

**Arabic loanwords in French  
via Spanish as an intermediate language:  
A semantic analysis**

MARTA KAŻMIERCZAK

*Received 5.07.2024,  
received in revised form 19.11.2024,  
accepted 21.11.2024.*

**Abstract**

The aim of this article is to examine the way in which, from a semantic point of view, words have passed from language A to language B by transiting through language C, on the model of the assimilation of Arabic words into French through Spanish. We are establishing a systematic classification of transition processes and their adaptation in two different historical-cultural realities (Spain of Al-Andalus and France), with the aim of examining the extent to which these double loanwords have been modified, and possibly altered. Representative examples have been selected to illustrate each process.

**Keywords**

historical linguistics, romance, lexicology, word formation, semantics

## **Analiza semantyczna zapożyczeń arabskich w języku francuskim poprzez hiszpański jako język pośredni**

### **Abstrakt**

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie w jaki sposób, z semantycznego punktu widzenia, słowa przeszły z języka A do języka B, za pośrednictwem języka C, na podstawie asymilacji słów arabskich w języku francuskim poprzez hiszpański. Tworzymy systematyczną klasyfikację procesów przejściowych i ich adaptacji w dwóch różnych realiach historyczno-kulturowych (Hiszpania-Al-Andalus i Francja) w celu zbadania zakresu, w jakim te podwójne zapożyczenia zostały zmodyfikowane i ewentualnie zmienione. Wybraliśmy charakterystyczne przykłady, aby zilustrować każdy proces.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

językoznawstwo historyczne, romanistyka, leksykologia, słotwórstwo, semantyka

### **1. Theoretical and formal aspects**

French is a language which has been in almost constant contact with the Arab world from the Crusades to recent periods of colonisation. This was particularly the case during the period of Muslim Spain, commonly known as Al-Andalus, from the 8th to the 15th century. During this period, many conflicts and cultural exchanges occurred, and French borrowed a significant number of Arabic words that Spanish had already adopted. The assimilation of these words took place in two steps: the first from Andalusian Arabic into Spanish, and the second from Spanish to French. This semantic assimilation also took place on three formal levels: phonetic, morphological and semantic. It is this last aspect that is introduced here. For ease of reading, Arabic words are transcribed using the DIN 31635 system. As we shall see, several of these words were borrowed from French

to English later on, which in this case implies a three-stage transmission: Arabic – Spanish – French – English.

The semantic assimilation of old loanwords means venturing onto a slippery slope where we are often reduced to more or less plausible conjectures. As the Andalusian variant of Arabic is still not sufficiently studied, in many cases it is difficult to determine unequivocally whether a semantic change has taken place in the Arabic or Ibero-Roman environment. The rule often mentioned by authors, according to which the semantic assimilation of loanwords generally consists in restricting the meaning of a polysemic etymon, is mainly true of lexemes borrowed at present. On the other hand, it is not always confirmed in the case of old loanwords, including those which are the subject of the present analyses. The lexical polysemy of ancient languages embedded in early civilisations is not very well studied. In the case of old loanwords, it often only appears later, when foreign lexical units, initially monosemic, are enriched over several centuries by assimilation into the borrowing language of new meanings which reflect the civilisational development. The following classification of the assimilatory mechanisms of Spanish Arabisms at the semantic level is based on the dichotomy of conservation of meaning / change of meaning. Either of this semantic relation is observed at the moment of transfer of a foreign lexical unit from language A (Andalusian Arabic) to language B (Mozarabic dialect / [old] Castilian). These relationships therefore apply to the chronologically primary meaning of "borrowed" in relation to the semantics of its Arabic etymon. Starting from the original meaning of a given loan, the subsequent semantic changes will be analysed in chronological order up to its contemporary meanings. Within the framework of this semantic dichotomy, a sub-classification will be introduced: 1 – Arabism / indigenous equivalent, semantically close or identical; 2 – Arabism without indigenous equivalent. Arabisms doubling native equivalents are not uncommon in the bilingual environment. Over time, for one reason or another, this type of Arabism supplants its native equivalent(s) or vice

versa. It may also be that the Arabism and its Romance equivalent(s) persist to the present day.

The assimilation of Arabisms despite the existence of native equivalents is usually explained by the fact that the Arabic synonym (or word with a similar meaning) made it possible to distinguish, within the same class of referents present in the Arabic and Ibero-Roman cultures (e.g. fortresses), the characteristics typical of the foreign culture. Lőrinczi (1969), in his semantic assimilation of Spanish Arabisms, reduced this difference to the *moro* / *no moro* formula in relation to the set of referent characteristics referred to an Arabism on the one hand, and its native equivalent on the other. In fact, Arab fortresses were different from those built by the Christians, so despite the existence of Ibero-Roman names (*fortaleza*, *castillo*) referring to indigenous realities, the Arabic noun *al-qaṣr* (*alcázar*) was borrowed to designate a specific type of Moorish fortress (cf. below). The semantic relationships between the two elements of this type of lexical doublet (*moro* / *no moro*) underwent changes as a result of the evolution of the referents specific to historically and culturally variable Arab and Christian realities. In general, in the case of Arabism, the *moro* feature underwent more or less advanced neutralisation over time, leading either to the blurring of semantic differences between equivalents, as in the case of *alcázar* / *castillo* (cf. *infra*), or to the disappearance of one or other element of the doublet following a complete fusion of the *moro* / *no moro* features within a single referent, as in the case of the Arabic *guitarra*, which supplanted the indigenous equivalent *cítara* (cf. *infra*), or finally to the advanced semantic differentiation of the two elements of the doublet, as in the case of *alcalde* / *juez*.

## 2. Semantic assimilation processes

### 2.1. Conservation of meaning

#### 2.1.1. Presence of native equivalents

The first category of semantic assimilation is where the borrowing language (Spanish in this case) already has a word designating the referent in question. This is the case with the words *alcázar*, which have just been mentioned, and also of *alcalde* (judge, mayor), *marfil* (ivory), *noria* (well), *alquermes* (vermilion), and *alcazaba* (small fortified site). Below we look at the emblematic case of the word guitar, which English then borrowed from French afterwards.

***guitarra*** (ar. *qīṭāra*)

**From Arabic to Spanish:** In medieval Spain, there were two types of guitar: a Greco-Latin guitar (*cítara*) and a *guitarra morisca*, brought to al-Andalus by the Arabs and featured in Spanish iconography from the 12th century onwards (*Cantigas de Santa Maria* of Alfonso X of Castile : TLF). The *guitarra morisca*, with its ovoid shape and short neck, was similar to a lute. The *cítara*, on the other hand, more closely resembled the modern guitar. Ancient guitars had double strings, the number of which could vary, which distinguishes them from today's guitars. The contemporary classical guitar, unlike the Spanish one, appeared in its present form from the nineteenth century onwards, and is the result of the evolution of the two aforementioned types. A complete fusion of the *moro / no moro* characteristics then took place in relation to the current referent, resulting in the disappearance of one element of the lexical doublet *guitarra (morisca) / cítara*. Both Spanish terms come from Greek: *cítara*, now an archaism, through Latin and *guitarra*, the name of today's instrument, also from Greek but through Arabic. The creator of the contemporary classical guitar (*guitarra clásica*) and its flamenco variant (*guitarra flamenco*)

was the Spanish luthier, Antonio de Torres Jurado. That is not to say that *guitarras moriscas* and *cítaras* have disappeared. They can be found in museums or in groups that specialise in playing old instruments. Apart from the classical guitar and the flamenco guitar, there are different kinds of acoustic guitars (*guitarras acústicas*) and electric guitars (*guitarras eléctricas*). *Un, una guitarra* in the metonymic sense also means a guitarist playing in an orchestra or band. On the other hand, *una guitarra* as a technical term refers metaphorically, given certain visual associations, to the plaster crusher.

**From Spanish to French:** In medieval France, the *zither* (Greco-Latin guitar) was first used. In the 13th century, the hispanism *guitarre* is noted, which proves that more or less at that time the Moorish-style guitar from the Iberian Peninsula appeared in France. The term *guitare moresche* is noted in French texts from the 14th century (*Comptes de l'hôtel de Jean, duc de Normandie*). The later evolution of this referent occurred under the influence of changes in Spain (cf. above). At the end of this evolution, in the 19th century, France adopted a Spanish-style guitar (i.e. the contemporary classical guitar). Nowadays, this Spanish term has a very broad meaning because it can refer to different types of guitar (flamenco, acoustic, etc.) and to any instrument, often folkloric, more or less similar to the guitar: Arabic guitar, Hawaiian guitar, balalaika, banjo, bouzouki, etc. In a metaphorical sense, the noun *guitar* was used as an architectural term from the 19th century onwards to designate a framework made mainly of curved pieces, used to support the projecting roofs of dormer windows. The openwork structure of this rounded framework is reminiscent of the decorative motifs of the guitar rosette. Moreover, in a metaphorical sense, this Hispanicism is present in expressions, now outdated, such as *autre guitare, c'est la même guitare* ('jingle, banal theory or hackneyed maxim').

**noria** (ar. *nā'ūra*)

**From Arabic to Spanish:** This is one of the best-known hydraulic machines in the history of mankind used to irrigate fields. Originally, widespread in Greece and the Near East, it was also used by the Romans throughout the Empire, including the province of Hispania. In al-Andalus, these machines were used on a large scale by the Arabs, who also took over the Roman norias and perfected them. At a later date, Arab versions of the norias were also used by the Catholic kings. So it is hardly surprising that the Arabic word *noria* came to supplant the native equivalent *tímpano* (from the Latin *tympanum*). Old Castilian used the form with the agglutinated article, *annoria*, which persisted as an archaism (*anoria*). In modern Spanish, there are other Arabisms for different types of hydraulic device, but only the noun *noria* has been borrowed by many languages. Over time, modernised norias began to be used in a variety of ways in other fields, such as mining. As a result of a centuries-long evolution of the referent, the *moro* trait was gradually neutralised, and various types of modern norias are entirely devoid of it. In the metaphorical sense, the *noria* refers to hard labour and a panoramic wheel in amusement parks.

**From Spanish to French:** *Norias* have been used in modern-day France for a very long time. In Roman times, this device was called a *tympanum*. Later, French created a number of synonymous terms, such as *moulin à eau* (watermill), *roue à eau* (waterwheel), *puits à chapelet* (chain pump) or *posaraca*. *Posaraca*, a term used in *langue d'oc* countries (Bertrand Boysset) and noted in 13th century texts, is most likely derived from a nominalised Occitan phrase [*il*] *posa [et] raca* ("he draws water and spits"). Despite this wealth of terminology, French adopted the Hispanic *noria* in the eighteenth century. This economic form proved very useful. On one hand, since it had the same meaning as its Spanish equivalent (a traditional hydraulic machine used for irrigation and consisting of a vertical bucket wheel), it was more precise than the indigenous equivalents such as *moulin à eau*, *roue à eau*, which also referred to

machines that simply transmitted the force of water. On the other hand, it replaced the traditional term *tympān*, which was characterised by a high degree of polysemy (hydraulic, architectural, medical, carpentry and printing terms).

### 2.1.2. Absence of native equivalents

In other cases, borrowing is fully justified by the absence of native equivalents. This is the case with the word *sarabacane*, and some names of edible plants such as *azerole*, as well as *curcurma* and *lime* (which has been preserved in English but not in French, which has only kept "citron"). We will examine the cases of these last two words here.

***lima*** (ar. *laīmūn*)

**From Arabic to Spanish:** Different varieties of limes and lemons have been known for a very long time, as evidenced by a varied etymology that ends up in the Persian language (*līmū*, *līmūn*) and from which comes the Arabic equivalent *laīmūn*. Europe came to know these citrus fruits through the Arabs, who spread them through the East for a variety of uses, including medicinal (e.g. treating eczema or cleaning wounds) and decorative. The Arabs propagated the cultivation of these citrus fruits in al-Andalus around the 10th century, so it is highly likely that the Arabic term was assimilated by Mozarabic dialects relatively early on. The original Mozarabic form appears to be *laimon*. It was then changed to *limon* by analogy with the form *lima*, which appears in later Castilian texts (15th century). These citrus fruits spread to the courts of Castile and Aragon from the 13th century onwards, following the progress of the Reconquista. Of the two Castilian forms, *limón* and *lima*, French only assimilated the latter (*lime*), as the French form *limon* is an Arabism borrowed directly from Italian. Each of these two Arabic names, *limón* and *lima*, referred to different varieties of this citrus fruit. As ancient sources show, *limas* were smaller, rounder and sweeter tasting than *limones*. What is more, *limo-*



nes probably had more varieties than *limas*, as in old lexicographical sources *lima* is often described as an '*especie de limón*' and *limones*, according to the 18th century *Diccionario de Autoridades*, "*hailos dulces y ágricos, y mezclados de agrío y dulce*". Nevertheless, from the outset, there was terminological confusion between these two Arabisms, which persists today, as it is not uncommon for the two nouns to be used interchangeably. Latin botanical terminology is the most precise. With the exploration of new continents and territories, Europe discovered new varieties of *limas*. Today, two varieties are the most widespread: *lima ácida* or *gallega* (*citrus aurantifolia*), also known as *limón peruano* (*mexicao*), which is highly acidic and green in colour, and *lima persa* or *lima Tahití* (*citrus latifolia*), which is less acidic and yellowish in colour. Other well-known varieties include *lima dulce* (*limón dulce* or *limón de Roma*), which resembles a lemon, *lima de Cantón* (*limón mandarina*), which is similar to a mandarin orange, *lima larga*, which grows only in Australia, and *lima de Nueva Guinea*. The noun *lima* is also a synonym for *limero* (the tree that produces this fruit) and also refers to a drink made from this fruit. Following lexical conversion, it can also be used as an adjective to designate a colour similar to one of the fruit (*color lima*: light shade of green tending towards yellow).

**From Spanish to French:** Europe first saw an acid variety of the citrus fruits mentioned in this paragraph, thanks to Italy, where the Crusaders brought them (*Trésor de la langue française*). Genoa became the main centre for growing and distributing these fruits in the 15th century. Nevertheless, France imported them from Italy before this date, assimilating at the same time an Italian Arabism *limone* with the same etymon as its Spanish equivalent (see above). The Italianism *limon* is already noted in texts from the early 14th century. Long before, French had created a neologism with a similar meaning, *citron* (13th century). It is not clear what type of lexicogenic formation is involved here. It may be a formal and semantic

adaptation of the Latin form *citrum*, which designates the *cédrat* (Eng. *citron*, medieval form *citre*) close to the lemon, known in Europe since Antiquity, or a contamination of this form with *limon*, which would prove that French assimilated this Italianism before the 14th century. The lexical doublet *citron* / *limon* shows that medieval France imported different varieties of citrus fruit. Old French sources describe *limons* as more acidic than *lemons*, which can be sour or sweet, and which have more varieties. Over time, given the similarity between *limes* and *lemons*, the two terms became interchangeable. Today, *limon* is an archaism, a synonym for *lemon* in the current sense. *Limas*, imported from the Iberian Peninsula, appeared in France at a later date, as evidenced by the Spanish word *lime*, which was not assimilated into French until the 16th century. The old varieties of limes were different from today's because the old sources describe them as "very sweet" (Furetière 1727). Over time, under the influence of Spanish, French broadened the semantics of the noun *lime*, which now mainly refers to acidic species. Acidic *lime*, otherwise known as *citron vert* (Eng. *lime*), includes Gallet lime (*citrus aurantifolia*) and Persian lime (*citrus latifolia*). Other varieties may be acidic (e.g. *Rangpour lime*) or sweet, also known as *limettes* or *citrons doux* (sweet lemons) (e.g. Mediterranean (Palestine) lime, Tunisian lime etc.). Similar to Spanish, the noun *lime* can be used as an adjective to designate a colour similar to one of this fruit (lime colour: light shade of green tending towards yellow). The English words *lime*, *lemon* and *citron* are French borrowings.

***cúrcuma*** (ar. *kurkum*)

**From Arabic to Spanish:** This plant, originally from Asia and long appreciated for its nutritional and medicinal properties, was introduced to al-Andalus by the Arabs in the 13th century. Originally, they mistakenly believed it to be a variety of saffron (*Dictionnaire étymologique*, Ménage). To name this Asian plant, they borrowed the Persian noun *kurkum* for saffron. It was not

until relatively late that turmeric began to spread from al-Andalus to medieval Europe, where it was used mainly as a seasoning for dishes and sauces, considered a cheaper substitute for the saffron that was so popular at the time, and whose cultivation in al-Andalus had been introduced by the Moors in the 9th century. The Arabs, who traded saffron on a large scale, popularised the spice in many European countries in the early Middle Ages. In some languages, the name was borrowed directly from Arabic (esp. *azafrán*), while in others, such as French (*safran*), this Arabism was assimilated through medieval Latin, as the cultivation of saffron was developed in Christian monasteries. Only in Greek do we find the noun *κρόκος*, etymologically related to its lexical equivalents in Semitic languages, Sanskrit or Persian. Turmeric is now widely used, mainly in medicine and cosmetics. The origins of the English word, although thought to have been borrowed from French, are not clearly elucidated, and may be an alteration of an Indian word.

**From Spanish to French:** As in other European countries, turmeric spread to France in the 15th-16th centuries thanks to Arab traders who brought it from Spain, where it was already known in the 13th century. The Hispanic term *curcuma*, found in French texts from the 16th century onwards, originally referred (like its Spanish equivalent) to a plant whose root, also known as Indian saffron, was used mainly as a spice, a cheaper substitute for the long-known saffron. The latter term, also of Arabic origin, appeared in French in the 12th century through medieval Latin (*safranum*). Over time, this term came to have more and more applications, as turmeric, in addition to its uses in cooking and medicine, is also used in cosmetology and as a yellow dye in the dyeing of materials (fabrics, wood, leather, paper etc.).

## 2.2. Restriction of meaning

In cases where the semantic field is restricted, borrowing is again done with or without the presence of equivalents in the native lexicon, and also according to the *moro / no moro* distinction.

### 2.2.1. Presence of native equivalents

#### 2.2.1.1. Opposition arabism / native equivalent corresponding to the referential dichotomy *moro / no moro*

In addition to the complex cases of the words *alcohol* and *hasard* (chance) detailed below, both also passed into English. We also find in this category the words *algazil* (Arabic guard), *ataurique* (carved plant motif), *adobe* (terracotta brick), *alcarazas* (vase), *alfange* (Moorish sword), *almagra* (red ochre) and *alezan* (type of light brown horse).

**alcohol** (ar. al-kuḥūl)

**From Arabic to Spanish:** The semantic evolution of this Arabism means that the noun *alcohol* must be considered a loan in two ways: diachronically (from the Middle Ages to the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries) as a loan in the strict sense, and synchronically as a semantic calque, since the new semantics, borrowed from Latin and more specifically from the Latin of the alchemists, is the source of most of its contemporary meanings. The Iberian dialects borrowed the Arabo-Andalusian form *al-kuḥul* mainly in the sense of 'eye shadow' (made from galena or stibine). A restriction of meaning took place, as the Arabic etymon also referred to a 'very fine powder' (including galena and stibine). Ibero-Roman sources from the 13th century attest to the form *alcohol* and its more advanced variant *alcofol*. This was an eye care product, spread by the Arabs in al-Andalus, applied as a medicine but also as a cosmetic, whose main

ingredient was powdered lead sulphide (galena) or antimony sulphide (stibine). Eastern women used it to darken their eyelids, eyebrows, eyelashes and eye contours. Many Spanish and French lexicographical sources define this Arabism imprecisely as antimony powder, whereas the term *antimoine* actually means "shiny white metal", from which eye shadow could not be produced. The main ingredient of this powder was a dark grey crystalline ore called *stibine*, *stibnite* or *antimoine*, which possessed this metal. This lack of precision is due to the fact that the Latin term *antimonio* (Sp.) / *antimoine* (Fr.) used to refer to this ore and not – as it does today – to a metal which, until the 17th century, was known as *régule (regulus) d'antimoine*. What is more, the alchemists and physicians of the time (in their texts, the term *alcoh(f)ol* in the sense of 'fine powder' was very common) were more interested in antimony than lead, as it was thought to have medicinal properties and alchemists were particularly fond of this metal for its ability to free gold from its impurities. It is therefore hardly surprising that in these texts, written in Latin, Spanish, Italian or French, *alcoh(f)ol* is most often referred to antimony powder, hence the imprecision of contemporary lexicographers. Recent chemical analyses of micro-samples of old cosmetics have proven that this eye care product is made from galena, as emphasised by Bouysse and Girault. This product had been known on the Iberian Peninsula for a very long time (since Roman times and in the early Middle Ages), but its renaissance took place under the Arab influence, so the loan *alcohol* / *alcofol* quickly replaced pre-existing and almost forgotten Latinisms designating this product.

Another semantic evolution of the Arabism *alcoh(f)ol* took place in scientific Latin (14th-16th centuries), as European alchemists, who wrote their treatises in this language and were keenly interested in this powder, borrowed this Spanish Arabism with a great extension of meaning: fine powder based on stibine or galena > any fine powder > any fine and pure extract (prepared in pharmacy, for example) > fine and pure extract obtained by trituration, sublimation or distillation. The

next stage in the semantic evolution of *alcohol* in the Latin of alchemists is, this time, a restriction of meaning by Paracelsus, who used the term in the sense of ‘extract obtained by distillation’, probably for the first time, and then in even more restricted sense of *alkohol vini* as the equivalent of the Latin *spiritus vini* used at the time, i.e. ‘an aqueous solution obtained by distilling wine’ (ethanol). This solution is the purest essence of wine. Over time, alchemists, chemists, physicians and pharmacists began to use the elliptical form *alk(c)ohol [vini]* in a broader sense, as a subtle essence (ethanol) obtained by distilling wine or another previously fermented beverage. In this sense, the term *alk(c)ohol* gradually began to replace equivalent Latinisms, such as *aqua ardens* or *aqua vitae*. The semantics of *alk(c)ohol* in scientific Latin indicates a break between the ancient and contemporary uses of this Arabism. The extract from *Pharmacia acroamatica* (1686) by Georg Wedel, a German professor of chemistry and medicine, demonstrates this perfectly. After pointing out that the term ‘alcohol’ was used to designate any kind of fine powder, including an antimony-based eye product, he remarked: “[...] a subtle essence of liquids called volatiles, of which the spirit of wine, which is known as alcoholic because it is so subtle, is also called alcohol” (Fr. [...] *alcohol etiam prædicatur de subtilitate liquidorum nominatim spiritum, unde spiritus vino alcoholisatus audit, qui adeo subtilis est*).

Spanish gradually assimilated all the new uses of this Arabism from scientific Latin, although this did not mean that traditional semantics was neglected. From this point onwards, the loanword ‘alcohol’ has the status of a semantic calque in Spanish, as most new meanings are assimilated from other languages. Initially, the term *alcohol* in the new meanings assimilated from scientific Latin was used in scientific language. In the 18th century, Spanish sources attest to the meanings ‘extract obtained by sublimation and distillation’, and then ‘extract obtained by distilling wine’. The noun *alcohol* gradually began to include distillates of other fermented beverages, and entered common parlance, mainly in a broader sense to de-

signate all kinds of spirits obtained by distillation. In this way, it became the equivalent of indigenous terms such as *aguardiente*, and later came to designate any kind of alcoholic beverage. It should be pointed out that in the beginning, the adjectival form [*bebida*] *alcoholica* was used. The final stage in the semantic evolution of this Arabism occurred in the 19th century. At that time, given the intense development of chemistry, the noun *alcohol* became a scientific term *par excellence*, meaning 'organic compound with properties similar to ethanol'. The systematic extension of the scientific semantics of the term *alcohol* occurred through a mechanism of semantic calque, largely from French, given the important contribution of French chemists in this field (see below). As a result, these substances began to be called alcohols too, for example: *alcohol sólido*, *alcohol de menta*, *alcohol de quemar* etc. In contemporary Spanish, the noun *alcohol* also retains the meanings referring to its original semantics: the term is still used in cosmetology to designate a powder used to blacken hair, eyebrows and eyelashes, and in mineralogy to designate galena. As new meanings of the noun *alcohol* dominated its original semantics (eye shadow), the Spanish created the neologism *kohl* to refer to this cosmetic. It is used in a historical context and in reference to current events. Today, this eye shadow is made with products other than the old *alcohol*. This neologism was formed by the contamination of *alcohol* and the classic Arabic form *kuhl*. We cannot rule out the possibility that it is a loanword from the French form *kohl*, which has the same meaning.

**From Spanish to French:** The semantic development of this noun in French is similar to its Spanish equivalent: in its first stage it is a complete borrowing, and from the Renaissance onwards, when *alcohol* borrowed new meanings from scientific Latin that gave rise to modern meanings, this Hispanism has to a large extent the status of a semantic calque. Although this loanword is only noted in texts from the 14th century onwards in the same sense as its Spanish equivalent (eye shadow made from pulverised stibine or galena), it was most likely assimilated

in French much earlier, thanks to the import of this product from the Iberian Peninsula and also to oriental influences in court fashions following the Crusades. Eye shadow made from these minerals had been known in France since Roman times, but the influence of Ibero-Arabic culture led to a return to this product in the Middle Ages. From the Renaissance onwards, French began to assimilate new meanings for the word *alco(h)ol* from scientific Latin: fine powder > any fine, pure extract > fine, pure extract obtained by trituration, sublimation or distillation > extract obtained by distilling wine. This latter meaning appeared as early as in the 17th century. Later, the term was also applied to distillates of other fermented beverages (ethanol), and its new uses successively moved from scientific French to everyday French, where it broadened its meaning to refer to all kinds of alcoholic beverages. Initially, an adjectival form such as *boisson alcoolique* was used (see Littré). In the first half of the 19th century, the meaning continued to broaden: the noun *alcohol* began to refer to an organic compound with properties similar to those of Paracelsian *alcohol [vini]*. This new scientific semantics was mainly due to French scholars; consequently, this loan, unlike Spanish, is not a semantic calque at this stage of assimilation. Initially, *alco(h)ol*, as a generic name in chemistry, was only applied to two organic compounds: ethanol, which had been known for a long time and was called *alco(h)ol* at the time, and methanol, whose chemical composition, comparable to ethanol, had just been discovered by Dumas and Peligot. Of course, the idea of calling these two compounds *alco(h)ol* came from a Swedish scientist, Berzelius (in 1834), who named them *weinalkohol* and *holzalkohol* ('wood alcohol'), but it was French chemists in the second half of the 19th century who developed the terminological status of this noun on the basis of the new alcohols they were discovering. The entry for *alcohol* in the first volume of the *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX siècle* (1866) undoubtedly contributed to the assimilation of the scientific semantics of the term by other languages. Similar to Spanish, the term alcohol over time became a generic name for sub-



stances containing this chemical compound, used in various fields: solidified alcohol, camphorated alcohol, methylated spirits, etc. (see above). In contemporary French, the noun *alcohol* has also retained the meaning associated with its original semantics: very fine powder (ancient pharmacy). Similar to Spanish, as the new meanings of the noun *alco(h)ol* dominated its etymological meaning (eye shadow), French created a neologism *khôl* to designate this cosmetic, used in the historical and contemporary context. The ancestor of this term is the form *kouhel* (a deformation of the Arabo-Andalusian form [al]-kuḥūl), already noted in the 17th century.

**azar** (ar. *az-zahr*) ‘chance’

**From Arabic to Spanish:** Contrary to what one might think, this loanword, as a part of the Arabic linguistic heritage, is not linked to abstract concepts but to playing activities, since *az-zahr* is primarily used to refer to a dice in Andalusian Arabic. To fully understand the complex semantic evolution of this etymon, we need to go back to classical Arabic, where *az-zahr* literally means ‘flower’. The Moors introduced in al-Andalus an oriental variant of a dice game called *nard*. A flower called *az-zahrat an-nard* would have been depicted on one side of the dice. When rolling the dice, the aim was to ‘have a flower’ (as we have a six today), thus synonymous with a favourable throw of the dice, and then, by extension of meaning, the dice itself. This last meaning was popularised in an abbreviated form *az-zahr* in Andalusian Arabic, and the Iberian dialects borrowed precisely this meaning, even though they had an indigenous equivalent of Latin origin, *dado*. Given that the etymological meaning of the Arabic word *azar* (‘flower’) was unknown to the natives of the Iberian Peninsula, and that the mark of success in this game was the native word *flor*, an iconic representation of which appeared on one side of the dice, the Arabic word *azar* began to be used from the 13th century onwards in reference to other sides of the dice, which were signs of bad luck. The meaning of

*azar* as ‘a dice to play with’ gradually disappeared in favour of the long-existing indigenous word *dado*. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the meaning of *azar* was extended to mean ‘bad luck’, ‘misfortune’ and ‘risk’ (see Eng. *hazard*), and the contemporary basic meanings of ‘fate’, ‘chance’ and ‘destiny’ are documented from the 18th century onwards, hence the expression *juegos de azar*, among others. But if it means ‘a game of dice’, then when the element *azar* is used, the etymological meaning is updated. This Arabism in the sense of ‘risk’ also appears in the economic and administrative term *azar moral* (the synonym for *riesgo moral*), which is a structural calque of *moral hazard* in English.

**From Spanish to French:** This Hispanism, considered to be one of the oldest, is first noted in an Old French text in 1150 (*hasart*) (Kirkham: 115 in *Dictionnaire des mots français d’origine arabe*). Its medieval spelling is not codified (*hazart*, *hasart*, *hazard*, *hasard*). Originally, it referred to a variety of dice game adopted from the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the terminology associated with this game (chance as a winning and losing score). In comparison with the Castilian etymon, we are dealing with either the conservation of meaning or the restriction of meaning. The later semantic evolution of *hasard* is similar to the Spanish equivalent, except that the contemporary meanings are noted much earlier in French. Thus, because of the frequent *hazarz* (losing scores) in this game, the term began to be used in the figurative sense of ‘bad move’ as early as the 13th century. In the 15th century, the term was used in the broader sense of ‘risk’, ‘obstacle’ and ‘danger’ (*Songe doré de la pucelle* in *Anciennes poésies françaises*: 213 in TLF), which is now considered to be outdated. This semantics is at the origin of the golf term *hasard* (there is also an archaic form *hazard*) which means ‘obstacle, accident on a golf course’. The modern meaning “case, fortuitous event” probably appeared at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. Consequently, we are dealing with a move away from the original meaning of ‘chance’ in the expression *jeu de hasard*, lit. ‘game of dice’. The absolute and philosophical meaning dominates: ‘a game whose moves depend

on chance'. Similar to the Spanish term *azar moral*, the French equivalent *hasard moral* is a structural calque of the English *moral hazard*.

### **2.2.1.2. Opposition between Arabism and the indigenous equivalent corresponding to the *moro* referent**

This category includes two terms, *mozárabe* and *mudéjar*, which are designations of social types (García González 2013). *Mozárabe* is a term of debated meaning, which we will not go into here. As far as *mudéjar* is concerned, the Andalusian Arabs used the nominalised participial form *mudaǧǧan* (literally 'stopped', 'fixed') to express, in condensed form, the essential point: he (the Muslim) who can stay where he is fixed. *Mudéjar*, an Arabism assimilated in this specialised sense, attested in Castilian relatively late (15th century), made it possible to characterise more accurately the complex demographic realities of medieval Spain. The Mudejars, who were largely peasants and craftsmen, were initially able to practise Islam, keep their customs and speak the native language. Later, they became the victims of social, economic and professional restrictions.

### **2.2.1.3. Opposition between Arabism and the indigenous equivalent corresponding to the *no moro* referent**

Here, too, we come across two terms that are specific to the Arab-Andalusian world: *marane* (a Spanish Jew or Moor who was forcibly converted to Catholicism and remained faithful to his religion) (García González 2013) and *patache* (a small sailing boat used by the Christians).

## **2.2.2. Lack of native equivalents**

This category includes the words *arrobe* (unit of weight, which by a complex process gave the word *arobase*, i.e. the symbol @),

*azulejo*, *genette* (short spear), *maravedi* (coin), and also *azimut* and *alcove*, which have entered the everyday language.

***acimut*** (ar. *as-sumūt*)

**From Andalusian Arabic to Spanish:** In the case of the noun *as-sumūt* (literally ‘directions’), a specialisation of meaning took place in the Arabic language because the Arab astronomers, on the basis of their scientific discoveries, created a term based on this noun. This term was linked to an astronomical tool perfected by the Arabs called the *astrolabe*, and later adopted by the Europeans. A whole series of astronomical terms (*zenith* and *azimuth*) were introduced into European languages from the texts of Andalusian astronomers of Arab origin (including Ibn as-Saffar), particularly in the 11th and 12th centuries. In 1270, a work entitled *Libros del saber de astronomía* (based mainly on these texts) commissioned by the King of Castile, Alfonso X, was published. This was the first time the term was used in a borrowed form. With the development of the sciences, this term broadened its semantic scope. It is currently used in navigation, cartography, engineering, mining and ballistics.

**From Spanish to French:** Of the three main astronomical terms of Arabic origin, *zénith*, *nadir* and *azimut*, only the latter was assimilated by French through Spanish. Medieval Latin was the intermediate language for the first two. Their Spanish equivalents *z(c)enit* and *nadir* were also borrowed directly from scientific Latin. The nouns *azimut* and *zénith* share a common Arabic etymology. The only difference concerns an initial morphological form, because the initial form of the loan *zénith* is *samt* (literally ‘direction’), whereas the exact etymon of the form *azimut* is the plural of *samt* with the agglutinated article (*as-sumūt*). Although, according to French lexicographical sources, the noun *azimut*, in the same sense as its Spanish etymon, was borrowed in the 16th century (TLF), it is highly likely that it had already appeared in the astronomical language of medieval French, because English sources state that Middle English

borrowed the term from French at the end of the 14th century. Initially, the spelling *azimuth* dominated, and has been preserved in English. Only Richelet's *Dictionary* (1680) propagated the contemporary spelling; however, Quillet (1965) uses the floating spelling *azimuth* or *azimut*. The semantic evolution of *azimut* in French was similar to its Spanish equivalent (see above). Originally, this term only appeared in scientific texts in the astronomical context. Over time, its various specialised meanings were gradually borrowed from other languages in which new theories of azimuth were published. Here the contribution of French scientists should not be forgotten. As in Spanish, the entry *azimut* appeared relatively late in general dictionaries (it appears in Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* of 1690) and the first dictionary definitions were not very precise. Precise definitions, similar to those we use today, only appeared in the 18th century. Here is the definition in Diderot's *Encyclopaedia*: "azimut of the sun or a star is the arc of the horizon between the meridian of a place, any given vertical, in which the sun or star is located". From the 20th century onwards, the noun *azimut* also encompassed various non-scientific meanings. These are the expressions *dans tous les azimuts*, *tous azimuts* lit. 'in all directions'. These new meanings, initially linked to the etymological meaning of 'directions', first appeared in military vocabulary.

***alcoba*** (ar. *al-qubba*)

**From Arabic to Spanish:** The Arabic etymon originally referred to a dome and a vault (García González 2012) and later, by metonymic usage, to a building in which a dominant architectural element was the dome. This type of building, initially widespread in Persia, with a square floor plan and a main room used to store valuables and objects of worship, was taken over by the Arabs as a prototype for buildings, not only Moorish, representing religious architecture, such as mausoleums, mosques, synagogues etc. This type of building became a key element in the architecture of the Arab world, a characteristic

feature of the al-Andalus landscape. As a result, the word *alcoba* soon appeared in Iberian dialects, initially used in the same sense. Later, this type of building had a wider application that was not linked to religious functions. These buildings contained niches for sleeping, often with a dome-shaped vault, which is why the Arabic noun *al-qubba* began to designate this niche in the 14th century through a metonymisation mechanism. The Arabism *alcoba* also took on this new meaning. Over time, this noun came to refer to the bedrooms found in Moorish buildings, which were representative of Islamic architecture and were later adapted for habitation following the Reconquista. From then on, *alcoba* became a synonym for the indigenous noun *dormitorio* “bedroom” (García González 2012). This Arabism continued to expand its semantic range as the equivalent of *dormitorio*, also in reference to ancient and contemporary European architecture (stylised like Arabic architecture).

The noun *alcoba* in its basic sense (the sleeping room) is a classic example of Arabism, reflecting the changing relationship between Arab and Christian culture over the centuries. This is accompanied by the evolution of the characteristics of the referent to which this noun refers: oriental characteristics, a symbiosis of Moorish and Christian characteristics in the old *dormitorios* and a modern European style in today's rooms. The Arabism *alcoba* also refers to a sleeping compartment in a carriage. It also has metaphorical meanings in reference to historical and current conditions. In the metonymic sense, the noun *alcoba* referred to a traditional meeting of the kings of Mexico in the palace, and in the metaphorical sense, *alcoba* refers to a type of fishing net. A phraseological expression *secretos de alcoba* (intimate details of erotic life) is based on the metonymisation mechanism.

**From Spanish to French:** The loan *alcove* (the form of the time has no circumflex accent), adopted into French in the 17th century (*Trésor de la langue française*), is characterised by a restriction of meaning because it assimilates only the old meaning of the Spanish etymon (a niche for sleeping, often with a domed

roof). At that time, the Spanish noun *alcoba*, which was characterised by a more advanced semantic evolution, generally referred to a sleeping room with a vaulted ceiling. The French *alcôves* of the time were, admittedly, much less oriental in style than the old Iberian *alcobas*. This is particularly true of the vaulted ceiling, a much more characteristic feature of the latter. This fundamental meaning of the name *alcôve* has survived to the present day. Over time, French *alcôves* were also used as meeting places, so company chairs became an essential part of the furniture. A typically French alcove was the *alcôve des Précieuses* (also known as the *ruelle*), which appeared in the 17th century. It was an intimate part of the salon or bedroom, between the bed and the wall, where certain ladies of quality (the *Précieuses*) received guests or held literary and social salons, hence a derivation of the time *alcôviste*, referring to a fine mind who frequented *alcôves*. The literary context is the origin of uses of *alcôve* in the sense of ‘place for somewhat confidential literary discussions, confidential literary salon’. For example, in Jean-Christophe by R. Rolland we read: “he was tired of hearing nothing but talk about literature, – actors, authors, publishers, backstage chatter or literary alcoves”. Until the mid-18th century, French alcoves, separated from the main room by a platform, columns and a balustrade, were often used as reception rooms. Later, the bed was replaced by the sofa, and the word *alcôve* began to refer to a more intimate meeting place, becoming synonymous with *boudoir*. This type of alcove was popular in France mainly in the 19th century. In this context, the word is associated with bourgeois disapproval of “women of ill repute” and a “fin de siècle” lifestyle. These new uses of the alcove are at the origin of expressions based on the mechanism of metonymy (place for trial), such as *secrets d'alcôve*, *confessions d'alcôves* etc.: “Where journalism does not mop up the small facts [...] the chronicle of the house, the indiscretions of the alcove” (Gozlan, *Le notaire de Chantilly*, 1836). Today’s alcove is designed not only to hold a bed. In general, they are recesses built into a room for a particular purpose. There are,

for example, living-room alcoves equipped with a table and wall-mounted benches.

### 3. Conclusion

The processes have been classified here according to the mechanisms involved in Spanish semantic assimilation, which therefore takes place along the lines described in the introduction.

With regard to the assimilation of Spanish to French, the classification of loanwords remains based on the opposition between preservation and change of meaning. The secondary classification criterion will be xenisms / hispanisms referring to adopted referents / hispanisms referring to the pre-existing referents.

From the point of view of the transition to French, the mechanisms of assimilation of Spanish words are schematically by conservation or by restriction of meaning. In the case of conservation of meaning, these may be either xenisms (words referring to foreign realities), as in the case of the words *alcade*, *alcazar* or *arobe* (which gave its name to the @ symbol), hispanisms referring to adopted referents (*guitare*, *curcuma*, *azimut* etc.), hispanisms referring to pre-existing referents (*alcool*, *noria*, *adobe* etc.), or both (*alkermès*). The same taxonomy accounts for the same processes in cases of restrictions of meaning: xenisms (*almagra*, *ataurique* etc.), loanwords referring to adopted referents (*genet*, *sarbacane* etc.) and loanwords referring to pre-existing referents (*alcôve* etc.). The majority of these words have been assimilated in English, generally with a meaning based upon the old French meaning; but it would be interesting to investigate further into this specific matter too.



## References

- Ammadi, Mostafa (2009). "Arabismos en la baja edad media". In: *VII Estudios de Frontera. Islam y Cristianidad. Siglos XII-XVI*, 71–76.
- Bory de Saint-Vincent, Jean-Baptiste (ed.) (1822-1831). *Dictionnaire classique d'histoire naturelle*. Paris: Rey et Gravier, Librairies-Editeurs.
- Bouysse, Philippe, François Girault (2018). *Gemmes, pierres, métaux, substances utiles*. Saint-Denis: Connaissances et Savoirs.
- Boysset, Bertrand (1892). *Revue Romania* 21: 540.
- Chamorro González, María Luisa (2009). "Arabismos en el español actual". *Acta Románica Brasiliensia*. 21: 59–70.
- Clot, André (2004). *L'Espagne musulmane*. Paris: Éditions Perrin.
- Corriente Córdoba, Federico (2005). "El elemento árabe en la historia lingüística peninsular: Actuación directa e indirecta. Los arabismos en los romances peninsulares (en especial en castellano)". In: Rafael Cano Aguilar (ed.). *Historia de la lengua española*. Barcelona: Ariel, 185–206.
- Deroy, Louis (1956). *L'Emprunt linguistique*. Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres».
- García González, Javier (1996). "Los préstamos árabes en el español: una revisión crítica". In: A. Alonso González et al. (eds.). *Actas del III Congreso Internacional de Historia de la lengua española*. Madrid: Arco-Libros, 677–685.
- García González, Javier (2012). "Identidades y actitudes en el contacto entre el árabe y el español medieval y su reflejo en algunos cambios semánticos". *e-Spania : Revue interdisciplinaire d'études hispaniques médiévales et modernes* 13.
- García Martín, José María (2013). *Contacto de lenguas e historia: El caso de los arabismos en español*. Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz.
- Haywood, J. A., H. M. Nahmad (1965). *A New Arabic Grammar of the Written Language*. London: Lund Humphries.
- Millar, María Angélica (1998). "Los arabismos en la lengua española". *Boletín de Filología* 37/2: 781–801.
- Rasmussen, Seth (2014). *The Quest for Aqua Vite: The History and Chemistry of Alcohol from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*. New York: Springer.
- Salgado, Felipe Maíllo (1983). *Los arabismos del castellano en la Baja Edad Media*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca.

Walter, Henriette, Bassam Baraké (2006). *Arabesques. L'aventure de la langue arabe en Occident*. Paris: Robert Laffont.

### **Dictionaries**

Baalbaki, Rohi (1995). *A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary*. Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin.

Bloch, Oscar, Walther von Wartburg (1932). *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française*. Presses Universitaires de France.

*Diccionario de la lengua española*. Madrid: Real Academia Española.

*Diccionarios, Intermedio Lengua Española* (2001). Madrid: Ediciones SM.

*Dictionnaire Français-Arabe* (2008). Paris: Larousse.

Elliou, Bocthor (1882). *Dictionnaire Français-Arabe*. Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie Libraires.

Furetière, Antoine (1727). *Dictionnaire universel*. La Haye: Arnout & Reinier Leers.

Guemriche, Salah (2007). *Dictionnaire des mots français d'origine arabe*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

*Le Littré, dictionnaire de la langue française* (1863). Paris: Hachette.

Rey-Debove, Josette, Alain Rey (2017). *Petit Robert*. Paris: LeRobert.

*Trésor de la Langue Française* (TLF).

Wehr, Hans (1976). *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc.

Marta Kaźmierczak  
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-6369-3401  
Instytut Filologii Romańskiej  
Uniwersytet Gdański  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
marta.kazmierczak@ug.edu.pl