

English: the language of communication of
the European Union? The encounter/clash
with the languages of migration

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Abstract

The overwhelming amount of migrants, who entered the EU in the last decade, from all over the world, has inevitably brought with it a twist in communication. English, the language considered as the *lingua franca* par excellence, has undergone many changes, adapting itself to the needs of the speakers and the community of practice they belong to.

As the English language comes in contact with the various languages spoken by migrants from all over the world, specific linguistic strategies have inevitably become more and more common for the purpose of communication, e.g. code-switching, code-mixing or loan translation. In particular, the aim of this study is to analyse the outcomes of the contact between the English language and the Arabic language, more specifically in investigating peculiar linguistic strategies of language appropriation that appear to be more commonly disseminated in the use of the English language today. This study will also address the issue of English as a *lingua franca*.

The focus of the investigation will be on the United Kingdom, a nation that, according to the 2001 census conducted by the National Association of British Arabs, welcomes approximately 250,000 people of Arab origin.

I. Introduction

According to the Office for National Statistics over 330,000 people migrated to the United Kingdom in the year 2015¹. Considering that this data refers to one of the European countries, in only one year, even someone not keen on mathematics can easily understand the importance of this phenomenon for Europe, in the last decade.

The reasons for escaping the countries of origin are many: war, unemployment, disease, poverty and they seem to direct increasing numbers of people towards this continent from other continents, as well as pushing large amounts of people to move around within the borders of the EU. This continuous and enormous flow of human beings in and out of Europe has inevitably had some consequences at many different levels. Cultures have met, languages clashed, religions mixed; new approaches to living and experiencing a country have developed, contributing to a fast growing globalized society.

This investigation, thus, aims at analysing, from a linguistic point of view, the encounter/clash between the language spoken in the UK – English – and the ones spoken by migrants. The assumptions that guide this exploratory study are two. On the one hand, this study addresses the fact that English has undergone many variations, mixtures and extensions while being exposed to the languages of migration. On the other hand, the present study will attempt at proving that English is not spoken in the UK simply as it is the native language, but it is used as a *lingua franca*.

For the purpose of this study, as mentioned above, only one of the countries of the EU will be taken into consideration, that is the United Kingdom, and more precisely the case study will focus on the city of London. Among the many nationalities and ethnicities moving around the UK, the focus will be on those of Arab origin. This inquiry will be conducted by looking at the culinary world.

2. Migration to the UK

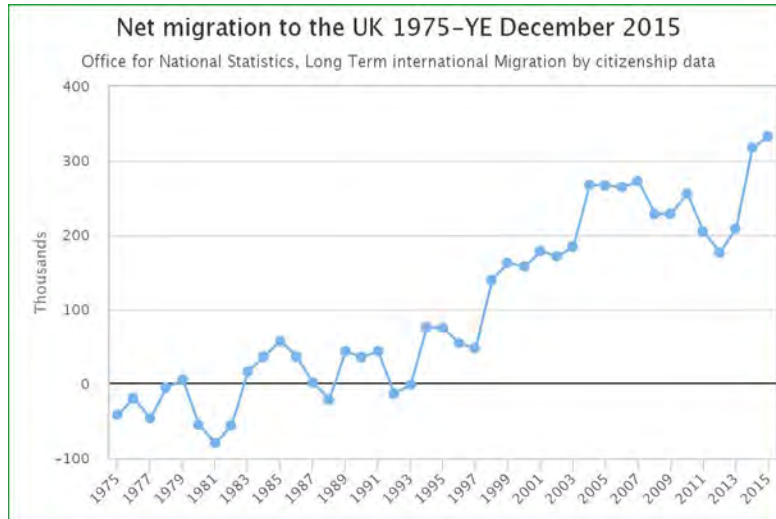
Starting from the year 2000 statistics prove² that the population of the UK has incremented more rapidly than any time in the previous 90 years, due to the high level of immigration. For example, the population of the UK, in 2001, was approximately 59 million people, 8.3% of which (4.5 million approx.) were foreign-born. By 2011 the population increased to 63.2 million al-

¹ Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: May 2016. 2016. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/migrationstatisticsquarterlyreport/may2016>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016.

² From migration watch UK. <http://www.migrationwatchuk.org/>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016.

most doubling the foreign-born percentage (8 million people approx.). In the last year, 2015, people living in Britain were estimated to be about 65 million, with again an increase in foreign-born population. As a matter of facts, as shown in Table I, released by the Office for National Statistics, the peak of migration towards the UK is precisely between the 90s and the 2000s, increasingly growing starting from 2001.

Table I Migration to the UK³



The history of migration is a rather long and complicated one. A rough overview of foreign-born citizens, therefore of flows of migrants, can be retrieved through census information. According to the Migration Watch website, census started recording the place of birth of the population only in 1851, however the data referring to that time is not exact. Migration towards the UK begun to be monitored on a regular annual basis starting from 1964 with the establishing of the International Passenger Survey, later substituted in 1991 by the Long Term International Passenger Migrations, a more sophisticated measurement of immigration (Migration Watch UK website).

Many factors have influenced migration towards the UK from all over the world; one, very crucial, is the fact that Great Britain has been one of the greatest colony-maker of the world. In point of fact, the British Empire has witnessed several waves of colonialism. The first one can be identified with the first permanent instalment in the Americas in 1607. This was terminated in 1783 with the Paris Treaty, which recognized the United States of America as a free, independent country. The second phase, started even before the first one ended, in 1753. In this period Great Britain expanded its colonial powers first in India and then in South Africa, Canada, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. The third and final phase of colonization on the part of the British Empire started in 1870 and lasted until 1956 when the last counties of North Africa were freed from the colonial power (Ferguson, 2004). Throu-

³ Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016.

ghout the 300 years of colonial power, and even after, Great Britain has always been a reference for its colonies as well as a destination for migrants coming from the colonial states. More recently, in the nineteenth century, the situation related to migration took a turn. As Randall Hansen (2004) would claim, it is chain migration that has a key role in the increasing of migration. In fact, focusing on the years following World War I, there are three main migration waves that have interested Europe and more specifically the UK. First the arrival

of guest workers and colonial migrants to begin the reconstruction of Europe, then the arrival of their families when the economy started moving again and finally the surge in asylum seekers after the 1980s and the Cold War (Randall, 2004: 36).

With the constitution of the European Union, in 1993, things changed once again, as migration within the borders of the countries, which were part of the UE, became free, as codified in the Directive 2004/38/EC⁴ and the EEA Regulations⁵ (UK). From 1993, until present day – the future is still uncertain due to Brexit⁶ –, citizens of the EU have the right to freely live and work in all the other countries of the community. While those who arrive in the UK from countries outside the EU must undergo immigration control and need a visa to remain in the UK to live, work or study. The Home Office is in charge of granting visas if applicants meet the specific criteria.

Among the many nationalities and ethnicities of the people coming to the UK, it is estimated, by the National Association of British Arabs (NABA), that 240,545 British Arabs live in Britain. Manly coming from Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Morocco, Palestine, the Gulf States and Lebanon, as shown in figure 1 below.

⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:158:0077:0123:en:PDF>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016.

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1003/contents/made>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016.

⁶ On 23 June 2016, Great Britain, through a referendum, voted to exit the European Union.

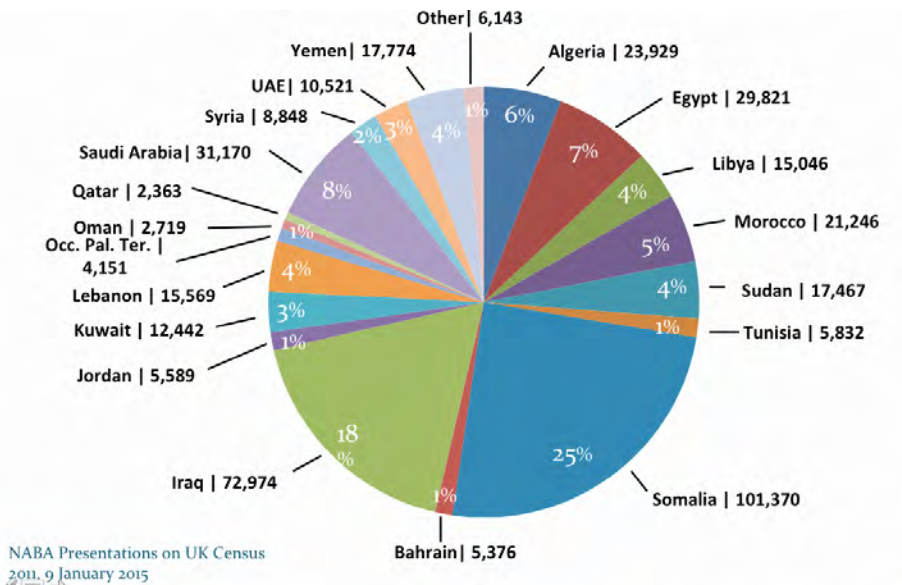
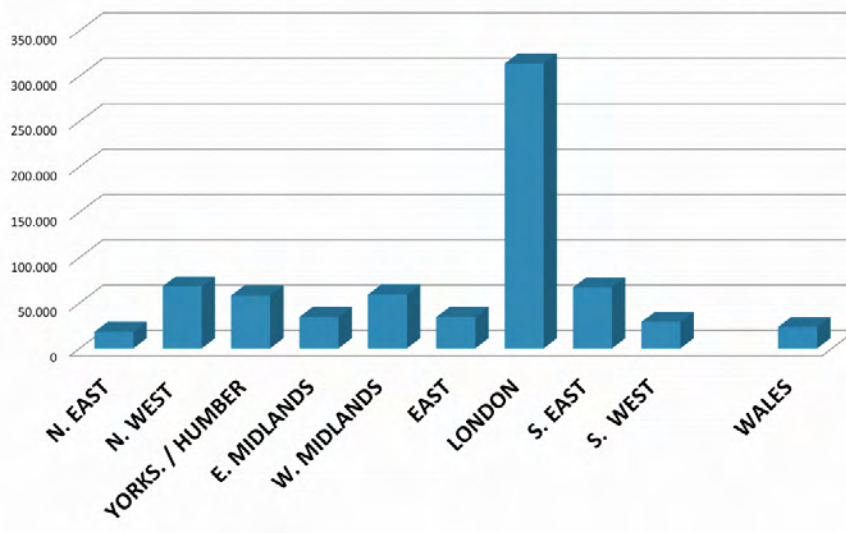


Figure 1 Arabs in the UK7

This massive group of Arab origin moving to the UK is distributed in the country in a peculiar way; 46% of Arabs living in England and Wales are based in London, according to the Census Information Scheme Statistics. Arabs make up approximately 0.4% of the population of England and Wales. 159,000 people, 0.3% of the population of England and Wales are of Arab origin and speak as their native language Arabic, making it seventh most commonly spoken language in the England and Wales area, as it is shown in the table below (Table 3) (NABA).

Table 3 Dissemination of Arabs in the UK8



3. Definitions of English and linguistic strategies. Code-switching, code-mixing and loan translations

In such a fluid environment, as the one described in the previous section, inevitably a language must be chosen for intercultural communication. «The relationship between language and culture through ELF9 is, *de facto*, the most common scenario currently adopted in intercultural communication» (Lopriore & Grazi, 2016: 6). As Leitner (2010) affirms «English dominates in international communication, international relations, science and technology, military and peacekeeping activities» (p. 17). As a matter of fact, English is the most widely spoken language in the world, with more non-native speakers than native, due not only to the history of colonization, but to the periods of globalization which led

7 NABA. <http://www.naba.org.uk/>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016.

8 NABA. <http://www.naba.org.uk/>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016.

to a constantly growing empowerment of English (Leitner, 2010).

Across the years English has been defined in many different ways, as Halliday (2009) explains we have English as a stan-

9 ELF is the acronym of English as Lingua Franca.

standard language, in that case we are referring to a language that has gone above the regional level and has been assigned the status of National language. In this case the language has a stronger role in comparison with dialectal varieties but at the same time it embeds some features and specific expressions of the original form. Halliday has also defined English as a global language, in this case the language has made another step forward going from the national level to the international and is used as a second language for speakers of other languages. English has been defined in many other different ways: International English, non-native English, English as a second language, English as a foreign language and the list goes on (Halliday, 2009).

A factor, which influenced the use of English, is without doubts the geographical environment in which the language is used. As the English language became more and more diffused throughout the world it gained different functions and different features according to the extend to which it came in contact with other languages, where it was used and for which reasons. *Creoles*, *pidgins* and mixed languages were created (Kirkpatrick, 2007). A *creole* is a language that derives from the combination of a native language and an external language, for example Bajan English that stems from the fusion of autochthonous languages and English. The peculiarity of *creoles* is that in many cases the distinctive traits of the language derive from neither of the languages which form it but are a consequence of a creative process. *Creoles* are considered the official language of the nation in which they develop. On the other hand a *pidgin* is not considered an official language, and it develops through the mixing of two different languages that come into contact. Finally mixed languages are the results of the combination of two basic languages, usually present in bilingual speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In some cases English has developed specific varieties as in the case of Indian English or South African English, which have peculiar phonetic, phonological, morphological and syntactic features (Palusci, 2010). Going back to the initial definition of English as *lingua franca* it is possible to describe it as defined by Firth «a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication» (1996:240). It is interesting, for the purpose of this research, to notice that originally the term *lingua franca* derives from the Arabic *lisan-al-farang*. This noun phrase was initially used to indicate and intermediary language used by Arab speakers with travellers from Western Europe (House, 2003:557). Firth's assumption implies that the users of English as *lingua franca* are not highly proficient in this language; therefore it is easy to retrace a number of linguistic strategies which unconsciously take them back to their native language. Some of these linguistic strategies are known as code-switching, code-mixing and loan translation.

Code-switching can be defined as the shift from one language to another within the same conversation or utterance, this switch can be unconscious or mechanical and it usually occurs when there is a lack of terminology. It could be

used for stylistic matters or for identity claiming as well. Using a different language can also be a strategy to reiterate a message or reply to someone's statement (Auer, 1998). Code-mixing, on the other hand, occurs when a mixture of different linguistic codes is present (Muysken, 2004). Loan translation, also known as borrowing, is the use of expressions from other languages embedded in the conversation in order to socially impress the interlocutor, to claim certain aspects of a culture or when no viable translation is available (Bleichenbaker, 2008).

This being explained, one might argue that the characteristics of a *lingua franca* are not the ones that define the variety of English spoken in the UK, since English is the official language of Great Britain. That might be true to a certain extent, but if we consider London as a case study, English becomes by all means a *lingua franca*.



Figure 2 London ethnicities

If we look at the map in Figure 2, taken from an article published on the on-line version of the Daily Mail on July 9th 2016, British people do not populate London. This, obviously humorous image, is supported by the data collected by the Migration Observatory of the University Oxford, which suggests that between Inner and Outer London, 70% of the population is not of British origin, according to the data collected in 2004 and with a prediction of growth (Rienzo & Vargas-Silvas, 2016). Following these sets of data, it is possible to claim that speakers of English in London are not native speakers; therefore English can be seen as a *lingua franca*.

10 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2950401/How-one-three-Londoners-born-abroad-areas-live-in.html>. Last accessed: July 15th 2016

4. Corpus and Methodology

Thinking about languages and cultures coming together, one word certainly stands out: food. For the purpose of this analysis, the aim is to consider a field that could be as representative as possible of the encounter and sometimes clash of languages and cultures that come together as a result of such big masses of people moving around. Food responded to these characteristics. The geographical location, more relevant to the topic, as demonstrated by the data presented in the above sections is London, on which the corpus collection will focus. The ethnicity of the migrant group that will be considered is Arab.

In order to select what to include in the corpus to analyse, once identified both topic and geographical area, the largest search engine available: Google, was utilized to collect the corpus. The study was conducted through the use of the following key phrase: "best Middle Eastern restaurants in London", one of the first links, preceded by some local magazine and private blogs, refers to the famous social network *TripAdvisor*, (https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Restaurants-g186338-c30-London_England.html). *TripAdvisor* is an American website company founded in 2000 by Stephen Kaufer. The main function of this free on-line platform is to provide its users with reviews related to their travels to other users. It includes restaurants, bars, hotels, resorts and any kind of entertainment location. «*TripAdvisor* is a website based on the idea that travellers rely on other travellers' reviews to plan their trips, or at least can be satisfactorily helped in their decisions by them. Presently *TripAdvisor* contains 10 million travel reviews and opinions written by 5 million registered members and counts 25 million visitors per month» (Minguéns et al, 2008:2).

For the purpose of this analysis the first five restaurants found on *TripAdvisor*, under the phrase stated before in this section, were considered. *TripAdvisor* ranks restaurants according to the comments and votes the users award them, the more votes and best reviews, the highest the restaurant ranked. In the analysis, presented in the following section, the names of the restaurants and the description provided by the owners of the restaurants, when available, will be considered. Moreover, the ten most recent reviews left by the users of the social network, will be analysed. In choosing the restaurants those that had in their description the keyword 'Turkish' were excluded. This was due to the fact that the Turkish culture differs from Arabic, which is itself an umbrella term, including Lebanese, Syrian, Israeli, and more. In this specific case the corpus collected is of five restaurant names, two full descriptions provided by owners, fifty users' reviews. The time-span in which the reviews were collected extends from June 24th 2016 to July 20th 2016.

The analysis carried out will be exclusively qualitative, through an in-depth reading and manual analysis of the corpus collected. The main focus will be on occurrences of linguistic strategies such as code-switching or loan translation. Attention will be paid to forms of translation where retraceable.

5. What are we eating? A qualitative analysis of the language in use

The five restaurants considered are: *Cafe Loren*¹¹, *Maroush Express*¹², *The Palomar*¹³, *Ottolenghi Islington*¹⁴ and *Maroush Bakehouse*¹⁵. The first restaurant, *Cafe Loren*, as well as *The Palomar*, serves both Middle Eastern and Israeli food. The *Maroush Express* and *Maroush Bakehouse* both identify as Lebanese restaurants while *Ottolenghi* does not affiliate with any specific Middle Eastern tradition. As for the brief description the keywords in common to all restaurants in the corpus are 'Mediterranean' and 'Middle Eastern'. The first instances of code-mixing can be found in the names of the restaurants taken into consideration for this analysis, especially in the case of *Maroush Express* and the *Maroush Bakehouse*, where a foreign word becomes the pre-modifier of an English word. Looking at those names, the reader or customer of the restaurant immediately knows that the food prepared by those restaurants must be from a different country.

Only two out of the five restaurants provided a full description in the *TripAdvisor* website.

The *Maroush Express* provides the following description:

«*Maroush Express* may well be the busiest of the *Maroush* restaurants, particularly in finer weather, when it's not uncommon to see a queue trailing from the doors and extending along the street - though the restaurant seats up to 50 people. The multi-coloured glass tables create a bright, fun atmosphere - the cosy yet lively environment, coupled with fantastic food & service, attracts everyone from families to business people to a younger crowd later in the evening. Open noon to 1am, 7 days a week».

The second restaurant, which provided a description, this time longer than the first one, is *Maroush Bakehouse*:

«Ideally situated just minutes from London's Earl's Court exhibition centre our unique *Bakehouse* offers an appetising array of Lebanese food to please all. We pride ourselves in offering a top quality, on the go, meal whether it's a wrap, a mixed grill, a pastry, or a salad freshly prepared to your liking. Our delightful and highly professional chefs never fail to impress and our amiable staff will ensure your experience imitates that of a true Lebanese eatery. If you're visiting London, take some time out from exploring the city and try something different. Relax and enjoy a fresh juice or hearty coffee alongside one of our speciality cakes, or, indulge with our selection of delicate pastries. Our freshly made flat bread and distinctively smooth hummus are just a few of the

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/cafelorenLDN/>

¹² <http://www.maroush.com/restaurant/maroush-express/>

¹³ <http://thepalomar.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <http://www.ottolenghi.co.uk/islington/>

¹⁵ <http://www.maroushbakehouse.com/>

many delicious options on the menu tempting you in. Here at the Bakehouse our modern yet warm interior, combined with our friendly staff and irresistible aromas, echoes the passion and spirit of traditional home baking. You can even watch the Khobez (Lebanese flat breads) being prepared and baked whilst you eat. We are also delighted to announce that we now serve breakfast! From fresh, buttery croissants to free range omelettes, we've got what you need for the most important meal of the day. Plus with our wide range of thirst quenching juices, aromatic coffees and traditional teas we're a great place to get your day off to a good start».

In both cases the aim of the brief description is that of advertising the restaurants by highlighting their best and most attractive features. The second piece is, though, longer and includes, as well, an explanation of some dishes available. From a linguistic point of view, the second description is the most interesting as well. As a matter of fact, we can find the first occurrence of loan translation: *hummus*. In fact, *hummus* can be defined as a loan word since it has now entered the international vocabulary. Although of Arab origin, the noun, meaning specifically chickpeas, is well understood in this form

is mostly interesting is what happens soon after the occurrence of this Lebanese word, the author adds a translation of the word used, specifying that the word is referring to flat bread made according to the Lebanese tradition. In this case the code-switch occurred in order to create a stronger link between the restaurant and the culture from which it stems, as mentioned in the above section. The strategy is used as an identity claimer, but at the same time a translation is required in order to make sure the reader will not have any doubts about the offers of the restaurant.

Moving on to the reviews made by the users of *TripAdvisor*, the first word to point out is out the use of the same loan word found earlier: *hummus*. This noun occurs three times in the sub-corpus of the reviews. It is interesting to note that the word occurs in two different spelling, twice with double 'm', once spelled '*humus*', indicating that although it is used regularly in everyday language, it is truly used according to the users' preference.

The following table shows all the occurrences of code-switching retraced in the corpus.

Table 4 Code-switching¹⁶

	WORD	OCCURRENCES	TRANSLATION ¹⁷
1	Baklava	2	Dessert made with honey and nuts
2	(Fish) Falafel (sandwich/wrap)	1/1/1/1	Deep-fried balls or patty made with chickpeas or fava beans
3	Fattoush salad	2	Salad made with bread and mixed vegetables
4	Halumi cheese	1	Un-ripened cheese made with goat and sheep's milk
5	Kebab (style)	1/1	Has various definitions, basically roasted meat
6	Kebhi	1	Variant of Kebab
7	Labneh	1	Strained yogurt
8	Machneyuda	2	Restaurant in Jerusalem
9	Nishnushin	1	Nibbles
10	Pita Bread	1	Flat bread
11	Polenta	1	Typical Italian dish made of boiled cornmeal
12	Sambousek Cheese	1	Deep fried Lebanese pastry filled with feta cheese
13	Schawarma Chicken	1	Mixed meats cooked on a spit
14	Shawarma	1	
15	Shewarma	1	
16	Shwarma	1	
17	Home/ Red/ Vegan/ tasty Shakshuka	1/1/1/1	Poached eggs served with vegetables or cheese
18	Shashuka bowls	1	
19	Shish Taouk (chicken)	1/1	Traditional marinated chicken
20	Shish Tauk	1	
21	Soujouk	1	Spicy, dry sausage
22	Pork Belly Tajine	1	The pot in which a stew or omelette is cooked made of earthenware
23	Wark Inab B'zelt	1	Vine leaves filled with rice and other condiments

all over the world referring to a dip or spread made of chickpeas and sesame paste, with olive oil, garlic and lemon juice. The second interesting occurrence in this section of the corpus is the code-switching, which occurs later in the text, where the writer of the description uses the word *Khobez*. What

¹⁶ Parenthesis indicate that the noun occurred as well without pre- or post-modifiers: the slash indicates the different types of occurrences.

¹⁷ All explanations of type of food were retrieved from the menus of the five restaurants comprising the corpus

Example 1 seems to be an acknowledged word for the users of *TripAdvisor* since there is no attempt of explaining what the dish is in neither of the two examples. It is the same for most of the other examples in Tab. 4. What emerges from the table is that this shared common knowledge is not always correct or equally shared. In examples 13 through 16, the different reviewers are referring to the same dish, but each person spells the dish in a different way, implying a superficial knowledge of the noun and a superficial usage as well. In examples 17 and 18 it is possible to identify the same type of phenomenon; in the latter case the users clearly highlights - through the use of question marks after the Arab word - her little knowledge and possible misspelling of the word. The word is used both as a noun and as an adjective. Examples 20 and 21 fall under the same category of different spelling of the same word. In example 3 the word *fattoush* is used as pre-modifier of the noun salad, which is once again an improper use of the noun being that the noun already means 'salad'. Example 22 is very similar in construction to example 3 as *tajine* refers to the type of pot in which the meat is cooked and not the dish *per se*. In this category of improper use another example from Tab. 4 can be added, example 19, as this dish is already made with chicken as its peculiarity, and there is no need of a post-modifier to specify it. Example 10 can be put in limbo, as *pita* is by now more a loan word than an occurrence of code-switching due to its very common usage in everyday language. Example 11 strikes out as out of place, as it refers to an Italian typical dish and not Arab, underlining once again a superficial knowledge of Arab cuisine.

An interesting phenomenon, which was found to occur repeatedly in the corpus, is the one explained earlier in this section for the noun *khobez*; example 9, in fact, is used in the review only after an English translation of the same content is provided.

One last aspect of the corpus, which was taken into consideration is the native language of the reviewers: 24/50 of the reviewers declare to be from the UK or another country in which English is the native language, such as New Zealand or Australia; 8/50 are explicitly from countries in which English is not the native language, such as Germany or Norway; and 18/50 have not declared their country of origin. In some cases it was easy to suppose that the reviewers did not speak English as a native language due to grammatical and structural mistakes occurring in the review. In other cases, although the profile of the user indicated an English-speaking country as the origin, the name of the user could lead one to believe that the place declared is only the city of residency and not of origin. Due to the anonymity of social media these are all suppositions and it is not possible to determine the reviewers' actual native language unless contacted personally one by one.

6. Conclusion

Although one might argue that English is spoken in London and the UK because it is indeed the official national language, and that the *TripAdvisor* reviewers used English for their comments because English is generally adopted as the language used on this kind of social network, this study attempts to prove the main assumption that guided this investigation and that is that English is used as *lingua franca* in the European Union, regardless of the city in which it is used. As matter of fact, as showed in the second section of this article, London, the geographical case study chosen for the investigation, is inhabited by a number of immigrants which surpasses the number of British inhabitants, therefore it is among people who don't use it as their native language. The choice of using English, among them and with other people of different nationalities is therefore not only a question of geography but as well as of comprehensibility. All the users of *TripAdvisor*, which were not native speakers, used English to reviews the restaurants. The restaurants owners, although using strategies like code-switching or code-mixing, to maintain a bond with their culture of origin as well as to give a sort of exotic attractive taste to their menus use English to name their restaurants, write their menus and communicate among each other and with their clients. This phenomenon can be extended possibly to all major European cities in which high numbers of immigrants gather from all over the world.

This study may not provide solid proof of the reality of this phenomenon, being it concentrated on a limited corpus, therefore not representative enough to draw general conclusions, but it is an attempt at setting out the ground for a more in-depth and thorough research into the use of English as the European *lingua franca*.

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