

Arabic Americanisms: Arabic Words in American English

Maneh Al-Johani*

* Ph.D. in English language and general linguistics, Indiana University, U.S.A., 1982.
Lecturer in the Dept. of English, Faculty of Arts, King Saud University.



Abstract

The English language has developed a tendency to borrow words from many languages. This tendency is best exemplified by American English during the nineteenth century. Spanish was the language from which English borrowed extensively to meet its need to name the new environment of the New World. Those borrowings and the newly developed vocabulary from other sources came to be known as Americanisms. Although many of the Spanish-origin Americanisms are Arabic words, nobody has ever pointed to this fact. The present paper gives a brief introductory background that establishes the contact among the three languages - Arabic, Spanish, American English - and shows the influence of Arabic on English in general and American English in particular.

After defining "Americanism," and pointing out some characteristics of Arabic words in English, an annotated survey of about sixty words is presented, arranged by the dates of their appearance in American English sources. A brief discussion of every word provides necessary information that establishes it as an American borrowing from Arabic through Spanish. After a short remark about the changes of meaning the Arabic words went through, a topical classification of these words is offered to give an idea of their scope and nature.

Languages borrow lexical items from each other to name new concepts or products that are not readily identifiable by native resources. English is an outstanding example of this phenomenon because it has borrowed so extensively from many languages of the world that more than half of its vocabulary comes from outside the native Germanic stock.¹ The English language's tendency to borrow from other languages is best exemplified by American English.

When the first American settlers inhabited The New World, they had to deal with a new environment. They had to provide names not only for places they settled in, but also for their fauna and flora, their valleys and mountains, their rivers and lakes. To meet this need of name-giving to many of the natural elements of their environment, the early American resorted to the following methods:

1. The use of descriptive epithets: they called **maize Indian corn** in the beginning.
2. The use of old words for new concepts such as **lot** and its derivatives.
3. The coinage of a new word for a new concept: they used **muskrat** for an animal peculiar to their new home.
4. Borrowing from local languages especially the Indian languages; they borrowed **moose**, **possum** and **skunk** among many others.
5. Borrowing from non-American languages especially Spanish, because it had been the language of the people who had dealt with the New World environment for many years before the American settlers reached that part of the world. That is why the settlers of the southern parts of America borrowed extensively from the Spanish language. Many of these borrowings were Arabic words which were taken as Spanish.

The new stock of vocabulary added to the English language in America came to be known as "Americanisms." The term was first used by an American settler, Rev. John Witherspoon, who wrote in 1781 a series of articles known as "The Druid" in which he commented on the peculiarities of American speech. In "The Druid" no. V he defined Americanism as the "... use of phrases or terms, or a construction of sentences, even among persons of rank and education, different from the use of the same terms or phrases, or the construction of similar sentences in Great Britain."² Although the term "Americanism" sometimes denotes a thing peculiar to America, including customs, beliefs and characteristics, it is used in this paper in accordance with **Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language**, which gives the following definition: "A word, phrase, or idiom originating in or peculiar to American English."³ This definition includes, in addition to the peculiar developments of American English, the various loan words that were borrowed by English in America whether they were from local or outside sources, as I classified them in the previous paragraphs.

When I started collecting material for this paper, I thought comprehensive works on Americanisms, such as Sir William Craigie's **A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles** and Mathews' **A Dictionary of Americanisms** would provide a better coverage and would trace the Spanish words to their Arabic origin⁴. I was disappointed because I discovered as early as the introduction of Craigie's Dictionary that he attributed Arabic words to Spanish⁵. I decided to skim through Mathews' Dictionary looking for Arabic words. I found a few dozens attributed to the Spanish language without any hint to their origin. It is true that Mathews indicated in the preface that he would be concerned mainly with the immediate sources of

Americanisms, but he did not follow this practice consistently, especially with Arabic words. For example, he mentioned that **tabby** and **cush** are American borrowings from Arabic through African languages.⁶ These examples made me suspect that Mathews did not know that some of the words he was attributing to Spanish were Arabic.

It is not only Craigie and Mathews who ignored the Arabic elements within Americanisms, but so did Clapin⁷ and Bentley.⁸ the former has an appendix of Spanish words in English (which helped me to discover a few words not mentioned by Mathews). The latter is a whole book devoted to English borrowings from Spanish. Both failed to mention anything about the origins of the Spanish words in English.

In the following pages, a historical survey of Arabic words in American English borrowed mainly through Spanish will be given, along with a brief description of the historical background of Spanish-Arabic and Spanish-American contacts. I will point out a few characteristics of Arabic words in American English and give examples of some changes in their meanings. After the introduction of each word with its Arabic origin and how and when it came into American English, a simple subject matter classification will be provided. Personal and place-names will not be considered in this study.

Arabic-Spanish Contact

Spain was for about eight centuries the home of an Islamic and Arabic civilization. This civilization was the result of the Muslim Berber and Arab invasion of Spain in A.D. 711. Within a few years, the whole peninsula was under the invaders' political and cultural domination.

Some of the educated Arabs learned Latin and almost all the Mozarabs (Spanish Christians living under Muslim rule) learned how to communicate in Arabic. The educated Spaniards regarded the knowledge of Arabic to be as essential as the knowledge of Latin in the Middle Ages. That was so because Arabic was not only the language of the governing people, but was also a language of a higher civilization at that time. The Arabs benefited from the Indian, Greek, and Roman achievements in every field. They added to these achievements and transferred them to Europe, mainly through Spain. The Arabs and the Spaniards freely intermarried and lived together in a bilingual country so that almost every Spaniard had a number of Arabic words in his everyday vocabulary.

Although the Moriscos (moorish) population in 1610 was forced to leave Spain or convert to Christianity, the impact of the Arabs on Spain can still be seen in various aspects of Spanish lives. The least apparent, though not the least important, is the influence of Arabic on the Spanish language. The expert can see this influence in family names and place-names as well as in the everyday vocabulary of Spanish. The Spaniards transferred some of their borrowings to the rest of the Western world. Walt Taylor wrote the following:

"... the borrowing of other languages from Spanish vocabulary constitutes those very words from Arabic which were strange to Europe, borrowed from Spain when it was teaching the rest of Europe what it had learnt from the Arabs. Thus Arabic affected the vocabularies of the European languages primarily through Spain, and not only did it teach

*Europe but Spanish America; and even in the United States, it is said, of the Spanish words which the Red Indians adopted, about 200 are of Arabic origin."*⁹

Arabic Words in English

Spanish was one of the major bridges across which Arabic words came into European languages. It is next only to French and Latin as a source of Arabic words that were borrowed by English.¹⁰ Thus in addition to direct borrowings from Arabic, English borrowed a considerable number of Arabic terms through French, Latin, Italian, Eastern languages such as Persian, Hindustani, Turkish, Hebrew, and African languages, especially Swahili.

The exact number of Arabic words in English is not known. Walt Taylor suggested one thousand words with many thousands of derivations from those words.¹¹ I believe the actual number is greater than this figure, especially if we add to it words which appear to be of Arabic origin or words which are used by Arabists and Islamists in their studies of the East. In addition to this, many Arabic words were attributed to other languages, either because they were borrowed through those languages or because nobody knew that those words were Arabic. Such languages may include Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, Persian, Urdu, Turkish and a few others. In some of these languages, Arabic words constitute as much as thirty percent of their vocabularies. This is because Arabic has been the *lingua franca* of the Muslim world for centuries.

When we come to the impact of Arabic on American English, we find that Spanish was the major source of Arabic Americanisms. The Arabic elements in Spanish contributed, no doubt, to making Spanish the greatest source of Americanisms that were borrowed during the nineteenth century, when the New World in general and the American South in particular were under the colonial domination of Spain. When the American settlers replaced the Spaniards in the South, they borrowed many of the Spanish names that were given to places, animals, plants and certain activities by their predecessors. Many of these words were Spanish borrowings from Arabic on the European continent. Furthermore, many of these words are still used in the Southern parts of North America without being recognized as Arabic. This is due to the fact that the American regional vocabulary of the South has not been studied thoroughly for etymological purposes.

In the following study I will limit myself to American English borrowings from Arabic, mainly through Spanish, as an unrecognized channel of influence on the American language.

American-Spanish Contact

Columbus's historic discovery was achieved under the auspices of the King and Queen of Spain. Therefore, Spain was the first European country which came in contact with the New World. Spain at that time was a rising colonial power which sponsored most of the expeditions of exploration to find new homes for the Christian faith and to discover new sources of wealth. When the other European countries started to be interested in the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the Spaniards were already there. They found themselves in an "unnamed" country and started playing "God's role" as Charlton put it.¹² Some of the material they used in performing this

role was their borrowings from Arabic. When the English speaking people came to that part of the world, the Spanish language provided them with a considerable number of words which labelled some of the New World's aspects.

English borrowing from Arabic through Spanish is a phenomenon which started on the continent with such words as **alcatrass**, **alcazar**, and **noria**.¹³ The Arabic elements in these borrowings constitute a high ratio, namely six percent of the foreign elements in English.¹⁴ That phenomenon was increased considerably in the New World by various factors. First, the English people found themselves in a new environment — new in its plants and animals as well as in its inhabitants' customs and ideologies. They felt more than ever the need for adequate terms to describe their physical surroundings. They met this need by many ways, among which was borrowing from the Spaniards, who had already gone through this kind of experience. Secondly, the English speakers came into direct contact with the Spaniards in the New World. Such a communal relationship was not possible on the continent.

The Spanish population was (and still is) concentrated in the south-west of the United States.¹⁵ New Mexico, Arizona, Florida, and Texas have been the places where Spanish and American culture were intermixed since the early seventeenth century. Though the Spaniards were driven out of some of their first areas of settlement, there are still large communities of Spanish-speaking people in the United States. In Texas alone, there are about half a million Spanish-speaking persons. Such communities are bilingual and still exercise some influence on language on both sides of the border. Some American English borrowings from Spanish are originally Arabic words. The Arabic elements in Americanisms were regarded as pure English words by those who have treated the subject of Americanisms. An explanation of this practice could be the fact that Arabic words in Spanish were completely nationalized and not easily recognized by scholars who are not well-versed in Arabic.

Difficult to Recognize

Arabic words in American English are, in most cases, not easily recognized by an average Arabic-speaking person because they have been modified or changed drastically. The strange pronunciation and spelling of Arabic words are due to various reasons. Firstly, Arabic and English are written in different orthographies, ا ب ت versus a b c. Secondly, although the Arabic sound inventory contains only thirty-five sounds, more than ten of these sounds are difficult, if not impossible, to pronounce for an average native speaker of English. These sounds are consonants: glottals, fricatives and stops such as [y] غ، [x] خ، [t] ط and some others which cannot be transcribed accurately even by the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. Thirdly, Arabic words in Americanisms were borrowed through Spanish. This of course means that they are second-hand Arabic words which have been stamped by Spanish modification according to Spanish phonetic rules. No doubt this adds to their strangeness.

In fact, the drastic change which the Arabic words have undergone was greater in Spanish than in English. The difference between the English and the Spanish forms of these words is not great. Some of them are even identical. When there is any difference at all, it is realized in the form of the voicing of certain consonants, or the changing of some vowels. For example, **acequia** is pronounced in Spanish [əseki̯a]

and in English [se:ki:ð] or [ðse:kwia]. The word **adobe** is [dōbī], [ðdōbī] or [dōb] in English and [ðō òbē] in Spanish as transcribed by Bentley.¹⁶

On the other hand, the Spanish and the Arabic origins are nearer, generally speaking, to each other than the Arabic to the English. However, there is a great difference between the Spanish and the Arabic forms of the same word, so that one wonders how this change happened. To answer this question satisfactorily would involve studying the history and phonetic inventory of Spanish, which would go beyond the scope of this paper.

Characteristics of Arabic Words

Though Arabic words in American English have gone through a considerable change before and after their borrowing from the Spanish language, they still have one characteristic or another which may betray their origin. The most obvious characteristic of Arabic loan-words is that some of them start with **al-**. This is of course the definite article in Arabic, namely "the" **ال**. The definite article in Arabic is pronounced in two ways: [al] as **al-forja** and **al-gorroba**; and [a] as in **adobe** and **acequia**. This means that the [l] of [al] assimilates to the following segment whenever it is [+coronal] and [+anterior]. The same definite article appears, strangely enough, at the end of two Arabic words in English, **admiral** and **arsenal**. This, it seems, resulted from mixing two words together. Not knowing the word boundary of Arabic, the first borrower took the first word with the definite article of the following one. Thus **admiral** originated from **amir** and **albahr**, "a leader" and "the sea" respectively. As a compound **amiralbahr** was broken in the middle, which resulted as **amiral**. The "d" was added later by analogy with **admire** which was thought to be the origin of **admiral**.^{17, 18} **Arsenal** in turn was modelled after **admiral**. In Italian, from which the word was borrowed, it is **arsena**. In some cases the [l] of the definite article is dropped in a few words in English where it should appear according to Arabic rules, as in **apricot**.

Another aspect of Arabic words in American English is that a few of them end with **a**, as **batea**, **bellota**, **vega**, **alfalfa** and a few others. This stands, generally speaking, for the Arabic syllable [əh], a very common feminine morpheme. Because the sound [h] is not common word-final in the European languages, the syllable [əh] was reduced to a shwa. This sound is common in Arabic words in English either alone or sometimes as a whole syllable, retained in **Allah**, **moolah** and others. Nevertheless, the syllable [əh] does not always appear as **-a**, or **-ah** in spelling. In a few instances, it appears as **-e**, especially in American English as in **adobe**, **giraffe**, and **gale**. These may be due to analogy with other English words which use **-e** to indicate a preceding long vowel. In addition to this, the final **-a** appears in some words which do not end with [ə] or [əh] in Arabic. Such words include **camisa**, **zebra**, and **arroba**.

Arabic Words in American English

In general the Arabic words in American English are not among the very common Arabic loan-words in English. They were common along the frontiers and in the agricultural communities of the nineteenth century. Though the majority of the following list is still in use, especially in the South-western part of the United States, some of the words in the list are regarded as obsolete, at least in some of their uses, such as **alguazil**, **almud** and **azote**. In fact some of them did not flourish in American

English for more than a few decades. Furthermore, some of the Arabic words borrowed by American English were confined to local use, as in the case of **ama**, **camisa**, **zapat** and **zaguan**.

In the following survey, the Arabic words are arranged according to the date of their first attested use in American English or their first citations in the **OED**. This date is not necessarily, in fact in some cases is not, the first date of the various uses of the word under consideration. I may make a few historical remarks about certain words and introduce some of my findings on them. Assuming that the reader knows the meaning of most of these words in American English, I omit at times the meanings of common words.¹⁹

1. Fustic (1548): This word was borrowed on the continent around the date quoted. Its American meaning is limited to a type of tropical American tree of the mulberry family from which a yellow dye is extracted.

2. Cannibalize (1553): The word **cannibal** was borrowed from the Spanish word **carib** during the sixteenth century. None of the dictionaries I have consulted attributed it to Arabic despite the fact that some of them derived it from **carib** which was probably borrowed from the word **qalibi**, 'strong-men.' **Galibi** is an Arabic word which means 'the one who defeats.' This word was used by Columbus to designate the people of the islands that were later to be called the Caribbean Islands.

The American contribution to this word is its use as a verb which denotes more than one meaning. Webster gives the following meanings: a) to strip (old or worn equipment) of parts for use in other units to help keep them in service; 2) to take any or all personnel or components from (one organization) for use in building up another; 3) to swallow up or devour another of the same type.

3. Lime-ade (1622): The date quoted is the date of the borrowing of the first part of the word, which took place on the continent through the French language. The American coinage, **limeade**, is probably of a later date. As an Americanism this word means: a drink made of lime juice and water.

4. Alchemy (1638): Craigie defines this word as 'a mixed metal resembling brass. Usually attrib. with spoon.' Mathews does not include this word. Now it is obsolete as Craigie says. The word was borrowed on the continent in 1362 and used in a technical sense from the Arabic [alkīmya].

5. Alguazil (1671): This word was used in regions under Spanish influence to mean 'a sheriff.' It came from the Arabic word [alwazīr], 'the minister' in a cabinet. Mathews labels this word as obsolete.

6. Adobe (1675): This word is taken from Arabic [atṭubāh], "a sunbaked mud;" it is a south-west American borrowing, and possesses a wide range of applications with a few combinations such as **adobe house**, **adobe castle**, **adobe dollar**, etc.

7. Albatross (1732): This word was borrowed on the continent from Arabic [alqādūs] 'water container'. Though the OED attributes it to Latin, it is an established Arabic word. It became mixed up with Spanish **alcatraz**.²⁰ **Albatross** in American English means "woolen material" and several types of webfooted birds formerly reputed to carry water.

8. Captain, capitan (1746): This term is attributed to a Latin origin in the sources I have consulted. I suspect it is from the Arabic word [qobṭān] 'chief of a ship', which is quite similar to **captain**. It could be an Arabic borrowing from Latin, but handed over to Spanish by the Arabs. An Arabic dictionary says it is an Arabic borrowing from Italian. However, the word was used in Arabic before the existence of Italian as a vernacular. While **captain** was an American English borrowing that meant "chief", **captain** was borrowed on the continent, but the Americans extended its use to include: 1) a courtesy title; 2) a minor party officer in a district election; 3) used in combinations as **captain's walk**, **captain's beat**, etc. The same word, **captain**, has been taken back by modern Arabic to signify a military rank.

9. Musk (1771): This word has been used in English since 1398. It originated from the Arabic word [misk], "the odoriferous substance extracted from the musk deer's gland". The American use of the word consists mainly of its uses in combination with other words such as **musk-beaver**, **musk turtle**, and a few others.

10. Alacron (1772): This is a common word for scorpion in Texas and New Mexico. It is from Arabic [al'ŌkrŌb] , which carries the same meaning.

11. Albacore (1775): This word is not in Mathews. Craigie defines it as "one or other fish of the tunny kind". The **OED** attributes it to Arabic [albŌkr] "a young camel, or heifer." Unless by very free extensions of meaning, it is not clear to me how a young camel became a kind of fish.

12. Cipher (1788): This term was borrowed on the continent along with its sister in meaning as well as origin, **zero**, from Arabic [ṣēfr], "empty" or "nothing". Both words were borrowed from French which borrowed **zero** from Italian, as Partridge alleges. The American extension of the word includes the use of **cipher** as a verb (cf. decipher), **ciphering**, "counting" and the zero mark on a thermometer which seems to be no longer in use.

13. Muslin (1792): It stands for any of several types of cotton cloth used for bedding named after a city in Iraq [Mūṣal] where the first type was manufactured.

14. Alcalde (1803): This term is derived from Arabic [Alqāḍi], "judge" or "arbitrator," which also appears in English as **cadei**, a "Turkish title". Mathews says it is obsolete though it was in use till 1948 even with English suffixes as **alcaldeism** and **alcaldeship**.

15. Salamander (1805): The origin of this word was Persian. Nur lists it among the Arabic words in Spanish. The **OED** says that Latin was the source of this word, but Latin took it from Persian. In Arabic it appears as [ṣēmāndōl] , "an animal which cannot be burned by fire".

16. Alcaide (1808): This word is used interchangeably with **alcalde**, which is regarded as the current spelling of both words. But the meaning attached to **alcaide**, "an administrative officer or mayor" shows that the origin of this word is [alqāyad] "the leader". The **OED** still maintains the distinction between **alcalde** and **alcaide**, at least in their origins.

17. Buckaroo (1827): This word has many forms of spelling. It is regarded by Craigie as a corruption of Spanish **vaquero**, "a cowboy". Though the **OED** says it is from Latin, I think it was borrowed from either Arabic[bôqārôh] "a cow" or [bôqqarôh]

“cowboys”. Both spellings are nearer to **Buckara**, which is another spelling of this word, than **vaccarius** which the **OED** considers as the origin of **vaquero**. Even if it is a corruption of **vaquero**, it could be an Arabic word from the same origin, because some words start in Arabic with **b**, which have changed in Spanish to **v** (cf. **vega**).

18. Camisa (1829): This is an American borrowing from Spanish. Its other common form is **chemise** (maybe through French). The latter appeared in English as early as 1050. Both words came from Arabic [qamis] “a shirt,” as the **OED** indicates.

19. Alameda (1831): None of the sources I have consulted traces this word beyond Spanish. When I saw it, its form and meaning suggested to me the Arabic [alʔamedōh], literally “the pillars. By extension, it is used in Arabic for any group of long objects arranged in a row. This agrees with what **alameda** stands for in American English, “a road with a row of trees”. The Arabic word suggested here is nearer in sound and meaning than the suggested Spanish origin **alamo**, “popular tree”.

20. Zigzag (1832): The American part of this word is its use as a short form for **zigzag fence**. The word itself has been used in English since 1712. The **OED** states it is of unknown origin. The Arabic word [ziqāq] has been suggested as the origin of this word. French rather than Spanish seems to be the channel of this word into English.

21. Gale (1833): As an Americanism, this word means a “state of pleasant excitement or hilarity”. Though Nur says it came from Arabic [jālwdh] “neatness” or “festival dress”, I think this word was borrowed from French as **gala** which stands for Arabic [gēlōh] “a party or festival made in the open air, especially at noon”. This sense is common, at least in Arabic, and is nearer to the meaning of the word in English than the word suggested by Nur.

22. Alcabala (1836): This word is an American borrowing from Spanish **Alcavala** which was also borrowed from Spanish by English on the continent. Though both words mean the same thing in English, i.e. tax, duty, they are borrowed from two different Arabic words: [alqābalōh], “received tax on imported goods,” which means literally “to meet or receive”, and [alkōfālōh], “a guarantee”. The **OED** does not include the first word.

23. Cafeteria (1839): As Bentley says, the Spanish element in this word is the suffix **-eria**. At the same time, only the first element may have come from a remote Arabic origin. The word **coffee** and **cafe** originated from Arabic [qāhwōh], originally one of the many names of wine in Arabic. Later on, it came to mean “coffee”.

24. Toro (1839): This word as well as **torero** and **matador** seems to have originated from the Arabic word for “bull,” namely [θaur]. The last one especially strikes me as identical with the Arabic phrase [mātōaur] “the bull died”.

25. Arroba (1840): This is an American borrowing from Spanish in the southwest regions. It means a measure of 25 pounds. The Arabic origin of this word is [ʔrrub], literally “a quarter” used for “a measure of grains”.

26. Alchy (1844) and alchist (1888) and some of their combinations such as **alchy-cooking**, **alchy-gang** and **alcohol stove** are Americanisms derived from **alcohol**. This is, of course, a continental borrowing of the sixteenth century through

French. The European dictionaries give Arabic [alkohl] as the origin of this word. **Alkohol** is "a black substance used to blacken the eyelids for cosmetic purposes". This is still the only use of this word in Arabic. How **alkohl** became **alcohol** and obtained its present meaning is explained by European philologists as an extension of meaning. This may be the case. However, I think the extended meaning of this word to include intoxicating beverages has been borrowed from another Arabic word which carries this meaning and is also similar in form to **alkohl**. This word, [alyawl] written **alghual**, means "the substance which causes intoxication in alcohol". It is clear that this word can be very easily confused with **alkohl**. Thus the meanings of the two words were attached to one of them (cf. **alcalde** and **alcalde**). Though the early spellings of **alcohol** do not clearly support this theory, the essential difference between the two words resides in the sounds [ʔ] and [k], which are not easily maintained in European languages, especially English. An interesting point about this word is that it was back-borrowed by modern Arabic to carry some of its meanings in European languages, while the word I am suggesting is known only to educated people, it is found in the Quran [37:47].

27. Algerine (1844): This word means any one who behaves like the Algerian pirates. It is used colloquially as a name of a faction in Rhode Island politics in the nineteenth century. **Algerineism** is used to mean the practice of terrorism. The Arabic origin of this word is [aljazā'ir] , literally a group of islands or pieces of land but used as the name of the well known African country. It was possibly taken from [aljōzāyīri] "an algerian".

28. Batea (1844): This is a southwest borrowing from Spanish. I could not find it in the **OED** or in **Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language**, but it is listed by Craigie and Mathews. This term is from the Arabic word [bāṭayḏh] , "a wooden bowl", which agrees with its definition by Craigie, "a shallow wooden trough used in California and Mexico for washing ore".

29. Alfalfa (1845): Mathews does not have this word. Craigie defines it as "a variety of lucerne, much grown in the West". It is also in Clapin's dictionary. The sources at my disposal identify the Arabic [alfisfasḏh] , 'a green fodder,' as the origin of this word, but none of them explains the great difference between the sounds of the two words.

30. Alforja (1847): Another variation of this word is **Alforge**, which Craigie labels as "an obsolete Portuguese borrowing", but **alforja**, he says, is a Mexican-Spanish word used in the Southwest. Both words originated from the Arabic [alxurj] which means "a saddle, bag" not as the **OED** claims "the store, supply, provision".

31. Almud (1849): Though this word is not found in the **OED**; it is listed by Craigie and Mathews as a southwest borrowing from Spanish. They define it as "A Portuguese and Spanish dry measure used in Texas for about a peck". This agrees with the meaning of [almod] in Arabic, "a wooden measure for grains" that sometimes varies in capacity from one Arab country to another.

32. Zapato (1849): This word is not in the **OED**. It is recorded by Mathews as an American borrowing from Spanish. It means "a pair of shoes or boots". The word [sibt] in Arabic means "dyed leather". In Arabic colloquial use [ṣabbāt] signifies "a pair of shoes or boots".

33. Calaboose (1850): This word came from **calabash** which was borrowed on

the continent (1596) from Spanish **calabaza**, the latter coming from Arabic **khirbiz** "water-melon or pumpkin". **Calaboose** is an American slang term which means "prison, jail". However, in some Arabic dialects the Turkish word **kalabsh** is used to mean "a handcuff". It could have influenced the American sense of the term.

34. Vega (1850): Mathews labels this word as an obsolete southwest borrowing from Spanish. It is used to mean "an extensive plain or valley." The **OED** describes this word as "of obscure origin" and gives 1645 as the date of its first appearance in writing. This word, as Nur says, is the Arabic word [bugʔōh], "a piece of land". This term is different from **Vega** which means "the brightest star in constellation Lyra" that was borrowed from Arabic [wāqī] "falling" in (alnasr) **al-wāqī** "the falling vulture". This last word was behind the name of the Vega Chevrolet.

35. Zagan (1851): The **OED** does not have this word. Mathews says it is a southwest borrowing from Spanish meaning "an entrance or vestibule". Nur says the Arabic origin of this word is [iṣṭiwān], "[arched] entrance of a house".

36. Dinero (1856): The word [dīnār] has been a common name for golden or silver coins in the Arab world since the eighth century. It is possible that both the Arabic and the Spanish words were borrowed from Latin. However, even if the Arabic word was not the origin of **dinero**, it must have emphasized its use in Spanish, because no other European country uses this word for money or as the name of its currency.

37. Camphor (1961): This term is borrowed from Arabic [kāfūr] which is the origin of all the European forms of this word. Arabic seems to have borrowed it from India. The American meaning attached to this word is "spirit of camphor" in addition to its use with combinations such as **camphor bottle**, **camphor chest**, **camphor weed**, etc.

38. Ama (1863): While Craigie does not record this word, Mathews describes it as a "rarely used Southwest borrowing from Spanish". In American English it means "the mistress of a house". The **OED** does not have this word, but I am quite sure that it originates from Arabic: either from [amōh], "a woman," "slave girl", or [umm] "mother" but also "the mistress of the house".

39. Apricot (1867): Craigie gives the year 1676 for the first appearance of this word in American English and defines it as "a plum-like fruit". The origin of this word as established by the **OED** and other authorities is Arabic [albōrquq].

40. Alfilaria (1868): The **OED** and Partridge give the Arabic word [alxīlā] as the origin of this Americanism. It means "pingrass". Another form of this word, which is recorded by Craigie, is **filerita**.

41. Tariff (1868): The Arabic word [ta'rōfōh] is the origin of this term. However, many of the meanings associated with **tariff** in English are European development not attested in early Arabic dictionaries. Even European philologists quote the Arabic word [tārīf] "introduction or explanation" as the origin of **tariff**. The American meaning of the word which is still in colloquial use is "any bill, charge, fare", as Webster (1974) puts it.

42. Alkali (1870): This word is given various meanings in American English. Of course, it was introduced into English on the continent through its technical use. It came from Arabic [alqālī], meaning "that which burns other things". American English

uses it almost extensively for "salt or salted soil". It appears with other words as **alkali desert**, **alkali dent**, **alkali flat** and **alkali grass**. This is in addition to **alkaline** and **alkalied** which carry different meanings.

43. Algodon (1871): This word is an American English borrowing from Spanish. It is rare, as Mathews labels it, and stands for the Arabic word [alqoṭon], "the cotton or its tree". This same word was borrowed on the continent as **cotton**. It is of course the commoner of the two and has as many as twenty-six derivatives as shown in the OED.

44. Cable (1876): The origin of this term is doubtful. Many authorities (Taylor, 581; Ba'alabaki, 1980) suggest the Arabic word [kabl] "a thick long rope" as its origin. Its American uses consist mainly in the short form as in **cablegram**, **cable car** and some others.

45. Giraffe (1877): This word, borrowed by the British from Arabic, means "a long-necked animal known as giraffe". In American English, the meaning of this word was extended to include "phrases for cheating or getting the best of something".

46. Zebra (1882): Though Taylor lists this word as a borrowing from Arabic, the OED traces it to Spanish and Portuguese and Partridge to Amharic (a semitic language, spoken in Abyssinia) via Spanish and Portuguese. There are two Arabic words which denote the animal which zebra stands for: [fērā] and [hēmārōzzōrōd]. Both words are not very similar to **zebra**. The word in American English means "a convict or his striped suit".

47. Acequia (1884): In this spelling and meaning of "an irrigation ditch" the word is an American English borrowing from Spanish. The Arabic origin is [assāqōyōh] "an irrigation ditch or instrument for raising water from wells for irrigation". **Acequie madre**, "the main ditch" and **acequidor** "officer in charge of **acequia**" are also used in Texas and New Mexico. The second Arabic meaning, i.e. "a machine for raising water for irrigation", was borrowed on the continent about 1687 and attached to **saqia**, without the definite article. The American word **acequia** is recorded in the OED supplement.

48. Azote (?): Clapin only mentioned this word. She defines it as follows: "In Texas a switch or anything used as a whip". She does not provide any date. It is clear that this is the Spanish form of the Arabic word [aṣṣawṭ], "a whip".

49. Stable (1886): This word is an Americanism in the sense of "a booth or stall where certain commodities are dealt in". It is also used in combination with **car**, **lot**, **fly**. The origin of this word, which was borrowed on the continent, is the Arabic [iṣṭabl], "an enclosure for horses".

50. Amber (1888): This term was borrowed on the continent from Arabic [ambōr], "ambergris". In the New World it was extended to include tobacco-juice, and produced more than one combination: **amber jack**, **amber fish** and **amber stream**.

51. Hackamore (1889): This word is taken by the American West from Spanish **jaguima** which was borrowed from Arabic **shakīmah**, "a hatter". Webster defines its American meaning as "A rope or rawhide hatter with a headstall used in breaking horses". This is exactly what [shakīmah] means in Arabic.

52. Tuna (1895): This word was borrowed by American English from American

Spanish. It denotes various types of fish and food made thereof. the **OED** is not sure about the origin of this word, but Webster (1970) attributes it to Arabic and ultimately to Latin.

53. Bellota (1910): Craigie does not mention this term, but Mathews defines as American English from Spanish used in the Southwest in the sense of "an oak or its acorn". The Arabic origin is [bāllūṭah] , carrying the same sense as the English word.

54. sudan grass (1929): The meaning of this compound is "a grass grown for hay in semi-arid regions", as Mathews describes it. The Arabic element is the word [Sūdān] which is the name of an African Arab country and means literally "black people". It was not borrowed directly by American English, but the use of the compound **sudan grass** is American.

55. Accite (?): Neither **OED**, Mathews nor Craigie recorded this word. Clapin describes it as coming "from Spanish origin used in Texas for any kind of combustible oil". This meaning agrees totally with the similar-in-form Arabic [azzait]. The word **accite** is an established Spanish borrowing from Arabic.

56. Alberca (?): Clapin is my only authority in proving the existence of this word among Americanisms. She attributes it to Spanish and says it means "water hole or water pocket in Western Texas". It is identical in meaning as well as in sound with Arabic [alberkâh].

The above list of words could be increased considerably. In my search for Arabic words, I relied almost entirely on Mathews' Dictionary, which contains only completely established Americanisms. That is why he rejects some terms recorded by Craigie. Had I skimmed Craigie's Dictionary, I could have found a few more. Beside the fact that I might have overlooked some words which may be easily assigned to Arabic, many must have escaped my attention because of the drastic change in meaning as well as in form they have gone through. I have also neglected a few words which were established as part of the English borrowings from Arabic, but were not completely established as Americanisms. An example is the word **shaik**, which originated in England from Arabic [šayx], "an old man". Besides its uses as "a chief of a tribe", "a Muslim scholar", and "a respected person", it carries the sexual connotation of "a man who is irresistibly attractive to woman". The latter meaning, which is not recorded in **OED**, seems to be an American use of this word, but I could not find it in any authority on Americanisms — may be because this meaning is a slang one, as Webster's Dictionary says.²¹ More often than not, I neglected Arabic words which are used as Americanisms only with other words, i.e., as combinations of two separate words or as compounds. For example, the first word in each of the following combinations comes from Arabic **Assassin Collar**, **Camel Walk**, **Camel Cricket**, and so forth. I included very few words only from sources other than Spanish. This accounts for the absence of most of the words borrowed from French and all of those borrowed from the African languages. I also deliberately omitted personal and place-names which were introduced by Spanish into the United States, such as **Toledo**, **Cordova**, **Alhambra**, **Granada** and many others.

Arabic words borrowed via Spanish give a good illustration of the major types of Americanisms which may include: 1) words which were obsolete in England but were revived in America to be used either for the same old meaning or for a new meaning; 2) words, though common in England, used in a different sense in the New World;

and 3) words borrowed from other languages.

The stimulus for borrowing the above words was mainly necessity. English does not have equivalent terms for many of the above words, such as **alcohol**, **alkali**, **apricot**, **cipher**, and others. However, some of the Arabic words in English were borrowed for their picturesque associations and local color (mainly Spanish) as is the case with **ama**, **buckaroo**, **calaboose** and **alcalde**.

Based on a list of ninety-four commonly used Arabic loanwords, Taylor has compiled a table of percentage of English borrowings from Arabic throughout the history of the English language.²² The seventeenth century appears as the apex of English borrowings from Arabic (as much as 40% of the total borrowing). The second largest percentage was borrowed during the nineteenth century (about 30%). Most of these large percentages were borrowed by American English through Spanish.

Change of Meaning

It is clear from the previous survey that some of the Arabic words carry a few meanings which never existed in the Arabic language — new or additional meanings. Some of these meanings were the result of the misunderstanding of pairs of the Arabic words which were mixed together and one was taken for the other, as is the case with **alcaide** and **alcalde**; **alkohl** and **alghual**. Sometimes the additional meaning is the result of extension. The Arabic word **cipher**, for example, does not mean in Arabic more than “a dot” or “empty”. In American English, however, it means in addition, a “dispatch in ciphers”, to “figure out” or decipher. This is also true in the case of **alkali**, **zebra**, **cable** and others.

To demonstrate the semantic fields of the Arabic words borrowed by American English I have classified them, according to their subject matter, into the following major categories:

Plants and their Products

alceite	apricot
alfilaria	bellota
alfalfa	camphor
alforja	fustic
algorroba	limeade
amber-plum	sudan-grass.

Animals, Birds and Fish

alacron	amber-fish
albacore	salamander
albatross	zebra.

Titles

alcalde	buckaroo
alcaide	capitan
alquazil	captain
algerine	sheik.
ama(h)	

Words Related to Farming and Farmer's Life

aceite	arroba
acequia	azote
acequidor	batea
adobe	cable
alberca	stable
alforja	vega
almud	ziqzaq.

Miscellaneous

almeda	cannabalize
alcabala	cipher
alchemy	gale
alchy	musk
amberjack	tariff
cafeteria	zagan.
calaboose	

Afterword

Arabic elements in Americanisms have not been well-studied. Therefore, this is an area that needs further investigation, which will correct false etymologies and discover new elements. I realize that some of the etymologies of the words I have listed above are not completely established. In most cases I am not the only authority in attributing these words to Arabic origins. In the case of those words that nobody has ever pointed out to be of Arabic origin, such as **aceite**, **azote**, **alberca**, **ama(h)**, **batea**, **bellota**, **capitan**, they are not traced beyond their immediate source, Spanish. I feel that I am on solid ground in attributing these words to Arabic. If nobody has recognized Arabic as the origin of these words, it is because nobody has ever pointed out the influence of the Arabic language on American English before the present study.

Notes

1. For a discussion and references dealing with the proportion of native and non-native elements in the English vocabulary in general and certain authors in particular, see Alexander (1969: 109-10).
2. Mathews, Milford M. **A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, 17.
3. Guralnik, David, ed. **Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language**. 2nd College Edition. New York: World Publishing Company, 1970, 44.
4. My interest in Arabic words in American English started during the days of my studentship. I remember taking a course called "American English" which surveyed the history and influences on the English language in America. While reading for that course about American English borrowings from other languages, I expected to find some borrowings from Arabic, either directly or indirectly. However, that expectation did not come true. I could not find any mention of any Arabic words among Americanisms. I took the absence of Arabic loan-words

from American English to be due to the fact that the majority of Arabic elements in English were borrowed by the British people on the continent or in the East during the colonial period of Great Britain. Even if there were a few words in American English, I thought they might not be worth mentioning, especially in introductory books about American English. Nevertheless, I detected a few Arabic words attributed to Spanish by Marckwardt (1978:4). Although I drew my teacher's attention to this point, I was not able to trace many American borrowings from Spanish to Arabic origin. In this paper I will try to do what I could not do then. I would like to thank my colleague Dr. Peter Verdemann of the English Department, King Saud University for reading a draft of this paper and suggesting some stylistic improvements.

5. In his "prefatory note to part I, (p. IX), Craigie wrote "only one foreign language, Spanish, has made direct contributions of any note, to the number of some twenty words, including **acequia, adobe, alameda, and alamo, alcaide, alcalde, alfalfa, aparejo, arriero, and arroyo.**" He does not mention that those words, with the exception of **alamo** and the last three words, are Arabic.
6. Mathews, op. cit., viii.
7. Clapin, Sylva. **A New Dictionary of Americanisms: Being a Glossary of Words Supposed to be peculiar to the United States and the Dominion of Canada.** Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1968, 431-4.
8. Bentley, Harold W. **A Dictionary of Spanish Terms in English: With Special reference to the American Southwest.** New York: Octagon Book, 1973.
9. Taylor, Walter. "Arabic Words in English." Tract no. XXXVIII in Society of Pure English Tracts XXXI-XL. London: Clarendon press, 1933, 594-95.
10. Al-Sayed, Sahira. A. "A Lexicon and Analysis of English Words of Arabic Origin." Doctoral dissertation. University of Colorado, 1973. Notice that Spanish ranks third among sixteen languages.
11. Taylor, op. cit, 567.
12. Charlton, Laird. **Language in America.** New York: World publishing, 1970, 226. For a detailed discussion of the American practice of naming their new home, see charlton Laird (1970, PP. 226-54).
13. For additional examples see Mary Serjeantson (1962: 213: 20).
14. Al-Sayed, op. cit.
15. I have relied on Bentley's historical account of the American and Spanish contact in the New World. See, for example, his introduction, p. 19, and after.
16. Bentley, op. cit., 85, 87.
17. Partridge, Eric,. **Origins.** 2nd ed., New York: the Macmillan Company, 1959, 9.
18. Pyles, Thomas and John Algeo. **The Origins and Development,** 311.
19. Unless mentioned otherwise, dates which follow the main entries of Arabic loan-words are those of Mathews, whereas the dates of the early appearance of a certain word in English are taken from **The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary,** 1971.
20. A detailed treatment of this word is given by "Adil Tahir Nur, 1971.
21. Webster indicates that this use of the term is an old slang. However, I don't agree with him, because this meaning of the word **sheik** is still operative in the United States. This seems to be the meaning E.M. Hull intends in his novel **The Sheik.**
22. Taylor, op. cit., 579 and Al-Sayed, op. cit., 326.