

Spread of “Arabic *al-*“ in Spanish

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This poster summarizes a few of the more salient findings of a comparative investigation into the etymologies and diachronic distribution of 767 Spanish word forms beginning in /al/. Historians have long recognized the prominent role borrowing from Arabic has played in the introduction of numerous items of this form to Spanish, but the present study diverges from previous examinations of this topic in treating the Arabic origin of many such words as merely a starting point for a diachronic account of *al-* rather than as the crux of the matter. Evidence is presented throughout the poster to argue that Spanish speakers’ reanalysis of noun-initial /al/ as a prefix has resulted in the spread of this segment to bases that bear a semantic and/or formal resemblance to precursor items in *al-*, and that this occurrence typically has very little to do with speakers’ ascription of a quality of “Arabicness,” real or imagined, to any of the words involved. Similarities in use observed among words that were borrowed in *al-*, words that gained the sequence as the result of regular phonetic developments in Spanish, and words exhibiting non-lautgesetzlich instances of *al-* are highlighted to demonstrate that most probable cases of hypercorrection of word-initial material to /al/ or of prefixation of *al-* to new noun bases in Spanish are likely to have been motivated by a popular perception of the altered words as members of semantic sets such as “plant types” or “architectural terms” that contained large numbers of commonplace nouns in *al-* at the presumed moments of reanalysis. The overarching claim is made that the analogical spread of *al-* in Spanish has taken place on a larger scale and in a more predictable manner than has been elsewhere suggested in the literature.