

**THE ARABIC LOANWORDS IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE  
AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR ADOPTION.**

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*The article deals with the loanwords in Russian borrowed from the Arabic language. It considers the ways of how both languages interacted in the historical context and analyses functioning of the words having the Arabic origin in the system of the recipient language.*

Every language is inextricably bound up with the humanity. To be a human being is to use a language and to talk is to be a person. A language is an ability inherent to us. Modern languages including such as English, Russian, Arabic, Berber, Belarusian, French, German are particular systems presenting the developments of that ability. One of the important reasons for studying languages is to find out more about ourselves, about what makes us persons. And the best point to start this study with is to learn more about our own language, the language that has fed our minds and contributed to our view of the world. The historical approach is an appropriate one for studying languages. To understand how the things are, it is helpful and often essential to know how they got to be that way.

When a speaker imitates a word from a foreign language and at least to some extent adapts it in sound or grammar to their native speechways, the process is known as borrowing and the word thus borrowed is a loanword. The ways to borrow the loanwords can be both oral and written. If borrowed orally, the word undergoes more visible transformations than in case when we adapt it in a written way.

Though the speakers of Arabic and Russian have never shared the same territory for living, neither bordered on the neighbouring countries, the Russian-Arabic linguistic contacts date back many centuries ago.

Some researchers consider their starting point to be in the XI–XII centuries when the commercial contacts between the old-Russian and Arab traders were set using the water ways through the Volga river and the Caspian sea. At approximately the same time the pilgrims from the Kievan Rus began visiting the Christian shrines in Palestine controlled by the Muslim leaders of the Near East. It is worth mentioning right here that a famous educator Euphrosine of Polotsk also made her pilgrimage to the Holy land at that period of time and died in Jerusalem in 1167.

During the years to come the Russian language absorbed a number of the words connected with the Muslim cult, also the administrative and trade terms. All these loanwords resulted from the military conquests of Ivan the Terrible and other Russian Tsars who added new lands to the Russian Empire. At first the words from the East trickled into Russian by way of the Turkic language. In the XVIII century a lot of Arabic words came into Russian by means of French, English, Dutch and other European languages. These were the terms, mostly connected with navigation, mathematics, astronomy, trade. Even the famous nowadays term “lingua franca” in the meaning of “a language used as a means of the interethnic communication” is nothing else but an Arabic “lisan al ifrang” / لسان الافرنج. “Ifrang or ifranja” was a word to call the Europeans entering the Near East region during the Crusader invasion.

Later the further development of the diplomatic, scientific and economic relations with the Arab countries contributed to the growing amount of the Arabic loanword vocabulary in the Russian language. New arabisms are added nowadays due to the available travelling around the world and the increasing interest to the Eastern countries, their culture, philosophy, religion.

The Arabic and Russian languages belong to absolutely different language systems. However, namely this factor makes the research of these languages so challenging and inspiring. Russian is a Slavic language of the Indo-European family. It's written in Cyrillic alphabet. The Russian alphabet consists of 33 letters, it has six vowels. Arabic belongs to the Semitic language family. It is written from right to left in a cursive style. The basic Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters; what is more, almost all the letters are consonants. There are only three vowels. Belonging to the different sound systems, these two languages have an obvious distinction in the amount of the sounds and their quality in each of them. Undoubtedly it influences the process of the adoption of the Arabic words into the Russian lexicon. Thus, there are 36 consonant sounds in Russian and 28 ones in Arabic. There are such sounds in Arabic which are absolutely not characteristic of the speakers of Russian and hence, their articulation is inconvenient. On the other hand, some Russian letters give the sounds which do not exist in Arabic and in their turn complicate the way of learning Russian. The process of borrowing the words from Arabic into Russian was obviously affected by this.

The majority of the Arabic loanwords in Russian are nouns and they are consequently subjected to the grammatical categories functioning in the Russian language. Both the Arabic and Russian nouns have the categories of a gender, a number and a case. However, the differences in these two language systems are considerable. The discrepancy of the formal attributes of the gender in both languages causes the significant transformation of this category for the Arabic nouns adopted by Russian. The difference in the amount of the grammatical genders complicates this process even more. Thus, in Arabic we have got an opposition of masculine-feminine, while in Russian a noun can be masculine, or feminine, or neuter. In the Russian language the grammatical category of the gender is closely related to the biological category of "sex" and can be considered natural, whereas the Arabic gender is purely grammatical. Being different from one language to another, the gender in grammar can be related to as culture bound as well. Dividing the Arabic loanwords into three genders of Russian we can observe their following transformations:

- some words belonging to the masculine gender category in Arabic acquire the endings of the feminine gender in Russian. The example here is masculine مسجد [masjidun] which becomes a feminine noun [mechet'] мечеть;
- the loanwords can gain the formal attributes of a masculine gender in Russian while their original Arabic correlates are feminine: منارة [manara] fem. – [minaret] минарет masc.;
- to the third group we can refer those nouns the gender of which coincides in both languages: فتيلة [fatil] masc. – [fitil'] фитиль masc.

The grammatical category of a number in modern Russian is based on the opposition of plural-singular while in Arabic we observe singular- dual- plural. In the process of absorbing the word in Russian the Arabic word being originally only plural, gets the entire paradigm. As an example we can show the word طلاسيم [talasim] which is only plural transforming into [talisman] талисман having both singular and plural forms. On the contrary, the Arabic word غلام [gulam] being only singular has formed the Russian word [gulyamy] гулямы which is only plural.

Normally, the Arabic nouns undergo all the existing rules of changing the words in Russian. But some of them cannot be declined: [kofe] кофе, [mumiyo] мумиё, [mokko] мокко, [kafe] кафе.

The Arabic definite article *al* is retained in one form or another in such Russian words as [alhimiya] алхимия, [algebra] алгебра, [al'manah] альманах, [elixir] эликсир, [alkogol'] алкоголь, [azimut] азимут.

The scientists are not unanimous about the amount of the Arabic loanwords in Russian. Linguist Gavrilova T.P. wrote about 193 Arabic loanwords in Russian in 1981. The Arab researcher M.H. Hallawi later pointed out 260 arabisms, only a half of them being in active use only. According to the research carried out by the scientist V.V. Reztsova, there are about 235 lexemes of the Arabic origin in Russian. And she classifies them according to the thematic approach:

- 1) Plants and animals: [artishok], [limon], [hna] [sahar].
- 2) Geography and nature: [azimut], [musson], [avaria], [sirokko].
- 3) Social status: [admiral], [sheriff], [emir], [sultan], [sheih].
- 4) Clothes and materials: [atlas], [moher], [shuba], [halat], [fata].
- 5) Scientific terms: [almaz], [balsam], [tsifra], [algebra], [shifr], [zenith].
- 6) Religious terms: [allah], [Koran], [hadzh], [shaitan], [djinn], [imam].
- 7) Food and drinks: [alkogol'], [bakaleya], [kofe], [magarych], [halva], [shafraan], [carawai].
- 8) Human activity: [basurman], [fakir], [musul'manin], [beduin].
- 9) Political and economical spheres: [kabala], [kandaly], [halifat], [emirat].
- 10) Precious stones: [almaz], [lazurit], [yashma].
- 11) Constructions: [al'kov], [arsenal], [harem], [magazine], [medrese].
- 12) Literature and language: [al'manah], [kalam], [shifr].
- 13) Military topic: [djidhad], [kinzhal], [shahid].
- 14) Emotions: [azart], [gashish], [kaif].
- 15) Mass and money: [tara], [kantar].
- 16) Musical instruments: [lyutnya], [tamburin].
- 17) Human character: [hanzha], [nabob].

We will analyse some of the most widely known arabisms in Russian in order to try to show the peculiarities of their adoption and linguistic behavior.

[**admiral**] адмирал – [**emir al bahr**] أمير البحر – this word has got the vivid Arabic roots and is translated as "a commander of the sea". It appeared in the Russian language at the times of Peter the Great and apparently came from the Dutch. Through the confusion with Latin *admirabilis* meaning admirable, this word acquired a letter *d*.

[**algebra**] алгебра – [**alzhabr**] الجبر – this word being so familiar for the native speakers of Russian came into it from the Arabian world where the exact sciences were blossoming in the Middle Ages. Also the numbers used nowadays are called Arabic ones on the same etymological reason. Alzhabr in Arabic means the “reconstruction of the disassembled parts”.

[**alkogol'**] алкоголь – [**alkuhul**] الكحول – this word is a bright example of the Arabic influence on the Russian language vocabulary. Its reference to Arabic is proved easily by the article *al*. The word alcohol' means strong drinks in Russian but in Arabic it meant “finely ground powder» which presumably was used by the medieval Arabian naturalists. The Russian word “alchimiya” is also borrowed from the Arabic word sounding much alike and meaning the science about the composition of the substances. In the Middle Ages Arabic was a language of the advanced science.

[**almas**] алмаз – [**almas**] الماس – this word was brought into old Russian from the Turkic languages, which in their turn had definitely borrowed it from Arabic. There exists the connection of the Arabic word “almas” and the Greek word “adamas” meaning something adamantine which logically enough is characteristic of the property of a diamond.

[**al'mahah**] альманах – [**аль-манах**] المناح – It means “a non-periodical publication” in Russian and it means “calendar” in Arabic.

[**gibraltar**] Гибралтар – [**zhabaltariq**] طارقجبل – the given word was borrowed from the Arabic language by means of Spanish and the literal translation is “the mountain of Tariq”. Tariq (the whole name was Tariq ibn Ziyad) was a famous Amazigh general from Morocco who led the Muslim conquest of Spain in 711 A.D. The cliff where a military camp was set was called after general Tariq's name.

[**magazin**] магазин – [**mahazin**] مخازن – this is an Arabic loan word but it had entered the European languages before it appeared in Russian. Presumably, this word eventually came to Russian from an Italian “magazzino” meaning “a store”.

[**safari**] сафари – [**safar**] سفر – the original Arabic word means “a travelling”. The Russian safari thus means practically the same.

[**tarif**] тариф – [**ta'rifa**] تعريفة – this word was brought into Russian by a European language, probably German or French. The Arabic word “ta'rifa” meant ‘the announcement about the tax levies’.

[**halva**] халва – [**halwa**] حلوى – they both mean the traditional Eastern sweet dessert made from the ground nuts and seeds, mixed with caramel.

[**shachmaty**] шахматы – [**sheihmait**] شىخ ميت – this popular intellectual game gets its name from the Persian-Arabic combination meaning “the sheikh is dead”. And that is exactly where the sense of chess lies, to remove the king from the game.

[**shifr/tsifra**] шифр/цифра – صفر [**syfr**] – this French loanword goes back to Latin *cifra* which was borrowed from the Arabic language where it meant “emptiness” like zero. The relation between a numeral and a cipher is obvious as the cipher may represent a number of numerals.

It goes without saying that the development of the personal, political, scientific, economical relations between the people living around the world and the countries on the whole will contribute to the process of the mutual influence of the languages, to the reciprocal linguistic enrichment and benefication.

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