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Methodological Characteristics Of the Most Important Modern Arabic Dictionaries

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Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the significance of lexicography, particularly modern Arabic dictionaries and their methodological characteristics, and to demonstrate that Arabs were among the pioneering nations in lexicographical composition. The chronological evolution of Arabic lexicography has been continuous, rich and uninterrupted, leaving a profound impact on the modern lexicographical movement through the emergence of significant dictionaries. This study concludes by demonstrating the importance of these Arabic dictionaries and outlining the methodological features of the most prominent modern ones.

Keywords: dictionary, lexicography, Arabic language, characteristics, methodology.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

The dictionary has held great significance for Arabs both in ancient and modern times, as they were among the pioneering nations in the field of lexicographical composition. Its earliest manifestations can be traced back to the mid-first century of the Hijra, with the primary aim of interpreting obscure Qur'anic passages and unfamiliar prophetic traditions. Religious motivation was thus among the most important factors in the emergence of this branch of knowledge, alongside other sciences. The dictionary has kept pace with history in its development up to the modern era, wherein numerous and diverse dictionaries have appeared. Some of these dictionaries have followed the path of their predecessors in terms of methodology and characteristics, while others have sought innovation in both form and approach. What, then, are the most prominent methodological characteristics of the most important modern dictionaries?

1-1. Research problem

- The role of the dictionary as an essential tool in learning Arabic.

- What role do modern Arabic dictionaries play in the development and preservation of the Arabic language?

- Highlighting the methodological characteristics of the most important modern Arabic dictionaries.

1-2 Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses**:**

- It is hypothesized that the dictionary is one of the essential tools in the Arabic language.

- It is hypothesized that modern Arabic dictionaries contribute to the development of the Arabic language.

- It is hypothesized that modern dictionaries possess methodological characteristics, whether traditional or new.

1-3 Significance and objectives of the study

This study aims to identify the importance of the dictionary in achieving the objectives of Arabic language learning .It aims to highlight the characteristics of the most prominent modern Arabic dictionaries, whether traditional or innovative. The current study may contribute to highlighting the importance of the modern Arabic dictionary and the methodological characteristics it possesses. The significance of this study derives from the following premises:

- The scarcity of studies and research on this topic despite its importance.

- This study seeks to shed light on the importance of modern Arabic dictionaries and their constituent elements.

- This study addresses the importance of the dictionary among Arabs, the factors in its development, and aspects of innovation and tradition within them.

1-4 Review of Previous Studies

We shall present some Arab studies which, while not directly addressing the subject of the present study, may touch upon certain aspects of it, for the purpose of drawing upon them in discussing the study's findings. This study aims to address the methodological characteristics of modern Arabic dictionaries, representing linguistic research seeking to evaluate efforts of codification and modernization. Some dictionaries have adopted traditional methods, while others have adopted modern approaches. Among these studies are descriptive comparisons such as the" Dictionary of Modern al-Mawrid" or "al-Mawrid al-Ḥadīth" and the "Dictionary of Linguistic Terminology". Also notable is Ibrāhīm ibn Murād's (2009) study in his book "The Arabic Dictionary Between Theory and Application".

2. Definitions

2-1. Dictionary (al-muʿjam): The term "muʿjam" in heritage texts is a verbal noun derived from the root "ʿ-j-m," which in the language denotes obscurity and ambiguity. When is prefixed (aʿjama), it acquires a new meaning, namely, to remove its obscurity and ambiguity. The definition of "muʿjam" indicates that it was so named for two possible reasons: one relates to removing the ambiguity that surrounds vocabulary items, and the other results from the arrangement of dictionary materials (Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah, 2003).

2-2. Lexicography (al-ṣināʿah al-muʿjamiyyah): Lexicography, or the art of dictionary-making, is a science whose objective is the compilation of dictionaries. It is related to linguistics but is not part of it because it is concerned with applied matters. It has a pedagogical purpose for dictionary users seeking to learn the meanings of words. It is the technique of producing dictionaries and the linguistic analysis of this technique (Wahbah & al-Muhandis, 1984).

3.The historical evolution of the Arabic Lexicography

Arabic lexicographical composition witnessed significant development in vocabulary alongside the compilation of thematic or semantic dictionaries. Credit for this pioneering effort and for developing a method by which to collect and codify the Arabic language in a unified book is due to the doyen of Arabic linguistics, al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, with his dictionary "Al-ʿAyn". This was followed by systematic lexicographical composition, which underwent considerable development among the Arabs.

Arabic dictionaries crystallized in the form of phonetically and alphabetically arranged dictionaries, followed by the emergence of a number of semantically arranged dictionaries. Professor John Heywood, Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Durham,

states in his book "Arabic Lexicography": "The Arabic dictionary, from its inception, aimed to record linguistic material in an organized manner, and in this it differs from all the early dictionaries of other nations, whose aim was to explain rare or difficult words" (cited in Mīdanī, 2010).

Furthermore, Arabic lexicographical composition is based on foundations and principles encompassing various aspects, which have been incorporated into the study of lexicography to specialize in the study of languages and linguistics in investigating lexicographical issues. Arab countries were among the pioneers of this industry, which received considerable attention and care, encouraging the significant emergence of publishing houses (Mīdanī, 2010).

In addition, Arabic lexicographical composition is among the most important and precise linguistic endeavors, given its dual scientific and educational value, which makes it an indispensable necessity in existence and life. In the modern era, the lexicographical movement was somewhat modest, with a recorded decline compared to its former state, owing to the extended period of dependency experienced by the Arab world, beginning with Ottoman rule and followed by European colonialism. This movement was led by a group of Lebanese and Egyptians, with both individual and collective efforts (Kishlī, n.d.). The lexicographical movement managed to keep pace with contemporary developments and attempted to record all the vocabulary and terminology introduced into Arabic, adding new elements to the modern Arabic dictionary.

4. Functions of the Arabic Dictionary

Al-Zamakhsharī defined the dictionary as: a book that contains the largest possible number of language vocabulary items, accompanied by explanations and interpretations of their meanings, with the materials arranged in a specific order, either alphabetically or thematically. A complete dictionary is one that contains every word in the language, accompanied by an explanation of its meaning, derivations, pronunciation, and illustrative examples showing its usage. Thus, a dictionary is a list of vocabulary items and their derivatives, with pronunciation, arranged according to a specific system. It is a book containing words arranged in a particular order with explanations of their meanings (Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah, n.d.).

Determining the functions of the dictionary relates to an external issue: the needs of the dictionary user (or "customer," in market terms) and the type of information they seek from it. Lexicographers have identified the most important functions of the dictionary as follows (al-Rudaynī, 2012):

- Indicating pronunciation (including syllabic division and stress placement).
- Determining orthographic representation or spelling.
- Etymological derivation.
- Morphological and grammatical information.
- Usage information.
- Encyclopedic information.

Dictionaries vary in their selection among these functions and also differ in their order of priority.

5. The Importance of the Arabic Dictionary

The lexicographical movement represents a movement of human thought and consists of interconnected links with a relationship to what preceded them. The first task of modern lexicographers was to revive the ancient lexicographical heritage, then to move once again to producing new works relevant to their own time. However, they adhered to tradition to the extent that some saw their dictionaries as nothing more than a repackaging of the old in a new guise (e.g., Al-Wasīṭ). The importance of these dictionaries may be summarised as follows (Khalīl, 1997; ʿUmar, 1998):

- The dictionary is a book containing a large number of Arabic vocabulary items, arranged in a specific manner and with interpreted meanings.

- Preserving the perfection of the Noble Qur'an and protecting it from mispronunciation, error, and misunderstanding.

- Clarifying rare and unfamiliar meanings, explaining them, and making them accessible to the mind for comprehension.

- Protecting the Arabic language from mispronunciation and corruption, preventing its extinction and disappearance, especially with the passing of linguists and scholars.

- Contributing to facilitating the learning of Arabic, especially for non-native speakers, and facilitating the comparison of its vocabulary with that of other languages.

- Language dictionaries and specialized dictionaries contain a large number of scientific terms coined by early scholars, which have become part of the Arab scientific and linguistic heritage.

- One observes in Arab literary and intellectual movements the proliferation of new terminologies in contemporary culture, philosophical studies, criticism, rhetoric, and linguistics, imposed by the use of contemporary and modern sciences and methodologies,

which have become a terminological language due to the multiplicity, intersection, and even contradiction of sciences.

- Therefore, attention must be paid to the pitfalls inherent in the modern Arabic lexicographical industry, unless precautions are taken against the spread of vocabulary and linguistic and terminological changes in our language. This is in response to some of the dilemmas faced by scholars, including lexicographers, in previous stages.

- Lexicography in general comprises two different yet complementary aspects: the first is theoretical, involving the selection of theoretical, methodological, and scientific foundations and the objectives sought from compiling a dictionary. The second is practical in nature, encompassing the practical steps to be followed for producing a specialized, bilingual, or trilingual scientific dictionary: the pre-production stage and the post-production stage (ʿUmar, 1998).

6. The Most Important Modern Arabic Linguistic Dictionaries and Their Methodological Characteristics

Arabic lexicography has passed through several stages and periods before reaching maturity. Throughout this historical trajectory of lexicographical composition, various Arabic lexicographical schools emerged, attempting to arrange dictionary words based on their methodology, beginning with al-Khalīl's approach in his dictionary "Al-ʿAyn" and extending to modern dictionaries and their methods of classification and arrangement. Modern Arabic dictionaries are numerous: some followed the path of ancient dictionaries, while others attempted innovation in their content by introducing words not found in ancient dictionaries (ʿĀmir, 2014). The most important of these are:

6.1 "Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ" by Buṭrus al-Bustānī

Buṭrus Būlus ʿAbdullāh al-Bustānī was a modern linguist, born in one of the villages of Shuf in Lebanon in 1819. He was known for his extensive knowledge, profound culture, and scientific, cognitive,

and linguistic ability. He learned several languages including Syriac, Italian, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. His activities included founding four newspapers and two dictionaries: "Qaṭr al-Muḥīṭ" and "Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ", which "is considered the first modern Arabic dictionary compiled in the nineteenth century." The first part was printed in 1866, and in 1869 Buṭrus al-Bustānī completed the compilation of the second part (Kishlī, n.d.).

He compiled it in 1869 CE. He used al-Fīrūzābādī's "Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ" as the basis for his lexicographical material, adding vocabulary found in other dictionaries, omitting place names, personal names, tribal names, and some dialectal variants. He formulated interpretations suited to the spirit of the age and added a small number of vocabulary items, meanings, and terms.

6.2 "Al-Munjid" by Father Louis Maʿlūf

The author, Louis Maʿlūf, was born in 1867 in Beirut, Lebanon. He travelled to Europe, where he worked as an editor for the newspaper "Al-Bashīrah" for nearly thirty years. He died in 1964. He wrote "Al-Munjid", compiling it in 1908, in which he employed symbols like those used in foreign dictionaries, and it achieved great popularity. However, despite all this, it is not suitable as an authoritative reference for researchers due to some errors. Many improvements have been introduced to it, such as illustrations, tables, and maps (Maʿlūf, 1908).

This dictionary is a concise, accessible school dictionary that is easy to use, and it is among the modern dictionaries that marked a turning point in the lexicographical movement, as it came as a concise, simplified work for students. These dictionaries differ from ancient ones, which were directed at linguists and scholars who had the patience for lengthy research. Modern dictionaries are mostly directed at students eager for knowledge and wishing to expand their understanding, while their time is limited by the rapid pace of scientific development. Thus, everyone now wants speed in fulfilling

their needs, and dictionaries must provide what they want with ease and simplicity, with clear wording and explanations not above their level (Maʿlūf, 1908).

"Al-Munjid" is among the dictionaries that took this desire into account, as expressed by its author: "To proceed: the men of letters of the Arabic language and its eminent scholars working to elevate its status, especially schoolteachers, have long felt an urgent need for a school dictionary that is neither too concise nor tediously lengthy, but rather accessible in its approach, distinguished by what school dictionaries in foreign languages are known for in terms of precision of arrangement and clarity of indication" (Maʿlūf, 1908). His dictionary thus came to fulfil this demand.

Regarding the sources of its material, Louis Maʿlūf does not mention the sources from which he drew, but it can be said that he benefited from earlier ancient and modern dictionaries such as "Asās al-Balāghah" by al-Zamakhsharī, "Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr" by al-Fayyūmī, "Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ" by al-Rāzī, "Lisān al-ʿArab" by Ibn Manẓūr, "Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ" by al-Fīrūzābādī, "Tāj al-ʿArūs" by al-Zabīdī, and "Aqrab al-Mawārid" by al-Shartūnī. He relied heavily on "Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ" by Buṭrus al-Bustānī and benefited greatly from it (al-Shihābī, 1995), like other modern lexicographers mentioned previously. In this regard, he states: "We have preserved the wording of the ancients as much as possible and have omitted mentioning anything that violates literary decency, with coarse words whose ignorance does no harm and whose knowledge rarely benefits" (Maʿlūf, 1908).

7.Aspects of Tradition and Innovation in This Dictionary:

a. Aspects of Tradition:

1. Adoption of alphabetical arrangement while observing the roots of the entry, as he was unable to break free from the traditions of the ancients in their treatment of linguistic materials.

2. He benefited from the ancient and modern Arabic lexicographical heritage in receiving and recording his material, especially "Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ" by al-Bustānī, "Tāj al-ʿArūs" by al-Zabīdī, "Lisān al-ʿArab" by Ibn Manẓūr, and "Asās al-Balāghah" by al-Zamakhsharī.

b. Aspects of Innovation

- Avoidance of obscure and unfamiliar words and omission of anything that violates literary decency.

- Imitation of European dictionaries in presentation and arrangement, by making each branch an independent line in parentheses, distinguishing between loanwords and original words, placing the root of the entry between angle brackets, in addition to its concise and abbreviated nature, in keeping with the desire he mentioned in his introduction, the level of students, and the spirit of the age.

- The use of numerous illustrations and pictures to clarify meanings and reinforce them in the mind, making them more memorable and closer to the soul.

7-3.Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ

This dictionary published by the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo at the request of the Ministry of Education in 1936, as it was desired to provide the Arab world and the Arabic language in particular with a dictionary that met the needs of the age and was well-constructed. Its authors included Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā, Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt, Ḥāmid ʿAbd al-Qāhir, and Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Najjār. It focused on the language both ancient and modern, expanded its coverage of scientific, literary, and artistic terminology, and included

many words of civilisation, modern words, and loanwords. This dictionary consists of 7,000 entries, 450 words, and 600 illustrations, with over 1,000 pages (Bulayyid, 1994).

7-4. Al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr

Among the most important matters stipulated by the Academy in its founding decree was the production of a historical dictionary of the Arabic language. Among its members was the German orientalist Fischer, who played a significant role in completing the introduction and a sample before his death after World War II in 1949. The Academy later undertook the publication of this dictionary. After this discouraging period for the production of the historical dictionary, it managed to publish a part of "Al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr" in 1951, with the assistance of specialists and competent editors, and submitted this experiment to Arab and orientalist specialists for their observations, which they then incorporated (Bulayyid, 1994).

This dictionary is "a comprehensive dictionary that encompasses the language throughout its different periods, citing poetry and prose from any era in which it was produced, and recording new words necessitated by the requirements of development and imposed by the demands of civilisation and scientific progress. The Academy has published the second part containing the letter Bāʾ, and in the third part the letters Tāʾ and Thāʾ" (Bulayyid, 1994).

Its methodology may be summarised as follows:

a. Adoption of alphabetical arrangement with division into chapters and sections.

b. Placing the headword subject to explanation between angle brackets at the beginning of the line, highlighted with the basic meanings, followed by detailed explanations.

c. Citing words borrowed from other languages with their foreign origin.

d. Mentioning proper names of persons and countries with some brevity and conciseness.

e. Attention to citations and texts drawn from the Qur'an, authentic Hadith, and ancient and modern poetry and prose.

7-5. "Muʿjam al-Wajīz"

This is, in effect, an abridgment of "Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ". A school edition of "Al-Wajīz" has been printed and distributed to secondary school students, and they cannot do without it. It helps the student and learner to reach the meaning of words, their origin, plurals, simple and augmented forms, and the origin of weak radicals.

7-6. "Muʿjam Alfāẓ al-Qurʾān al-Karīm"

This dictionary came after the Academy decided in its seventh session to produce a linguistic dictionary of the words of the Noble Qur'an, as it is the authoritative reference for the Arabic language. The Lexicography Committee was tasked with this, and it in turn formed a sub-committee from among its members to undertake this task. The Lexicography Committee presented to the conference the most important rules it deemed appropriate to follow in producing this dictionary.

Its work proceeded according to rules including: arranging the words of the Qur'an according to the method of "Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ", with each word accompanied by the verses in which it appears (according to alphabetical order). Regarding the interpretation of meanings, it relies on what early scholars provided in terms of texts and linguistic references, and authoritative sources to trace what they narrated, presenting them in order with sensory meanings first, then abstract meanings, then figurative, then terminological.

The dictionary includes Qur'anic words that are not of Arabic origin, with indication of their origin, and similarly for loanwords appearing in it, with explanation of the meanings in which they were used in their other languages. In addition, geographical names are

carefully reviewed, geographical illustrations are provided to locate sites, and proper names and geographical facts are also addressed. The explanation is given in precise, accessible wording that the educated middle class can understand. When the committee completes a part, it is submitted to the General Lexicography Committee and to the Academy for approval and publication. The books relied upon in preparing this dictionary are collected from public libraries and placed at the disposal of the working committee, with a designated space in the Academy building.

Moreover, the Academy has rendered a great service by publishing a considerable number of specialized dictionaries, including: "Dictionary of Chemistry and Pharmacy" (1983), "Dictionary of Geology" (1965), "Dictionary of Physics" (1984), in addition to other dictionaries of considerable value.

One problem remains facing modern dictionaries: that of being comprehensive of all Arabic vocabulary and words, given their reliance on the efforts of individuals only. In light of the significant challenges facing the Arabic language in the age of globalization and the spread of English everywhere, even in education, efforts must be intensified to preserve it more effectively, and to work on producing Arabic dictionaries that develop and preserve the Arabic language (al-Shihābī, 1995).

8. Conclusion

In summary:

- Arabic dictionaries have undergone a rich chronological evolution, beginning with vocabulary interpreting the obscure passages of the Qur'an, leading to systematic nominal dictionaries such as "Al-ʿAyn" and "Lisān al-ʿArab", and culminating in modern Arabic dictionaries and electronic dictionaries—an unbroken and continuous evolution.

- Modern Arabic dictionaries are among the most important tools upon which the Arabic language relies, and the compilation of modern dictionaries has involved collective effort, unlike ancient dictionaries.

- Modern dictionaries aim to comprehensively document and analyse the vocabulary of the Arabic language and its linguistic usages, attempting to record definitions of words and terms.

- The efforts of the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo in preparing and updating modern dictionaries such as "Al-Wajīz", "Al-Wasīṭ", "Al-Kabīr", and the "Dictionary of Quranic Vocabulary" represent a significant contribution to preserving the treasures of the Arabic language and its heritage.

- Methodological characteristics are the backbone of dictionaries, especially modern ones, and we have observed diversity in their structure in modern dictionaries, such as those of the Academy of the Arabic Language—"Al-Wasīṭ" and "Al-Kabīr"—while other prominent modern dictionaries such as "Al-Munjid" and "Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ" have retained their traditional approaches, representing a repackaging of the old in a new guise.

- Modern Arabic dictionaries are numerous; some have followed the path of ancient dictionaries, while others have attempted innovation in their content by introducing certain characteristics not found in ancient dictionaries.

9-Recommendations:

- The necessity of preparing a comprehensive study on ancient and modern Arabic lexicography to highlight its importance.

- Attention to modern dictionaries through the organization of seminars and scientific conferences that can propel the Arabic language towards further development and prosperity.

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