Investigating the World of Arab Lexicographers

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Abstract:

   Principled dictionary-making is, by definition, guided by a series of rules, mostly involving the notions of generality (of entries) and specificity (of audience). A dictionary must specify the general case when possible, and must address its audience. Thus a definition of the English word 'chair' would not immediately make reference to the ability to rock back and forth, since this is a property of a subset of chairs, and not chairs in general. Similarly a dictionary entry for 'thong' will include radically different primary senses depending on whether the dictionary has been written for Australian release ('item of open footwear') or for North American ('skimpy underwear'). While these guiding principles have been established and followed for good reasons in the creation and publication of all major dictionaries, there are some cases when it makes good sense to follow another route. The desire for a dictionary of a language is as strong for speakers of non-national languages as it is for national languages, and in some cases clearly stronger.

Key words: dictionary-making- generality-primary senses- open footwear- underwear

INTRODUCTION

Arab lexicographers are undeniably pioneers in the world of dictionary making. Their contribution in this field has been very great that they affected the making of dictionary. They

were the first to introduce to the world of alphabetical lists which continued to affect the making of dictionaries to-date. Arabic lexicography derives its importance from Arabic language which claimed the interest of Western linguists who spared no time and efforts in exploring its treasures.

Scholars of linguistics have studied every aspect of this language since the pre-Islam period and have been meticulous in conveying their findings without alteration or compromise. In the Ignorance Period poets and the orators competed with each other for the most eloquent narration and interpretation and their interest in and devotion to the Arabic language were greatly increased by the birth of Islam. The language became an indispensable element in the fulfillment of religious obligations and especially for the understanding and preservation of the Koran. However, we notice that beside its role in religion, Arabic became a language to serve as a vehicle for other humanities and civilizations. In that a great number of writers were using it to produce innumerable works. Those who devoted, their scholarship to the dictionary were undoubtedly far ahead of the others. They presented their works much like general-purpose encyclopedias, from the point of view of understanding meaning and reaching far into the depth of things; discerning eloquent *(fasih),* rare *(navddir)* and foreign *(gharib)* words from each other. On the other hand the fact that the dictionary scholars were one step ahead of the others is attributable also to their compilation of items contained in books dealing with various topics. Despite all this, works in the Arabic dictionary field are very rare. A fair amount of attention has been given to questions such as the method and the development of lexicography, especially in the Arabic language. This work is being elaborated in order to assist learners of Arabic to cope with the difficulties they may encounter in this field.

Arabic معجمMu'djam

Dictionary (Vocabulary): This is a book containing a rather detailed inventory of the language by explaining, giving meaning(s) with a particular, sui generis disposition. In general the arrangement of such kind of books is either in alphabetical order or according to the topic (systematic). The denomination of dictionary we have given to these books has its counterpart in the Arabic معجمMu'djam « or *Kdmus* قاموس . However the sources do not supply a clear knowledge of the time periods in which these expressions were used for the first time. Nevertheless we understand that the first users of the expression *Mu'djam* were the *hadiths* scholars and that this started in the early III. Century of Hegira. Bukhari has an alphabetical order system and in the *Mu'djam* style the names of the *hadith* scholars are mentioned in its work entitled *al-Tdrih al-Kabir.*

Mu'djam المعجم

The first work titled *Mu'djam* was *Mu'djam al-Sahdbah* معجم الصحابة written by Abu Yaia b. 'Ali al- Tamimi (died 307/919), followed by the works edited under the titles of *al-Mu 'djam al-Kabir* الكبيرand *al-Mu'djam al-sagir* المعجم الصغير by Abu'l-Kasim 'Abdullah b. Muhammed al-Baghavi (died 315/ 927). We can determine from the above that the expression *Mu 'djam* was used by the *hadith* scholars and that it was borrowed by the linguists in its actual meaning. As concerns the use of the expression *Kamus* with the same meaning; according to our investigations it was first used by Firuzabadi الفيروزبادي (died 817/1414). Being an illiterate community, Arabs were therefore unaware of the dictionary and consequently of its importance. Compelled to learn the meaning of some words and expressions by the birth of Islam, they undertook the task of editing on their own initiative.

As generally acknowledged, not all languages were collected and edited as a book when they first appeared and they subsisted for a while solely a means of speech, with some

parts collected and edited later on. Some other parts disappeared altogether because they were not recorded.

In response, with the aim of preserving their language, each community started to reassemble the materials of their respective languages and to keep them within the form of a book we now know as a dictionary (vocabulary).

EDITING A DICTIONARY

One of the primordial reasons for editing a dictionary is the fear of making an error while reading, commenting or when endeavoring to understand the Koran. A further reason is to avoid the intrusion of foreign words into the original language. Furthermore, when deemed necessary to learn the meaning of a certain word, it is customary to refer to the scholars of the period. There was also the fear of losing knowledge in this field with the death of the scholars; this consideration underscores of the reasons above. We understand that the first person who planted the seeds of the editorial undertaking was Ibn'Abbas. He was succeeded later by Abu Umaymah b. Taghlib Rabah al-Djariri (Died 141/758) who imitated the method of the former. Although they were presented as two of the most eminent scholars in the field for their having planted the first seeds of Arabic dictionaries, the first edition of a methodically arranged dictionary in its basic definition started with al-Khalil b. Ahmad al-Farahidi (died 170/786). Scholars post Ibn 'Abbas and Abu Umaymah compiled and gathered words independently of the notions of meaning and details. The works carried out in this field appeared first within books containing words pertaining to one distinct topic. We may call them books of subjects (of reference).

Works such as Abu Hanifah al-Dinavari's *Kitab al-nabdt,* al-Asma'i's *Kitab al-ibil, Kitab al-khayl, Kitab asmd al-vuhush, Kitab al-nakhil* and Abu Zayd's *Kitab al-laban* and *Kitab al-matar,* together with Ibn Kirkirah's (died 182/798) *Khalk al-insdn* are the best examples of topic books.

The movements of editing the Arabic language and literature reached an apex coinciding with the first editions of dictionaries giving meanings of words according to their own methods. A natural result of this development, as it progressed through a series of steps, and eventually acquired today's dictionary form, was the classification of a word according to its sound as an utterance (vocal), arrangement of a word by rearranging its letters, arrangement of words according to their last letter and accepting that letter as *bab* (chapter), and the first letter as *fasil* (section), and finally an arrangement in alphabetical order.

The names of the dictionaries can be listed as shown here below important dictionaries of the dictionary editing movements in chronological order - and swift succession:

- *Kitdb al- 'ayn,* al-Khalil (died 170/786)

- *al-Djlm* (= al-Huruf), Abu ' Amr al-Shaybani (died 206/821)

- *al-Gharib al-musannaf,* Abu 'Ubayd Kasim b. Sallam al-Haravi (died 223/837)

- *al-Alfdz,* ibn al-Sikkit (died 244/858)

- *al-Mundjid,* Kurra' al-Naml (died 309/921)

- *al-Djamharah,* Ibn Durayd (died 321/933)

- Divan al-adab(=mizan al-lughah wa mi'yaral-kalam), Farabi (died 350/961)

- *al-Bdri* \ al-Kali (died 358/967)

- *Tahzib al-lughah,* al-Azhari (died 370/981)

- *Mukhtasar al- 'ayn,* al-***Zubaydi*** (died 379/989)

al-Muhit, al-Sahib b. 'Abbad (died385/995)

al-Sihdh, al-Djavhari (died 394/1003)

Makayis al-lughah wa al-mudjmal, Ibn Paris (died 395/1004)

al-Muhkam and *al-Mukhassas,* Ibn Sidah (died 459/1066)

Asas al-baldghah, al-Zamakhshari (died 538/1143)

al- 'Ubdb (=madjma' al-bahrayn), al-Saghani (died 650/1252)

Mukhtdr al-sihdh, al-Razi (died 666/1268)

Lisdn al- 'arab, ibn Manzur (died 711/1311)

al-Misbdh al-munir, al-Fayyumi (died 770/1368)

al-Kdmus al-muhit, al-Firuzabadi (died 817/1414)

Tddj al- 'arus, al-Zabidi (died 1205/1790)

The dictionaries were intended to help students of language to carry out their language work quite efficiently in identifying Arabic dictionaries and to benefit from them, we will not identify and analyze each and every one of these dictionaries, which are worthy as independent texts when studied individually. But we will consider the evolution of the principal Arabic dictionaries that formed a school. It is our belief that the review of one or two of such books will suffice since they resemble each other so strongly in their respective arrangement and structure.

We can maintain that, in the following schools, the dictionary movement developed over three centuries between the end of the II. Century of the Hegira and the end of the IV Century, in accordance with their respective leaders and their works:

1. Madrasah al-Taklibat:
A school established by al-Khalil, in which the order is affected by interchanging the letters composing the word. The school is divided into two sections:

a) Taklibat al-savtiyyah: The group composed of al-Khalil's *Kitab al-'ayn,* Djavhari's *al-Tahzib,* Abu 'All al-Kafi's *al-BarV* and Ibn Sidah's *al-Muhkam.*

The arrangement in this type of dictionaries is in accordance with the utterance point of the letters. The method used here starts from the guttural sounds "غ خ ح ه ع toward Labial sounds *و ا ي"* .

b) Taklibat al-hicaiyyah الهجائية: The best example for that kind of dictionary is Ibn Durayd's *al-Djamharah.* As a basis, the order is arranged by using the alphabetical composition set out by al-Khalil.

2. Madrasah al-Kafiyyah: A school born out of the expansion of the poetry under the dominance of the *saci* (rhymed prose).

Following from this arrangement, the school took as a basis the last letter of the word naming it as *hdb* (chapter), and the first one as *fasil* (section).

Al-Djawhari with his *al-Sihdh,* Firuzabadi with his *al-Kdmus* and Ibn Manzur with his *Lisdn al-'arab* were the pioneers of this school.

This school adopted the system which consisted of isolating the word from its surplus and arranging it alphabetically within itself, then nominating the last letter as *bdb* and the first one as *fasil.* However there are some difficulties in picking up words ending with a "واوwaw" or a "ي ya".

Al-Madrasah al-Abdjadiyyah المدرسة الأبجدية:

This describes the group of today's dictionaries edited according to the alphabetical order. The pioneer of the group is Abu ' Amr, founder of this school, and contemporary of al-Khalil, although he did not imitate the latter in his book *Kitab al-djim (= al-Huruf* = the letters). In his work the author arranged the words in alpha-betical order by taking only the first letter thereof However, Barmaki is the linguist who, for the first time, applied today's system of an alphabetical order within the word itself; effected by taking into consideration the first character. If the word is "triliteral"; it is the second letter, if the word is "quadriliteral"; the third letter and in the case of "five-lettered words *(khumdsi)";* the fourth letter thereof.

The representatives of this school were Ibn Faris with his *al-Makdyis* and *Mudjmal,* al-Zamakhshari with his *Asds al-Baldghah,* al- Bustani with his *Muhit al-muhit,* al-Fayyumi with his *al-Misbdh al-munir,* al-Ab Luis al- Ma'luf with his *al-Mundjid,* and finally Sa'id al-Sharnuti with his *Akrab al-mavarid.* These types of dictionary activities, which give precedence to the facility of consulting a dictionary, continue today.

Further to this, with the birth of the Islamic religion and the event of the expansion of the Arabic language among non-

Arabic communities, the Arabic dictionary movement impacted on the vocabulary of other communities, instigating the preparation of numerous dictionaries. The Arabic-Turkish-Persian dictionary of Minisky is worthy of mention the first books in this field.

3.a Kitab al-'Ayn كتاب العين

The author of this treatise is Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Khalil b. Ahmad al- Farahidi (100-170/ 718-786). He was an Arabic linguist and grammarian who was bom in Oman. He received his education in Basra and became renowned there. He received lessons from Abu 'Amr b. al-'Ala and had many individual pupils. The most famous of them was *Sibawayh*.

Al-Khalil led the life of an ascetic who refused all worldly offerings. He made a pilgrimage to Mecca almost every year. Al-Khalil was not only the first to present the science of "prosody (*'Artid)"* but he also prepared the first dictionary arranged according to the utterance of the letters.

In the preface of his work, al-Khalil explains mainly how he wrote and arranged his work according to the sounds and the utterance points of the letters; the dictionary is arranged as per the sources of the characters, beginning with the letter *'ayn* =ع one of the guttural sounds and leading in alphabetical order up to the labial sounds. That is why his dictionary was called *Kitab al- 'Ayn* .

An arrangement in alphabetical order was followed in *Kitab al-'Ayn,* beginning with the guttural sounds and directed toward the labial ones.

ع ح ه خ غ/ ق ك/ ج ش ض/ص س ز
ط د ت/ ظ ذ ث/ ر ل ن/ ف ب م/
و ي

Al-Khalil followed a further arrangement, according to the distance of the utterance point of the letters, putting aside the

characters added onto the word and taking into consideration only the root letters (radicals). The rearrangement meant that words obtained by displacing the letters were also located in the same place. For example, he placed the words obtained by the displacement of the letters such as:

<div dir="rtl">

ع ب د/ ع د ب/ د ع ب/ ب ع د/ ب د ع

</div>

At the same place as the word "ع ب د- , and explained the fact. Al-Khalil considered each and every letter of the alphabet as a section, calling them *Kitdb*. He divided the book into sections equal to the total number of letters and gave the name *Kitdb al-'Ayn* to the first section where the dictionary begins with the letter *'ayn,* for the second section; Kitab al-ha, and the third section; Kitab al-kha. He also arranged the sections he named "Kitab" as follows: sound word composed by two letters, as in:

<div dir="rtl">

قد لو قد

</div>

-a triliteral word composed by three sound letters forming the basis of the word **بحر جعل**

- defective triliteral word either *mithal,* hollow or defective وعد

<div dir="rtl">

قال جرى

</div>

- assimilated words وشى شوى

- quadrilateral words دحرج

- five letter words سفرجل

Nevertheless al-Khalil assembled triliteral and quadriliteral words in one single section because there were so few of them. On the other hand, when giving the meaning of the words, the author supported and substantiated the meaning with extracts from the Koran, works from the *hadith,* and proverbs and poems. In addition al-Khalil also cited some of his contemporaries in related articles in his book, especially his pupils al-Asma'i (216/831), Abu 'Ubayda (209/824) and Sibavayh (180/796).

Being the first work in the dictionary field, it is to be expected that some missing points, errors and difficulties might exist in the *Kitab al- 'Ayn* . There have been many publications

dealing with this aspect of the book and criticizing *Kitab al-'Ayn*. We may mention, among others, the two works, namely Abu Bakr al-Zabidi's (379/989) *Istidrdk al-ghalat al-vdki' fi al-'ayn* and al-Khatib al-Iskafi's (420/1029) *Ghalat al- 'ayn*. If we wish to find a word in the *Kitdb al- 'Ayn* there is a certain procedure to be followed:

- to determine the basic root letters of the word
- to open the *idgham* if the word is *mudaaf*
- to be familiar with the utterance point of the word's first letter and consequently the rearrangement of the utterance points
- to pay attention to the words obtained by means of transposition of the letters;
- to determine if the word is dual, trilateral, quadrilateral, five-lettered or six-lettered.

3.b Kitab al-Djamharah   كتاب الجمهرة

The author of this book is Abu Bakr Muhammed b. al-Hasan b. Durayd (321/933), an Arabic grammarian and a man of letters, was born in Basra in the year 223/838. He was renowned for his extraordinary memory. He received lessons from masters such Abu Hatim al-Sidjistani (died 248/862) and al-'Utbi (died 256/869). Well known linguist scholars like Abu'l-Faradj al-Isfaham (died 356/967), Ibn Khalavayh (died 370/980) and al-Zadjdjadj (died 311/923) were among his students. He wrote several valuable works in his field of interest. *Al-Djamharah,* his three-volume work with the major part of the last volume arranged as an index, is the second largest dictionary surviving today after *al-Khalil's Kitdb al- Ayn.*

(i) Kitab al-Djamharah

This is one of the most noteworthy dictionaries of the Arabic language. It is also known as *al-Djamharah ji al-lugha* and *Djamharah allughah.* Ibn Durayd dedicated this work to 'Abd

Allah b. Muhammed Mikali. Being in the style of *Kitdb al-'Ayn,* it followed a different method of arranging chapters.

Unlike al-Khalil, Ibn Durayd included words of common and frequent use in the Arabic language. That is why his work was called *al-Djamharah* (major part, majority).

In the preface, the author gives information about its arrangement, the particularities of the letters, their varieties and utterance points and the rhythm of the words. He divided the materials of his dictionary not according to the utterance points of the letters but by taking into consideration the alphabetical order and the creation of words by interchanging the place of the letters.

The structure of the word *(bind)* is as follows for Ibn Durayd:

- Dual, quadriliteral, *mudaaf* and assimilated
- being strong triliteral, the ones whose *'ayn* (medium letter of the radicals) and *Idm* (last letter of the radicals), are defective rare *(nddir)* words
- Strong quadrilateral
- Strong five-lettered

The above structures are also divided into chapters according to alphabetical order. For instance: Words beginning with the letter *bd* are arranged as *bdb bd* and as *bdb td* with the addition of the following letter *td,* as *bdb tha* with the subsequent character *tha,* and with the next letter *cm* for other words without returning to the preceding letters. As for the words obtained by compiling the letters preceding the letter with the *bdb* title, there will be naturally other *bdbs* since the book follows the *kalb* method.

Still in Ibn Durayd's work, we note that the *hamzah { ء)* does not follow a single pattern and that he considered it as a sometimes defective letter. This view is consistent with that of earlier linguists, while sometimes it is recognized as a real letter amongst recent linguists.

He accepted the *hamzah* as a real letter in the chapter of *mudaaf* words and as a defective one in other chapters. Nevertheless he added a section called *al-navddir fi al-hamzah* containing rare words beginning with the letter *hamzah,* as an attachment to the end of trilateral words section. There is a great resemblance between this work of Ibn Durayd and al-Khalil's *Kitdb al-Ayn* from the angle of style, explanation and substantiation.

However since the *al-Djamharah,* having an important place in the development of the Arabic lexicography, has a rather jumbled classification system, it is not always easy to find words required.

Being an important work, *al-Djamharah* was published in four volumes, including an index, (Haidarabad, 1344-1351). Further to this publication were two undated offset printings, one in Baghdad and one in Beirut.

CONCLUSION

Judging by the above cited works of ancient Arab scholars of language and lexicographers, we can safely conclude that their contribution to the world of lexicography is undoubtedly very great. Some of the treatises they have complied in this domain did not reach us due to diverse historical reasons. One such sad incident is the Mogul invasion of Baghdad where they destroyed the big library known as *Daru Al-Hikma*, the House of Wisdom. Possibly some of these dictionaries were among the lost legacy. They were thrown into the rivers *Tigris and Euphrates* until their waters dyed blue due to the ink used for inscribing the treatises.

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