

# TRENDS IN ARABIC LEXICOGRAPHY

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## Introduction

A careful examination of lexicography in the Arab World would reveal that this activity has, over the centuries, been deeply influenced by cultural and historical factors. Hence, any attempt to fully understand issues pertaining to the status of Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA), Classical Arabic (henceforth (CA)) and the various local dialects in Arabic dictionaries is doomed to failure unless the researcher fully grasps the significance and contribution of four elements : the Arabs' religious beliefs, which are essentially formed by Islam; memories and images of a distant and glorious past where empire, language and religion overlapped; the legacy of suspicion and hostility that has characterised the relations between the Arabs and the West in general, and, finally, a deep sense of unity based on a common cultural heritage of which language is probably the most apparent manifestation.

In this article, the author will seek to investigate the impact these factors have had on the language of general monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in the Arab World and will conclude by making certain proposals. To achieve this purpose, the article will be divided into four sections :

- A) Lexicography and Classical Arabic : a Historical Perspective,
- B) The Arabic Language and National Revival,
- C) The Status of MSA, CA and the Vernaculars in Modern Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries,
- D) Future Prospects of Arabic Lexicography.

## A - Lexicography and Classical Arabic : A Historical Perspective

Like all early linguistic activities amongst the Arabs, lexicography originated as an offshoot of religious studies. Lexicography, according to Abdul-Tawwab, «was initiated in order to understand the **Holy Quran**, the cornerstone of Islam and the constitution of the Muslims». (Abdul-Tawwab, p. 229). Thus, Ibn Abbas's efforts to interpret the **Holy Quran** by reference to Arabic poetry which he described as «the record of the Arabs» «الشعر ديوان العرب» can be considered the real, but inadvertent, beginning of Arabic lexicography, a beginning that was to determine, to a large extent, not only the method of illustration and exemplification (i.e. by reference to Arabic poetry and drawing on specific Arabic dialects) but also the variety of Arabic destined to underlie the host of dictionaries compiled throughout the ages, namely what has come to be known as Standard Arabic. (Abdul Tawwab, p.229).

With the establishment of the Ommayad dynasty in Damascus as the masters of the nascent Arab empire, and driven by their zeal to preserve the language of the **Holy Quran** and Hadith, and partly by a sense of ethnic and linguistic superiority, Arab linguists, whose ranks, remarkably enough, were swelled by many-Arabs, single-mindedly embarked on a feverish quest to document the Arabic language. Yet, the collection of linguistic data was highly selective, and «field linguistics in the second Hijri century was not an attempt to record various aspects of Arabic or to investigate language variation in the

Arabian Peninsula ; rather, it sought to search for the pure structures and words amongst... (certain)... Arab tribes.» (Hijazi, p.97). Data thus gathered was collected either personally by linguists (such as Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad, Khalaf Al-Ahmar and Al-Asmā'i) who traversed the vast deserts of Najd for years collecting «pure» Arabic words or from Najdi beduins who flocked to the linguistic centres in the newly acquired countries (specially Iraq) and acted as informants to linguists and lexicographers. (Naja, p.8)

This is quite understandable : for while Ibn Abbas was working in an almost purely Arabic environment in Madīna, the Arab armies were storming out of their peninsula to eventually capture countries covering a huge expanse of land, extending from the Pyrenese in Europe to the Indian sub-continent in the east. As a result, the different Arabic dialects, only a handful of which were recognised as «pure», were now spoken within the same environment, with the attendant linguistic changes and accommodations normally associated with such physical proximity. On the other hand, some of nations which the Arabs conquered soon gave up using the languages that were predominantly spoken in their countries prior to the Muslim era (like Qubtic, Latin ,Aramaic and, to a lesser extent, persian) in favour of the language of the conquerors. But, in the process, they were making some inroads into Arabic (accents, foreign words and linguistic misuse) which were not tolerated, particularly by the fiercely proud Arab Ommayad dynasty.

The efforts of lexicographers, however, did not immediately lead to the compilation of dictionaries. Instead, they gave rise to a forerunner that assumed the form of a number of treatises written on specific subjects such as Al-Asma'i's «Names of Animals», «Names of Trees» and Al-Dainoury's «Names of Storms» and «Names of Plants», etc. (Naja, p.9).

With the demise of the Ommayad caliphate, field linguistics came to a virtual standstill, but not lexicography which continued to thrive on the data gathered by earlier generations. With the compilation of Al-'Ain العين by Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad (born 100 Hijri), a rich lexicographical tradition was established

that continues unbroken until today. For since the publication of that dictionary, at least seventeen other monolingual dictionaries have appeared, spanning, though unevenly, the time gap that separates us from Al-Khalil.

Still drawing a clear demarcation line between Al-Faseeh («pure», «correct») and other forms of Arabic, lexicographers who followed Al-Khalil throughout the Abbasid period continued to carry out their task, declaring that their primary objective was the preservation of Arabic in its «pure, correct» form. To this end, they continued to derive their illustrations and examples from the Holy Quran, Hadith, and poetry, while deliberately excluding any common linguistic errors, rare words and linguistic data that could not be confirmed by reliable beduin informants. (Naja, pp. 42-43). And for several centuries, the ultimate target remained unchanged, a fact that is manifested in the names of the dictionaries : Al-Sahhah الصحاح, Al-Bari البارع, Tahthibu L-Lugha تهذيب اللغة, Asasu L-Balagha أساس البلاغة, Al-Muhkam المحكم, Mu jam Maqayisu L-lugha معجم مقاييس اللغة .

On the linguistic front, the late sixth century saw CA establish itself as a «purely literary dialect, distinct from all spoken idioms and super-tribal .... [after] ... having its grammar, syntax, vocabulary and literary usage standardised during the third and fourth centuries.» (Encyclopedia of Islam, PP. 565-567). The rise of the Mamlouki dynasties and soon after the Ottoman empire marked the beginning of the end of interest in CA ; the Mamlouk and Turkish rulers were more interested in furthering their own languages than in the promotion of CA. Dialects started to compete with CA and the first managed, in certain cases, to supersede the latter in writing, a function that was heretofore jealously preserved for CA.

## B) The Arabic Language and National Revival

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Arabs started their struggle for independence, first from Ottoman rule and later from the British, French and Italian colonialists. One aspect of this national revival was the restoration of Standard Arabic as the language of education and

writing. Amongst the Arab activists, it was felt that they could assert and fortify their identity through this linguistic medium which is, at the same time, the language of the Holy Quran. In some cases, especially in the days of the Turks, this attempt to revive Arabic reached comic proportions. Khalil Sarkis, the owner of *Lisanu L-Hal*, a Lebanese newspaper appearing in 1877, wrote the first editorial in rhythmic prose, a kind of language reminiscent of Badi' -Zzaman Al-Hamadani's *Al-Maqaamaat* المقامات. Another example was the attempt to write the news in the form of poetry. The political significance of these two short-lived attempts will become more evident if we know that they were made when the efforts of the Turkish overlords to «Turkify» all the citizens of their empire were at their peak. (Al-Afaghani, p. 5).

With the collapse of the Ottomans and the resultant distribution of the spoils of war amongst the Allies, primarily Britain and France, the threat to the Arab identity continued, but this time it took a different dimension : under the Turks, the Arab national identity, and not Islam, was at stake. In contrast, under the European Christian domination, the difference in religion and a legacy of long and bloody confrontations between the two neighboring blocks came into play.

Historically, systematic European interest in the Arabic dialects dates back to the first half of the eighteenth century when the *Instituto Universitario Orientale* of Napoli was started in 1732 by a papal decree to teach the Arabic dialects to missionaries who were to be sent to the Arab World. (Juha, p. 109). This was followed by other institutions in Austria (1754), France (1795), Russia (1814) and Britain (1814). (Zughoul, p. 29). Since then, interest in the study of the Arabic colloquials has continued undiminished. Orientalists studied and taught these vernaculars : Reverend de Lacy Evans O'leary (1872-1957) studied the Coptic language as well as the Syrian and Moroccan dialects; W. Diem and A. Noth studied the Yemeni dialect; Thomas Johnstone published a study on the Eastern Arabian dialects; The Middle East Centre at the University of Cambridge has also been working on a dictionary of Egyptian Arabic and H.H. Grot published studies

on the Syrian dialect. At the same time, the majority of the academic institutions offering Arabic programmes still teach and conduct research on the dialects : examples include SOAS, Leeds University and Durham University (UK), Seminar Orientalische Sprachen and Erlangen University (Syrian and Iraqi Arabic, both in Germany), *Instituto Universitario Orientale* of Napoli (Italy). In addition, Arab and other research students in these institutions are encouraged to study the Arabic dialects or other varieties such as the Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA).

This Western interest in colloquial Arabic at the expense of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and CA was not only perceived with suspicion by the Arab intellectuals and academic institutions but also met with open hostility since dialects were always considered a corruption of *AlFusha* (Standard Arabic), and any attempt to accord them precedence over or place them on an equal footing with *AlFusha* was viewed as a colonial ploy intended primarily to enhance the European grip on the Arab World. «(British) Orientalists», writes M.R.Faisal, «were constantly in contact with the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, frequently visiting them to be briefed on the latest developments and decisions. The missions they carried out from time to time to the orient were not scientific ; they were political missions arranged by these plotting, cunning minds in both ministries.» (Faisal, p. 1333).

In condemning the colonialists' efforts to undermine Arabic, Al-Jundi (1970) states «From the beginning of the modern age, the Arabic language has faced serious... challenges at the hands of... colonialists... who saw in Arabic a threat to their interests. (And to counter this threat), they resorted to two measures :... to increase the use of foreign languages and to encourage the local dialects.» (Al-Jundi, 1970, p. 97).

Al-Afaghani, another Arab thinker, drew identical conclusions : «foreign centres emerged (in the Arab countries under occupation) that backed the call for the (use of) dialects and provided for this purpose money, platforms, agents and publications. The occupation forces clandestinely supported (the) dialects.» (Al-Afaghani, 1978 : p. 7). In the same vein, Hussein describes the call by certain Egyptian

intellectuals to use the Egyptian dialect instead of AlFusha as «a colonialist, secessionist call sponsored by the British» (zughoul, p. 30).

Some Arab intellectuals perceived this attack on AlFusha to be motivated solely by the desire to destroy both pan-Arabism and Islam, particularly by the missionaries who, according to Al-Jundi for example, drew a master plan to undermine Islam and pan-Arabism : for them, «... the elimination of the Holy Quran, the basis of Islam, required the elimination of Standard Arabic.» (Al-Jundi, 1970, p. 97). Thus, the same author persists, the orientalist who busied themselves with collecting data on Egyptian Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, etc, were actually driven by a desire «to eliminate the language of the Holy Quran and to replace it by the local dialects, thus leading to the fragmentation of... a united Arab World... which is bonded together by the Holy Book». (Al-Jundi, 1970, p. 98).

These, indeed, were not isolated voices. With the exception of a handful of Arab thinkers, including some eminent ones like Bint Ishati', Mohammad Kurd Ali and Yousuf Dagher, the Arab intelligentsia voiced the same sentiments : they never trusted the motives of the Orientalists. The latter group includes in its ranks prominent names such as Ahmad Faris Al-Shidyaq, Prince Shakeeb Arsalan, Mohammad Hussein Haikal, Zaki Mubarak and many others (Juha, 1982) for whom a uniform written language was «the symbol of the (Arabs') old cultural unity and their political union in the present day.» (Encyclopedia of Islam, p.573).

### C) The Status of MSA, CA and the Vernaculars in Modern Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries

#### 1 - Dialect Dictionaries

The Arab armies which marched out of the Arabian Peninsula, carrying the message of Islam, soon settled down in their new homes, bringing their various dialects into contact with each other and with the languages of their host countries. Consequently, the gap between CA and the spoken dialects widened, forcing some lexicographers to turn their attention to what they termed Lahn Al-Aamma; mistakes of the general public. The overt purpose of the

dictionaries compiled in this category was to describe the usage errors made in the speech of the general public and to correct them in accordance with the lexical and grammatical rules of Classical Arabic. Hence, they were puristic, remedial and prescriptive in their outlook and approach. Verses from the Holy Quran, Hadith and poetry continued to be cited as the ideal correct forms that must be emulated. (Nassar, pp. 96-110).

This situation amongst Arab lexicographers prevailed until the 19th century when a marked shift in the attitude of Arab lexicographers towards the vernaculars emerged. This was probably motivated by the efforts of Orientalists and missionaries and, to some extent, as a result of the lack of interest shown in AlFusha and the subsequent emergence of the local dialects as suitable media for writing. Thus, dictionaries for several Arabic vernaculars were compiled, including the Egyptian dialect (e.g. Al-Tuhfatu L-wiqa'iyya fi Llughati L'amiyyati Lmisriyya (التحفة الوقفية في اللغة العامية المصرية), compiled by W.M. Al-Quni and 'Usuul L-Kalimat L'Aamiyya (أصول الكلمات العامية) by H. Tawfiq (1899), Rashid 'Atiyya's Al-Daleel (الدليل) and AL-Mu'ujam (المعجم). (Nassar, 1956 : pp. 110-116). Meanwhile, certain Orientalists were carrying out detailed descriptions of the dialects of several Arab countries in Asia and North Africa.

When The Arabic Language Academy was set up in Cairo in 1932, the decree establishing it entrusted to it the task of conducting a scientific study of the Arabic dialects. But in spite of such a clear mandate, and possibly wary of being branded as anti-Arab or anti-Islamic, linguists in the Academy and most modern Arab lexicographers who approached the dialects were at pains to dissociate themselves from the earlier motives for compilation of colloquial dictionaries; they stressed, at every turn, that they were primarily concerned with the dialects in order to find what links could be established with CA. For example, in his introduction to his dictionary of North Morocco, Abdul-'Al defines his objective as follows : «Dictionaries of the Arabic dialects serve to bring Arabs closer together, so within a relatively short time differences between these dialects will vanish and pan-Arabism in its

clearest manifestation, i.e. linguistic unity, will be realised.» (Abdul-'Al, 1968 : p.6). At the same time, the use of colloquial Arabic in a monolingual dictionary that claims to deal with MSA was an unforgivable sin. Ma'aluuf, the compiler of **Al-Munjid**, was so ostracised by Naja that the latter warns the users against the compiler's undeclared intentions : «We warn the youth from being carried away by people who have suspect motives so our youth can be aware of what happens in the Arab World at the orders of colonialists who desire to destroy pan-Arabism.» (Naja, 1978) : p. 200).

Another aspect of interest in the dialects was a call for lexicographers to compile a dictionary which explores dialectal words that form part of MSA stock and to determine which of these words are common to the Arab countries. Nonetheless, academic interest in the vernaculars was never encouraged.

## 2 - Standard Arabic Monolingual Dictionaries

Building on methodologies developed in the West, a number of Arab lexicographers including Al-Bustani (Muḥeet Al-Muḥeet المحيط), Luis Ma'louf (Al-Munjid المنجد) and Al-Shartoony (Aqrabu L-Mawaarid أقرب الموارد) spearheaded the effort at the turn of the century to revive lexicography in the Arab World. Nonetheless, «they could not free themselves from the shackles of the past and did not dare to record any of the language of the 20th century.» (Al-Mu'jamu L-Waseet, 1987, المعجم الوسيط, p.7). Such a partial break with the past had to wait for the emergence of the Arab language academies, notably The Arabic Language Academy in Cairo which was established in 1932 and given a mandate to realise, inter alia, the following objectives :

- a - To preserve Arabic and make it capable of meeting the needs of the present age compiling dictionaries ... determining which items and structures are to be used and which are to be ignored ;
- b - To compile a historical dictionary of Arabic and to publish accurate research on the history of certain lexical items and their change of meaning ;
- c - To carry out scientific studies of the Arabic dialects. Although it is not obvious what this

particular objective entails since no effort has been made in this respect, it is unthinkable that the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo has ever seriously contemplated the possibility of raising the dialects to the level of MSA, let alone allowing the first to supersede the latter. An interest along the lines mentioned in Abdul-'Al's introduction (1968) would probably be more in line with the Academy's way of thinking. (Al-Mu'jamu L-Waseet, 1987, p. 7).

Given the distinguished status this Academy enjoys in the Arab World, the dictionaries it publishes assume a special significance : they would be representative of not only the views and practices of one of the primary linguistic regulatory bodies but also of the main stream of thought amongst the Arab intelligentsia. For this reason, I would like to examine in detail one of its most commonly used dictionaries; namely Al-Mu'jamu L-Waseet المعجم الوسيط.

In his introduction to the dictionary, the Secretary General of the Academy, Ibraheem Madkour, criticises the earlier dictionaries because «they remained confined to certain times and places, and have, therefore, failed to keep pace with the changes that took place (in the Arab World)». The place was Arabian peninsula and the time was between the «end of the second Hijri century and the end of the fourth Hijri century». (Al-Mu'jamu L-Waseet 1987, المعجم الوسيط, p. 11).

To remedy this shortcoming, the Academy has been driven by the general principle that the Arabic language forms a continuum, straddling the past and the present. This principle was faithfully observed in the single volume it produced in its historical dictionary and partially in the medium size dictionary under discussion where «lexical entries from the pre-Islamic, early Islamic periods and the 20th century (are listed) side by side, (thus) eliminating the spatial and temporal barriers erroneously erected between the various linguistic periods in Arabic.» (Al-Mu'jamu L-Waseet 1987 المعجم الوسيط, p.10).

As a result, the user of the dictionary finds in the first letter (Al-Alif), for example, lexical entries from CA وأرطت الإبل (the camels) have a stomach ache as a result of eating a special plant ; الأري a hook for tying an animal; أوى الجرح (the wound)

to get close to healing); الأزوج; one who fails to do noble deeds; أزر الحصان, (of a horse) (to have a certain combination of colours) appearing alongside words from MSA: أسيون (action); أم (nationalise); الإوزى (the goose step). In most cases, the criteria used for including, or excluding, a certain obsolete item are not obvious to the user, a practice which leads the researcher to conclude, albeit tentatively, that such a method is motivated only by the constraints of space rather than a systematic approach that might be based on any definitive lexicographical principle.

Another salient feature of the dictionary is the extensive use of Quranic quotations to illustrate meanings. In the first letter which covers 35 pages, for example, the author has counted about 95 Quranic verses, compared to about 19 classical proverbs, 10 verses and 4 hadiths. This practice seems to suggest that, given the limitations of space and the changes the Arabic language has undergone over the centuries, the lexicographers are primarily interested in the preservation of the language of the Holy Quran more than any other part of their linguistic heritage. Furthermore, the less educated user is likely to seek the help of this dictionary in order to find the meanings of Quranic words more than he would need it, say, to look up the meanings of obsolete words he might encounter in the poetry of Tarafa Bin Al-'Abd (a famous pre-Islamic poet).

Perhaps the statement made by Hans Wehr's in his article on 'Arabiyya (The Arabic Language) sums up, more succinctly than any other statement the author had read, the position of the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo: «The dogma that 'Arabiyya as the oldest literary form of the language was better and more «correct» than any later forms and that it must therefore be the highest authority for linguistic correctness at the present day too became a guiding idea for the whole language movement, even if there were voices in the opposition». (Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1978 : p. 572).

### 3 - Bilingual Dictionaries

The compilation of bilingual and multilingual dictionaries prior to the present century was initiated, not by Arab lexicographers, but by non-Arab

compilers who sought through these dictionaries to preserve their own languages, either for religious reasons like the Coptic-Arabic glossaries compiled in Egypt for nationalistic reasons. (Naşsar, pp. 91-93). The fragmentation of the Arab empire and the subsequent emergence of smaller political units dominated by Turkish and Persian princes gave rise to a nationalistic revival that manifested itself in dictionaries combining Arabic and these languages. Sometimes, Persian, Arabic and Turkish were collected in one dictionary such as Muntaha L- 'Arab Fi Lughati Tturki Wal- 'Ajami Wal- 'Arab منتهى الأرب في لغة الترك والعجم والعرب compiled by Aḥmad Bin Moḥammad Bin Arabshah. Some of these were no more than glossaries. In addition, Al-Şaḥḥaḥ and Al-Qamous Al-Muḥeet were translated into Persian and Turkish.

As Europe's interests in the Middle East increased, several Orientalists compiled bilingual dictionaries, including F. Rapheleng, W. Bedwell, E. Castell and Meninski. This trend continued in the 18th and 19th centuries and several French, German, English, Syriac, Hebrew and Persian dictionaries with Arabic appeared. (Naşsar, p. 94). But the development of a modern full-fledged lexicographical movement did not gain solid ground until the twentieth century which heralded a serious attempt to document Arabic and make it compatible with the requirements of the century.

If we examine the modern general bilingual dictionaries in the Arab World, we shall discover that the status accorded to CA, MSA and the dialects depends on four factors: the language of the head words (English-Arabic or Arabic-English), the source of the compiler's data, his education and background and, finally, the potential users of the dictionary. To illustrate this point, I shall analyse some of the more important bilingual dictionaries that have recently appeared, restricting my research geographically to Egypt and the Asian Arab countries and linguistically to dictionaries using Arabic and English.

#### English-Arabic Dictionaries

This category includes the largest number of dictionaries and has been served by both Arab and non-Arab lexicographers with the two groups



**A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic and Rohi Ba'albaki's Al-Mawrid : An Arabic-English Dictionary.** Like its English-Arabic counterpart, the last dictionary in this group lists only MSA entries as headwords, very occasionally citing words from CA. Elias and Wehr's dictionaries, on the other hand, share certain common features which merit further discussion.

Elias's dictionary was compiled during the mid-twenties, well before the proliferation of the linguistic regulatory bodies in the Arab World. Owing to the absence of any formal policy to guide his work and under the influence of his own dialect, Elias was left to make his own decisions regarding many of the crucial issues, including the varieties to be used and the size of the CA component in his dictionary. The compiler opted to use three dialects : his own Egyptian dialect which forms the bulk of the dialectal words (sometimes as many as ten words in a single page), and, to a significantly lesser extent, the Iraqi and Syrian dialects. In explaining his decision to use Egyptian entries, the compiler states that he hopes to «... lay down the basis for them to be used in the Arabic-speaking countries if accepted. Otherwise, they can be replaced by more correct items derived from Al - Fuṣṣa . Examples include طرطوقة, طقطوقة (cracker), يادوب (almost) كنفكة ( coffee - pot ), طفشانة ( picklock ), طلق حنك (low-necked), ديكولتية, شفشي (filigree), معزة (she-goat), قرفان (sick ; nauseated) and زغطة (hiccough), to list only a fraction of the entries of this type appearing in the dictionary. On the other hand, and in order «to enhance means of understanding amongst the Arabic-speaking countries», he includes in his dictionary «... a large number of (lexical items from) colloquial Syrian Arabic (such as زعير, درج, خوخ, بلبل, سيران) ...and colloquial Iraqi Arabic (like مرصاع, راية, شادن).

Whilst Elias was dealing with Arabic as a mother tongue, using this advantage to determine the nature of the lexical entries to be included in his dictionaries and the rationale therefore, Hans Wehr, a German Orientalist, decides, at the outset, on the variety he wanted to deal with : «the vocabulary and phraseology of modern written Arabic (which) is

based on a form of the language... found in the prose of books, newspapers, periodicals and letters (as well as) in formal public address, over radio and television and in religious ceremonial». This variety is selected, to the exclusion of the others, because «it provides a medium of communication over the vast geographical area whose numerous and widely diverse local dialects it transcends. Indeed, it gives the Arab people of many countries a sense of identity and an awareness of their common cultural heritage.» (Wehr, 1974).

Unaffected by any a priori position as to what should be included in the dictionary and determined to make his dictionary «a faithful record of the language as attested by usage» rather than «a normative presentation of what theoretically ought to occur», Wehr lists not only «classical words and phrases of elegant rhetorical style side by side with new coinages that conform to the demands of the purists, but also.. neologisms, loan translations, foreign loans and colloquialisms which may not be to the linguistic taste of many educated Arabs.» (Wehr, 1974).

But despite this seemingly definitive methodology, Wehr, like any other lexicographer dealing with current Arabic, had to tackle two major problems : colloquialisms and classicisms. In the introduction to his dictionary, Wehr admits that «colloquialisms and dialect expressions that have gained currency in written form.. vary from country to country». Yet, his dictionary, like Elias's, distinctly reveals a significant concentration of Egyptian dialectal words such as بىكليت (bicycle), بعكوكة (club,society). Some of these are, naturally, of Turkish origin like اديخانه (toilet), بوزباشي (captain), ريم (grill, roast), شوح ( aide - de - camp ), ريم (froth, foam) and a long list of words beginning with the prefix باش (senior, chief) such as باشجاويش (master sergeant), باشريس (physician-in-chief), باشمفتش (petty officier), باشكاتب (chief clerk) and باشمفتش (chief inspector).

Wehr also lists scores of what can be safely described as obsolete terms, including idioms such as ركب ذنب الريح (participate in), قرض رباطه (speed along like the wind), ضرب فيه بعرق (die).

In explaining the reasons for the inclusion of a large number of classicisms, Wehr comments : «Arab authors, steeped in classical tradition, can and do frequently draw upon words which were already archaic in the Middle Ages. The use of classical patterns is by no means limited to belles-lettres. Archaisms may crop up in the middle of a spirited newspaper article. Wherever an aesthetic or rhetorical effect is intended, wherever the language aims more at expressiveness than at imparting information, authors tend to weave in ancient Arabic and classical idioms. They are artistic and stylistic devices of the first order. «The conclusion this long discussion inevitably leads to is that» it is clear from the foregoing that it is not possible to make a sharp distinction between living and obsolete usage...». Therefore, «the vocabulary of modern Arabic... is by no means standardised, its scope at times difficult to delimit.» (Wehr, 1974).

#### **D) Future Prospects of Arabic Lexicography**

From this overview, we can describe the Lexicographical situation in the Arab World as follows :

1 - Interest in the compilation of dictionaries for the various Arabic dialects has been restricted to two categories of compilers : the Orientalists whose motives were interpreted as anti-Arab and anti-Islamic, and Arab lexicographers who have carried out the task mainly for political reasons : to further boost the idea of pan-Arabism. Other lexicographers have also used the dialects to a much lesser extent in their dictionaries, but the selection of the dialect was largely determined by the nationality of the lexicographer or the sources of the lexical data.

2 - CA and MSA tend to overlap in the works of both Arab and foreign lexicographers for complex reasons that basically involve historical and cultural considerations.

3 - No lexicographical interest has been shown in the variety better known as Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), in spite of the fairly extensive research conducted, mainly in the West, to determine the features and

functions of this variety, the underlying assumption being that Ferguson's concept of diglossia still characterises the linguistic situation currently prevailing in the Arab World.

Yet, what does the future hold for Arabic lexicography ?

To persist in describing the situation in the Arab World as diglossic might be a gross oversimplification of the reality of a rather complex linguistic phenomenon. The prevalence of the dialects, to the exclusion of MSA, was, and still remains, the direct result of illiteracy, and although the rates of illiteracy in the Arab World are unacceptably high, Arabic, like all living languages, is not static. With the spread of education at all levels and the wide use of the mass media (radio, TV and newspapers), the gap between MSA and certain Arabic dialects has narrowed. The emergence of Educated Spoken Arabic supports our claim that the gap between the two varieties is indeed growing small and might eventually become, in quantitative terms, negligible. This characterisation is particularly true of a number of Arabic dialects including Egyptian, Gulf, Iraqi and Greater Syrian dialects. In North Africa, however, the pace of change has probably been much slower, but a similar pattern of development can be easily observed. Thus, Ferguson's prediction that several distinct varieties of Arabic will eventually emerge has not been fulfilled, mainly because he underestimated the impact of culture and history on the path that a language such as Arabic is likely to follow. (Ferguson, 1959).

The spread of education coupled with the emergence of ESA and the failure of any dialect to rise to the status of MSA all provide the researcher with clear evidence that the conflict between the latter variety and any other variety aspiring to take over its functions has been settled and that MSA is no longer threatened to be superseded by any of the local dialects or the emergence of any new languages. Therefore, the cultural objections that militated against the compilation of dictionaries for the different Arabic dialects are no longer valid, and time has come for Arab lexicographers to start in earnest

a thorough investigation of their dialects. For the same reasons, dialectal studies in the Arab academic institutions should not be treated as a taboo. Another legitimate argument that can be advanced for the compilation of dialectal dictionaries relates to the question of needs ; undoubtedly, the most important single factor that determines the language variety to be selected in a particular dictionary is the user. And since there will always be groups of users such as students, diplomats, businessmen, tourists and anthropologists who will be interested in learning a certain Arabic dialect, it becomes not only relevant but also necessary to cater for their needs, without attaching any stigma to the dialect chosen.

In this connection we should also refer to the issue of using dialectal words in the general MSA dictionary. The use of colloquial words to illustrate the meanings of dictionary headwords is both convenient and common though, as we have demonstrated, far from being, thus far, systematic. If elements from any dialect are to be used, perhaps Cairene Arabic would be the best candidate, not because of any inherent or acquired linguistic characteristics that dialect may have (since Egyptian Arabic remains intellectually and culturally as impoverished as any other Arabic dialect) but primarily owing to the fact that it is largely understood by the majority of Arabs as a result of the widespread use of Egyptian TV series and films, educational links and, in general, the singular demographic and cultural status Egypt enjoys amongst Arabs.

Another serious issue to be tackled is the limits of MSA and the place of CA in a dictionary that professes to reflect the current linguistic situation in the Arab World. In considering this issue, a dictionary of MSA will have no claim to being modern if it fails to be based on a core of the language that speakers of Arabic at large share. In the author's opinion, such a core exists in the form of journalistic Arabic.

To the majority of Arabs, the language of journalism seems to enjoy a special status for a variety of reasons : first, the Arabic used by newspapers is understood by people who, though

they can read and write, come from different regional and educational backgrounds. Secondly, newspapers seem to form the principal reading material of a large section of the Arab population. Thirdly, Arabic newspapers from different Arab countries and from other international centres such as London and Paris are distributed throughout the Arab World. Other newspapers are sent via satellite for simultaneous publication in several countries. Fourthly, because the newspaper is written for readers with varying backgrounds, it tends to use a language that can be safely described as generally comprehensible to a wide readership and, therefore, forms the most uniform variety in use in the Arab World. Fifthly, newspapers seem to be, practically, the most decisive element in determining which colloquial and translated words or even idioms are to be accepted as part of Modern Standard Arabic. This process forms, in fact, the main source of enrichment for Arabic, though it lies, most of the time, beyond the control of the official linguistic regulatory bodies. (See Abu-Ssaydeh, 1992).

The position of CA vis-a-vis MSA is another delicate issue that has to be resolved. Proponents for maintaining CA claim that the Arabic language is a continuum; it is the language of the **Holy Quran** and the Hadith texts, and if CA is abandoned, this will virtually sever our links with our heritage, both literary and religious. Opponents, on the other hand, counter by claiming that such a position is untenable; language is ever-changing and a general dictionary for MSA should restrict itself to an account of the lexicon of the Arabic language as it is used here and now. Considering this issue, however, from a purely lexicographical point of view, one can claim that the major criterion that determines whether a certain lexical item is to be included in a dictionary that purports to describe MSA is use ; if a certain lexical item is in circulation, it will find a place for itself in the dictionary, and the citation of archaic forms will not revive them or lend them legitimacy. Therefore, the purpose of maintaining religious and literary vocabulary would probably be best served by the incorporation of studies on these subjects into the secondary and tertiary educational systems and possibly a general public interest in the literary and

religious heritage of the Arab civilization. On the other hand, and equally importantly, a thorough historical dictionary that covers the entire Arabic

language would be not only desirable on academic grounds but will form a major tool for the preservation of the language.

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