Do Ten Thousand Arabic Loanwords Truly Exist In English?

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Abstract: This review paper introduces Sulaiman Abu Ghawsh's 1977 Arabic book *Ten Thousand English Loanwords of Arabic origin* and presents his hypothesis of four possibilities: a) English borrowed from Arabic or Arabic borrowed from English, b) both borrowed from another language, c) one of them is a mother to the other, and d) both of them are siblings from another mother tongue. This paper is specifically dedicated to discussing the first possibility that Abu Ghawsh eventually supports. Then, the article presents the four morphological and phonological change patterns that Abu Ghawsh believes occurred to these words when migrated to English either directly or through the scenic route of other languages; these patterns are: dropping vowels, inversion, replacing, and adding or removing.

Keywords: Loanwords, etymology, Sulaiman Abu Ghawsh, phonological and morphological change, borrowing, English words of Arabic origin.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Spread of any language is related to the power of its nation, economically, politically and technologically. Back in history, in the European Middle Ages (5th to 15th centuries AD), people of the west faced the Dark Age while the Arab countries were at the peak in every field of knowledge. During that time, Arabic, a term-rich language, spread out to many countries and places for two reasons: the first, because of the foreigners (non-Arabs) who travelled to learn in the Arab countries since Arab schools were the most powerful in all possible fields of knowledge, and second because of the Arab traders who were very active and mobile travelling and spreading their language. As a matter of fact, people of other nations were fascinated by Arabic: how accurate it was! How beautiful meanings, connotation and denotations it carried! People were fascinated by the new discoveries and inventions (e.g. algebra, algorithm, chemistry, cumin … etc.) Arabs made, and all these inventions had pure Arabic names. That is why it is needless to say that whoever learners English from the Arabs grasps that there are unignorable similarities between English and Arabic words. In this review paper, I am going to introduce Abu Ghawsh's claim and assumptions about how English lexicon is rich of Arabic loanwords. It is believed that some of these Arabic words were borrowed directly to English; however, most of these words took the scenic route, through Spanish, Italian, and/or French; or through Turkish, Persian, or Urdu; or through Hebrew or Latin. This produces a good deal of phonological deformation; as does the dialect variation within Arabic. "Arabic" says Cannon "is an international language long known as a major supplier of words to Swahili, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Persian, Turkish, Indian languages like Hindi and Urdu, and English" (2).

Abu Ghawsh established these four possibilities (28):

a) English borrowed from Arabic, or Arabic borrowed from English.

b) Both borrowed from another language.

c) One of them is a mother to the other one.

d) Both of them are siblings from another mother tongue.

Possibilities (b) and (d) have been excluded because of two reasons. First, if the two languages borrowed from one mother language, this implies that that mother tongue was rich and strong enough to face extinction and survive till now. Second, English and Arabic are from two completely different language families- Arabic is from the Afro-Asiatic family and English is from the Indo European one. If they had borrowed from the same language, both of them would then have to belong to the same language family, but they do not. Possibility (c) has also been excluded by Abu Ghawsh and he dedicated his book to the other two possibilities (a) Arabic borrowed from English and (b) English borrowed from Arabic. Abu Ghawsh mentions that he studied these cases for over seven years without the feeling of belongingness or passion towards Arabic as his first language (since such feelings can lead to inaccurate findings), and he came up with a reality that English is the language that borrowed approximately ten thousand words from Arabic (28).

Abu Ghawsh examines common words that help come up with rules that can decide which language borrowed from the other. Applying these rules to many words, he believes, will help us avoid laws of chance. Abu Ghawsh finds that word family can be a good solution. He believes that if we find a common word between the two languages, we should search their word families. If one of them has a rich word family while the other is an orphan, it explicitly means the former is the lender and later is the borrower (Abu Ghawsh 28). Applying this rule, Abu Ghawsh concludes that the truth is that English borrowed from Arabic because when comparing two similar words, he finds that the Arabic one has a large family while the English is orphan.

The above logic might seem naive, but let us have closer looks at the examples that Abu Ghawsh provides. Take for example, the word *cut*, which is in Arabic قط, with the same pronunciation and meaning but with changing the letter ط into *t* in English because ط has no equivalent in English and *t* is the closest sound to it. Now, let's start the process and see Abu Ghawsh's logic:

The word قط with its family members	The Meanings
م + قط *cut* plus the letter *m* in Arabic	قطم it means cutting by teeth
قط+ ع *cut* plus the letter ع which has no equivalent sound in English	قطع it means cutting with a tool
قط + ف *cut* plus the letter *f* in Arabic	قطف it means to cutting/ picking fruit from a tree
قط+ر *cut* plus the letter *r* in Arabic	قطر it means cutting/ dripping from liquid
قط with no extra letters	قط it means only to cut

Abu Ghawsh believes that this whole family in Arabic can never be said that it was taken from the orphan English *cut*, but the opposite is more logical and scientific (30). It should be taken into consideration that he doesn't mean by the family members parts of speech. No, that is another story. Abu Ghawsh continues to show the patterns through which one can recognize a word to be originally Arabic. One, there should be a noticeable similarity in pronunciation and meaning. If one of these two conditions is lost, then the similarity becomes a mere coincidence. For example, the Arabic word for girl is بنت which is pronounced in English the same like *bent* the past of *bend*. There are lots of words like that but they don't make any sense because they don't match in meaning. Two, the difference between Arabic dialects even in the old days should be taken into consideration, too.

II.   PATTERNS 1

A. *Dropping Vowel Letters:*

In Arabic, vowel letters are not original in the word; they aren't even letters in Arabic but just marks which are called tone marks الحركات. Therefore, in order to recognize an English word that is borrowed from Arabic, one, Abu Ghawsh says, should evacuate the vowel letters from the English word and compare it to its Arabic equivalent which is now vowel-letters free. The second phase is to recognize if these vowel letters in the English word are mere vowels or they occupy a place of an original Arabic consonant sound that non-Arabs cannot pronounce and use a vowel instead. Examples will clarify:

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The English word	It is Arabic origin	Explanation
Solid- (sld)	صلد (sld)	After removing the vowel letters in the English word, it gives the same pronunciation and meaning of that in Arabic.
Ill (ill)	عليل /عل (ill)	The "i" here isn't a mere vowel, but it is in the place of the Arabic ع that non-Arabs can't pronounce.
Elite (elit)	علية(Elit)	The "e" here isn't a mere vowel, but it is in the place of the Arabic ع.

Phonological and morphological change to the words can happen due to inability of non-Arabs to produce certain sounds and due to non-existence of these letters in non-Arabic alphabets.

B. Inversion:

It means the change of letters order in a word to make it easier or even for any other reason we don't know. Abu Ghawsh tries to prove inversion in Arabic before he gives examples of Arabic loanwords in English.

The word	After inversion
جاء "to come"	اجا "to come" in some dialects in Egypt and Syria
أحد "someone"	حدا "someone" in the Shami dialect.
زوج "pair or husband"	جوز "pair or husband" in the Egyptian dialect
عربون "deposit"	رعبون "deposit" in the Syrian dialect

There still are many other words like those in the table which make Abu Ghawsh proves that since inversion happens in Arabic, it can happen when transferring the word into English, too. The following table shows some inversion patterns in the Arabic loanwords in English.

The Word in English	The word in Arabic
Shark ⟹ (Krsh)	قرش which matches in meaning and pronunciation
Led ⟹ (dal)	دل which means in Arabic and English the past of *lead*
Serene ⟹ (rseen)	رصين which matches in meaning and pronunciation.

C. Replacing:

It means to change a consonant letter, and hence sound, with another due to difficulty of or lacking the original one. The table below illustrates:

The English word	The word in Arabic
Cable	حبل the letter ح doesn't exist in English
Just	قسط the same in the first word
Earth	أرض the ض doesn't exist in English

D. Adding and removing:

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It means to add or remove some letters or sounds. The reasons behind this addition or removal, Abu Ghawsh believes, are many but passing of time is the major one, usually almost everything changes through time. The following table explains:

The English word	The word in Arabic
Blame	لام with adding "b" in English
Antique	عتيق with adding "n" in English
Assert	أصر with adding "t" in English
Eye	عين with removing "n" in English

III.   CONCLUSION

I cannot argue by the end of this review paper that Abu Ghawsh's claim is or is not valid; all what I can do here is to say that his argument can be a key to more detailed linguistic studies that dive deeply into the roots of these words and discover more realities and provide us with more information. Ten thousands is a huge number of words that can lead to many MA theses and PHD dissertations that can address this topic in detail. An important issue that I noticed while writing this paper was that information in etymological dictionaries can be misguiding and non-symmetrical sometimes. Abu Ghawsh mentioned that he looked up the word *table* in some etymological dictionaries (he didn't mention the name of these dictionaries) and found that the origin of this word is Italian; I looked it up in the Online Etymological Dictionary and found that it was from Latin *Tabula* or "uncertain" origin. Abu Ghawsh believes it is from Arabic طبل [tabl]; none of these etymological dictionaries mentions this Arabic origin!

A list of English words of Arabic Origin

Zero صفر	Solid صلد	Mare مهر	Good جيد	Credit قرض	Burn فرن
Wrest رسغ	Sick سقم	Love ألف(بتشديد اللام)	Gloom ظلمه	Craft حرفه	Bury واري
Wise واعظ	Sheriff شريف	Loyal ولاء	Giraffe زرافه	Cover كفر	Bulbul بلبل
Whore عاهره	She هي	Lip شفه	Gain جنى	Crack شرخ	Bug بق
Wicked وكد	Shame شين	Lick لعق	Gaby غبي	Courage جرأة	Buffalo بقرة
Whim وهك	Shark قرش	Less ليس	Futile باطل	Cough كح	Brush فرش
Weak وعك	Sesame سمسم	Lead دل	Furrow قرو	Cotton قطن	Bright برق
Way وحي	Serene رصين	Language لغه	Furnish فرش	Cop قبه	Bouquet باقه
War وغي	Round دوران	Just قسط	Fertile فرات	Coma اغماء	Bloom برعم
Waist وسط	Rubbish دبش	Jury شورى	Fellow وليف	Collect لقط	Blame لام
Vine عنب	Refuse رفض	Judge قاضي	Erase ازال	Coffin كفن	Badge دبج
Trouble اضطراب	Pure برئ	Jail غل	Elite علية	Chess كش	Bad بذئ
Tyre اطار	Practice مارس	Jar جرة	Dummy دميه	Cheque صك	Bald بليد
Type طبع	Pope اب	Ill عليل	Down دون	Cheer سرور	Awake افاق
Twin تؤم	Flat فلاة	Incapable غير قادر	Desk دكة	Check شق	Attack عتك
Trade تجر	Palace بلاط	Ignore انكر	Delude ضلل	Chart خريطه	Assist ساعد
Trace تأثر	Observe أبصر	Idle عاطل	Defend دافع	Chap شاب	Assassin حشاشين
Track طريق	Noble نبيل	Hurry هرع	Day ضياء	Chamber قمرة	Assert اصر
Thick كث	Negotiate ناقش	House حوش	Damage دمر	Cave كهف	Ash قش
This ذه	Negate ناقض	Hum همهمه	Cipher صفر	Cat قط	Army عرام
That ذاك	Musk مسك	Horrible رهيب	Cup كوب	Castle قصر	Argue هرج
Then اذا	Module معدل	Hiss هسيس	Cut قطع	Case قصه	Arch عرش

Tall طول	Mirror مراءة	Hobby هوايه	Cumin كمون	Carmine قرمزي	Apart فرط
Tail ذيل	Mile ميل	Hollow خلو	Cube كعب	Capable قابل	Antique عتيق
Syrup شراب	Merge مرج	Hang شنق	Cry صرخ	Call قال	Anger نفر
Summit قمه	Meter متر	Gurgle غرغر	Crush جرش	Camel جمل	Amber عنبر
Street سراط	Merry مرح	Guide قائد	Crime جريمه	Cable حبل	Alumni علوم
Story اسطوره	Master مسيطر	Grade درجه	Crunch قرمش	Cabin قبو	Allowance علاوة
Alcohol غول	Alas اسف	Agree أقر	Adobe الطوب	Adapt هدب	Ache اخ

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