

Revisiting borrowings into Arabic: Evidence from lone English nouns in Lebanese Arabic **Nahed Mourad (University of Ottawa)**

Too often is Arabic reported to be an exception to the rules of code-switching as it is claimed to be resistant to constraints found to operate in other language pairs (Boumans 1998; Nortier 1989; Bentahila & Davies 1983, Davies et al. 2013). This disagreement rooted in the contentious nature of lone other language material in otherwise Arabic discourse. The status of lone other language nouns in Arabic remains a basic issue, if unresolved, and raises a number of questions, not least of which is whether they are bona fide borrowed items or, alternatively, single-word code switches. This is a longstanding issue that has divided researchers in contact linguistics (Poplack and Dion 2012, Sankoff 2013, and many others). If a conceptual, methodological and analytical distinction between borrowing and code-switching is to be maintained (as argued in the present investigation), then it is of paramount importance that researchers elaborate replicable and empirically accountable procedures for differentiating lexical borrowing and code-switching (G. Sankoff 2013; D. Sankoff et al 1990; S. Poplack & Dion 2012; Budzhak-Jones & Poplack 1997; Torres Cacoullous & Aaron 2003).

In this study, I address these issues through quantitative analysis of a subsample of a rich corpus of Lebanese Arabic (LA)/English language mixing, collected from 16 bilinguals residing in Ottawa, Canada. Adhering to the comparative sociolinguistic method outline by Poplack and Meechan (1998), embedded in the variationist framework, I make systematic comparisons of the behavior of the lone English-origin nouns in otherwise Arabic discourse (N=343) with the behavior of their noun counterparts in the two benchmark varieties unmixed LA and unmixed ENG extracted from the same subsample. This analysis focuses on conflict sites, areas where the grammars of two languages differ, in rate and/or conditioning, enabling me to determine the grammar operating on these lone English-origin nouns. These conflict sites involved different levels of linguistic structure: morpho-phonological (assimilation of definite determiners to the initial segment of the following noun), morphological (plural formation), and morpho-syntactic (marking of possession).

The analyses of these English-origin nouns in otherwise LA discourse revealed they are treated both consistent with their unmixed Arabic counterparts and divergent from their unmixed English counterparts. For the diagnostics above, the following general results were found: 1) coronal initial nouns undergo assimilation like their LA counterparts; 2) they use a postposed possessive marker like their LA counterparts; 3) they mark their plural with an –et suffix like their LA counterparts and most importantly, in ALL the above cases, they behave very differently from their English counterparts.

Crucially with regards to the contention outlined above, the behavior of these English-origin nouns, expressing morphological as well as phonological components specific to LA, suggests that they are borrowed into LA and not code-switched. In such a case, they cannot be brought to bear on any analysis of code-switching, let alone be used as counterexamples to theories of code-switching. Moreover, this analysis further emphasizes the necessity of an accountable methodology, such as the comparative sociolinguistic methodology, that can allow a comparison within the mixed linguistic system as well as with the unmixed benchmark varieties in order to ascertain the status of these other-language items.

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