# AUDIENCE JUDGEMENT AND THE ROLE
# OF THE TERMINOLOGIST IN TECHNICAL LEXICOGRAPHY*

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## 1. Introduction

The present study is an empirical investigation of the register users' acceptance of Arabic terminology in the field of linguistics. Terminological coinage in the Arab world is normally conducted by the Arab league and its relevant specialized organizations such as ALESCO, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization. More than seventy dictionaries have been produced since 1945. One of the major dictionaries that concerns us in the present study is the *Unified Dictionary of Linguistic Terms*, as a representative of technical dictionaries. However, the role of audience is an important determinant of acceptability and therefore the terminology of these dictionaries finds limited application because the level of the terms' acceptability by register users is extremely low. This study also outlines essential features of terminological coining for the creation of efficient and acceptable terms.

Several Arab organizations that coordinate, unify and support research work have attempted to coin new terms in technical terminology. These organizations include, first of all, the Arabic language academies. The first academy was established in Syria in 1919, followed by another one in Egypt in 1932, in Jordan in 1976, and the Home of Wisdom in Tunisia, established in 1983. Secondly, the Coordination Bureau of Arabization in the Arab world in Morocco was established in 1962 and is supervised by ALECSO. This bureau aims at promoting lexical and linguistic research on problems of scientific and technical terms in Arabic. The third group consists of academic unions such as the Arab Scientific Union, established in 1954, the Arab Universities Union, established in 1960 and the Arabic Academy Union, founded in 1970.

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All of these organizations continue their efforts to keep abreast of modern scientific terminology and to enhance the Arabization movement. However, the Arabization endeavor of coining technical terminology can only be meaningful if it is continually subjected to implementational processes, that is, if the suggested linguistic terms are accepted and used by the targeted speech community (Jernudd and Das Gupta 1971: 200-201). As Fishman (1968: 10) correctly says, without such acceptance, conscious language selection or innovations are likely to be resisted or sabotaged.

However, to our knowledge, no study so far has been conducted to show to what extent the Arabic technical terms are accepted by the targeted register users. The few studies made in recent years have to do with the technical evaluation of the handling of neologisms. These include, for example, a study by Hleil (1992) on problems facing the Arabic translator particularly in technical terminology. Another recent study of the evaluation of technical translation in the field of dentistry was conducted by Hajjaj and Al-Jarrah (1997). A study by Kharma (1997) evaluated Arabic lexicography in the light of recent developments.

In contrast to these studies, the present study is an empirical investigation of the register users' acceptance of Arabic terminology in the modern field of linguistics. The term 'audience' is used to refer to targeted register users. The study aims at investigating how recent Arabic terms in linguistics are actually being used or if they are not being used and why they are not being used. The study specifically investigates the rate of acceptability of linguistic terms coined or translated into Arabic for the use of relevant register users. It is our hope that such an investigation will enable us to develop criteria for the acceptability of technical terms that can be considered in future endeavors in the field of Arabic terminological creation. As Al-Qasimiyy (1978) has pointed out, it is obvious that the study of terminology acceptance by register users is essential if we are to assess the effectiveness of the ongoing Arabization of technical terms.

## 2. Research Approach

For this study, fifty linguistic terms taken from the *Unified Dictionary of Linguistics Terms: English-French-Arabic* (henceforth, *UDLT*) were tested by using the questionnaire method on 250 users of this register. The categories of users consisted of 50 university and college instructors teaching English language and linguistics in Saudi Arabia and Jordan,[1] 100 high school teachers of English in the two countries, and 100 fourth year Jordanian students majoring in English.

The selection of the English linguistics terms and their Arabic equivalents were taken from *UDLT*, published in 1989, which includes 3059 terms. The selection of the terms was made according to the following criteria:

(1) Terms formally approved by ALECSO, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, which produced the *UDLT.*
(2) Familiar terms in different areas of applied and theoretical linguistics which could be taught or studied by the Arab respondents in any basic linguistics course.
(3) Terms coined by different means of word formation in Arabic such, as translation, derivation, and borrowing.

The three criteria above took into consideration the educational levels of the different categories of the respondents. Therefore, all fifty terms were included in the questionnaire for all informants since all of them are linguistics register users.

We followed the six criteria suggested by Picht and Draskau (1985: 114-116) in order to find out if an Arabic term is accepted or not. These six criteria for an ideal term were listed in the questionnaire. They included the following:

(1) The term should be precise, that is, it should accurately (unambiguously) reflect the concept which it represents.
(2) The term should conform to the phonological and grammatical structure of the target language.
(3) The term should be potentially productive of derivations.
(4) The term should be as concise as possible so long as it is understood.
(5) The term should essentially not be polysemous, and it should not have (unnecessarily many) synonyms or homonyms.
(6) The form should be consistent with the morphological patterns of the terms already developed.

The respondents were instructed to mark those criteria which, in their evaluation, met or seemed to meet each term. It was assumed, here at least in theory, following Mwansoko (1993) that anything "ideal" is regarded as perfect and, hence, acceptable. The percentages of respondents in each category (that is, instructors, teachers and students) who found a term acceptable according to each of the previously mentioned six criteria were totalled and then divided by six. Equal weight was given to all six criteria since it is assumed that any "ideal" term would fulfill all of these criteria. In this way, it was important to establish a broadly-based 'acceptable score' (Mwansoko 1993: 180). This meant that acceptable terms are those which get the highest scores whereas terms that were not accepted are those getting the lowest scores. It was decided that terms with a score of 50% or more of the informants would be regarded as having been "accepted", while those with a score of less than 50% would be considered as "rejected". The results of this investigation are discussed below.

## 3. Results of terminology acceptability questionnaire

To begin with, results indicate that ten out of fifty Arabic terms were strongly rejected by all respondents, as the scores in Table 1 show. In fact, the three categories

of respondents unanimously gave these terms the lowest scores, i.e. below ten. This means that these terms did not meet any of the six criteria for acceptability.

Table 1. Least acceptable terms.

| Terms | Acceptibility scores | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Instructors (n=50) | Teachers (n=100) | Students (n=100) |
| 1. *fadla* "adjunct" | 9.7 | 7.8 | 4 |
| 2. *lugha* "idiom" | 8 | 6.3 | 5.6 |
| 3. *nabSa* "click" | 1 | 1.5 | 0 |
| 4. *raTa:na* "jargon" | 3 | 2 | 1.5 |
| 5. *ishtira:k lafZi* "polysemy" | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| 6. *9unsor daal* "morpheme" | 9.8 | 8.8 | 4.3 |
| 7. *iHalat il9a:id* "anaphora" | 8.5 | 7.4 | 2 |
| 8. *mustawa ataTwi:H* "prosody" | 9 | 6.2 | 5 |
| 9. *iqHa:m* "epenthesis" | 7.6 | 6.1 | 4.3 |
| 10. *istithba:t* "tag question" | 9.2 | 6.9 | 5.2 |

It is, therefore, evident that these terms seem to lack clarity and accuracy. It was possible for the researcher to meet with one category of the respondents, the students, in an informal retrospection session carried out immediately following the appearance of the results. The student respondents provided information about their reasons for rejecting terms in Table 1. They said they thought the terms were semantically "overloaded", "ambiguous", and in most cases did not reflect accurately the concepts they represent. This description was particularly given to the first five terms: "adjunct", "idiom", "click", "jargon" and "polysemy", which could be given perhaps simpler terms such as *kalima mulHaqa, iStila:H, TaqTaqa, lugha xa:Sa*, and *ta9adod ma9a:ni*, respectively.

As for the other five terms in Table 1, students described them as being "quite unfamiliar" and "incomprehensible". This description was given in particular to items no. 6, 7 and 8. Students were able to provide alternative terms in Arabic that were acceptable to them from other dictionaries available to them. Moreover, most students thought that their understanding of "morpheme" in English was not related to the Arabic term given to it. Later on we will provide more discussion of the term "morpheme", which is usually hard to translate into Arabic.

Next, we now analyze the most acceptable Arabic equivalents of the English linguistic terms as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Most acceptable terms.

| Terms | Acceptability score | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Instructors (n=50) | Teachers (n=100) | Students (n=100) |
| 1. *anaZi:r* "cognate word" | 70 | 85 | 81 |
| 2. *niZa:m ramzi* "code" | 75 | 70 | 88 |
| 3. *taDa:d* "antonymy" | 85 | 90 | 94 |
| 4. *lisa:niya:t* "linguistics" | 90 | 95 | 96 |
| 5. *lahja fari:da* "idiolect" | 72 | 80 | 84 |
| 6. *za:ida* "affix" | 89 | 92 | 95 |
| 7. *naber* "accent" | 95 | 92 | 94 |
| 8. *Sa:mit* "consonant" | 93 | 89 | 96 |
| 9. *muSawat* "vowel" | 91 | 93 | 90 |
| 10. *majmu'9at mufrada:t* "lexicon" | 82 | 79 | 76 |
| 11. *qit9amin ilkala:m* "segment" | 86 | 81 | 92 |
| 12. *imtiza:j* "amalgam" | 82 | 86 | 84 |
| 13. *hadhf ija:zi* "ellipsis" | 85 | 81 | 91 |
| 14. *kriyol* "creole" | 95 | 92 | 94 |
| 15. *sa:ndhi* "sandhi" | 93 | 91 | 96 |

It is interesting to discover in Table 2 that all of the three categories of respondents gave high scores to all fifteen terms. Moreover, it is important to note that the scores of the three categories of respondents are well matched, i.e., no big discrepancies are found among them. It seems that this high rate of acceptability is due to the fact that the terms meet all of the six criteria of acceptability and thus were formed in an appropriate and precise way. Moreover, most of these terms can be commonly found and are normally used in Arabic. They are not as "alien" as the terms in Table 1 since most of them (such as the Arabic equivalents of "code", "antonymy", "accent", "vowel", "consonant" and "ellipsis") have a long history of usage in Arabic. Therefore, the task of the lexicographer in translating these terms into Arabic is not difficult. Moreover, the respondents gave high scores to the two terms that were Arabicized loanwords. The two calques or reduplications, "creole" and "sandhi", have become part of Arabic linguistic terminology since it is clear that it is quite difficult to come up with purely Arabic equivalents for these words. (And for that matter, "sandhi" was itself a borrowing into English from Sanskrit). The terms in Table 2 clearly show how an audience positively reacts to equivalents that are simple, concise and accurate.

Table 3 shows terms that received low varying degrees of acceptability by the three categories of informants. It should be noticed, however, that in spite of some discrepancies of scores given to these terms, all did not go beyond the acceptability rate followed in this study, that is, 50% or more.

Table 3. Low varying degrees of acceptability.

| Terms | Acceptability score | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Instructors (n=50) | Teachers (n=100) | Students (n=100) |
| 1. *taDmiin tarki:bi lil jumlah* "embedding" | 30 | 35 | 45 |
| 2. *ziyadat taxi:s mufi:dah* "modification" | 25 | 40 | 43 |
| 3. *uslu:b gheir maHki* "indirect speech" | 15 | 20 | 35 |
| 4. *muxtazal naHti* "acronym" | 13 | 30 | 40 |
| 5. *taradod fil a Swa:t* "frequency | 40 | 42 | 45 |
| 6. *maja:z jumlah* "paraphrase" | 11 | 16 | 35 |
| 7. *Haml jumlah* "subordination" | 20 | 32 | 41 |
| 8. *badal Sarfi* "allomorph" | 15 | 18 | 30 |
| 9. *badal Sawti* "allophone" | 17 | 20 | 30 |
| 10. *9unSor taxsi:s* "determiner" | 21 | 10 | 30 |
| 11. *wiHdah Sawtiyah* "phoneme" | 20 | 32 | 35 |
| 12. *lahja su:qiyah* "slang" | 13 | 20 | 35 |
| 13. *jumlah* "clause" | 13 | 20 | 35 |
| 14. *kala:m* "utterance" | 11 | 27 | 34 |
| 15. *ju:dat al ad'a* "diction" | 25 | 40 | 45 |
| 16. *lugha xa:Sa* "formulaic language" | 13 | 20 | 39 |
| 17. *Harf xaTi* "grapheme" | 11 | 21 | 35 |
| 18. *iStila:H* "metalanguage" | 11 | 7 | 25 |
| 19. *bayen lughawi* "isogloss" | 15 | 30 | 45 |
| 20. *majmu:9a* "phrase" | 12 | 15 | 30 |

There were only five terms that were considered to be borderline cases, terms that scored between 46% to 49% and these terms are excluded in our discussion here. The terms are *9ilm il awaza:n* "metrics", *almuwalad* "neologism", *alwadi9 ala:ni* "synchrony", *ta9ajub* "interjection", and *taSri:f* "inflection".

To begin with, it is important to note that the compound terms in Table 3 received low scores of acceptability. Such terms as no. 1, 2, 3 and 5 are made up of three to five words, and they were largely rejected by instructors and teachers. It seems that compound terms that consist of small definitions may not have been a good strategy to follow creating new terms in Arabic. Moreover, the concepts expressed in these terms are not accurately conveyed. For instance, *uslu:b*, which is part of the little definition of item no. 3, has the correct meaning of "style" but is wrongly used as "speech". Thus a confusion is created between the meaning of "style" and "speech" in Arabic. The lexical choice of *muxtazal*, meaning "acronym" in item no. 4 is not as simple or as common as *muxtaSar*, which could be a better alternative. Such alternative terms, among others, still need to be evaluated for acceptance in a future study on comparative terminology, for an investigation is needed here about proper lexical choices in terms of simplicity and common usage.

As for the Arabic equivalents of "allomorph", "allophone", "phoneme" and "grapheme" (items no. 8, 9, 11 and 17, respectively), they largely received a low acceptability rate particularly by college instructors whose scores for such terms were not more than 20%. These instructors seem to be more sensitive to precision of definitions than the other two categories, the teachers and the students, even though all respondents showed stronger rejections particularly of this group of terms. The attempt to find Arabic equivalents for such terms, which are hard to translate, did not help much in providing acceptable accurate renditions. We have already noticed how similar terms "sandhi" and "creole" in Table 2, were better accepted as they are, since they are loan terms with no appropriate Arabic terms possible. As a matter of fact, when checking other dictionaries such as the one compiled by the Committee of Arab Linguists (1983) and another one by Al-Khuliyy (1982), we noticed that these terms as well as others that are hard to translate into Arabic, were dealt with in a special way. In these dictionaries, the terms were replicated, that is, their English forms were kept with little modification other than adding the Arabic definite articles. Al-Khuliyy's dictionary provided a brief explanation of their meanings for readers.

As for items no. 6, 13, 14, 16, 18 and 20 in Table 3, college instructors again gave these terms very low scores in comparison with the two other categories of teachers and students. In spite of this discrepancy, it is clear that these terms were not well accepted by all respondents, nor were almost all of the other items in Table 3. These results indicate that there are some flaws involved in terminology coining. In our considered judgement, the Arabic equivalents for the English terms "paraphrase", "clause", "utterance", "formulaic language", "metalanguage" and "phrase" are not accurate. Taking the term "phrase" as an example, we notice that it has different meanings according to systemic and traditional grammar. In traditional grammar, "phrase" is an element of structure that has more than one word but that lacks subject-predicate structure and therefore, it is neither a sentence nor a clause, whereas the Arabic equivalent in the dictionary mistranslates it with the possibility of its being a sentence. In systemic grammar, on the other hand, a "phrase" refers to a group such as a noun phrase, which is referred to as a nominal group (see Crystal,

1992). The flaw, then, is that terms were not studied nor were they translated by scholars who knew their linguistic meanings. Another relevant problem is also found through the low scores given to the term "clause". This term was defined in Arabic as *jumlah*, a "sentence", thus making no difference between a clause and a sentence, which surely leads to confusion on the part of the readers. Al-Khuliyy (1982) suggested an alternative rendition, *jumailah*, meaning "little sentence" in Arabic, possibly a better choice.

Another confusion created by mistranslation is the rendition given to the English term "utterance". The Arabic term given to it was *kala:m*, meaning "speaking". Its definition received a very low score by all respondents (between 11% to 34%). More surprisingly, other terms in the same dictionary such as "parole", "speech" and "speech acts" were all defined also as *kala:m*, another serious flaw of terminological overgeneralization in using the same Arabic term to refer to four different concepts.

## 4. Discussion and data analysis

On the basis of the data analysis presented thus far, some remarks can be made about the register user's acceptance of terms. In the first place, the results of this investigation show that not more than one third of the terms (15 out of 50) was accepted by all respondents who participated in the study. As a matter of fact, translation theorists such as Nida (1964), Jackobson (1959), Willss (1982), de Waars and Nida (1986) and Sa'adeddin (1987) all emphasize the role of audience as a determinant of acceptability. The essence of the audience notion, according to Shakir and Farghal (1994: 78) is "that translators (like successful writers) address, on behalf of the SL writer, TL recipients whose beliefs, traits, attitudes and modes of thinking should be taken into account when translating". By the same token and for the terminologist (or the lexicographer), the consideration of the register users must emanate from the awareness that TL dictionary users or readers are not passive targets. Both the terminologist and the register users must be engaged in a term negotiating process especially when producing technical bilingual dictionaries such as linguistic terms dictionary. However, Al-Thebaiti (1998) rightly maintains that there is a lack of co-ordination even among the Arabic academies and the Bureau of Coordination of Arabization. Consequently, the exchange of terminological information among linguists, lexicographers and terminologists does not seem to be efficient.

Secondly, our data show that although the general terminological acceptability among all informants is low, this level of acceptance decreases even more with higher academic background and experience. There is a tendency among college instructors, who have a better appreciation of the underlying meanings of the translated terms, to give lower acceptability scores for most of the tested terms than do the other informants. However, this discrepancy owing to the varying academic backgrounds of the respondents did not influence the general rejection of the terms (Table 1 and Table 2).

Thirdly, findings in this study suggest that terms such as "phoneme", "morpheme", "allophone", and "allomorph", which are hard to translate in an accurate way, may be more favored in their English-based loan terms, as they seem to be re-jected by all categories of respondents when their Arabic equivalents failed to provide their exact meanings. In view of this observation, Shehata (1998: 146) provides an example of how the term "morpheme", for instance, caused a great deal of confusion among more than twenty Arab researchers who used various Arabic terms to refer to this concept. The multiplicity of the Arabic terms for this term alone, i.e. "morpheme", included *9amil Si:gha, da:l nisba, Sarfi:m, wiHdah Sarfiyah, Sarfiyah mujarada, wiHda:t da:lah*, ...etc. However, the English-based loan term was preferred by more researchers, thus avoiding inaccurate Arabic renditions and misconceptual relationships. Furthermore, the multiplicity of the Arabic terms for one concept, as we have pointed out earlier, was a serious problem even in one dictionary rather than in two or three different ones. Another serious problem is also the use of one Arabic term such as *kala:m* to refer to various concepts. These two problems of overgeneralization need to be dealt with more efficiently when updating the dictionary under investigation in the future (see Hleil 1992 for more discussion of this issue).

Finally, the data analysis discussed above indicates that Arabic terms, such as those in Table 3, having long definitions received low acceptability rates and they were not favored. Long definitions may reduce clarity and thus lead to ambiguity. We agree with Al-Thebaiti (1998) in saying that a term should be a vocable, not a phrase and that in order to facilitate common usage, a term has to be a word or a symbol, rather than a phrase (notice the constructions of the terms 1, 2, 3, and 5 in Table 3). Moreover, the value of having single terms will definitely help in facilitating derivations, i.e. increasing the number of "associated derivatives" (Al-Thebaiti 1998). However, we feel that a phrase or even short sentences can be provided between brackets if there is a need to clarify single word definitions.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study has revealed that register users' acceptance of the Arabic terms is extremely low. This finding can be regarded as a manifestation of users' resistance to officially coined and approved terms in a dictionary developed by an official organization in order to be disseminated in the Arab world. Most of these terms may be rejected because they are felt to be ambiguous and imprecise. Register users may have been unable to distinguish between the Arabic definitions and the restricted technical meanings of these terms. As a matter of fact, most of the rejected terms received extremely low scores particularly with the fifth criterion for ideal terms (the terms should essentially not be polysemous and they should not have many synonyms). Moreover, terms may have been resisted because their definitions are misleading. The English word "idiom", for instance, was rendered as "language" or *lugha* in Arabic (item no. 2, Table 1), but no mention was made of another meaning of "idiom' so that the difference that can exist between "language" and "idiom" was not clearly expressed.

Still another reason for rejecting terms could be the variations and the richness of classical Arabic vocabulary, which according to Al-Qasimiyy (1978), is advantageous in creative literary expression, but it is mostly disadvantageous in scientific

and technical literature. A good example already cited is the multiplicity of words for the English term "morpheme". In analyzing the data of the present study, almost all respondents did not seem to have understood the Arabic term *nabSa*, given to "click" (Table 1, item no. 3). This Arabic term may be prevalent in some parts of the Arab world, but it may not be frequently or commonly used in other Arab countries. The variations in classical Arabic vocabulary must, therefore, be taken into consideration when translating foreign terms. In fact, a simple Arabic term which may be understood better by many Arabic speakers could be *TaqTaqa* rather than *nabSa* for "click"[2]. Therefore, we recommend that common terms rather than scarce or ambiguous ones be employed when updating the dictionary under investigation. Efforts should, therefore, be made by the Arabic academies, ALECSO, and universities to co-ordinate more efficiently in the field of terminology and lexicography.

To achieve this objective, we also recommend, on the basis of the present findings, that terminology coinage should reflect a certain type of criteria similar to the above-mentioned ones for "ideal" efficient terms. However, no criteria could be efficient enough unless the audience of specific register users is consulted for evaluation and acceptance during the process of terminology coinage. Involving an informed audience in this process will be a big step forward from traditional terminology coinage, for never before has the focus been put so firmly on the response of the receptor in modern translation theories, e.g. (Willss 1982, Jin and Nida 1984, Sa'adeddin 1987, Shakir and Farghal 1994). In theory at least, such a new role of the audience "will put an end to the centuries-old contention between literalism and liberalism in translating, because the criteria for translation evaluation... is based on the relationship of the texts to their respective receptors" (Chang 1996: 2).

It is our hope that the findings and the recommendations presented in the study will be considered as a positive input for raising the acceptability of particularly technical terms in Arabic lexicography. After all, term accuracy and audience positive reaction to it are essentially one and the same thing. As Nida points out:

> Actually, one cannot speak of 'accuracy' apart from comprehension by the receptor, for there is no way of treating accuracy except in terms of the extent to which the message gets across (or should presumably get across) to the intended receptor (Nida 1964:183).

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[2] The Arabic terms in the dictionary for "adjunct", "jargon", "anaphora", "click", and "prosody" were described as particularly complex and unfamiliar by ten university instructors (communication with the researcher after responding to the questionnaire). They added that suggesting such terminology involves an extreme degree of peculiarity.