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THE TREATMENT OF LEXICAL BORROWING IN ARABIC SOURCES

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Abstract: his article examines the concepts of muʿarrab, dakhil, and muwallad in Arabic linguistics, focusing on their definitions, distinctions, and areas of overlap. Based on classical sources and the views of prominent scholars such as Al-Jawaliqi, Al- Maydaniy, Ibn Durayd, Al-Suyuti, and Al-Jawhari, the study analyzes the criteria used to identify loanwords in Arabic. Special attention is given to the role of the istishhād period in determining the authenticity of lexical items. The article highlights both similarities and differences in scholars' approaches and concludes that while muʿarrab refers to adapted foreign words integrated into Arabic structure, dakhil represents a broader category that includes all borrowed elements regardless of adaptation. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the historical development of Arabic vocabulary.

Keywords: muʻarrab, loanwords, muwallad, istishhād, Arabic linguistics, borrowed words, lexicology, Arabic language, language history, morphology.

Since ancient times, hundreds of words from various languages have entered the Arabic language. Arabs used these words in their speech; eloquent speakers employed them in their expressions, and poets incorporated them into their poetry. Some of these words are even found in the Qur'an and the Prophetic hadith. Lexicographers and other linguists studied such words from different perspectives, establishing rules to identify them and formulating principles for adapting them to Arabic phonology and morphological structure.

In this regard, certain fundamental works of grammarians also served as a basis. In particular, they contributed significantly to the development of studies focused on the relationship between form and meaning within the linguistic system (Talipov, 2025, p. 602).

These words were termed muʿarrab ("Arabized") or muʿrab. Al-Jawhari states regarding the verb ʿarraba:

"تقول عربته العرب أو أعربته"

("One says: the Arabs Arabized it, or made it Arabic.")

Sibawayh, however, used only the form muʿrab (with a sukūn on the letter ʿayn and a fatḥa on the rā'). In his work Al-Kitab, he writes:

"هذا باب ما أعربه من الأعجمية"

("This is the chapter on what has been Arabized from non-Arabic.") (Sibawayh, 1988, vol. 2, p. 342).

Other scholars also employed this term. For example, Abu Hatim al-Sijistani narrates from al-Aṣmaʿī:

"إن جدة أصلها أعجمي.... فأعرب" (Al-Azhari, 1969, p. 459), meaning: "The word Jidda is originally non-Arabic, but it was later Arabized."

Similarly, regarding the word al-Istar (أستار), Abu Saʿid states:

"لأنه بالفارسية جهار فأعربوه فقالوا أستار" (Al-Azhari, 1969, p. 382),meaning: "This word was 'jahār' in Persian; the Arabs Arabized it and pronounced it 'istar'."

However, the more widely used term is muʿarrab, referring to a word borrowed into Arabic and fully integrated into the language. This term is extensively used in linguistic literature (Al-Jawaliqi, 1990, p. 13).

In Arabic linguistics, the term taʿrīb (Arabization) is also used. It is the verbal noun of ʿarraba and denotes the process of transferring a word from a foreign language into Arabic.

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According to al-Jawaliqī, words borrowed into Arabic are classified into two main categories: muʿarrab and muwallad. Muʿarrab refers to a foreign word that has been adapted to Arabic by modifying its phonetic and morphological structure in accordance with Arabic linguistic rules and that was used during the period of istishhād (i.e., the period considered authoritative as linguistic evidence). Such words gain a firm place in the language if they appear in the Qur'an, hadith, or in the speech of eloquent Arabs.

Muwallad, on the other hand, refers to words that entered Arabic after the period of istishhād, or to new forms derived later from previously Arabized words. It also includes later changes in pronunciation or structure affecting earlier Arabized words (Al-Jawaliqi, 1990, pp. 14–17).

Al-Jawaliqī further defines muwallad as follows:

"غير أن «المولد لفظ عام يشمل كل ما أحدث من الكلمات بعد انقضاء عصر الاستشهاد سواء أكان ذلك عن طريق النقل من اللغات الأعجمية أم الاشتقاق من معرب أم الاشتقاق من كلمة عربية أم الارتجال"

("The term muwallad is a general designation that encompasses all words that emerged after the end of the period of istishhād, whether through borrowing from foreign languages, derivation from Arabized words, derivation from Arabic words, or through spontaneous coinage.")

The linguist Ahmad Maydani (d. 1124), in the introduction to his work Nuzhat al-Tarf fi Ilm al-Sarf, discusses various grammatical terms used in Arabic. Among them, he distinguishes between dakhīl and muʿarrab, stating:

"دخيل لما ليس في كلامهم؛ ومعرب لما عربوه، أي جعلوه عربيًا"

That is, dakhīl refers to words that were not originally part of the Arabs' speech but entered from external languages, whereas muʿarrab denotes words that were adopted and adapted by the Arabs, becoming integrated into the Arabic language (Yakubova, 2021, pp. 619–623).

The term dakhīl is derived from the expression "فلان دخيل في بني فلان" (fulān dakhīl fī banī fulān), which means "a person who does not belong to them." Linguists often use this term as a synonym of muʿarrab, considering their meanings to be equivalent. In some cases, foreign words are described using both terms simultaneously. For instance, in Tahdhīb al-lughah (6/257), the word al-nārjīl (النارجيل) is described as muʿarrab dakhīl, and similarly, in (6/332), the expression al-humayān dakhīl muʿarrab is used.

The difference between muʿarrab and dakhīl lies in the fact that dakhīl is a broader concept than muʿarrab. Thus, any word that has entered the Arabic language from non-Arabic (ʿajamī) languages may be termed dakhīl, regardless of whether it entered during the period of istishhād or afterward, whether it conforms to Arabic phonological and morphological patterns or not, and whether it is a common noun or a proper name. Some linguists do not classify proper names as muʿarrab, but rather as dakhīl. Al-Fayyumi states: "As for what they adopted as proper names, it is not muʿarrab." Instead, such words are described as foreign (ʿajamī), for example, proper names like Ibrāhīm and Isḥāq (Al-Jawaliqi, 1990, p. 17).

Al-Suyuti defines lexical borrowing using the term muʿarrab as "the Arabization of meaningful words created in other languages" (Al-Suyuti, 1998, p. 7). In this concise definition, he aligns with the view of Sibawayh and his students. For them, the primary criterion of "Arabization" is the actual usage of a foreign word in the language. According to this perspective, conformity of the borrowed word to Arabic morphological patterns is desirable but not obligatory. Sibawayh maintains that the formal integration of a borrowed noun involves two basic processes: its compatibility with Arabic inflectional endings and its ability to take the definite article al.

The prominent linguist Al-Jawhari classified borrowed lexical units into two categories: Arabized and foreign. The term muʿarrab ("Arabized") denotes words that have adopted an Arabic form and undergone assimilation, whereas dakhīl ("foreign, intrusive") refers to borrowed words that have not undergone morphological assimilation and have retained their original form (Qodirov & Aliyev, 2010, p. 62).

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Thus, the primary conditions for the formal assimilation of a word are: a) preserving the phonetic structure of the borrowed term, that is, pronouncing it using the phonetic system of Arabic without distorting its original sound composition;

b) conformity with Arabic word-formation patterns, meaning that the borrowed word is adapted to Arabic morphological models.

According to historical sources, the Arabic language contains a significant layer of terms borrowed from neighboring languages such as Syriac and Mesopotamian Aramaic, as well as from Greek and Latin. Modern Arabic, in turn, is characterized by the borrowing of technical terminology from Western European languages (Belkin, 1975, p. 105).

Scholars have generally defined the concept of muʿarrab through four main criteria:

Words borrowed from foreign languages into Arabic, whether their form has changed or remained unchanged;

Words that are not originally Arabic but are used by Arabs in their speech with meanings established in another language;

Words used by eloquent Arabs, particularly those attested during the period of istishhād (the normative period of the Arabic language);

The process of incorporating a foreign word into Arabic by adapting it to the lexical system of the language (Tawfiq Shahin, 2003, p. 133).

There have also been scholarly debates among linguists regarding the methods for identifying whether a word is of non-Arabic (ʿajamī) origin (Al-Maydani, 2014, p. 65).

Linguists, including Al-Suyuti, have proposed several methods for determining whether a word in Arabic is of non-Arabic (ʿajamī) origin. These methods include the following:

Transmission (naql): that is, when one of the authoritative scholars of Arabic explicitly states that a given word is of foreign origin.

Non-conformity to Arabic morphological patterns: a word that does not fit the established system of Arabic word patterns may be identified as dakhīl. For example, ibrīsam (إبريسم) does not correspond to typical Arabic morphological structures.

The occurrence of the letter nūn at the beginning of a word followed by rā’ is considered a sign of foreign origin, as in narjis (نرجس).

The occurrence of the letter zāy after dāl at the end of a word is not characteristic of Arabic, as in muhandiz (مهندز).

The combination of the letters ṣād and jīm within a single word is also indicative of foreign origin, as in al-ṣawljān (الصولجان) and al-jass (الجص).

The co-occurrence of the letters jīm and qāf within one word is another such indicator, as in al-manjanīq (المنجنيق).

The absence of so-called “ḥurūf al-dhalāqa” (smooth-flowing letters) in quadriliteral or quinqueliteral words is likewise considered a sign of foreign origin. In genuine Arabic words, at least one of these letters is typically present. Examples include safarjal (سفرجل), qaḍaʿmal (قذعمل), qarṭaʿb (قرطبع), and jaḥmarish (جحمرش) (Al-Suyuti, 1998, vol. 1, p. 27).

Foreign (ʿajamī) words in Arabic are generally classified into three categories:

First category: Words that have been modified by Arabs and fully adapted to the Arabic linguistic system. Such words are used in the same way as native Arabic words. Examples include dirham (درهم) and bahrāj (بهرج).

Second category: Words that have been partially modified but not fully adapted to Arabic morphological patterns. Consequently, the rules applicable to the first category do not apply to them. Examples include ājurr (آجر) and ibrīsam (إبريسم).

Third category: Words that have been adopted without modification. If such words are not adapted to Arabic morphological models, they are not considered part of the Arabic lexical system; however, if they are adapted, they may be treated as Arabic. An example of the first case is Khurāsān (خراسان), which does not conform to the Arabic pattern fiʿālān. Examples of the

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second case include khurram (خُرَّم), adapted by analogy with the pattern of sullam (سُلَّم), as well as kurkum (كركم) and qumqum (قمقم), which have likewise been adjusted to Arabic patterns.

In some instances, Arabs replaced certain sounds due to difficulty in pronunciation. In this regard, Sibawayh states:

"ويبدلون مكان آخر الحرف الذى لا يثبت فى كلامهم"

("They substitute, in place of another, a letter that is not stable in their speech.")

In other words, Arabs replace sounds that do not exist in their phonological system with other, more familiar sounds. Examples include kūsa (كوسه) and mūza (موزه).

In this process, certain sounds in Persian may correspond either to the glottal stop (hamza, ء) or to the consonant yā' (ي). Consequently, Arabs adapted such sounds by replacing them with letters that fit their phonological system. For instance, the letter jīm (ج), due to its phonetic proximity to yā' (ي), was sometimes used as a substitute. Likewise, the letter hā' (ه), which shares certain phonetic features with yā', could in some cases replace it (Al-Suyuti, 1998, p. 305).

Conclusion. In Arabic linguistics, the concepts of muʿarrab and dakhīl have received considerable scholarly attention. Muʿarrab refers to a foreign word that has been adapted to Arabic, with its phonological and morphological structure aligned to Arabic linguistic rules and attested in the speech of Arabs during the period of istishhād. In contrast, dakhīl is a broader concept, encompassing all words that have entered Arabic from non-Arabic languages, as well as forms later derived from earlier Arabized words.

Scholarly opinions exhibit certain differences in this regard. For instance, some scholars classify borrowed words that occur as proper names as dakhīl, emphasizing that they should not be considered muʿarrab. Others, however, such as Al-Suyuti and Ibn Durayd, at times use muʿarrab and dakhīl as synonymous terms. At the same time, scholars have established a set of criteria for identifying muʿarrab words, including the arrangement of sounds and letters, morphological structure, and lexical compatibility. Such principles are extensively discussed in the works of Al-Jawaliqi, Ahmad Maydani, Ibn Durayd, and Al-Jawhari.

Furthermore, it has been established that, due to the long-standing historical contact of Arabic with other languages, multiple layers of borrowed vocabulary have emerged within it. In this process, phonetic and morphological adaptation served as the primary mechanisms. Some words were fully integrated into the phonological and morphological system of Arabic, while others were only partially adapted or remained unassimilated.

The term dakhīl refers to all words borrowed into Arabic from foreign languages. It is a broader concept than muʿarrab: regardless of whether a word has been adapted to Arabic, whether it belongs to the period of istishhād or emerged later, any borrowed word may be classified as dakhīl. The principal distinction between dakhīl and muʿarrab lies in the fact that dakhīl encompasses muʿarrab and is thus used in a more general and inclusive sense.

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