words ultimately of Arabic origin entered English in the Middle English and Early Modern periods. [...] Small numbers of (probable) direct borrowings are found in Early Modern English and the numbers subsequently climb modestly, peaking round about 1800 [...]. In many cases, especially earlier in this period, it is difficult to be certain that a loan has come directly from Arabic rather than via another language [...]. Most of these loans relate specifically to aspects of Arabic culture (or to Islam), e.g. *hashish* (1598), *madrassa* (1616), *hammam* (1625), *kohl* (1799), *hadj* (1847), *hijab* (1885), *mujahidin* (1887). Greater currency is shown by some of the large number of later loanwords ultimately of Arabic origin that have entered English wholly or partly via French [...].

The focus of linguistic concern of the present analysis will be on those borrowings which have been adopted directly from Arabic since 1801. As will be seen, the *OED Online* represented an essential tool in identifying the various words that show an Arabic origin in their etymological description. In addition, the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, edited by Onions *et al.* in 1966, offered additional etymological information concerning the Arabic-derived words presented in this study.

1.2 The online version of the *OED* as a source of Arabic borrowings

The findings included in this article result from a close review of the linguistic data provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (henceforth

² See fn. 1.

OED). The *OED* is currently being subjected to its first complete “overhaul”. The digitized form of the *OED*, containing the complete text of the Second Edition from 1989 (*OED2*), the 1993 and 1997 *OED Additions Series*, and an essential number of updated and new entries which belong to the Third Edition, or *OED3*, can be searched online. The results of the revision work, including revised and new dictionary entries, are being added to the electronic *OED Online* every quarter³. The *OED Online* permits an exhaustive count and account of all the words and meanings which have their origins in Arabic⁴. The following search makes it possible to retrieve all the different nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabic borrowings from the electronic *OED Online: Advanced Search: Entries containing “Arabic” in “Etymology” and “1801-” in “Date of Entry”*. The corpus data on which the present article is based was identified in the *OED Online* in the summer of 2016. At that time, the *OED* did not include any lexical item assumed to have come from Arabic in the twenty-first century. The number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabic borrowings listed in the *OED Online* totals 302 lexical items. The sample of words comprises borrowings adopted from Standard Arabic, some borrowings from regional or dialectal Arabic, and several from additional national varieties of Arabic. *Riqq*, for example, ‘[a] musical instrument similar to a tambourine, used principally in Arab countries’ (*OED3*), was taken over from Egyptian Arabic into English in 1836. Furthermore, the sample contains borrowings which show a ‘mixed’ etymology in the *OED*, i.e. lexical items which were partly adopted from Arabic and partly from another language. This holds for the twentieth-century borrowing *ouguiya*, for instance, which refers to ‘[t]he principal monetary unit in Mauritania, equivalent to 5 francs of the West African Monetary Union’ (*OED3*). Details in the *OED3* make it clear that the word was derived from both the French form *ouguiya* and its Mauritanian Arabic etymon *ūgiyya*.

In this study, all of the borrowings analysed are assumed to have been borrowed directly from some dialect of Arabic regardless of their meanings and whether they had been borrowing into Arabic from some other language historically. The word *tajine*, for instance, first attested in 1898 in English in the sense of ‘[a]ny of various types of North African (orig. Moroccan) stew prepared by slowly cooking the ingredients in a shallow, earthenware cooking dish [...]’ (*OED3*), was regarded as a borrowing from (Moroccan)

³ For more information concerning the revision of the *OED*, see Durkin (1999: 1-49).

⁴ For detailed information about the production and the advantages of the electronic form of the *OED*, see Brewer (2004) and Brewer (2007: 213-257).

Arabic, despite the fact that it ultimately goes back to ancient Greek *τάγηνον* 'frying pan' (see *OED3*).

Before we consider the various subject fields of borrowings which have been taken from Arabic into English during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the classification of loan influences presented in this paper requires some terminological clarification.

1.3 Classification of loan influences

The classification undertaken in the present analysis is based on the categorization provided by Carstensen in 1968 for researching Anglicisms in German. Carstensen's model considers the most important categories of lexical borrowing and is applicable to other language contact situations including that between English and Arabic. I shall confine myself to the different categories of lexical borrowing which could be identified among the Arabic borrowings investigated in this paper. The following terms will be used: borrowing, transliteration, adaptation, and hybrid.

1.3.1 Borrowing

Borrowing functions as the usual term for a word or a meaning which was taken over from another language. It can also refer to an affix, combining form, phrase or even speech sound taken in as well as to the process by which a word or a meaning is borrowed from another language.

1.3.2 Transliteration

Most of the words borrowed from Arabic since 1801 have undergone *transliteration*. The term refers to the process by which the characters or letters of a foreign alphabet are translated into the alphabet of another language, or to the lexical item rendered in this way. The majority of transliterated Arabic borrowings presented in this article approximate or correspond to the pronunciation of their originals in the source language. An example is *niqab*, '[a] veil worn by some Muslim women, covering all of the face and having two holes for the eyes' (*OED3*), which reflects Arabic ب ا ق ن. According to the *OED2*, it was borrowed into English in 1936.

1.3.3 Adaptation

Adaptation specifies the assimilation by which a word from a foreign language becomes an integrated unit of the language borrowing it. The term can also

relate to the naturalized lexical item itself. The borrowing *ghazeeyeh*, which denotes '[a]n Egyptian dancing girl' (*OED2*), may serve as an example. The *OED2* makes it clear that the word was adapted from *ġāziya*, which represents the Romanized form of its Arabic source term.

1.3.4 Hybrid

The term *hybrid* is used to designate a word which comprises both foreign and native components. The Arabic borrowing *Salafist* serves as an example. It entered English in 1974. The item was formed from the Arabic *salafī* 'Salafī', to which the English suffix *-ist* was attached.

As already mentioned, the majority of words borrowed from Arabic into English since 1801 were subjected to a transliteration process arising out of the non-Roman spelling system used by Arabic. Some Arabic borrowings show more than one orthographic form in the receiving language. Cannon (1997: 177) rightly draws attention to the fact that particularly 'recent transfers [from Arabic] have had little opportunity for a "standard" spelling to develop.' *Felafel*, designating a type of dish, may be adduced as an example. The borrowing is first recorded in the *OED2* in 1951. Two additional spelling variants exist in English which reflect vowel alternation of the word: *falafel*, the more frequent spelling, and *filafil*, which can also be used in English. All the three forms correspond to the Arabic *falāfil* (see *OED2*).

It also seems noteworthy that most of the borrowings presented in this paper show only one specific meaning, such as *tabl*, a designation of a type of drum. The word goes back to the synonymous Arabic *ṭabl*. Arabic-derived words which have developed additional senses due to semantic change are in the minority. *Hijab* might serve as an example. It was first attested as a technical term from Islam in 1885 in English, referring to '[t]he practice observed by some Muslim women of wearing concealing clothing (esp[ecially] headgear, or (in early use) living in seclusion' (*OED3*), as in:

- (1) 1885 T.P. Hughes *Dict. Islam* 174/1 *Hijab*, a term used for the seclusion of women enjoined in the Qur'an. (*OED3*)

From the linguistic evidence included in the *OED3* it emerges that the word came to specify '[a] head covering or veil worn in public by some Muslim women.' According to the *OED3*, this use, which now represents the common meaning of the borrowing, first occurred in 1980 in English:

- (2) 1980 *Associated Press Newswire* (Nexis) 15 July She said the wearing of the hijab, or veil, is a matter of choice.

The word is derived from the Arabic *hijab*, which literally translates as 'veiling'.

2. Subject fields influenced by Arabic during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

As already outlined, the *OED Online* lists 302 borrowings which were taken over from Arabic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The words under consideration were divided into seven major subject areas and their related domains, in order to provide insight into the various semantic fields influenced by Arabic during the last two centuries. The assignment of the Arabic-derived words and meanings relies on their classification in the *OED*.

The following list gives an overview of the numbers and percentages of borrowings in ascending order in the different subject areas enriched by Arabic during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For each field, a number of illustrative examples of Arabic borrowings are given:

1. **The Fine Arts and Crafts (9 borrowings, i.e. 3.0%)**
 - 1.1. Literature (1 borrowing, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *ghazal*, n. (1801).
 - 1.2. Music (8 borrowings, i.e. 2.6%), e.g. *tabl*, n. (1831); *riqq*, n. (1836); *kissar*, n. (1864); *gimbri*, n. (1876).
2. **Language and Linguistics (13 borrowings, i.e. 4.3%), e.g. Sahidic, adj. (1830); mimation, n. (1873); shadda, n. (1896); Lihyanic, n. (1911).**
3. **Gastronomy (24 borrowings, i.e. 7.9%)**
 - 3.1. Kitchen Utensil (1 borrowing, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *zarf/zurf*, n. (1836).
 - 3.2. Drink and Tobacco (6 borrowings, i.e. 2.0%), e.g. *shisha*, n. (1832); *merissa*, n. (1844).
 - 3.3. Cookery (17 borrowings, i.e. 5.6%), e.g. *kibbeh*, n. (1829); *halawi*, n. (1836); *tajine*, n. (1898); *baba ganoush*, n. phr.⁵ (1938); *felafel/falafel*, n. (1951); *tabbouleh*, n. (1955).
4. **Civilization and Politics (38 borrowings, i.e. 12.6%)**
 - 4.1. Government, Administration and Politics (18 borrowings, i.e. 6.0%), e.g. *wali*, n. (1811); *mudir*, n. (1844); *Mendoub*, n. (1923); *umma*, n. (assuming a meaning from politics in 1946); *Amal*, n. (1979).

⁵ The grammatical terminology employed in this paper is based on Quirk et al. (2008).

- 4.2. Terrorism, War and the Military (20 borrowings, i.e. 6.6%), e.g. *redif*, n. (1836); *jihad*, n. (1869); *intifada*, n. (1985); *Hamas*, n. (1988); *al Qaeda*, n. phr. (1996).
5. **The Natural Sciences (43 borrowings, i.e. 14.2%)**
- 5.1. Astronomy (1 borrowing, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *Deneb*, n. (1867).
- 5.2. Medicine (4 borrowings, i.e. 1.3%), e.g. *argel*, n. (1803); *Yunani*, adj. 1922).
- 5.3. Zoology (6 borrowings, i.e. 2.0%), e.g. *mhor*, n. (1825); *ariel*, n. (1832); *raad*, n. (1858).
- 5.4. Geography and Geology (14 borrowings, i.e. 4.6%), e.g. *wadi/wady*, n. (1839); *hammada*, n. (1853); *seif*, n. (1925).
- 5.5. Botany (18 borrowings, i.e. 6.0%), e.g. *argan*, n. (1809); *tarfa*, n. (1858); *sim-sim*, n. (1917).
6. **Islam and Religion (79 borrowings, i.e. 26.2%)**, e.g. *Eid-al-Fitr*, n. (1823); *to halal*, v. (1855); *Eid-al-Adha*, n. (1880); *madhhab*, n. (1929); *takaful*, n. (1953); *Salafist*, adj. (1974).
7. **People and Everyday Life (79 borrowings, i.e. 26.2%)**
- 7.1. Animal Rearing (2 borrowings, i.e. 0.7%), e.g. *saluki*, n. (1809).
- 7.2. Tourism (3 borrowings, i.e. 1.0%), e.g. *mandarah*, n. (1836); *mudhif*, n. (1888).
- 7.3. Monetary Units (5 borrowings, i.e. 1.7%), e.g. *fi*, n. (1891); *halala*, n. (1961); *ouguiya*, n. (1973).
- 7.4. Security and Police (6 borrowings, i.e. 2.0%), e.g. *razzia*⁶, n. (1821); *ghaffir*, n. (1831); *mutawwa*, n. (about 1977).
- 7.5. Transport and Travelling (7 borrowings, i.e. 2.3%), e.g. *dahabeeyah/dahabiah*, n. (1846); *mahaila*, n. (1904).
- 7.6. Communication (9 borrowings, i.e. 3.0%), e.g. *quais kitir*, int. (1898); *malesh*, int. (1913); *iggri/iggry*, int. (1917).
- 7.7. Clothing (16 borrowings, i.e. 5.3%), e.g. *habara*, n. (about 1817); *'sherwal*, n. (1844); *gandoura*, n. (1851); *niqab*, n. (1936); *hijab*, n. showing a meaning from clothing in 1980).
- 7.8. Society, Human Behaviour and Feelings (31 borrowings, i.e. 10.3%), e.g. *kef/keif/kief*, n. (1808); *ghazeeyeh*, n. (1819); *bint*, n. (1855); *faki*, n. 1872); *Saudi*, n. (1933); *Sahrawi*, n. (1976).

⁶ According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966), *razzia* shows a mixed etymology. It was partly borrowed from French *razzia* and partly from its Algerian Arabic etymon *gāziya* (see also the OED3 for additional etymological details).

The sample of nineteenth- and twentieth-century borrowings from Arabic includes 17 lexical items which are not easily categorized. Examples are *tahalli* and *hawala*. Of these, *tahalli*, referring to '[d]ecoration', was borrowed into English in 1833 (*OED2*). It goes back to Arabic *taḫallī* 'ornamenting'. *Torba* represents a twentieth century borrowing from Arabic. The word specifies a type of cement in English. As stated in the *OED2*, it was adapted from the Arabic *turba* in the sense of 'dust, earth, soil' in 1910.

2.1 The fine arts and crafts

"The fine arts and crafts" constitutes the field with the smallest number of Arabic-derived items. It includes nine borrowings which have to do with literature and music. *Ghazal*, for instance, was adopted into English in 1801 as a term for '[a] species of Oriental lyric poetry, generally of an erotic nature, distinguished from other forms of Eastern verse by having a limited number of stanzas and by the recurrence of the same rhyme' (*OED2*). According to the *OED2*, the word corresponds to both Persian and Arabic *ghazal*. Another example is the borrowing *gimbri*, '[a] small Moorish guitar played by plucking the strings with a piece of dry palmetto leaf' (*OED2*), as is exemplified by the following *OED2* quotation:

- (3) 1903 *Westm. Gaz.* 18 Feb. 2/3 The slender fanatical singer, Whose fingers were skilled on the gimbri.

The borrowing can also denote 'a player of this instrument' (*OED2*). *Gimbri* is an adaptation of the Arabic *gunbrī* (*OED2*). Like most of the borrowings in this area, *gimbri* is not confined to specific contexts in the receiving language. Yet it comparatively often occurs in Arabic-speaking contexts in English, as in the following example, which is taken from a novel revealing a Moroccan locale:

- (4) 1907 F. Campbell *Shepherd of Stars* xv. 177 The Gimbri wagged his [head] from side to side. (*OED2*)

It seems noteworthy that the field of the fine arts and crafts does not encompass any word or meaning which was introduced from Arabic during the twentieth century. The afore-mentioned *gimbri* is the latest acquisition of this field documented in the *OED*: it was introduced into English in 1876.

2.2 Language and linguistics

Similarly, the domain of language and linguistics includes a relatively small number of adopted words and senses. An example is the nineteenth-century borrowing *mimation* and its spelling variant *mimmation*, a technical term in Semitic grammar for '[t]he appending of *m* to the flexional vowels in Semitic languages, esp[ecially] Akkadian' (*OED3*). Its first attested use dates from 1873 (*OED3*):

- (5) 1873 *Eng. Cycl. Arts & Sci. Suppl.* 173 The use of mimmation by the Babylonians.

The *OED3* notes that the borrowing is a hybrid which was formed from the Arabic *mīm*, the designation of the Arabic letter which reflects the Roman *m*, and the English suffix *-ation*. A further Arabic borrowing from the field of language and linguistics is *Lihyanic*, '[t]he name of an ancient Semitic language known only from north Arabian inscriptions of the 2nd and 1st centuries b.c.' (*OED2*). It is first documented in English in 1911:

- (6) 1911 *Encycl. Brit.* XXIV.626/1 A more commendable proposal is to call the inscriptions Lihyānī, since the tribe of Lihyān is sometimes mentioned in them... Other brief inscriptions ... have been discovered... Their writing is a somewhat later form of the Lihyānī, and the dialect ... seems to be very similar to Lihyānī. (*OED2*)

The word is derived from Arabic *lihyān* to which the suffix *-ic* was attached. The majority of Arabic borrowings in this domain are documented in specialized literature about language and linguistics.

2.3 Gastronomy

Arabic has served as the donor language of 24 borrowings in the area of gastronomy, encompassing words and meanings to do with "kitchen utensils", "drink and tobacco", and "cooking". *Zarf/zurf*, *merissa*, *shisha*, *felafel/falafel* and *baba ganoush* serve as examples. *Zarf* and its spelling variant *zurf* relate to '[a] cup-shaped holder for a hot coffee-cup, used in the Levant, usually of metal and of ornamental design' (*OED2*), *merissa* is the name of a type of beer produced in Sudan, and *shisha* refers to a type of water-pipe or the tobacco which is smoked with this pipe. A close review of the *OED*

quotations shows that *shisha* occurs in English mainly in Arabic-speaking contexts. The following *OED3* citation from 2003, for instance, describes an Egyptian setting:

- (7) 2003 *enRoute* Mar. 26/2 At night, the cafés along the Corniche, like cafés everywhere else in Egypt at night, are full of men drinking tea, smoking *shisha* and playing backgammon.

Shisha was adapted from the Egyptian Arabic *šīša* ‘hookah’, ‘tobacco which can be smoked with a hookah’. The Arabic source term ultimately goes back either to Persian *šīša* ‘glass’ or to Turkish *şişe* ‘glass’ (see *OED3*). *Felafel/falafel* and *baba ganoush* specify dishes. The former has become a widespread term for a dish which includes peppers and small pea balls, usually served in a flat bread roll, and the latter is used to denote ‘[a] Middle Eastern (originally Lebanese) dish of puréed roasted aubergine, garlic, and tahini’ (*OED3*). The various Arabic-derived culinary terms under review are fairly often found in specialized literature on food and cooking, as can be seen from the following usage examples of *baba ganoush*, *tajine*, a variety of stew originating in Morocco, and *kibbeh*, a Middle Eastern dish typically prepared in Lebanon and Syria:

- (8) 1986 J. Ridgwell *Middle Eastern Cooking* 28 (*heading*) Baba Ghanoush ... Aubergine and tahini purée. (*OED3*)
- (9) 1990 *Gourmet* Sept. 165/2 The spicy, hearty meat stews cooked in clay pots called *tajines* are probably Bedouin in origin. (*OED3*)
- (10) 2003 E. Powell tr. S. Jamal *Arabian Flavours* 37 One of the most sought-after and flaunted virtues in the eyes of the family of a girl of marriageable age is her dexterity in preparing *kibbeh*. (*OED3*)

2.4 Civilization and politics

Arabic has also served as a source of words in the domain of “civilization and politics”, including borrowings related to “government, administration and politics”, “terrorism, and war and the military”. *Umma*, for instance, shows a political meaning some time after its first attested use in English. Since 1885 the word has been documented in English with reference to ‘[t]he Islamic community, founded by Muhammad at Medina, comprising individuals bound to one another by religious ties on a tribal model’ (*OED2*). *Umma*

assumed an additional sense in English in 1946, serving as '[t]he name of a nationalist political party founded in the Sudan in 1945' (*OED2*). In this use, the word is spelled with a capital initial letter, as in:

- (11) 1981 *Economist* 24 Jan. 43/2 There are parochial or communal parties which do not favour or are fearful of, absorption into larger units: these include the Christian Phalange in Lebanon, the Umma in Sudan, the Neo-Destour in Tunisia. (*OED2*)

Umma was borrowed from the Arabic word '*umma* 'nation, people, community' (see *OED2*). A further example is *Mendoub*, which was adopted from the Arabic *mandūb* in 1923, denoting '[t]he Sultan of Morocco's representative in the administration of the international city of Tangier, with responsibility for presiding over the legislative assembly' (*OED3*). Since Tangier was under the jurisdiction of Britain, Spain, France and a number of other countries from 1923 to 1956, *Mendoub*s are no longer involved in the international administration of that city. Hence, it is now confined to historical contexts in present-day English, as can be seen from an *OED3* citation of 1999 which records the spelling variant *mandub*:

- (12) 1999 *Britannica Online* (Version 99.1) at *Morocco*, Tangier, though it had a Spanish-speaking population of 40,000, received a special international administration under a *mandub*. (*OED3*)

The majority of the borrowings from the field of "civilization and politics" are associated with terrorism, and war and the military. *Jihad*, a term occurring commonly in Present Day English, may be adduced as an example. It was borrowed from Arabic in the sense of '[a] religious war of Muslims against unbelievers, inculcated as a duty by the Qur'an and traditions' (*OED2*) in 1869. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966) also documents *jihad* as a spelling variant of this borrowing. The word widened its semantic scope a few years after it entered English. It has been documented since 1880 in an extended use, referring to '[a] war or crusade for or against some doctrine, opinion, or principle' or 'war to the death' (*OED2*). The domain of terrorism, and war and the military also contains the latest borrowing from Arabic listed in the *OED*. This is *al Qaeda*, '[a] network of militant Islamic groups active internationally since the 1990s, and [...] associated with numerous attacks on military and civilian targets across the world' (*OED3*). The phrase frequently occurs in attributive function in English, as in *al Qaeda cell*, *al Qaeda link* and *al Qaeda terrorist* (see *OED3*).

2.5 The natural sciences

The natural sciences with their various related areas constitutes the second largest domain influenced by Arabic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In all, 43 borrowings can be assigned to this field. The greatest proportion of lexical items belongs to geography, geology and botany. A number of the natural science terms under review are specialized expressions which have not made it into everyday use. Examples are *mhorr*, a borrowing from Moroccan Arabic which refers to a variety of gazelle native to the Sahara, and *sim-sim*, a synonym for 'sesame'. In addition, there is *seif*, a technical term in physical geography for '[a] sand dune having the form of a narrow ridge elongated in a direction parallel to that of the prevailing wind' (*OED2*). These types of borrowings are chiefly documented in scientific texts and encyclopedias. A perusal of the documentary evidence available in the *OED* reveals that *mhorr* and *seif* also function as adjectivals in English, as in:

- (13) 1974 *Encycl. Brit. Micropædia* IV. 443/3 Coat ... reddish brown with white rump, underparts, and head and a white spot on neck in the western races, such as the critically endangered mhorr gazelle. (*OED3*)
- (14) 1975 *Nature* 20 Feb. 617/2 Until the recent drought, seif dunes were mainly active in this region north of the 150-mm isohyet. (*OED2*)

Seif was adopted from the Arabic noun *saif*, which literally means 'sword'. *Wadi* is one of the few Arabic borrowings from the natural sciences with which the average speaker of English would be familiar. It corresponds to the Arabic *wādī*.

2.6 Religion and Islam

"Religion and Islam" and "people and everyday" life constitute the two fields where the impact of Arabic was strongest in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both categories include 79 borrowings. *Eid-al-Fitr* and *takaful* constitute two representative borrowings associated with religion and Islam. Of these, *Eid-al-Fitr*, which came into English in 1823, is the designation of '[t]he Feast of Breaking the Fast, a major Islamic festival celebrating the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, and commencing on the first day of the tenth month of the Muslim calendar' (*OED3*), e.g.

- (15) 2004 *New Yorker* 13 Dec. 52/2 The clientele that morning was mainly veiled wives in black burkas and bearded men wearing shalwar kameez,... who were shopping for Eid-al-Fitr – the sighting of the new moon that marks the end of Ramadan. (OED3)

The word is given quite a complex etymological description in the OED3: it was partly influenced by Persian *ṭīd-i fiṭr* and its Arabic etymon *ṭīd al-fiṭr*, 'Feast of Breaking the Fast'. *Takaful* is classified as a technical term from Islam (OED3), specifying '[t]he principle of mutual obligation' or, more specifically, 'a form of mutual insurance, compliant with Sharia law, in which subscribers contribute to a fund, sharing losses and liabilities and also any profits which may accrue' (OED3). The borrowing corresponds to the Arabic *takāful*, which literally means 'mutual obligation'.

2.7 People and everyday life

Like the area of "religion and Islam", that of "people and everyday life" takes in 79 items. These fall into eight subgroups, consisting of borrowings relating to "animal rearing" (e.g. *saluki*, the name of a breed of dog), "tourism", for instance *mudhif*, which designates 'a guest house' or 'a reception room' (OED3) in Iraq, "monetary units" (e.g. *halala*, specifying a unit of currency which is used in Saudi Arabia), "security and police", (e.g. *ghaffir*, '[a] native Egyptian policeman; a guardian, watchman' (OED2)), and several terms associated with "transport and travelling", such as *dahabeeyah* and its spelling variant *dahabiah*, denoting '[a] large sailing-boat, used by travellers on the Nile' (OED2). In addition, it contains nine borrowings having to do with "communication", among them a number of interjections which may render a speech or a conversation more vivid and expressive. An example is *malesh*, which entered English in 1913 in the sense of "[n]o matter!", 'never mind!' (OED3). The interjection is quite often put into the mouth of characters who speak English but whose first language is Arabic in order to increase the authenticity of a scene described or an utterance. This is illustrated by an extract from the novel *Baghdad without Map*, which reveals a Middle Eastern locale:

- (16) 1991 T. Horwitz *Baghdad without Map* i. 10 'Malesh' Ahmed said, producing a second oar. *Malesh* is an Egyptian phrase of surrender, meaning 'never mind' or 'doesn't matter'. (OED3)

Malesh is derived from the colloquial Arabic form *ma 'alay-š* 'no matter' (see OED3). This group of OED entries also lists sixteen terms for clothing. An

example is the borrowing *habara*, a type of silk garment worn by women. It goes back to Arabic *ḥabara*. Evidently, this word, like *seif*, can function adjectivally in English, as in *habara veil* (*OED2*). Of the borrowings in the category “people and everyday life”, a substantial number have to do with “society, and human behaviour and feelings”. The majority of these types of words, such as *faki*, ‘[a] title given in Africa to schoolmasters’ (*OED2*) and *Saudi*, which represents a common term for a person from Saudi Arabia, relate to the individuals who make up a society.

3. Conclusion

This study constitutes an *au courant* investigation of a significant part of the foreign vocabulary adopted into English during the last two centuries: the sum of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabic borrowings documented in the *OED Online*. As mentioned above, even the latest Arabic-derived word, *al Qaeda*, which entered the language in 1996 according to the *OED*, is considered here.

The documentary evidence provided by the electronic *OED* has made it possible to give an overview of the manifold domains and spheres of life from which Arabic words have been adopted into the English language since 1801. As regards the proportion of borrowings in the various subject areas, the data indicate that the greatest donations have been made in the fields of “religion and Islam” and “people and everyday life”. Arabic has long served as an important donor language of lexical items, among them a substantial number of words from Islam. Cannon – VanDuinkerken (2008: 36-37) point out that

Arabic is an international language long known as a major supplier of words to Swahili, Romance languages, Persian, Turkish, Indian languages like Hindi and Urdu, and English. A tabulation of such contact data worldwide would place Arabic among the major word-suppliers to English. [...] Islam has had continuing, modern influences, with items going into Southeast Asia and the Philippines, among other distant areas. In conveying Islam to the world, Arabic surpassed Sanskrit as an international carrier of religion.

A substantial number of the fairly recent borrowings related to “religion and Islam” are specialized terms that the ordinary proficient speaker of English

would not commonly encounter. An example is *madhhab*, taken over from Arabic in 1929 as a technical term in Islam for '[e]ach of the schools of Sunni Islamic law, each of which is based on a particular system of interpretation of Islamic religious and legal texts' (*OED3*). The number of Arabic-derived words in the domain of people and everyday life, comprising eight subareas, such as animal rearing, transport and travelling, and communication and clothing might be explained, to some extent at least, by the global presence and impact of Arabia and Muslim culture. The status of Arabic as an influential language world-wide might have led to the adoption of manifold terms reflecting objects, concepts and ideas common in the Arabic world into English. Cannon – VanDuinkerken (2008: 37) draw attention to the fact that

Twentieth-century petrol wealth has given the Arabs political and strategic importance, with international events continually involving Arabia and the Muslim world. The impact of Islam has carried Arabic into the bahasas of Malaysia and Indonesia, where national contests determine the muezzin who can best call the faithful to prayer in Arabic. The war between Iraq and Iran and later Middle Eastern intercourse have had global impact.

The borrowings of the natural sciences, with their various related fields, make up the second largest category of lexical items taken over from Arabic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The adoption of natural science terms has likely resulted from the advances made in these domains in Arabic-speaking countries and the consequent coinage of Arabic terms for such concepts, terms which spread with those advances to English-speaking nations.

As for the individual subgroups of the various major subject areas, the highest number of Arabic borrowings are included in the domains of "society, human behaviour and feelings" (31 borrowings), "terrorism, war and the military" (20 borrowings), "government, administration and politics" (18 borrowings), "botany" (18 borrowings) and "cooking" (17 borrowings). These findings illustrate that Arabic not only contributed to the English lexicon in the form of specialized terms restricted to scientific or technical contexts but also in the form of a variety of borrowings having to do with everyday life.

The present article serves as a prolegomenon to further study. Considering the highly political, sociological, and historical implications Arabic shows in the Western world, it would be worth delving into further research on the degree of borrowing in different English varieties, such as

British versus American English. It would also be interesting to provide a rounded picture of the various historical, political, and cultural reasons which may have led to the introduction of Arabic words into English. However, such a broad analysis would have to be carried out within a framework that is far beyond the scope of this paper.

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