

Turkish Loanwords

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1. History of contacts

Close contacts between the Arabs and speakers of Turkic languages go back to the first half of the 9th century, when the Abbasid caliphs began recruiting Turks from Central Asia as Praetorian guards. Although some of these mercenaries – for instance ʿAḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn and his successors – were even de facto rulers of Egypt (868–905), their language left hardly any traces in Arabic. The same is true of such later *Turkish* dynasties as the Ikhshidids and Seljuks. However, during the rule of the Mamluks in general (13th–16th centuries), and of the Bahrī Mamluks (whose sultans were Kipchak Turks) in particular, at least the Arabic of Egypt was significantly influenced by a Turkic language. Nevertheless, the vast majority of *Turkish* loans in both written and colloquial Arabic date from the time of the [Ottoman Empire](#), which for about four hundred years dominated a large part of the Arab world. The influence of the *Turkish* language during that time even reached regions not under direct control of the Ottomans, such as Oman and Morocco. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War brought to an abrupt end Arabic/*Turkish* language contacts in most of the former provinces of the empire and resulted in a relatively rapid decrease in the use of *Turkish* words in all registers of Arabic. The remaining small number of *Turkish*-speaking minorities in Syria, and the so-called Turkmens of Iraq, have played only a limited regional role for the further transmission of *Turkish* loans into Arabic. The only exception to this general tendency are the Arabic minorities within the boundaries of present-day [Turkey](#). Because of the strong impact of *Turkish* in the educational system and the media, the dialects of these Arabic speakers are still influenced by *Turkish* not only in vocabulary but also to some degree in morphology and syntax (for the situation in Cilician Arabic, see Procházka 2002:184–203).

In the following sections, the region is always specified for dialectal words; examples taken from Modern Written Arabic are not explicitly indicated as such. Although Ottoman was the origin of nearly all *Turkish* loans into Arabic, the *Turkish* etyma – unless otherwise indicated – are cited in modern *Turkish* orthography and phonological form to enable the reader to find

them in *Turkish* dictionaries. The term ‘*Turkish* loan’ is used in the sense that Ottoman *Turkish* was the transmitter of the words in question, whether these words were originally *Turkish* or borrowed by *Turkish* from another language.

2. Ways and periods of borrowing

The unavailability of historical dictionaries of Arabic, together with our limited knowledge of Kipchak *Turkish*, makes it sometimes difficult to distinguish Mamluk from (especially earlier) Ottoman loans. The Turkic language of the Mamluk upper class influenced personal names and official titles, as in the names Aq Sunqur (< *aq sonqur* ‘white falcon’) and Tīmūr Buġā (< *timur boġa* ‘iron bull’). However, the extent to which other words entered Arabic during the Mamluk period, and which of them have survived, has not yet been investigated. A pre-Mamluk origin is in fact claimed for *dabbūs* < *topuz* ‘mace; globular knob’ (see Ateş 1966:30) and for *xāzūq* < **xazuq* (modern: *kazık*) ‘pale, stake; pile’ (the Egyptian ‘*aza*’ < *qazaq* < *qazıq* ‘telegraph poles’ is clearly a later borrowing reflecting the Ottoman form of the same word). Likely Mamluk loans are *buqša* < *boqča* (modern *bohça*) ‘bundle’, and *xāšūga/xāšū’a* < **xāšuq* (modern *kaşık*) ‘spoon’, the latter used in Iraqi and Syrian dialects (see Procházka 2004).

On the basis of the semantics and the phonological shape of the loanwords, it can be assumed that the bulk of Ottoman-*Turkish* loans found their way into Arabic during the 18th and 19th centuries. The three most important routes of transmission of *Turkish* loans were through official written Ottoman as the administrative language of the empire; through the standardized Ottoman *Turkish* spoken by the military class, government officials, and probably traders; and through vernacular *Turkish* in those areas with a denser *Turkish* population (for direct loans from *Turkish* dialects, see Procházka 2004).

Except for the technical terms of Ottoman civil and military bureaucracy, most *Turkish* words found their way into written Arabic and (for obvious reasons) especially into Arabic dialects, due to direct contacts, that is, through oral rather than literary borrowing. In many instances, the spelling of the *Turkish* loans in Arabic do not precisely follow the orthography of Ottoman, and clear cases of spelling pronunciations are rare (cf. Procházka 2004).

Because a remarkably large proportion of the Ottoman lexicon consisted of foreign elements, Arabic also picked up a number of non-*Turkish* lexemes from Ottoman, including words not only from Persian, Greek, and Slavonic but also from French and Italian. Western words entered Arabic through Ottoman because, until the 19th century, *Turkish* was the main language for the transmission of Western ideas and culture into the Arab world (for the special case of reborrowed Arabic words, see Sec. 6, below). Although it is not always possible to separate direct loans from these other languages into Arabic from those which entered Arabic indirectly via *Turkish*, in many cases a *Turkish* transmission can be detected because of phonological (e.g. restricted use of geminated consonants in colloquial *Turkish*) or semantic adaptations these words underwent in *Turkish*.

Of Persian origin are, for instance, *xumbara* ‘small jar’ > Ottoman *kumbara* ‘bombshell’ > *qunbula* ‘bomb, grenade’; *čādor-šab* > *çarşaf* > *šarşaf* ‘bedsheet’. Ultimately Greek is *sēmadoúra* > *šamandıra* > *šamandūra* ‘buoy’; Italian (see Behnstedt 1996, esp. 64–65) is represented by *timone* > *dümen* > *dümān* ‘rudder, helm’ and *caciocavallo* > *kaşkaval* > *qaşqawān* ‘a kind of cheese’. French in origin is *capote* ‘soldier's coat’ > *kaput* ‘soldier's coat; condom’ > Egypt *kabbūt* ‘condom’. From (South) Slavonic is the toponym *an-Nimsā* ‘Austria’ < *Nemçe* ‘German speakers, Austrians’ < *niemce* ‘German’.

3. Phonology of *Turkish* loans

In most cases, Ottoman *Turkish* words in Arabic have undergone phonological changes in order to substitute sounds not known to Arabic and to adapt the loans to common morphological patterns. Although some sound changes appear quite regularly, on the whole there are no phonetic rules for them since there are so many exceptions and no conformity in sound changes among the different dialects. Therefore, the following sketch should not be taken to be a complete description of all possible sound shifts. *Turkish* consonants, of which only six, *č*, *g*, *p*, *v*, *ñ*, *ž* (the latter two play no role for the loans), are unknown to Standard Arabic, were generally much less affected by changes than the nine vowel phonemes.

In both written Arabic and most Arabic dialects, *Turkish*ç [tʃ] usually has become š, e.g. *çanta* > *šanța* ‘suitcase’, *çuval* > *šuwāl* ‘sack’; Tunis *bıçkı* > *bāšqi* ‘mincing knife’. Sometimes, however, and especially in final position, it is *j*, e.g. *saç* > *šāj* ‘thin sheet iron’. The sound *č* is maintained in the Iraqi dialects, which have a phoneme *č* (< *k*), and in the Anatolian and North Syrian dialects, which, doubtless because both regions had the earliest and most direct contacts with the Ottomans, adopted this new phoneme under the influence of *Turkish* (and Kurdish). Examples are: Iraq *suç* > *šūč* ‘blame, fault’, *alçak* > *alčag* ‘rotten, low-down’; Anatolia *bekçi* > *bakči* ‘guard’; and Syria *çay* > *čāy* ‘tea’, *çöl* > *čöl* ‘steppe’ (for the occurrence of *č* in Syria, see Behnstedt 1997, maps 18–30).

The sound *g* is generally reflected as *ġ* if followed by a back vowel (e.g. *damga* > *damġa* ‘stamp, hallmark’), but as *k* if followed by a front vowel (e.g. *sergi* > *sarkī* ‘bill of exchange’). The *j* in *jumruk* < *gümriük* ‘customs’ (ultimately < Latin *commercium*) is probably a spelling pronunciation from the Egyptian use of the letter *jīm* for *g*. In dialects which already possess the phoneme *g* (e.g. Egypt, Yemen, and Bedouin dialects), the *Turkish* *g* remains unchanged. The same is true for the Anatolian and numerous Syrian dialects, in which the large number of *Turkish* loans have led to the adoption of a marginal phoneme *g*, e.g. Anatolia *gamlake* < *gömlək* ‘shirt’.

The voiceless *p* nearly always becomes *b*, e.g. *paşa* > *bāšā* ‘pasha’; Iraq *tepsi* > *tabsi* ‘tray’; Syria *top* > *tōb* ‘cannon’; Tunisia *sepet* > *sbāt* ‘basket’. The labiodental *v* is either reflected as *w* (e.g. *çavdar* > *jawdār* ‘rye’) or, especially in initial position, as *b* (e.g. *vapur* > *bābūr* ‘steamship’).

The *Turkish*ğ (in Ottoman, pronounced *ġ* in the vicinity of back consonants) normally appears as *ġ*, e.g. *baġa* > *bāġa* ‘celluloid’, but sometimes as *k*, e.g. in *iğdiş* (modern *iğdiş*) > *kadiš* ‘cart horse, nag’ (probably via dialectal *gdīš*). Ottoman *q* is sometimes reflected as *k*, as in *bakraç* > *bakraš* ‘kettle’. The shift *q* > *x*, however, might be indicative of an older loan (see above, *xāzūq*).

Quite frequent, but with regional variations, is the velarization of *d*, *t*, *z*, *s* in the vicinity of back vowels, e.g. Egypt *oda* > *’ōda* ‘room’; written Arabic *tava* > *ṭawwāya* ‘frying pan’, *boza* > *būza* ‘a beerlike beverage’, and *sağ* > *šāġ* ‘right, proper’. Metathesis of consonants is also sometimes found, e.g. *zincir* > *jinzīr* ‘chain’; Syria *başlamak* > *ballaš* ‘to begin’, and *çapkın* ‘good-for-nothing’ > *šaqban* ‘to twaddle’.

In the dialects, *Turkish* consonants are often affected by the same sound shifts as the corresponding Old Arabic consonants. Thus, *Turkish*ç [dʒ] appears as *g* in Egypt, but as *ž* in parts of Syria and the Maghreb. Ottoman *q* is usually reflected as *’* in those urban dialects

where Old Arabic *q* has become a glottal stop, e.g. *qazma* > Cairo 'azma 'pickax', Jerusalem *qışla* > 'işle 'barrack'.

The treatment of the nine different Ottoman *Turkish* vowels is not homogeneous, neither in written Arabic nor in the dialects. The following very rough rules have countless exceptions: *a, ä* > *a, ā*; *e, i, ı* > *i, ī*; *o, ö, u, ü* > *u, ū*. Many vowel changes, though, are clearly the result of the tendency to reshape *Turkish* words in Arabic patterns. This is often true for nouns and always the case for verbs. Examples are *başlık* > *bašnūqa* 'kerchief', *çizme* > *jazma* 'boots', *fişek* > *faşak* 'cartridges'. The dialects usually also treat the vowels of loanwords according to their own phonetic rules: unstressed short vowels (especially *i, u, ə*) in open syllables are often elided, e.g. Syria *konak* > *qnāq* 'halting place', Tunisia *börek* > *brīk* 'a kind of fried pastry'.

Initial *Turkish* is sometimes preceded by ' , e.g. *araba* > 'araba 'carriage, wagon'. Several loanwords differ from the vocalization of modern *Turkish* since they reflect older Ottoman, e.g. *duğrı* (modern *doğru*) > *duğri* 'strait' (in, e.g., Palestine, Egypt), and *vergü* (modern *vergi*) > Palestine *wērko* 'real estate tax'.

4. Morphology of *Turkish* loans

Many *Turkish* loans, nouns as well as verbs, have been integrated into Arabic by adapting them to Arabic patterns. Borrowed nouns are usually masculine unless they end in *-a* and are therefore regarded as feminine, e.g. *çevirme* > *šāwirma* 'charcoal-broiled mutton'; *tencere* > *tanjara* 'casserole'. The construct form of these feminine nouns is regularly used, e.g. *çorba* > *şurba* 'soup', *şurba* 'adas' 'lentil soup'; Syria *oda* > 'ōda 'room', 'ōdet *sāfra* 'dining room'. Adjectives, however, are often invariable for gender, e.g. *sade* > *sāda* 'simple, plain'; Syria *çürük* > *čərok* 'rotten'; Iraq *yasak* > *yaşağ* 'illegal'; but Syria *zengin* > *zangīn*, fem. *zangīne* 'rich'. As the number of borrowed adjectives is relatively small, relative forms are rare and seem to exist only in the dialects, e.g. Palestine *aşlab* 'prettier' < *şalabi* < *çelebi*.

Collective nouns such as *fişek* > *faşak* 'cartridges' or Syria *bürüncük* > *brənjok* 'fine crêpe' form a *nomen unitatis* according to the usual rules, i.e. *faşaka*, *brənjke*. The most frequent form of pluralization is the suffix *-āt* (or *-w/yāt*), e.g. *kıskaç* > *quşāj*, *quşājāt* 'pliers', *paşa* > *bāšā*, *bāšāwāt* 'pasha'. Nouns whose singular is in an Arabic pattern, however, often exhibit internal plural forms, e.g. *balta* > *balta*, *bulağ* 'ax'; *kemer* > *kamar*, 'akmār 'belt'; *parmak* > *barmaq*, *barāmiq* 'spike'; *tabur* > *ṭābūr*, *ṭawābīr* 'queue'.

Verbs are usually regarded as a more intensive integration of foreign words into a language than nouns. In both written and dialectal Arabic, all verbs of *Turkish* origin have been altered to Arabic patterns for the sake of inflection. Many of these verbs were not directly borrowed from *Turkish* verbs but derived rather from *Turkish* nouns already integrated into Arabic. At least in written Arabic, the number of verbs derived from *Turkish* is not large; examples are *başama* 'to print' < *başma* < *basma* 'print', *jamraka* 'to take toll' < *jumruk* < *gümriük* 'customs', *farraşa* 'to brush' < *furşa* < *fırça* 'brush', *dawzana* 'to tune' < *düzān* < *düzen* 'tune'. In most dialects, the number of verbs going back to *Turkish* is much larger. For Syria, Halasi-Kun (1969:29, 82–84) reports 75 verbs, e.g. Syria *yasak* 'forbidden' > *yassağ* 'to forbid'; Iraq *çizmek* > *čazz* 'to mark over'; Egypt *kılavuz* 'screw-tap' > 'alwaz 'to screw down'.

Turkish derivational suffixes have usually been borrowed as a unit with the root word and thus are found in all layers of Arabic. In some dialects (Iraq, Syria, Egypt), a few very

frequent *Turkish* suffixes have become productive and are used to a limited extent with Arabic words in combinations unknown to *Turkish*. The best survey on this topic is Masliyah (1996), who covers the Iraqi dialects; for written Arabic, see the lists in Gülensoy (1975:129–133). By far the most common suffix is *-ci*, which is used for professions and (in Arabic, almost exclusively negative) characterizations. Halasi-Kun (1969:68–70) provides a list of about one hundred words for the Syrian dialects; for Egypt, see the explanations, including a long list, in Prokosch (1983a:70–73). Examples are *boyacı* > *būyaji* ‘house painter, shoeshine’, *hurdacı* > *xurdaji* ‘dealer in miscellaneous smallwares’; Iraq *bāysikilçi* ‘bicycle seller’, *‘aragçi* ‘drunkard [i.e. addicted to arrack]’; Syria *batakçı* > *baṭaqqi* ‘swindler, gangster’; Egypt *makwagi* ‘laundryman’. In addition to the relational suffix *-li* (e.g. Syria *Mardilli* ‘a person from Mardin’) and the suffix *-siz*, added to nouns to form adjectives meaning ‘without’ (e.g. Iraq *šarafsız* ‘without honor’), there also appears *-lik*, e.g. *tozluq* > *tūzluq* ‘gaiters’. In Iraq, the latter suffix is, in a pleonastic combination with the Arabic ending *-iyya*, used to form abstract nouns, e.g. *zmāl* ‘donkey’ > *zmālləğiyya* ‘stupidity’.

Elements of Ottoman compound nouns, either of *Turkish* or Persian origin, have also been borrowed into Arabic, e.g. *-xāne* ‘house’, *-dār* ‘carrier of’. The noun *baş* ‘head, chief of’ is particularly frequent in newly created combinations in Arabic, for instance Syria *bāš-argəlzi* ‘senior waiter responsible for the hookah’; Algeria *bāš-kəddāb* ‘big liar’.

5. Lexical importance and semantic domains

For obvious reasons, one hundred years ago the number of *Turkish* loanwords in both written and spoken Arabic was considerably larger than it is today. The decline in direct contact, the Arabization of the official language, and, last but not least, the negative perception of the Ottoman era in today's Arab world have resulted in the rapid decrease of *Turkish* loanwords. Although no systematic research has been done, studies such as Barbot (1961), Prokosch (1983a), and Reinkowski (1998) suggest a drastic decline of the *Turkish* influence on spoken Arabic. Approximately half of the words quoted in the dictionaries of the Arabic dialects in question are no longer in active use or have even become unintelligible. A similar situation can be assumed for written Arabic (for *Turkish* loans in written Arabic in general, see Ateç 1965; Mutawallī 1991; Zahidi 1977). Thus, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to estimate how many *Turkish* loanwords still exist in Arabic. For contemporary written Arabic, the number certainly does not exceed 250. In the dialects, the somewhat dated figures are 3,000 for Syria (Halasi-Kun 1969:20), 1,150 for Egypt (Prokosch 1983a), and about 250 in Iraq (Reinkowski 1995).

Particularly symptomatic of the quantitative and semantic decay of *Turkish* loanwords in Arabic is the history of the old Ottoman-*Turkish* titles since the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. Many of the Ottoman titles for military ranks, such as *‘ombāšī* < *onbaşı* ‘corporal’, *yūzbāšī* < *yüzbaşı* ‘captain’, and *mīr ālāy* < *miralay* ‘brigadier general’, were officially used in some Arab armies until the 1950s. However, today these words appear almost exclusively in historical novels or films. Some of the old Ottoman titles are now applied to menial jobs or positions, or used with ironic or even pejorative connotations. For instance, in Tunisia *šāwuš* < *çavuş*, formerly ‘sergeant’, now means ‘office boy, gatekeeper’. In Egypt, *balṭagi* < *baltacı* ‘pioneer’ is now used in the sense of ‘gangster, rowdy, bouncer’. In written Arabic, *šalabī* < *çelebi* ‘gentleman, prince’ sometimes appears in the sense of ‘dandy, fop’.

In spite of the aforementioned examples, and the universal tendency to a lowering of social status in titles, several *Turkish* words are still used in many Arab countries as polite forms of address ([terms of address](#); for Jordan, see Prokosch 1989). In Egypt, titles such as

bāšmuhandis < *bašmühendis* ‘(chief) engineer’ or *hānim* < *hanım* ‘lady’ are widespread and are regarded as very polite (Rosenbaum 1998:100).

Several other *Turkish* loanwords are now used infrequently simply because they denote tools, dresses, or fixtures which have become obsolete (see examples below). Most *Turkish* loans in Arabic fall into the following domains: administration and government, army and war, crafts and tools, house and household, dress, and food and dishes. The influence of *Turkish* on Arabic in these particular categories is obviously the consequence of the presence of the Ottoman bureaucracy and army in the Arab world in particular, and of the influence of centuries-long relations on everyday life in general. Moreover, many new things, such as fashions in dress or improved tools for craftsmen, reached the Arabs via Istanbul, for centuries the cultural center of the Islamic world. A few specific examples of *Turkish* loans into Arabic in each of the above-listed cultural categories follow:

Administration and government: *dönüm* > *dūnum* ‘a square measure’, *damga* > *damğa* ‘stamp’ (and *damāga* ‘to stamp’), *gümriük* > *jumruk* ‘customs’, *zindan* > *zinzāna* ‘prison cell’.

Army and war: *binbaşı* > *bikbāšī* (with spelling pronunciation!) ‘lieutenant colonel’, *kol* > *qōl* ‘army corps’, *tabur* > *ṭābūr* ‘battalion, queue’, *lağım* > *lağam* ‘mine’, *tabanca* > *ṭabanja* ‘pistol’.

Crafts and tools: *takım* > *ṭaqm* ‘set (of tools), service’, *çengel* > *šankal* ‘hook’, *sinara* > *šinnāra* ‘fish hook’, *kılavuz* ‘screw-tap’ > *qalāwūz* ‘screw’, *yay* > *yāy* ‘spiral spring’.

House and household: *çeçme* ‘fountain’ > *šašma* ‘toilet’, *edephane* > ‘*adabxāna* ‘water closet’, *köşk* > *kušk* ‘kiosk’, *soba* ‘stove’ > *šōba* ‘stove, hothouse’ (e.g. in *taṭīr šōbī* ‘greenhouse effect’); Syria, Egypt *oda* > ‘*ōḍa* ‘room’; Iraq *çekmece* > *čakmača* ‘drawer’.

Household vessels: *bakraç* > *bakraj* ‘kettle’, *kazan* > *qazān* ‘large boiler’, *leğen* > *lakan* ‘basin’, *tawa* > *ṭawwāya* ‘frying pan’, *teneke* > *tanaka* ‘tin can’; Tunis *cezve* > *zazwa* ‘coffeepot’.

Dress: *çintiyan* > *šintiyān* ‘loose trousers’, *çizme* > *jazma* ‘boots’, *kayış* > *qāyiš* ‘belt, girth’, *kundura* > *kundura* ‘(Western-style) shoe’, *yaka* > *yāqa* ‘collar’; Syria *şapka* > *šabqa* ‘hat’.

Food (including fruits) and dishes: colloquial *burgul* (Standard *Turkish* *bulgur*) > *burgul* ‘cracked wheat’; *dondurma* > *dandurma* ‘ice cream’, *kavurma* > *qāwirma* ‘fried meat’, *sucuk* > *sujuq* ‘sausage’, *meze* > *māza/mazza* ‘hors d’oeuvres’; fruits: Ottoman *yusuf efendi* > *yūsuf afandi*, *yūsufi* ‘tangerines’, *hıyar* > *xiyār* ‘cucumber’; *yemiş* > *yāmīš* ‘dried fruit’.

Not yet investigated systematically are the formally Arabic words coined by the Ottomans and then borrowed back into Arabic (see the preliminary study by Prokosch 1999). Many of these words are abstract nouns denoting ideas and concepts imported to the Middle East from Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries (see Lewis 1996). Among them are *jumhūriyya* ‘republic’, *baladiyya* ‘municipality’, *qawmiyya* ‘nationalism’, *madaniyya* ‘civilization’. Frequently found are semantic extensions of Arabic words under *Turkish* influence, the result of the new meanings the Ottomans gave to already existing Arabic words. Examples are (the *Turkish* forms in parentheses) *fi’a* (*fiyat*) ‘price’, *sajjāda* (*seccade*) ‘prayer rug’, *fā’id*, also *fāyiz* (*faiz*) ‘interest [on money]’, *kīs* (*kese*) ‘*Turkish* towel’ (and likely > *mukayyis* ‘masseur’); Syria *xəṭyār* (*ihtiyar*) ‘old’.

6. Phraseological and syntactic influences

Especially in the dialects, there are a large number of calques. But because of the lack of detailed studies on phraseology in both Arabic and *Turkish*, it is often impossible to decide whether these loan translations actually went from Ottoman into Arabic or vice versa. The following examples are, however, definitely of Ottoman origin: Syria *aslan süti* ‘arrack’ (lit. ‘milk of the lion’) > *ḥalīb əsbā*, *kazık yemek* ‘to be cheated’ (lit. ‘to eat a fraud’) > *akal xāzūq*; Palestine *şöyle böyle* ‘so and so’ > *šēle bēle*; Iraq *ne var ne yok* ‘what's new’ (lit. ‘what is and what is not’) > *šaku māku*.

Apparently, there is no *Turkish* influence on the syntactic level, except in those Arabic dialects spoken within the boundaries of today's Turkey (for examples from the dialects of Cilicia, see Procházka 2002:199–202).

7. Summary

Given the long-term and very intensive contacts between Turks and Arabs, there are surprisingly few traces of *Turkish* in (written) Arabic, especially in contrast with the *Turkish* influence on the Balkan languages. The two main reasons for this difference in impact are, first, the relatively small number of ethnic Turks who actually lived in the Arab provinces and, second, the fact that Arabic was a much more highly developed and, especially because of its status in Islam, prestigious language than the languages of the Balkans. Today, in spite of a relatively stable core of *Turkish* borrowings (many of them neither phonologically nor semantically recognized by Arabic speakers as being of *Turkish* origin), *Turkish* loanwords in Arabic continue to undergo quantitative decrease, semiological diminution, and marginalization.

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