

*English Loan Words in the Spoken  
Arabic of the Southern Part of Iraq:  
a Sociolinguistic Study*

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### **1. General Outlook on Borrowing**

In language studies, the term ‘borrowing’ is commonly employed to refer to the linguistic process wherein a certain foreign linguistic element is taken over and incorporated into another different language. And such a linguistic process may occur on all levels of language. It sometimes takes the form of lexical items which are linguistically familiar as loan words and are regarded as nonnative words until they become part of the lexicon of the borrowing language. Bloomfield (1933: 444) defines ‘borrowing’, in its linguistic sense, as “the adoption of features which differ from those of the main tradition”. This definition has been set to comprehend two different implications for this term, which Bloomfield has described as ‘dialect borrowing’ and ‘cultural borrowing’ (ibid). However, the term ‘borrowing’ is chiefly used to indicate the second sense, which implies that the borrowed features come from a different language. Robins (1964: 309) explicitly refers to this sense when he states that word borrowing is

“the taking over of words from foreign languages”<sup>1</sup>. Gleason (1955: 397) also tends to maintain this sense when he describes borrowing as “the copying of a linguistic item from speakers of another speech form”, and then states that “the most evident instances are those in which the two forms of speech are quite different”. In the course of the present study, the term ‘borrowing’ is to be used in this implication only.

The phenomenon of linguistic borrowing has for a long time been the concern of so many ancient and modern language studies. The comparitists, for instance, while striving to trace back the historical sources of certain lexis for the purpose of providing evidence for their belief that all Indo-European languages had descended from one protolanguage, they incidentally found out that a great deal of cognate words are merely the results of linguistic borrowing (Lyons, 1968: 26) . And it appears that all languages tend to borrow from each other, a linguistic phenomenon which is ascribed to all types of contact and contiguity (Robins, 1964: 323).

Speakers of one language are often apt to use loan words whenever they require "to refer to things, processes, and ways of behaviour, organization, or thinking, for which words or phrases were not available or convenient in their own language hitherto" (ibid). But it does not follow from this that lexical borrowing is associated with only cultural and technological novelties. In fact, contact between different communities can be an important factor for the diffusion of words

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that Robins here confines the process of borrowing to words only.

from the language of one community into the language of the other. Such a contact is not necessarily geographical contiguity. It can be of various forms such as historical, cultural, political, etc.

One of the best examples of loan words which are correlated with the historical political factor is many of the Norman French lexical elements that have entered into English vocabulary during the time of the Norman rule in England.

Robins (1964: 324) refers in this connection to "the passage of great deal of English vocabulary into all the languages of India during the period of English rule" , which can also illustrate the influence of the historical political factor on word borrowing.

On the other hand, word borrowing can be either direct or indirect. A directly borrowed loan is certainly a native word in the language it is borrowed from. However, it is not often easy to determine whether or not a word is native since it requires tracing its etymology back to the earliest known stages of that language (Fromkin & Rodman, 1978: 292). This may cause confusion as to the actual source of the loan. In the present study this problem appears to be less acute due to the fact that since this study is not lexicographical, it is beyond its aim to compile all English loans used in the southern variety of spoken Iraqi Arabic (SIA). The present research is mainly concerned with the sociolinguistic variation in the use of loans, which makes it methodically convenient to avoid the mention of problematic examples.

Loaning of foreign words also occurs in Arabic. And it has been the pursuit of so many Arab scholars in the fields of semantics and

lexicography since the middle ages (Al-Samarra'i, 1982: 25-43). It has also been the concern of some modern orientalists and Arab lexicographers. In Iraq, for example, this linguistic phenomenon has been studied by a number of philologists and contemporary linguists (see for instance Al-Samarra'i, 1977). Some other lexicographers are interested in compiling loans that have been introduced into SIA from various languages (for this purpose, see Muhammad, 1990).

## **2. The Aim, Hypothesis and Method**

As mentioned above, the present paper is concerned with the study of sociolinguistic variation in the occurrence of loan words of English source in the speech of southern Iraqis (people living in the three governorates in the southernmost part of Iraq), who use a variety of SIA which is somewhat distinctive from that adopted by the metropolitans (dwellers of Baghdad) and those living in the vicinities roundabout.

It is hypothesized that speakers of the local variety of SIA used in the southernmost part of Iraq vary as regards the use of loans in their speech. Presumably, this variation occurs on both the phonological and lexical levels. It is also assumed to be correlated with some nonlinguistic variables the most obvious of which are the place of the residence of the speaker, his/ her level of education, his/ her age, his/ her sex and his/ her contact with the urban centres.

Methodically, the present research is mainly based on the linguistic intuition of the researchers themselves as they are native speakers of this linguistic variety. Also general personal observations collected

during a considerable period of time provide a part of the data which the study is based on. Part of the data also consists of information taken directly from a number of informants from different regions in the area of the research. Those informants are native speakers of the same linguistic variety under investigation. A more important part of the data is a collection of English loans listed by 165 randomly selected informants of both sexes who were junior and senior students at either the department of English or the department of Arabic (College of Education, University of Basra) during the academic year 1996-1997, and native speakers of the SIA used in the southernmost part of the country. Those young students are able to recognize English loans which they either use or only hear them used by other users of this linguistic variety of Arabic.

### **3. Linguistic Variation and Loans**

Linguistic variability has attracted the concern of a good many people for a long time. Variation may normally occur on all linguistic levels but attention has mainly focused on the phonological level. Investigation of variation on the lexical level has, due to procedural problems, been avoided in most cases. These presumptive difficulties are claimed to be due to the impossibility of collecting considerable data of lexical items, which are intended to be studied, from the speech of people who use them. However, it appears that it would be possible to collect such data had the study been confined to a specific type of vocabulary. Hence, the present study is restricted to one kind of vocabulary which is known as loans. By general observation, it has

been found that the occurrence of loans in the speech of one community undergoes a process of change. In this respect, Robins (1964: 323-5) has also found that loans normally alter in pronunciation in the direction of the sounds and phonological patterns of the borrowing language. On the other hand, it is believed that speakers of one and the same speech community vary in their use of loans on various linguistic levels. Such diversity in the occurrence of loans appears to take place on the phonological level by taking more than one form in pronunciation, and on the lexical level through the adoption of the loan or the maintenance of its equivalent in the borrowing language, or sometimes through the choice of one of two semantically similar loans borrowed from different linguistic sources. This variable occurrence of loans on both the phonological and lexical levels is found to be obvious in the speech of the native inhabitants of the southernmost part of Iraq. The presentation and description of that is to be introduced in the following section.

#### **4. Variable Use of English Loans in the Speech of Southern Iraqis**

The investigation of the data available to the present research as regards the linguistic variety under question has demonstrated both the phonological and lexical levels of variation in the use of English loans commonly adopted by users of this variety. On the first level, such loans appear to alternate with their native equivalents and/ or sometimes with loans of other different source. For illustrating this alternative use, the reader is referred to tables 1 & 2, the first of which

shows examples of English loans alternating with native equivalents, whereas the second supplies specimens of English loans which alternate with either native equivalents or other loans of different linguistic source.

Such variable use of English loans by speakers of the linguistic variety under reference is sometimes context-ruled, i.e. it occurs only in certain situational contexts. For instance, the alteration in the use of the English loan /fa:n/ (fan), /banka/, its equivalent, which is borrowed from another different linguistic source, and the native equivalent /marwaḥa/ takes place only when the context relates to a fan which is a part of an appliance or engine such as the fan of a car engine. In a general context when the word refers to the familiar electric appliance

**TABLE 1: English loans alternating with native equivalents**

English Form of Loan	Pronunciation of Loan in Southern SIA Southern SI	Pronunciation of Native Equivalent
party	/pa:rti/	/ḥafla/
design	/diza:yin/	/taşmi:m/
air conditioner	/ʔarkindişin/ or /orkindişin/	/mukayif/
electric coil	/koyil/ or /kwayil/	/malaf/
fit (adj.)	/fi:t/ or /fit/	/ra:hum/
in cash	/ka:ş/	/naqdi/ or /naqdan/
sister (nurse)	/sistar/	/mumarida/
modern	/modrin/	/mu'a:sir/ or /ḥadi:Ø/

back (adv.)	/bag/	/liwara:/
doctor	/daxator/, /dakator/ or /dikator/	/ṭabi:b/
freezer	/fri:z/ or /fri:zar/	/mujamida/
OK	/okei/	/ṣa:r/
group	/gru:p/	/majmu'a/
pipe	/pa:yp/, /ba:yib/ or /ba:yb/	/bu:ri/
having been cancelled	/ʔitkansal/	/nliGa/
wires	/wa:yra:t/	/ʔasla:k/
(power) generator	/janareitar/	/muwalida/

used for cooling a room by making a current of air, the English loan is not used and the variation is only in the use of /banka/ and /marwaha/. When the word (fan) happens to be heard in such a context, it can be explained merely as an attempt of code switching.

On the other hand, the variation in the English loans adopted by the speakers of the southern variety of the spoken Iraqi Arabic (SSIA) also occurs on the phonological level. They vary in the pronunciation forms. The lexical English item (air conditioner), for instance, takes different pronunciation forms when used as loan by speakers of the linguistic variety under reference (see table 1). Other examples that show phonological variation in the use of English loans in the speech of southern Iraqis are /kwayil/ ~ /koyil/, /fi:t/ ~ /fit/, /ba:yib/ ~ /ba:yb/ ~ /pa:yp/, /glob/ ~ /ʔglob/, /čans/ ~ /ča:ns/ ~ /ča:ns/, /komfyu:tar/ ~ /ka:mbyu:tar/ ~ /kombyu:tar/ ~ /kompyu:tar/ ~ /kambyu:tar/ ~ /kampyu:tar/, /gla:s/ ~ /gla:s/, /arkular/ ~ /arku:lar/, /tranšu:z/ ~

/treinšu:z/, /talafon/ ~ /talifon/ ~/taleifon/, /daxator/ ~ /dakator/ ~ /dikator/, /hambargar/ ~ /hambarga/, /smint/ ~ /simint/, /kleič/ ~ /klač/, /hatfon/ ~ /hadfon/, /soldar/ ~ /soldar/, /la:da:r/ ~ /ra:da:r/.

The variable use of English loan words is found to be correlated with a number of independent variables such as the place of residence, level of education, age, sex and contact with urban centres.

#### 4.1 Place of Residence

The data available for the present study shows no areal differences as regards the pronunciation of loans of English source by users of the southern variety of the spoken Iraqi Arabic except for very few restricted cases. The pronunciation of 'bicycle', for instance, has been found to be /baisikil/<sup>1</sup> (with a diphthongized vowel in the first syllable) in most of the residential places whereas the same loan is pronounced /ba:sikil/ especially by the uneducated old and mid-aged speakers who dwell in the rural and popular districts. There is also a surprising case where /k/ is replaced by /g/ in the same loan. This occurs exclusively in the speech of Khasibi Iraqi Arabic<sup>2</sup> users.

Another example is the different pronunciation of the loan 'doctor'. It is generally pronounced /dikator/ especially by dwellers of urban districts, but it is also heard as /dakator/ or /daxator/ by uneducated older villagers who either have migrated from or are still living in the

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting here that the final lateral sound in this loan is pronounced clear rather than dark, a case which shows a tendency to identify it with the corresponding local phoneme.

<sup>2</sup> Khasibi Iraqi Arabic can be considered a subvariety of the spoken variety under question.

rural areas of Umara. ‘Television’ is another sample of loans which vary in pronunciation in association with the place of residence and simultaneously the speaker’s state of literacy. In some cases it is realized as /tilvizyon/ by speakers who dwell in urban districts, but as /talafizyon/ by speakers who live in or have moved from the countryside.

On the other hand, although the analysis of the data has revealed very obvious variation on the lexical level in the use of loans by speakers of the linguistic variety under reference, such variation appears to be consistent regardless of the speaker’s place of residence. However there are very few exceptions to this pattern of variation. In very few cases wherever the English loan has a native equivalent of standard Arabic source, the sociolinguistic pattern of the use of the loan is that the native equivalent is much more preferable by the urbanites especially a particular sector of the learned who deliberately eschew English, whereas the adoption of the loan is much frequent in the speech of speakers who are either of rural origin or are still living in the country, and those who are of the common people and who can be characterized by their popular tendencies and most often by their current residence in the popular urban districts. An example of such exceptions is /tabi:b/ ~ /diktor/ or /dakator/ or also /daxator/. Another example is the localized plural form of the loan ‘wire’ which is pronounced either /waira:t/ (with a diphthongal vowel in the first syllable) or /wa:yara:t/. The native equivalent /asla:k/ is frequently adopted by the first above-mentioned type of speakers whereas the localized plural form is heard in use by the second type.

There is another pattern of lexical variation which is also correlated with the independent variable of the speaker's place of residence. This occurs when the loan has an equivalent which is itself a loan but not of English source. In such a case the pattern is that speakers whose places of residence are in the urban districts tend to adopt the loan of English source in their speech much more than the loan of other different source whereas speakers whose permanent residence is in the rural areas have the tendency of using the loan which has been borrowed from languages other than English much more frequently than the English loan. This occurs especially when the loan of non-English source is no longer felt to be a foreign word.

**TABLE 2: English loans alternating with either native equivalents and/ or loans of different linguistic source**

English Form of Loan	Pronunciation of Loan in Southern SIA	Pronunciation of Native Equivalent	Pronunciation of Alternative Non-English Loan
hook	/hu:k/	-----	/činga:l/
bar	/ba:r/	-----	/maixa:na/
store	/stor/	/maxzan/	/'inba:r/ or /'imba:r/
globe <sup>1</sup>	/glob/ or /?glob/	-----	/tri:k/
switch	/swi:č/	-----	/dugma/

<sup>1</sup> As a loan in southern SIA, it surprisingly means 'light bulb'.

fan	/fa:n/	/marwaha/	/banka/
ice cream	/aiskri:m/	-----	/dondirma/
chance	/ča:ns/, /čans/ or /ča:ns/	/had/	/baxat/
wheel	/wi:l/	-----	/čarix/
calendar	/ka:lindar/ or /kalindar/	/taqwi:m/	/ruzna:ma/
hose	/hoz/	-----	/swanda/ or /siwanda/
hotel	/uteil/	/findiq/	/msa:firxa:na/
coat	/kot/	/ma'taf/	/qabbu:t/
jacket	/ča:keit/	/sitra/	/ba:l <u>t</u> u/

#### 4. 2 Level of Education & Contact with Urban Centers

The investigation of the data collected for the present research reveals an extensive amount of pronuncional variation in the use of loans of English source by speakers of SSIA according to their level of education. For instance, those who are illiterate or having only the elementary level of education pronounce the loan 'coil' as /kwayil/ whereas those who have obtained an advanced level of education retain a form approximate to the English pronunciation (see table 1). Other examples are /ka:boi/ ~ /kawboi/, /wa:tarbamb/ ~ /wotarbamb/, /kandaysar/ ~ /kandansar/, /ba:yib/ ~ /pa:yp/, /dankar/ ~ /tankar/, /bla:yis/ ~ /plais/. It is worth noting here that the speaker's knowledge

of English increases the approximation to the original English pronunciation. It is also worth noting that illiterate ruralites and those of low level of education hardly tend to approximate to the pronunciation of the educated urbanites even when they maintain contact with the urban centres. On the other hand, it has been observed that urban speakers in general tend to approximate towards the form adopted by the educated. This sort of approximation appears to be associated with the process of urbanization. This is due to the fact that education is one of the characteristic aspects of urbanization. However, there are few cases in which educated speakers descended from rural areas adhere to their own original phonological realization of the loans they use, especially when they converse with members of their own speech community. Such cases can be illustrated by the adoption of /fidyo/, /ba:yib/, /ba:sigil/, /bam/, instead of /vidyo/, pa:yp/, /baisikil/ and /ba:mp/ respectively. This maintenance of local pronunciation can be interpreted as being a marker of individual affiliation to their local community. Milroy and Margrain (1980: 44) state that “closeness to vernacular speech forms correlated positively with the level of individual integration into local community networks”.

On the other hand, the type of speakers above-mentioned, despite the fact that they maintain a pronunciation approximate to their local phonological system in their use of English loans, they incline to employ loans of English source much more than their local or non-English equivalents. For example, the English loan /ba:yib/ (as pronounced by them) occurs in their speech much more than its equivalent /bu:ri/ (a non-English loan).

This tendency to adopt loans of English source in everyday speech is also a characteristic of the speech of educated users of SSIA who dwell in the urban centres of the area under study. But this type of speakers are different from the one mentioned in the previous paragraph in that they incline to approximate towards the original English pronunciation of the loan. This perhaps indicates a marker of accent.

### **4.3 Age and Sex**

Pronunciation of English loans by SSIA-users shows slight differences in association with age and sex. However, speakers from the older generation have been noticed to tend, on the lexical level, to maintain the use of English loans which are nowadays on wane such as /kajwal/ (casual worker), /bla:nkeit/ (blanket), /da:mij/ (damaged), whereas they eschew the use of newly-borrowed English loans especially wherever their localized non-English equivalents are available. In some situations when they find themselves obliged to use a newly-borrowed English loan, they tend to employ it ridiculously.

On the other hand, speakers from the younger generation are apt to adopt English loans more frequently in their speech. However, other independent variables may also affect this occurrence of English loans in the speech of such a type of speakers either positively or negatively. This is due to the fact that all independent variables operate simultaneously (Le Page, 1975a, cited by Milroy, 1980: 115).

In respect of sex, the investigation of the data collected for the purpose of the current study has revealed no differentiation on either of the phonological or lexical level. The only difference between the two

sexes in this respect is the choice of loans of French rather than English origin by educated female speakers especially in situations of buying and selling women clothes and cosmetics.

## **5. Conclusion**

The investigation of the data available to the current study has made it possible to infer a number of certain sociolinguistic patterns of variation as regards the use of English loan words by Arabic speakers in the southern part of Iraq. They can be set as follows:

1. Arabic speakers of this area differ, only in few cases, in the pronunciation of such loans according to whether they are ruralites or urbanites.

2. Those Arabic speakers are also greatly different in their pronunciation of such loans in accordance with their level of education. Learned speakers, with some exceptions, have the tendency to approximate to the English forms of pronunciation. The more the speaker is versed in English, the more he/ she approximates to the English pronunciation.

3. Illiterate ruralites and those of low level of education generally retain their own local pronunciation of English loans even when they maintain contact with urban centres.

4. On the lexical level, urbanites appear to adopt the use of the native equivalent wherever it is available instead of the English loan. On the other hand, the adoption of English loans is frequent in the

speech of ruralites and speakers of rural origin, especially the uneducated and those of low level of education.

5. Uneducated ruralites tend to use the loan of non-English source wherever available instead of its English equivalent.

6. The older generation especially the uneducated who descend from a rural origin are apt to adopt some English loans which are presently on the wane, but they avoid the use of newly-borrowed English loans especially wherever their localized non-English equivalents are available. They sometimes use them ridiculously. On the other hand, the occurrence of English loans in the speech of the younger generation is affected by one or more of social variables.

7. No sex differentiation has been revealed in the use of English loans by SSIA speakers.

### Phonetic Symbols Used in the Present Study

<u>Phonetic Symbol</u>	<u>Example from SSIA</u>	<u>Meaning in English</u>
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<u>Vowels</u>		
i	sin	tooth
i:	ḡadi:q	friend
a	walad	boy
a:	ba:rid	cold
o	moz	banana
u	darub	way
u:	su:g	market
ei	beit	house

**Consonants**

b	ba:b	door
d	daris	lesson
t	tamur	date
<u>t</u>	<u>ṭ</u> abi:b	physician
k	kari:m	generous
g	galub	heart
q	quful	lock
G	Giš	cheating
ʔ	ʔamal	hope
j	jibin	cheese
č	bačir	tomorrow
f	faqi:r	poor
<u>d</u>	be <u>d</u>	egg
s	msafir	traveling
z	zein	good
<u>s</u>	<u>ṣ</u> abur	patience
š	ša:b	young
x	xof	fear
<u>h</u>	<u>ḥ</u> ali:b	milk
ʿ	ʿein	eye
m	dam	blood
n	sami:n	fat
l	leil	night
r	fa:riG	empty
w	walad	boy
y	ʿiyada	clinic

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