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Linguistic Borrowing from Spanish into Algerian Colloquial Arabic: A Sociolinguistic Study in Western Algeria

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Dr. Yassine Dahouni [1], Dr. Lakhdar Bekiri [2], Dr. Sahnine Ali [3]

[1] Djillali Liabes University - Sidi Bel Abbes, Algeria
Email : dahouniyassine@gmail.com

[2] Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida, Algeria
Email : bekiricao@gmail.com

[3] Dr. Moulay Tahar University of Saida, Algeria
Email : sahnineali20@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This article discusses the phenomenon of linguistic borrowing from Spanish into Algerian Colloquial Arabic. The research sample is confined to Western Algeria. The long-standing language contact between Spanish and Algerian Colloquial Arabic extended from the Spanish military presence in Oran (1509-1792) to the beginning of waves of Spanish migration during the French colonial period (1830-1962). This contact left a rich lexical stock known in Spanish studies as Algerian Hispanisms (Hispanismos argelinos).

The article adopts a descriptive-analytical approach based on specialized linguistic studies that explain the mechanisms through which these loanwords entered the receiving language and became integrated at the phonological, morphological, and semantic levels. It also identifies the main semantic fields that attracted this borrowing and examines the sociolinguistic factors that led to the spread of this specific lexicon and then to its gradual decline after independence. We conclude that this borrowing is a living witness to the depth of multilingualism experienced in Western Algeria. We also conclude that this lexicon is receding over time and therefore requires scholarly documentation.

Keywords: linguistic borrowing; dialect; language contact; sociolinguistics.

1. Introduction

Linguistic borrowing is one of the most widespread manifestations of contact between languages in the world. It is also one of the clearest indications of cultural cross-fertilization among neighboring peoples or peoples that have historically coexisted within the same or a nearby geographical area. Linguistic studies have devoted considerable attention to Arabic borrowing from French in Algerian Colloquial Arabic because of the depth and duration of French colonial influence.

However, another aspect of language contact has received less attention in linguistic research: borrowing from Spanish. Contact with Spanish preceded contact with French by several centuries and had a deeper influence in Western Algeria than is commonly assumed.

The city of Oran and its surrounding areas were under direct Spanish occupation for nearly three centuries (1509-1792)[1]. After the Ottomans recovered the city, several successive waves of Spanish migration to Algeria occurred during French colonial rule. In some years, Spaniards became the largest European community in the Oran region and outnumbered the French themselves[2]. This long and continuous contact, driven by social and linguistic necessity, led to the emergence of a lexical stock of words of Spanish origin that entered the colloquial Arabic of Western Algeria. In linguistic studies, this stock is known as Algerian Hispanisms (Hispanismos argelinos), and it has been studied by a number of Spanish and Algerian researchers[3].

In this article, we seek answers to several questions: What historical circumstances paved the way for this borrowing? How were these Spanish loanwords linguistically adapted within the system of Algerian Colloquial Arabic?

Which semantic fields attracted this borrowing most strongly? What sociolinguistic factors contributed to the spread of this lexical stock?

To address this problem, we adopted a descriptive-analytical approach. It draws on a set of linguistic studies that document Algerian Hispanisms, as well as university research and specialized dictionaries produced at Spanish and Algerian universities.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundation:

2.1 The Concept of Linguistic Borrowing

A scientific study of linguistic borrowing requires beginning with its conceptual framework by considering first the lexical meaning of borrowing and then its technical meaning.

a. **Lexical meaning:** The concept of borrowing, in its lexical and etymological origin, is associated with the Arabic root (q-r-ḍ; qāf-rāʾ-ḍād). Its lexical meanings denote cutting, recompense, and giving. Ibn Manzur al-Ifriqi stated this meaning in his dictionary Lisan al-Arab: "A loan is what one gives of money so that it may be repaid ... and al-qard and al-qird are what people exchange among themselves and claim in repayment"[4].

In Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah: "The letters qaf, ra, and dad constitute a sound root, and it denotes cutting ... A loan is what you give a person from your money so that it may be repaid, as though it were something you had cut from your property"[5].

[1] Doncel, G. S. (1991). Presencia de España en Orán (1509-1792). Toledo: Estudio Teológico de San Ildefonso.
[2] Mechernene, F. (2021). "Los hispanismos usados en el lenguaje pesquero del Oranesado." eHumanista, 49, p. 306.
[3] Benallou, L. (1992). Dictionnaire des Hispanismes dans le parler de l'Oranie. Alger, p. 7.
[4] Ibn Manzur. Lisan al-Arab [The Tongue of the Arabs]. Dar Sader, Vol. 15, p. 118.
[5] Ibn Faris, A. (1979). Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah [Dictionary of Language Standards]. Dar al-Fikr, Vol. 5, pp. 71-72.

b. Technical meaning: When the concept moved into the field of linguistics, the meaning of borrowing broadened to refer to: "the process by which one language takes some linguistic elements from another language"[1].

A more detailed definition, which does not contradict the preceding one, views linguistic borrowing as the introduction of linguistic elements - whether words, sounds, morphological forms, or grammatical structures - from one language or dialect into another, in order to meet and accommodate the speakers' growing communicative and social needs[2].

Linguists establish that borrowing the term "loan" from the financial field and introducing it into linguistics is only a metaphorical use. In financial transactions, the borrower deprives the owner of the property and is obliged to return it. By contrast, a borrowing language does not deprive the source language of the borrowed expression when it uses it, nor is it obliged to return it at any time[3].

The American linguist Einar Haugen defined linguistic borrowing as the speaker's attempt to reproduce linguistic patterns that had been acquired from a linguistic system other than the speaker's original system. This process requires a minimum degree of bilingualism (Bilinguisme) among a group of speakers who serve as a bridge through which words pass from one language to another[4]. Haugen distinguished three main types of borrowing: full lexical borrowing (Loanwords), in which both the phonological form and the meaning of the word are transferred; hybrid borrowing (Loanblends), in which a foreign element is combined with a native element from the receiving language; and semantic or substitutional borrowing (Loanshifts), in which only the new meaning is borrowed and assigned to a native word that already exists in the receiving language[5].

The linguist Uriel Weinreich, in his book Languages in Contact, also argues that the intensity and duration of contact between two languages, together with the degree of social prestige enjoyed by each, are decisive factors in determining the extent and direction of borrowing[6]. This view is consistent with language contact between Spanish and Algerian Colloquial Arabic, which was characterized by demographic density and a long period of contact.

It should be noted that language contact between Arabic and Spanish is neither a recent phenomenon nor a one-way process affecting only one language. It is an old contact that goes back to the period of the Andalusian state, when Spanish borrowed thousands of words from Andalusi Arabic in many areas of life[7]. Remarkably, some words that entered Algerian Colloquial Arabic from

[1] Ghezail, B., & Djekaoua, Z. (2023). "Al-Iqtirad al-Lughawi: Ta'rib am Tawlid? [Linguistic Borrowing: Arabization or Lexical Generation?]." Afaq Ilmiyya, 15(2), p. 704.
[2] See: Serir Abdallah, F. (2018). "Zahirat al-Iqtirad min al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah: Namadhij Tatbiqiyyah [The Phenomenon of Borrowing from Arabic: Applied Models]." Jusur al-Ma'rifa, 4(2), p. 152.
[3] See: Anis, I. (1966). Min Asrar al-Lughah [Secrets of Language]. Anglo-Egyptian Library, p. 102.
[4] Haugen, E. (1950). "The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing." Language, 26(2), pp. 210-212.
[5] Haugen, E. (1950), pp. 214-224.
[6] Weinreich, U. (1953). Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems. New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, pp. 74-83.
[7] Corriente, F. (1999). Diccionario de arabismos y voces afines en iberorromance. Madrid: Gredos, p. 11.

Spanish in the modern period were originally Andalusi Arabic words that returned to Arabic after passing through Spanish. One example is the word for chess (Ajedrez in Spanish). It was originally borrowed from Andalusi Arabic «الشَّطْرَنْج» (al-shatranj), then returned to Algerian Colloquial Arabic in the Spanish-influenced form شَاطْرَانْجْ (Chatranj)[1]. This phenomenon may be described as circular or reverse borrowing, in which a word returns to its origin through an intermediary language.

2.2 Historical Context of Spanish-Algerian Language Contact

This language contact extends across three different historical stages:

2.2.1 Spanish Military Presence (1509-1792)

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, during Spanish-Ottoman competition for control over parts of the Mediterranean, the Spaniards took control of the Algerian city of Oran in 1509. The city remained under direct Spanish rule until 1792, when the Ottomans succeeded in recovering it[2]. This military and administrative presence, which lasted nearly three centuries, represents the earliest historical period of Spanish borrowing in the colloquial Arabic of this region. However, the direct linguistic effects of that period are difficult to distinguish precisely from those of later periods because of the continuity of Spanish vocabulary across time and the continuation of contact thereafter.

2.2.2 Colonial Migration (1830-1962)

This stage represents the most important source of linguistic borrowing from Spanish into Algerian Colloquial Arabic. With the French occupation of Algeria in 1830, Western Algeria received large numbers of Spanish migrants, most of them from Alicante, Murcia, and cities of Andalusia. They came in search of employment and to improve their social and economic conditions. Later, some arrived as refugees fleeing difficult political and social conditions after the Spanish Civil War and because of the nature of the Franco regime[3]. Statistics from the late nineteenth century show that Spaniards constituted more than three-fifths of the total foreign European population in Algeria. In the Oran region alone, their number reached about 92,290, clearly exceeding the French population in the same region, which numbered 79,675[4]. This demographic presence led to close daily communication and linguistic coexistence between Arabs and Spaniards in working-class neighborhoods, ports, and workplaces. In addition to direct borrowing from Spanish into colloquial Arabic, it produced a mixed variety with a French base known as Pataouète. It was spoken by European settlers and included a substantial lexical contribution from Spanish, Catalan, Italian, and Arabic[5].

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[1] Kaddour, A. (2013). Contribución al estudio de los hispanismos en el oeste de Argelia: corpus léxico, análisis fonético, morfológico y semántico. Tesis doctoral, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, p. 174.
[2] Matallah, B. (2019). Aproximación al dialecto argelino: la variedad de Orán. Trabajo de Fin de Grado, Universidad de Salamanca, p. 18.
[3] Mechernene, F. (2021), p. 306.
[4] Mechernene, F. (2021), p. 307.
[5] Bacri, R. (1969). Le roro. Dictionnaire Pataouète de la langue pied-noir. Paris: Denoël, pp. 7-9.

2.2.3 Post-Independence (1962 and Thereafter)

Following Algeria's independence in 1962, the country witnessed the almost complete departure of the Spanish community from Algeria, as was also the case with other European communities[1]. This departure had a clear effect on Spanish-derived vocabulary in Algerian Colloquial Arabic. The source of this lexical stock and its continuous renewal through permanent direct contact came to an end. Many words - especially those carrying meanings of insult and disparagement - therefore began to decline gradually and disappear. Other words remained in circulation and are still used today, including terms associated with occupations such as fishing, although most users are unaware of their Spanish origin[2].

3. Linguistic Levels of Adaptation of Spanish Loanwords

3.1 Phonological Level:

When a Spanish word enters the phonological system of Algerian Colloquial Arabic, it undergoes a process of phonological adaptation that brings it into conformity with the characteristics of Arabic articulation and syllable structure. The most important changes include:

- Vowel substitution: Spanish besugo (meaning "coral fish") becomes bisúgo in the Oran vernacular, where the unstressed Spanish vowel e changes to i[3].

- Substitution of plosive sounds: Spanish capazo (meaning "a large basket") becomes kabásu. The sound p, which is not present in the articulatory inventory of colloquial Arabic, is replaced by the closest voiced bilabial plosive b[4].

- Emphasis (Pharyngalisation): This is an original feature of Arabic phonology that extends even to borrowed foreign words. An example is the pronunciation of sigaro from Spanish cigarro in the emphatic form garro within the phonological structure of the Oran vernacular[5].

3.2 Morphological Level:

At the morphological level, Spanish loanwords are integrated into Algerian Colloquial Arabic as independent lexical units. They therefore rarely enter compound structures or complex derivations, contrary to what might be expected from a language as rich in derivation as Arabic[6]. Nevertheless, some forms of morphological adaptation can be observed, including the following:

- Derivation through affixation or addition: The adjective bumbardi, meaning "a big liar," is derived from the noun bumba, borrowed from Spanish bomba, meaning "bomb." In Algerian

[1] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012). "El préstamo español en el árabe del oeste de Argelia: los insultos." Revista de Filología, 30, p. 217.
[2] Mechernene, F. (2021), pp. 319-321.
[3] Mechernene, F. (2021), p. 310.
[4] Mechernene, F. (2018). "El lexico espanol en Aïn Temouchent." Revista Argelina, Universidad de Alicante, no. 7, p. 82.
[5] Matallah, B. (2019), p. 27.
[6] Kaddour, A. (2014). "Articulación morfológica de los préstamos del español." ASJP Journal, 14(1), p. 77.

Colloquial Arabic, bumba acquired the meaning "a big lie." The adjective is formed by adding a colloquial Arabic suffix[1].

- Initial deletion (Aphérèse): Spanish contrabando (meaning "smuggling") becomes trabando in Algerian usage through deletion of the first syllable. This phenomenon shows that colloquial speakers are not aware of the original morphological structure (prefix + root) of the borrowed word. The borrowed form is therefore treated as a simple lexical unit that cannot be analyzed internally[2].

- Masculine, feminine, and plural marking according to the rules of Algerian Colloquial Arabic, regardless of the original grammatical gender of the word in Spanish. For example, سيمانة (simana), meaning "week," forms the plural سيمانات (simanat) as a regular feminine plural by adding -at to the word.

3.3 Semantic Level:

The semantic level is the most suitable level for studying Algerian Hispanisms. A borrowed word rarely preserves its full original Spanish meaning. Instead, it undergoes processes of semantic shift (Glissement sémantique) that often reflect the nature of the social and cultural relationship between the two neighboring communities, which was sometimes tense[3]. The most prominent examples, especially in the field of insults and disparagement, include:

- The word astuto (meaning "skilled" or "shrewd") changed, in its colloquial feminine form ستّوتة (Settuta), to mean "hypocritical." This change developed by drawing on and generalizing the semantic feature of deception implicit in the original word[4]. This description is more strongly associated with the feminine form.

- The word caballo (meaning "horse") came to be used to describe a large-bodied woman. It also sometimes acquired the meaning of a woman of ill repute[5].

- The word sbanioli (from español, meaning "Spanish") acquired a general pejorative meaning referring to a rude or ill-mannered person. The original Spanish word is completely neutral in meaning and simply refers to a person's affiliation. This semantic development reflects the effect of national and religious tensions between the two neighboring communities during the colonial period[6].

The phenomenon of circular borrowing mentioned earlier can also be observed in the field of card games, where playing cards in the Maghreb bear Spanish names. This represents an old layer of borrowing that is thought to have arrived with the Moriscos expelled from al-Andalus, or through the shared culture of Mediterranean ports long before the spread of modern colonialism[7].

[1] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), p. 224.
[2] Kaddour, A. (2014), p. 89.
[3] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), pp. 220-226.
[4] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), pp. 223-224.
[5] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), pp. 225-226.
[6] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), pp. 220-221.
[7] Epalza, M. de & Slama-Gafsi, A. (2010). El español hablado en Túnez por los moriscos (siglos XVII-XVIII). Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, p. 374.

4. Lexical Fields of Linguistic Borrowing:

Spanish borrowing was not distributed equally across all areas of the colloquial lexicon. Rather, it was concentrated notably in specific semantic fields closely related to the nature of social and occupational contact between Spaniards and Algerians. The most important of these fields can be identified as follows:

4.1 Maritime and Fishing Vocabulary

Fishing vocabulary is one of the semantic fields richest in Spanish loanwords in the coastal cities of Western Algeria. Historically, this sector was an occupation in which Algerian and Spanish fishermen worked side by side. Many Algerian fishermen learned the foundations and modern techniques of the occupation directly from their Spanish counterparts[1]. A recent specialized study in this field recorded more than seventy-six living Spanish-derived terms in the vocabulary of fishermen in the Oran region alone[2]. These include names for parts of a boat: بروة (proa), تيمون (timón) 'rudder,' and بوبا (popa) 'stern'; fishing tools such as بالانغري (palangre) 'long hook' and مايا (maya) 'net'; and names of fish and seafood such as سردينة (sardina), كالامار (calamar) 'squid,' and بولبو (pulpo) 'octopus.' They also include verbs and technical terms such as ماري (mari), from amarrar, meaning 'to tie the boat,' and باريخا (parija), from pareja, a collective fishing technique involving two cooperating boats.

4.2 The Field of Insults and Disparagement

The field of insults and disparagement is a fertile area for Spanish loanwords. In his linguistic study, which includes more than three hundred words of Spanish origin in Western Algeria, Ahmed Kaddour identified more than twenty words used as insults[3]. According to Herrero and Kaddour, this reflects the fact that the lexicon of insults is highly open to renewal and borrowing in most languages because it requires expressive force and verbal novelty that attract the addressee's attention[4].

4.3 Fields of Everyday Life, Occupations, and Food:

In addition to the two preceding fields, Spanish loanwords also occur in the vocabulary of everyday life and different occupations. Examples include أبوغادو (abogado), meaning 'lawyer,' and seafood dishes with Spanish names such as بايلا (paella), as well as كالديرو (caldero), a cooking vessel[5]. Words connected with the body and physical characteristics are also found, such as كالبو (calvo), meaning 'bald.' This reflects the nature of direct daily contact between Spaniards and Algerians in markets and shared workplaces.

5. Sociolinguistic Factors Governing the Course of This Borrowing

[1] Mechernene, F. (2021), p. 321.
[2] Mechernene, F. (2021), p. 307.
[3] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), pp. 218-222.
[4] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), p. 222.
[5] Mechernene, F. (2018), pp. 77, 81, 92.

The extent and scale of Spanish borrowing in the colloquial Arabic of Western Algeria, as well as its current decline, can be explained by a set of interrelated sociolinguistic factors:

1. Direct geographical proximity: The coast of Oran and the southeastern Spanish coast, especially Alicante, are separated by a sea distance of only a few hundred kilometers. This made movement and migration between the two shores relatively easy throughout history[1].

2. Demographic and temporal density of contact: As noted above, the Spanish presence was neither temporary nor marginal. It extended for nearly four continuous centuries and, in some periods, reached a demographic weight that exceeded even the French presence in the Oran region[2].

3. The class and occupational nature of the relationship: Researchers note that Spanish borrowing was concentrated especially in popular and working-class environments, including fishermen, port workers, and residents of mixed working-class neighborhoods. French, by contrast, remained the language of administration and elite education. This explains the near-complete absence of Spanish from official and administrative use, compared with its entrenchment in everyday and occupational colloquial vocabulary. Working alongside Spaniards was the main factor that led Algerian fishermen to learn Spanish spontaneously without needing to study it at school[3].

4. The interruption of linguistic input after independence: The departure of the Spanish community after 1962 marked a decisive turning point. The inherited lexical stock lost the source of its renewal and continued vitality through living contact. As recent studies show, it therefore moved toward gradual decline, and younger generations today use these words far less than the generations of their parents and grandparents[4]. Some words, however, have remained alive in conservative occupational fields, especially fishing, where professional terms continued to be transmitted across generations from grandparents to parents and then to children, despite the end of direct contact with Spanish[5].

5. Algeria's general multilingual setting: Spanish borrowing forms part of a broader Algerian linguistic landscape characterized by complex multilingualism (Plurilinguisme), bringing together Standard Arabic, colloquial Arabic, Tamazight, and French. This makes Algerian Colloquial Arabic in general, and the colloquial Arabic of Western Algeria in particular, a living laboratory for the study of multilayered language-contact phenomena[6].

6. Conclusion

[1] Moreno Fernández, F. (1992). "El español en Orán: notas históricas, dialectales y sociolingüísticas." Revista de Filología Española, 72, pp. 5-8.
[2] Brunet, G. & Kateb, K. (2018). "Les Espagnols dans la région d'Oran." Annales de démographie historique, 135(1), pp. 81-82.
[3] Mechernene, F. (2021), p. 320.
[4] Herrero Ruiz de Loizaga, F. J. & Kaddour, A. (2012), pp. 226-227.
[5] Mechernene, F. (2021), p. 320.
[6] Matallah, B. (2019), pp. 16-19.

This article shows that linguistic borrowing from Spanish into Algerian Colloquial Arabic, especially in Western Algeria, is not a marginal or transient phenomenon. Rather, it constitutes a rich and historically rooted lexical stock formed through language contact that extended over centuries. This stock adapted phonologically, morphologically, and semantically to the characteristics of the receiving linguistic system.

It also shows that this borrowing was not randomly distributed across the lexicon. Rather, it was concentrated in specific semantic fields - maritime vocabulary, insults, and everyday life - that were directly linked to the nature of social and occupational contact between Spaniards and Algerians in Western Algeria. Its current fate is also linked to complex sociolinguistic factors that have led to its gradual decline after Algerian independence and the interruption of the living source that renewed it.

The study concludes that this linguistic stock, despite its considerable scientific and historical importance as evidence of the depth of the linguistic and cultural diversity that marked the history of Western Algeria, still lacks a comprehensive and unified lexical corpus that documents it in a rigorous scholarly manner. This need is increasingly urgent as the pace of its disappearance among younger generations accelerates.

We recommend conducting broader field-based sociolinguistic studies covering the different cities of Western Algeria and compiling a comprehensive dictionary of Algerian Hispanisms.

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