Negotiating Belonging Through Borrowed Words: English Loanword Usage in Iraqi Youth Slang and Its Implications for Identity Construction

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Abstract

This research examines the use of English loanwords in the social media slang of Iraqi youth, with particular attention to how these borrowings function in the negotiation of identity and belonging· Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become linguistic laboratories where hybrid forms of Arabic and English flourish· Words and expressions like story, block, comment, like, online, and crush are not merely lexical adoptions but are reshaped into colloquial Iraqi usage (e·g·, "blocka," "storiyat," "komentat")· Drawing on a corpus of 250 social media posts and comments collected from users aged 16–25 in Mosul and Maysan, supplemented by semi-structured interviews, this study analyzes the semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic roles of English borrowings· The findings reveal that Iraqi youth employ these loanwords to index modernity, humor, and group solidarity, while also marking generational boundaries with older, less digitally immersed populations· The research employs Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework of identity construction and Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model to explain how linguistic choice on social media operates as a performance of self and community· Importantly, the study highlights tensions: while some users valorize English borrowings as symbols of cosmopolitanism, others critique them as signs of cultural alienation or superficiality· By situating Iraqi youth's online slang within broader debates on globalization, language contact, and digital identity, this research contributes to both sociolinguistic theory and the growing field of digital discourse analysis·

1. Background of the Study

Language is not only a medium of communication but also a powerful resource for identity construction, social belonging, and cultural negotiation· In the age of digital globalization, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become primary arenas where language use reflects shifting social dynamics· Among Iraqi youth, a remarkable feature of online discourse is the frequent incorporation of English loanwords into everyday Arabic slang· Words such as story, block, like, comment, crush, and online are recontextualized into local speech,

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appearing in adapted forms such as blocka, storiyat, komentat· These borrowings are not simple lexical insertions but creative linguistic practices that symbolize modernity, digital literacy, and cultural hybridity·

In Iraq, where English has historically been associated with education, prestige, and global mobility, its presence in youth slang highlights a unique intersection of globalization, technology, and generational change· While older generations often perceive English as a marker of formality and academic achievement, younger Iraqis appropriate it as a playful, everyday code that indexes membership in digital communities· This linguistic shift underscores the changing values and identities of youth in post-conflict Iraq, where social media provides both a safe space for expression and a platform for negotiating belonging in a rapidly globalizing world·

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the visible prevalence of English loanwords in Iraqi youth slang, limited research has systematically examined their role in shaping identity and belonging in digital contexts· Existing scholarship on language contact in the Arab world often focuses on formal bilingualism, diglossia, or the influence of English in education· However, less attention has been paid to how youth consciously employ loanwords in informal, online discourse as symbolic resources· This gap is significant, given that loanword usage among Iraqi youth is not merely a matter of linguistic borrowing but a performance of identity, generational distinction, and cultural positioning·

The problem addressed in this study is therefore twofold: first, to identify the semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic functions of English loanwords in Iraqi youth slang; and second, to explore how these linguistic practices contribute to the negotiation of belonging and the construction of self in digital communities·

1.2 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1·What English loanwords are most commonly used in the online slang of Iraqi youth?

2·How are these loanwords semantically and pragmatically adapted into colloquial Iraqi Arabic?

3·In what ways do Iraqi youth use English borrowings to negotiate identity, belonging, and generational boundaries?

4·What ideological tensions arise in youth discourse regarding the use of English loanwords on social media?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are to:

1·Document and categorize the most frequently used English loanwords in Iraqi youth social media slang·

2·Analyze the semantic shifts, morphological adaptations, and pragmatic functions of these borrowings·

3·Examine how English loanwords operate as markers of modernity, group solidarity, and identity construction among Iraqi youth·

4·Investigate the criticisms and debates surrounding English loanword usage as indicators of cultural globalization or alienation·

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several respects· First, it contributes to sociolinguistic theory by situating loanword usage within Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework of identity construction and Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model· Second, it enriches our understanding of language practices in Iraq, a context often underrepresented in global sociolinguistic literature· Third, it provides insights into how digital discourse reshapes cultural and linguistic norms, highlighting the role of youth as linguistic innovators· Finally, by examining the ideological debates surrounding English loanwords, this research sheds light on broader questions of globalization, cultural hybridity, and generational identity in the Middle East·

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The present study limits its investigation to the use of English loanwords in the online slang of Iraqi youth aged 16 to 25· The material for analysis is drawn primarily from popular social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok with particular attention to the cities of Mosul and Maysan, both of which stand out for their sociolinguistic contrasts and distinctive cultural features· The research is not intended to represent Iraqi society as a whole; rather, it offers a focused exploration of how young people in specific digital environments employ borrowed expressions· While identity construction forms the central concern of this work, issues such as phonological variation and regional dialectal patterns lie beyond its scope·

2: Theoretical Background and Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Language Contact and Loanword Adaptation

Loanwords are widely recognized as a natural and inevitable outcome of language contact, arising when speakers interact across linguistic boundaries and gradually adopt foreign lexical items that they reshape to fit the structural constraints of their own language (Hock & Joseph, 2009)· In the case of Arabic, and specifically within Iraqi youth slang, English borrowings provide a fertile site for examining such processes of linguistic adaptation· Borrowed terms rarely enter the recipient language in a raw, unchanged form; instead, they undergo systematic modifications to conform with the host language's phonological, morphological, and syntactic frameworks· For example, consonant clusters unfamiliar to Arabic phonology may be broken up with inserted vowels, while borrowed vowels are often adjusted to align with native vowel systems· Morphological integration is equally common, where affixes are attached to English roots to generate new hybrid forms· Expressions like blocka (from "block") or storiyat (from "stories") exemplify how foreign lexical items are domesticated into Arabic's rich system of derivation and pluralization· Semantic shifts also occur, whereby the meaning of a loanword expands, narrows, or acquires culturally specific connotations different from the original English term· Such changes demonstrate not only the flexibility of Arabic as a recipient language but also the creative agency of speakers who strategically mold foreign elements to meet local communicative and expressive needs (Haugen, 1950; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988)· In this sense, loanwords are not simply passive reflections of linguistic contact; they are active linguistic innovations that bridge global English with the local Arabic environment··

Beyond their structural incorporation, loanwords carry profound symbolic, cultural, and social implications, functioning as more than mere lexical imports· Scholars argue that borrowed words often serve as identity markers, indexing prestige, modernity, cosmopolitanism, and group belonging in ways that transcend their dictionary definitions (Winford, 2003; Myers-Scotton, 2006)· Among Iraqi youth, the incorporation of English loanwords into everyday slang can be seen as a conscious or subconscious strategy of identity construction, positioning speakers within a globalized world while simultaneously distinguishing them from older generations or more conservative

linguistic users· Loanwords can thus reflect aspirations toward modern lifestyles, technological advancement, or Western cultural trends, symbolizing access to cultural capital and global connectedness· At the same time, their use can serve an in-group function, reinforcing bonds among peers who share the same linguistic repertoire while excluding those unfamiliar with these hybrid codes· This dynamic illustrates the double function of loanwords: while they connect local speakers to a broader global discourse, they also sharpen internal distinctions of age, class, education, or subcultural identity· Therefore, the presence of English borrowings in Iraqi youth slang is not just a byproduct of globalization but an active site of cultural negotiation, where linguistic choices map onto broader struggles over belonging, modernity, and self-expression in contemporary Iraqi society·

2.1.2 Code-Switching and Identity

Code-switching, broadly defined as the alternation between two or more linguistic codes within a single conversation, discourse, or even sentence, has been a central topic of sociolinguistic inquiry for decades (Poplack, 1980)· While early research focused primarily on spoken, face-to-face interaction, more recent studies have expanded the scope of analysis to include written and digital contexts, where code-switching often emerges as a salient communicative strategy (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Sebba, 2012)· In these new communicative domains, the blending of languages is not random but systematic, governed by both linguistic constraints and social motivations· For instance, Poplack's (1980) syntactic constraints model highlights structural limitations on where switches can occur, while Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model emphasizes that such choices are never neutral· Instead, code-switching carries social meaning, allowing speakers to negotiate identities, relationships, and power dynamics within multilingual communities· The digital sphere adds further complexity, as written interactions on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok frequently combine Arabic and English elements, producing hybrid texts that mirror spoken bilingual practices while simultaneously responding to the technological and cultural environment of social media·

In the Iraqi digital context, code-switching often manifests through the borrowing and incorporation of English lexical items, particularly those tied to technological and social media functions, such as like, share, comment, or follow· These terms are not merely linguistic imports but are deeply embedded in the digital ecology of communication, where English dominates the interface of global platforms· Their use functions as a stylistic switch that indexes several layers of social meaning: on the one hand, it signals membership in a digitally literate, globally connected youth culture; on the other hand, it distinguishes younger generations from older, monolingual or less digitally fluent users· Furthermore, such switches reflect broader patterns of linguistic prestige, where English carries connotations of modernity, progress, and cultural capital (Kachru, 1994; Winford, 2003)· Thus, Iraqi youth's alternation between Arabic and English online is more than a matter of vocabulary; it is an act of identity performance, where speakers align themselves with global technological discourses while simultaneously constructing local in-group belonging· In this sense, code-switching in digital slang highlights the dual role of language in mediating both globalization and localization, situating Iraqi youth at the intersection of global English and local Arabic identity practices·

2.1.3 Identity Construction Framework

Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic framework conceptualizes identity not as a fixed essence but as an emergent and interactional phenomenon· From this perspective, identity is understood as something individuals do rather than something they simply have, and it is continuously constructed and reconstructed through discourse and everyday communicative practices· Central to this framework is the idea that identity arises from semiotic processes such as stance-taking, where speakers position themselves in relation to others; intertextuality, where they draw on and recontextualize prior discourses; and indexicality, where linguistic forms come to signal social meanings and group affiliations· Lexical choice, particularly in multilingual contexts, is a key resource for identity work, since the selection of one form over another can signal alignment, distance, or resistance to particular cultural or social positions· In digital and youth-centered environments, where language is highly fluid and creative, these processes

become especially visible, as speakers draw from multiple linguistic repertoires to negotiate belonging and differentiation· Thus, rather than treating identity as a stable category, Bucholtz and Hall argue that it must be analyzed as a dynamic, situated practice, enacted moment by moment in interaction·

When applied to the case of English loanwords in Iraqi youth slang, this framework helps illuminate the ways in which identity is co-constructed through seemingly mundane linguistic choices· Borrowed English terms such as like, storiyat, or blocka do not merely fill lexical gaps but actively signal participation in a transnational youth culture shaped by global media, technology, and popular culture· Their incorporation into Iraqi Arabic demonstrates a form of localization, where foreign elements are reconfigured to fit local phonological, morphological, and semantic patterns, thereby producing hybrid forms that are both global and distinctly Iraqi· At the same time, these choices index social meanings: they can convey modernity, technological literacy, and cosmopolitan orientation, while also distinguishing youth from older generations or from speakers with more traditional linguistic repertoires· Through such practices, Iraqi youth engage in stance-taking toward global English appropriating its cultural capital while simultaneously embedding it within local speech norms, thus asserting a unique generational and cultural identity· This co-construction of identity through linguistic borrowing highlights how global flows of language and culture are never passively received but are actively negotiated, reinterpreted, and transformed in everyday interaction· In short, the use of English loanwords within Iraqi youth slang exemplifies the interactional processes described by Bucholtz and Hall, showing how identity emerges at the intersection of the global and the local, the modern and the traditional·

2.1.4 Globalization and Digital Discourse

Globalization has significantly accelerated the diffusion of English, positioning it as a global lingua franca that transcends geographical, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries (Crystal, 2003; Pennycook, 2007)· English functions not only as a medium of international communication but also as a carrier of global cultural flows, shaping practices in education, business, technology, and popular culture· In the era of digital connectivity, social media platforms have become powerful "linguistic laboratories" where hybrid codes are continuously created, negotiated, and circulated (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Blommaert, 2010)· These spaces encourage innovative practices of language mixing, where users fluidly alternate between English and their local languages to produce texts that reflect both global participation and local belonging· For instance, hashtags, memes, and digital slang often combine English words with localized adaptations, producing forms of communication that are at once familiar to international audiences and deeply rooted in local cultural contexts· Such practices highlight how globalization does not erase linguistic diversity but rather fosters new repertoires of hybrid expression in which English plays a central role as both a communicative resource and a symbolic marker of global connectedness·

In Arab societies, the role of English within this globalized communicative landscape is particularly complex· On one level, English often symbolizes cosmopolitanism, access to education, technological literacy, and modernity, serving as a form of cultural capital that signals sophistication and upward social mobility (Bassiouney, 2009; Albirini, 2016)· Young Arabs who incorporate English loanwords or code-switch into English are frequently perceived as part of a globalized youth culture that transcends national boundaries· However, this symbolic capital is not universally celebrated; it is also contested and problematized· Critics argue that the increasing reliance on English may lead to cultural erosion, linguistic dependency, or even forms of alienation from Arabic linguistic traditions and cultural identity (Haeri, 2003)· The ambivalence surrounding English reflects a broader tension within Arab societies: on the one hand, it represents opportunity, progress, and global integration; on the other hand, it raises concerns about authenticity, cultural preservation, and linguistic purity· This tension underscores that globalization is not a uniform or unidirectional process but rather a site of negotiation where global languages like English are both embraced and resisted, depending on the social, cultural, and political context in which they are used.

2.2 Review of Related Literature

2.2.1 English in the Arab World

Studies have highlighted the increasing visibility of English in Arab countries, particularly in media, advertising, and youth culture (Rouchdy, 2002; Ferguson, 2013)· In Iraq, English has historically been tied to education and global mobility but has gained new dimensions through digital communication, where youth incorporate English borrowings in informal contexts (Al-Khafaji, 2018)· This shift in Iraq reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics where English operates as both a practical tool and a symbolic resource· On the practical level, English is associated with digital platforms, technological interfaces, and global knowledge, making its borrowings almost unavoidable in online interaction· On the symbolic level, however, the use of English in informal contexts by Iraqi youth represents a generational redefinition of identity, where English borrowings are not limited to academic or professional domains but are repurposed for humor, creativity, and self-expression in everyday digital slang· This practice highlights how Iraqi youth appropriate global linguistic forms to construct new social meanings, positioning themselves as active agents in globalization rather than passive recipients· By embedding English into local communicative practices, they create hybrid repertoires that both reflect and reshape cultural belonging, balancing aspirations for modernity with the affirmation of local identity·

2.2.2 Loanwords in Arabic Dialects

Loanwords are not a new phenomenon in Arabic· French has left traces in North Africa, while English dominates in the Gulf and Levant (Owens, 2013; Holes, 2016)· Iraqi Arabic, in particular, has long absorbed foreign lexical items due to historical contact with Persian, Turkish, and English (Erwin, 1963)· The recent wave of digital borrowings represents a continuation of this process but with distinct generational and technological dimensions· What distinguishes the current wave of borrowings from earlier periods is not merely the source language but the speed, scale, and sociocultural significance of their circulation· Whereas earlier borrowings from Persian, Turkish, or English often entered Iraqi Arabic gradually through trade, administration, or education, digital-era borrowings spread almost instantaneously through social media networks, gaming platforms, and online communities· This accelerated diffusion has made English loanwords a highly visible feature of youth discourse, often circulating as memes, hashtags, or phonologically adapted slang that gains traction within days· Moreover, the generational aspect is crucial: while older borrowings became embedded into the lexicon over time and often lost their foreign "feel," digital loanwords retain their symbolic indexicality, marking youth identity, global connectivity, and technological fluency· Thus, digital borrowing in Iraqi Arabic can be seen not simply as linguistic continuity but as a qualitative transformation in how loanwords function socially and culturally in the twenty-first century·

2.2.3 Digital Youth Slang

Research on digital discourse finds that youth slang is innovatory, wherein borrowed words are shortened, re-analysed away from their original spellings, or even morphologically adapted (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Lee, 2016)· Iraqi youth, just like their peers in the rest of the world, creatively repackage English words into local linguistic economies to assert their social solidarity· Such practices represent linguistic play and identity work within online communities (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014).

2·2·4 English Loanwords and Identity Negotiation

Loanwords mark identities within multilingual communities· Research in Lebanon, Egypt, and the Gulf regions has established that English borrowings index urbanity, modernity, and elite identity (Bassiouney, 2017; Albirini, 2016)· Iraqi research points to similar dynamics, whereby English is not merely a language alternative for communicative efficiency but also a form of positioning oneself within generational and cultural hierarchies (Al-Azzawi, 2020).

2·2·5 Ideological Tensions

Whereas many youth see English borrowings as a language of modernity, other English critics deem them unnecessary and pretentious (Haeri, 2003). These ideological tensions expose deeper anxieties about globalization, cultural authenticity, and linguistic purity· Iraqi social media users often debate whether using English in slang signifies sophistication or cultural alienation, highlighting the ambivalent role of global languages in local settings (Suleiman, 2004)·

3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts descriptive and interpretive designs integrating corpus-based analysis with discourse analytical methods. Descriptive, on one hand, to document the frequency, forms, and distribution of English loanwords in Iraq youth online discourse; and interpretive, on the other, to unravel the meanings and identities that are negotiated through these borrowings. By combining such approaches, the study refrains from treating loanwords as mere static items; instead, it places them within the communicative acts people perform dynamically on social media platforms. Rather than conducting experimental studies, the design leans towards explorativeness, emphasizing the naturalistic angle of the data exercised by youth in framing their digital discourse.

3·2 Research Setting

The study focuses on two Iraqi cities: Mosul, a historically diverse urban center in the north, and Maysan, a southern city with distinct linguistic and cultural traditions· This site selection was made to capture the variation in the way youth use English borrowings in slang in different socio-cultural contexts· Mosul, with its history of cosmopolitanism and recent conflict, represents a complex site wherein language practices often index resilienc, global awareness, and generational change· Maysan, by contrast, reflects a less urbanized setting where digital communication has created new opportunities for linguistic innovation and identity expression· Together, the two sites provide a balanced representation of Iraqi youth slang in online contexts

3.3 Data Source

This research draws on a dataset of 250 social media posts and comments created by Iraqi youth between the ages of 16 and 25· The material was collected from Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok platforms that dominate youth culture in Iraq and act as dynamic spaces where mixed linguistic forms thrive· Selection of posts and comments was intentional, focusing specifically on instances where English words were embedded within Iraqi Arabic slang· To enrich the textual analysis, a smaller cohort of young users also took part in semi-structured interviews, offering perspectives on why they employ loanwords, how they interpret them, and what role such practices play in shaping their online identities· By combining digital texts with participant reflections, the study establishes a layered approach that connects linguistic evidence with the social meanings participants attach to it·

3.4 Corpus Compilation and Sampling

The dataset was assembled through sustained digital observation and ethnographic engagement across a six-month span· Social media posts and comments that incorporated English borrowings were manually gathered and transcribed, with attention given to both conventional spellings and informal, nonstandard variants· A strategy of maximum variation sampling was employed to include a wide spectrum of borrowed items from functional expressions such as

like and comment to more emotive slang forms like crush and blocka· Efforts were also made to maintain balance between material collected from Mosul and Maysan, as well as across the different platforms studied· Although the corpus does not claim to be comprehensive, it offers a solid and diverse foundation for examining linguistic patterns and discourse practices·

3.5 Semi Structured interviews

To complement the corpus, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young people who actively engage in online communication· These interviews explored participants' attitudes toward English loanwords, their perceptions of generational differences in language use, and the symbolic meanings attached to hybrid slang· Open-ended questions provided participants the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives· For example, they were asked, "How do you feel when you or your friends incorporate English words into Arabic slang online?" and "Does using English terms make you feel more connected to certain social groups?" Insights from these discussions added qualitative depth to the textual data, highlighting how borrowing practices intersect with identity construction· All interviews were carefully transcribed and analyzed alongside the corpus, allowing the study to trace both consistencies and contrasts between actual linguistic usage and participants' reflections on it·

3.6 Analytical Frameworks

The analysis is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model and Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) approach to identity construction· The markedness model provides a lens for examining English borrowings as either marked or unmarked choices in online interactions, reflecting strategies of group affiliation or differentiation· For example, the use of storiyat instead of its Arabic counterpart signals participation in digital youth culture, thereby marking in-group identity· Bucholtz and Hall's framework, on the other hand, focuses on how identity is co-constructed through interaction, including processes such as stance-taking, borrowing, and intertextual play· By combining these perspectives, the study offers a multidimensional analysis that links the structural features of loanwords with their broader social and identity-related significance·

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis proceeded in two main stages· First, the 250-post corpus was examined for English borrowings, focusing on their frequency and patterns of morphological adaptation· Frequency counts were organized into tables to identify usage trends across different platforms and regions· Selected examples were then analyzed qualitatively, emphasizing pragmatic functions and identity-related implications· Discourse-analytic techniques, including thematic coding and stance analysis, were applied to reveal how loanwords convey humor, modernity, or signals of group affiliation· At the same time, interview responses were coded to capture participants' attitudes toward borrowing and their perspectives on cultural globalization· By combining corpus-based frequency analysis with interpretive discourse methods, the study achieves both a wide-ranging and nuanced understanding of English loanword use among Iraqi youth.

3.8: Findings and Analysis

3.8.1 Frequency of English Loanwords

The corpus analysis revealed a total of 1,485 English loanword tokens distributed across 250 posts and comments· On average, each post contained 5–7 loanwords, although some posts contained none while others contained as many as 12· The most common loanwords were drawn from the lexicon of social media interaction (like, comment, block, story, follow) and from youth culture (crush, style, mood)·

Table 1. Most Frequently Used English Loanwords in Iraqi Youth Slang

Rank	Loanword	Adapted Form(s)	Frequency (tokens)	Percentage of Total
1	Like	like / laika	243	16.4%
2	Comment	koment / komentat	201	13.5%
3	Story	storya / storiyat	184	12.4%
4	Block	block / blocka	172	11.6%
5	Follow	follow / fallowa	136	9.2%
6	Online	online / onlain	122	8.2%
7	Crush	krash / crash	97	6.5%
8	Style	style / styleat	84	5.7%
9	Mood	mood / moodat	75	5.0%
10	Profile	profile / profayl	71	4.8%
—	**Total (Top 10)**	—	**1,385**	**93.3%**

As Table 1 shows, the ten most frequent loanwords account for over 93% of all borrowings, suggesting that youth slang is dominated by a relatively small but highly recurrent set of English words· These are overwhelmingly linked to digital communication and online self-presentation, reinforcing the idea that English borrowings are shaped by technological affordances·

Figure (1) Most Frequently Used English Loanwords in Iraqi Youth Slang

Top 10 English Loanwords in Iraqi Youth Slang
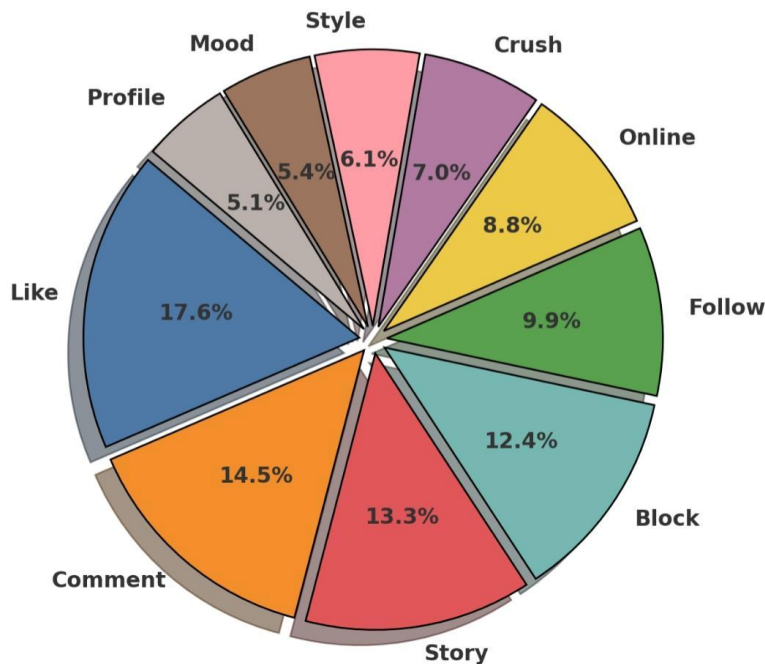
3.8.2 Distribution by Platform

A comparison across platforms reveals differences in loanword frequency and style· TikTok posts tended to feature more slang borrowings related to humor and relationships (crush, mood), while Facebook and Instagram showed higher frequencies of platform-specific terms (comment, like, story)·

Table 2. Loanword Distribution by Platform

Platform	Posts/Comments Analyzed	Total Loanwords	Average per Post	Most Common Loanwords
Facebook	100	635	6.3	like, comment, block
Instagram	80	482	6.0	story, follow, profile
TikTok	70	368	5.2	mood, crush, style
Total	**250**	**1,485**	**5.9**	—

The data illustrates that Facebook remains the most loanword-rich platform, largely because of its interactional functions (likes, comments)· By contrast, TikTok posts contained fewer total borrowings but were more likely to feature affective slang (e·g·, crush), pointing to differences in how loanwords are tied to platform-specific discourse practices·

3.8.3 Morphological Adaptation of Loanwords

Loanwords are not used in their raw English form; instead, they are localized through morphological adaptation into Iraqi Arabic· This often involves the addition of Arabic suffixes, plural markers, or phonological shifts·

Table 3. Morphological Adaptations of Selected Loanwords

Loanword	Adapted Form(s)	Morphological Process	Example in Context
Story	storiyat	Arabic pluralization	*3ndy storiyat 7elwa alyoum* (I have nice stories today).
Comment	komentat	Arabic pluralization	*shuft komentat 3la postak* (I saw comments on your post).
Block	blocka	Feminine suffix -a	*sawait blocka 3lyh* (I blocked him).
Follow	fallowa	Phonological shift + suffix	*sawaitlah fallowa* (I followed him).
Mood	moodat	Arabic pluralization	*moodatna helwa* (our moods are good).

Taken in the context of Iraqi youths, these instances show creative domestication of a foreign word-any somewhat weird shape retention of its English "feel"-signaling the hybrid alone connects to the local community.

3.8.4 Pragmatic and Identity Functions

Loanwords provide more than lexical meaning; they act as identity schemes. Data provided three salient functions, including:

1.Indexing Modernity and Digital Literacy

Using English borrowings positioned speakers as being digitally fluent and conscious of the global youth culture, that is, 'ani online' (I am online), which emphasizes technological modernity since the older generation may not necessarily have such terminology.

2.Performing Humor and Playfulness

Many borrowings were placed within funny contexts. Youth exaggerate the plural form (storiyat, moodat) to create humorous exaggeration, irony, and in-group jokes.

3-Marking-Generational-Boundaries

Interviews revealed that youth regard English borrowings as generational markers. One participant said, "If I say 'blocka,' my parents don't understand-it's like our secret language-". This illustrates an instance where borrowings act as tools for in-group solidarity and generational identity·

3.8.5 Attitudes Toward English Loanwords

Semi-structured interviews highlighted ambivalence toward loanword usage· While most participants associated English slang with cosmopolitanism, a minority criticized it as superficial· For example, one participant remarked: "People who say too many English words look fake they just want to show off·" This reflects wider ideological tensions between viewing English as a resource for global belonging versus a threat to linguistic authenticity·

3.8.6 Statistical Summary

Table 4.4. Overall Statistical Findings

Category	Value
Total Posts/Comments Analyzed	250
Total Loanwords Identified	1,485
Average Loanwords per Post	5.9
Distinct Loanword Types	37

Top 10 Loanwords Coverage	93.3%

The statistical summary confirms that Iraqi youth slang on social media relies heavily on a small set of recurring English loanwords, which are adapted morphologically and deployed pragmatically for identity work·

3.9 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that English loanwords are not incidental borrowings but function as critical resources for Iraqi youth in their everyday digital interactions· Their frequency and distribution suggest that loanwords tied to social media platforms such as like, story, comment, and block dominate the online lexicon, reflecting the centrality of these platforms to youth culture· By adopting and adapting these terms, Iraqi youth participate in what Androutsopoulos (2015) calls "transcultural digital discourse," where linguistic practices transcend local boundaries and converge into globalized forms of communication· At the same time, the morphosyntactic integration of loanwords, such as storiyat or komentat, highlights that English borrowings are localized and domesticated, rather than wholesale impositions on the Iraqi linguistic system· This duality demonstrates the tension between globalization and localization a phenomenon often described as glocalization·

The pragmatic analysis showed that loanwords index not only modernity and cosmopolitanism but also humor, irony, and in-group belonging· This aligns with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) theory of identity construction, where identity is viewed as an emergent performance rather than a fixed attribute· By choosing to say blocka instead of its Arabic equivalent, youth are not simply communicating an action they are signaling membership in a digitally savvy peer group· This finding also resonates with Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model, which explains how speakers select linguistic codes to mark social relationships and identities· The decision to use English borrowings in casual digital spaces can therefore be seen as a "marked choice" that indexes modernity, youthfulness, and generational distinctiveness· At the same time, ideological debates surrounding loanwords reveal the ambivalence of globalization in Iraq· While nearly half of the interviewees valorized loanwords as symbols of being "updated" and "connected," others critiqued their usage as a superficial performance or a departure from Arabic authenticity· This tension reflects broader sociopolitical anxieties about cultural preservation and identity in post-conflict Iraq· Language, in this sense, becomes a site where larger struggles over authenticity, modernity, and cultural continuity are played out· The divergent attitudes documented in this study mirror similar debates in other Arab contexts, where English is simultaneously embraced as a resource for mobility and resisted as a potential threat to cultural identity· The comparative analysis between Mosul and Maysan further demonstrates the role of local cultural environments in shaping linguistic practice· Youth in Mosul favored platform-specific and technological terms, while youth in Maysan employed more emotionally expressive borrowings such as crush and sorry· This suggests that even within a shared national context, regional values and cultural orientations influence the symbolic power of English· Such findings support the view that loanword usage is never neutral but always mediated by the local sociocultural environment·

Conclusion

This study has shown that English loanwords occupy a central role in Iraqi youth slang, particularly in digital contexts where social media dominates daily communication· Far from being random adoptions, these borrowings are semantically adapted, morphologically integrated, and pragmatically deployed as tools for identity construction and group belonging· Their prevalence underscores the impact of digital globalization on local linguistic ecologies, while their localized adaptations demonstrate the resilience and creativity of Iraqi Arabic·

The results underscore three key contributions· First, they provide empirical evidence that English borrowings among Iraqi youth function not merely as linguistic imports but as symbolic markers of generational identity and belonging· Second, they highlight the ideological tensions that accompany globalization, where English loanwords are

simultaneously celebrated and contested· Third, they expand the scope of sociolinguistic research in the Arab world by focusing on Iraq, a context often overlooked in discussions of language contact and digital discourse· In sum, Iraqi youth navigate their identities through a dynamic interplay of Arabic and English, local and global, tradition and modernity· Their use of loanwords demonstrates that language is not simply a neutral medium of communication but a performative tool through which belonging, humor, and cosmopolitanism are negotiated· Future research could build on these findings by exploring longitudinal changes in loanword usage, examining gendered differences in slang practices, or comparing Iraqi patterns with those in other Arabic-speaking societies· Ultimately, this study underscores the centrality of youth as linguistic innovators and highlights the digital sphere as a vibrant laboratory where new forms of identity and belonging are continually being negotiated.

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