

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Morphological Adaptation, Word Formation and Functional Integration of Arabic Loanwords in English

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VOLUME: Vol.06 Issue03 2026

PAGE: 78-81

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## Abstract

This article examines the role of Arabic loanwords in the English language, focusing on their morphological adaptation, participation in word formation processes, and functional integration into the lexical system. The study analyzes compound word formation, conversion processes, and the extent to which Arabic-origin lexemes contribute to semantic expansion in English. Additionally, the paper explores the limits of syntactic borrowing and compares English and Arabic phraseological parallels. The findings demonstrate that Arabic loanwords are deeply integrated into English primarily at the lexical and morphological levels, while their influence on syntax remains minimal.

## KEYWORDS

Arabic loanwords, English language, morphology, word formation, conversion, compounding, syntax, phraseology.

## INTRODUCTION

Language contact has always played a crucial role in the development of lexical systems. One of the most significant outcomes of such contact is lexical borrowing, through which languages enrich their vocabulary and expand semantic domains. Arabic has historically contributed a substantial number of loanwords to English, particularly in the fields of science, trade, mathematics, and culture.

As noted by Fatkullina, borrowed lexical units initially retain their foreign phonetic, graphical, and morphological features before gradually integrating into the recipient language system [1]. Similarly, Sapir emphasizes that borrowing predominantly occurs at the lexical level, whereas grammatical structures are rarely transferred between languages [2].

The present study aims to analyze Arabic loanwords in English from a comprehensive perspective, including their morphological adaptation, participation in word formation

processes, and functional behavior in modern usage.

## METHODS

This research employs a descriptive and comparative linguistic approach. The analysis is based on:

- lexical data from English containing Arabic-origin words;
- examples of compound formations and conversion processes;
- comparative analysis of English and Arabic syntactic and phraseological structures;
- secondary sources from linguistic literature.

The study combines qualitative analysis of lexical units with theoretical insights from morphology, lexicology, and contact linguistics.

## RESULTS

### 1. Morphological adaptation of Arabic loanwords

Arabic loanwords in English are typically adapted to fit the morphological system of the recipient language. Most of them function as monomorphemic units in English, even if they were morphologically complex in Arabic.

Examples include:

- alcohol (from al-kuḥl)
- coffee (from qahwa)
- algebra (from al-jabr)

These words have undergone phonetic and orthographic changes but are now fully integrated into English vocabulary [3].

A distinctive feature of many Arabic loanwords is the presence of the prefix "al-", originally the Arabic definite article. In English, this element has lost its grammatical function and become an inseparable part of the lexical unit (e.g., alkali, algebra, almanac) [4].

### 2. Arabic loanwords in compound word formation

Word formation through compounding represents one of the most productive mechanisms in English. Arabic loanwords actively participate in this process.

Examples include:

- coffee-table, coffee-pot, coffee-house, coffee-shop, coffee-bean
- cotton-mill, cotton-picker, cotton-field, cotton-fabric, cotton-industry
- alcohol-free, low-alcohol, alcohol-based, alcohol-related
- zero-gravity, zero-tolerance, zero-emission, zero-balance

These formations demonstrate that Arabic-origin lexemes function as productive bases in English word formation [5].

Compounds may appear in different grammatical categories:

- nouns (coffee grinder)
- adjectives (hazard-free)
- participial forms (cotton-picking)

This indicates the high degree of integration of Arabic

loanwords into English morphology.

### 3. Conversion processes involving Arabic loanwords

Conversion (zero-derivation) is a key mechanism of word formation in English. It involves a shift in grammatical category without morphological change.

Examples:

- mask → to mask
- cipher → to cipher
- tariff → to tariff
- heckmate → to checkmate
- zero → to zero

In many cases, conversion is accompanied by semantic extension or shift. While the core meaning is often preserved, the derived form may develop additional, frequently metaphorical meanings. For instance:

- cotton (n.) → to cotton (v.) – "to become fond of" or "to develop an affinity," representing a figurative extension far removed from the original material meaning;
- mask (n.) → to mask (v.) – not only "to cover the face," but also "to conceal intentions or emotions";
- checkmate (n.) → to checkmate (v.) – extending from a specific chess term to a general meaning "to defeat completely or decisively";
- zero (n.) → to zero (in on) (v.) – "to focus precisely," illustrating semantic broadening;
- cipher (n.) → to cipher (v.) – from "zero" or "code" to "to calculate" or "to encode information."

Furthermore, conversion may also occur in other directions, such as noun-to-adjective shifts:

- cotton → cotton fabric
- amber → amber light
- alkali → alkali solution

These examples demonstrate that Arabic loanwords are not only fully integrated into the English lexicon but also actively participate in productive word formation processes. Their involvement in conversion highlights their functional adaptability and confirms their deep assimilation into the grammatical and semantic structure of English.

Such transformations demonstrate that Arabic loanwords are not only integrated but also actively participate in semantic development [6].

#### 4. Phraseological parallels between Arabic and English

Although phraseological units are usually language-specific, some English expressions show semantic parallels with Arabic proverbs.

Examples include:

- "Kill two birds with one stone"
- "The calm before the storm"
- "The enemy of my enemy is my friend"

As noted by Naveed, these similarities may result from shared cultural experiences rather than direct borrowing [7]. Therefore, they cannot be classified as Arabic loan translations without historical evidence.

#### 5. Limits of syntactic borrowing

Syntax is one of the most stable components of language. Unlike lexical units, syntactic structures are rarely borrowed [8].

English and Arabic differ significantly in word order:

- English: SVO (Subject–Verb–Object)
- Arabic: predominantly VSO (Verb–Subject–Object)

Due to these structural differences, Arabic syntax has not significantly influenced English grammar.

However, certain expressions such as "peace be upon you" (from Arabic *as-salaamu alaikum*) appear in English, particularly in religious or cultural contexts. These are treated as lexical borrowings rather than syntactic transfers [9].

Additional examples of such expressions include "in shā' Allāh" ("if God wills"), "Allāhu akbar" ("God is greatest"), and "bismillāh" ("in the name of God"), which are often used in English discourse within Muslim communities or in translated texts without structural modification. Similarly, expressions like "wallāhi" ("by God") and "mā shā' Allāh" ("what God has willed") may appear in spoken or written English in contexts of code-switching or cultural reference.

In literary and translated religious texts, more extended formulaic constructions such as "may God bless him and grant him peace" (a rendering of Arabic honorific expressions) are also attested. Despite their syntactic appearance, these units

function as fixed expressions and do not influence the underlying grammatical system of English.

Thus, even when Arabic-origin expressions are present in English, they remain confined to lexical or discourse-pragmatic levels rather than contributing to structural syntactic change.

#### DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Arabic loanwords have undergone a high degree of lexical and morphological integration in English. Their ability to participate in compounding and conversion demonstrates their productivity within the language system.

At the same time, the absence of significant syntactic borrowing confirms Sapir's hypothesis regarding the limited transferability of grammatical structures. Phraseological similarities, while interesting, should be interpreted cautiously and not automatically attributed to borrowing.

Overall, Arabic loanwords illustrate how languages adapt foreign elements selectively, preserving structural integrity while expanding lexical resources.

#### CONCLUSION

Arabic loanwords have made a significant contribution to the development of the English language. Their integration is most evident at the lexical and morphological levels, where they actively participate in word formation and semantic expansion.

However, their influence does not extend substantially to syntax, which remains resistant to external interference. This confirms that borrowing is primarily a lexical phenomenon.

The study highlights the importance of Arabic as a historical donor language and demonstrates the dynamic nature of linguistic interaction.

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