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Level: 3rd Year

Subject: Linguistics (Sociolinguistics)

1.4 Linguistic Borrowing (Loanwords)

Borrowing is the by-product of language contact situations. Hoffer (2005:53) states that “one of the most easily observable results of intercultural contact and communication is the set of loanwords that is imported into the vocabulary of each language involved”. Haugen (1989:197) defines borrowing as “the general and traditional word used to describe the adoption into a language of a linguistic feature previously used in another”. Languages worldwide are borrowers and the lexicon of any language can be divided into indigenous and foreign words. Lexical material is the most likely to borrow, and nouns come in the forefront of loanwords. This does not dismiss the verity other materials (morphemes, inflections, etc) are not borrowed.

1.4.1 Types of Borrowing

Myers-Scotton (1993b; 2006) differentiates between cultural borrowings and core borrowings.

1. Cultural borrowings: enter the language abruptly and have the semantic role of filling lexical gaps in the host language. These are items for objects and concepts new to the culture of the recipient language.

E.g: pizza and paella entered Arabic when the food to which they refer were adopted by the Arabic-speaking community.

2. Core borrowings: enter a language even though that language already has an indigenous equivalent item to refer to the object or concept in question. They are normally redundant and unnecessary as they only duplicate meaning.

E.g: The media language, which is normally Standard Arabic, includes words like ‘reportage’, ‘mechanism’, ‘mondial’, etc. Such words, which are of a foreign origin (English or French), are of a gratuitous nature as Standard Arabic has viable equivalents (/taqri:r/, /?a:lijja:t/, /؟a:lami:/, respectively).

Linguists also identify other types of borrowing, such as:

Calque (also called loan translation): in such a case, the linguistic unit has no foreign features. It is rather a word-for-word native version of the original.

e.g 1. English French Arabic

Skyscraper gratte-ciel /na:tiђat saђa:b/

e.g 2. English ‘computer’ is calqued in Arabic as /ђa:su:b/

1.4.2 Borrowing vs. Codeswitching

In analyses concerning the dichotomy code-switching vs. borrowing, the true challenge lies in deciding on the status of single words: whether they are instances of borrowing or code-switch utterances. To help bring an adequate differentiation, two major, yet contradictory, approaches have been postulated with recourse to two chief criteria:

• Degree of EL items integration in the host language;

• Degree of use by monolingual speakers.

1. For Poplack and her associates (1981, 1987), loanwords show a degree of morphological and syntactic (+/- phonological) integration into the host language. An example of borrowing of such a kind is:

French word Arabic loanword

• table [ṭabla(h)] تاء التانيت (‘h’ feminine marker)

• la table [aṭṭabla] ‘al’ (assimilated as ‘at’, def. article)

• deux tables [zu:ʒ ṭwa:bl] or [zu:ʒ ṭa:bla:t]) (dual form)

• tables [ṭa:bla:t] (femine plural)

2. Myers-Scotton (1993 b) and her associates discard the idea of morphosyntactic integration. Instead, they observe that frequency of use is the single reliable criterion to distinguish between code switching and borrowing, arguing that items that appear very frequently are regarded as loanwords, whereas those that appear only occasionally constitute instances of code switching. In this view, code switching is typically associated with bilingual speakers; borrowed words are used even by monolinguals.