The Linguist and the Lexicographer

(REVIEW OF AL – MAWRID :

A MODERN ENGLISH – ARABIC DICTIONARY BY MUNIR AL –BA'LABAKKI)

Beirut : Dar Al-Elim Lilmalain

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I . INTRODUCTION:

A dictionary is usually defined as a book containing words of the language alphabetically arranged along with their meanings in the same language (monolingual dictionary) or in another language (bilingual Dictionary). Many contemporary linguists are no longer satisfied with this traditional point of view. They think of a dictionary as a companion to a grammar where the morphemes of the language are alphabetically listed , linguistically defined, and labeled according to the grammatical rules that apply to them (Bolinger 1968 :290).

Since Al-Mawrid is « a modern dictionary », its purpose , content , and form will be examined here in the light of the most recent linguistic standpoint.

II – PURPOSE :

As is indicated in its introduction, AL-MAWRID is a general dictionary which is intended for the speakers of Arabic. subsequently, the introduction , the general direction, and most of the labels and indications are written in their tongue. The pronunciation symbols transcribe the English forms rather than their Arabic equivalents. Its is also obvious that it is designed primarily as an aid to comprehension rather than to expression. (1)

In selecting his words and their senses, Mr. Al- Ba'Labakki fellowed two methods : (a) consulting and copying monolingual and specialized bilingual dictionaries, and (b) collecting his own citations and making use of his comments on the English-Arabic dictionaries which he used during thirty years of his career as a professional translator. (2)

III – CONTENT :

The content of the dictionary corresponds fairly well to its purpose as a general dictionary. there is a total of nearly 100,000 entries covering almost all the fields of human knowledge , as far as space permits .

3.1. MAIN ENTRIES :

Its main entries are not a reproduction or a reprint of any previous English–Arabic dictionary. In a comparative statistical study, the reviewer found that Al – Mawrid and Elies' Modern dictionary, which was the best seller in the Arab world until 1967, coincide only in 48,87% of their main entries and differ in 51,13% . (3)

3.1.1. SELECTION OF MAIN ENTRIES :

In accord with the view of most modern linguists, Al – Mawrid's main entries are of three types : (a) bound morphemes (dis - , - Iy , etc ...) , (b) single words (boy , happiness , ect ... ;) , and (c) multiwords (adhesive tape, jack – in – the – pulpit , ect ...) (Swanson 1967 : 64-5)

3.1.2. CONFUSED SUBENTRIES :

Al – Mawrid fails to get rid of the confusing traditinal procedure of listing idioms under one of their constituents in an inconsistent way. Thus 'by and large'is entred under'by' , 'at large' under ' large' ; but ' at most, at last ' are under ' at' ; and while ' on the cheap ' is listed under ' on ' , ' on the contrary' is entred under 'contrary ' and so on. Idioms should be listed under each of their constituents (Householder 1967 : 279) with cross references wherever necessary .

3.2. SPELLING :

Al–Mawrid presents full information about spelling : two slightly different variants of a word are listed under one main entry (e.g. color or colour) ; when there is an obvious difference between them , each one has a main entry with a cross reference attached to the less frequent one (e.g. thru : through) .

3.3. HYPHENATION :

It is a minor point , but one worth making , that unlike English , the Arabic writing system does not permit dividing a word at the end of a written or printed line. Therefore , syllabification is necessary in any English-Arabic dictionary. Unfortunately , hyphenation is not indicated in Al – Mawrid although it does not consume any considerable space (cf color & color).

3.4. PRONUNCIATION :

A good bilingual dictionary is expected to present an efficient description of the sound system of the target language , and to adopt an illustrated phonemic notation with which all the entries and contextual examples are transcribed .

Although Al-Mawrid is the first English-Arabic dictionary which presents phonological information ,(4) it is defective in many related aspects. Firstly, there is no account whatsoever of the English sounds or how they differ from their Arabic counterparts. Secondly, Al – Mawrid copies . Webester's notation which was meant for the native speaker of English, the foreign layman finds it very confusing.The letter (a), for instance, is assigned for five various vowels and diphthongs : $\grave{a},\bar{a},\hat{a},\ddot{a},\grave{a}$, and the character(o) appears in eight different sound : $\breve{o},\bar{o},\hat{o},oe,oi,\bar{oo},\bar{ou}$, and so on . Thirdly, many of the key words fail to function as illustrations . for rxample :

« â aware,...

......

a à bas , aperitif "
which of the two vowels in (aware) is meant to be the key sound of â , and how can a Saudi or Iraqi learner of English figure out the pronunciation of the french phrase à 'bas' ?? Fourth , the illustrative sentences of the dictionary are not transcribed ; had Mr . Al – Ba'labakki done that he would have been able to show the suprasegmentals such as pitch and intonation patterns .

Experience and experiments prove that the most appropriate notation for bilingual dictionaries is a basically phonemic one with few phonetic adaptations added wherever the users of the dictionary are expected to go seriously wrong .

3.5. ETYMOLOGICAL INFORMATION :

Al–Mawrid offers etymological information whenever relevant. It shows , for instance, that words such as 'admiral , alchemy , alcohol , algebra, sugar , zero' etc. are borrowed directly or indirectly from Arabic. Mr. Al- Ba'labakki is planning to

extend and perfect this type of information in the future editions. However, the reviewer is of the opinion that no etymological information should be included unless it has some obvious practical value, and Mr. Al-Balabakki ought to save the space for more useful information such as the morphological analysis which his dictionary lacks.

3.6.MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS :

Twenty-two years ago, Dr .Archibald A. Hill recommended that a dictionary should include a morphlogical rewriting which could be achieved by the use of periods or hyphens to mark morpheme bourdaries. Such a morphological analysis would assist the user of the dictionary in preceiving the relationship between the word he is looking and other words he has already learned ,and so the learning load would be reduced.(HILL 1948 : 10)

Although Dr. Hill's thesis has not been put into practice, (5) many linguists concerned with lexicography, such as Harrel and Malone, have recently come to recognize and emphasise its importance. (Householder 1967 :281)

3.7. MEANINGS AND TRANSLATIONS :

In fact, Al-Mawrid should be praised highly for its accurate translations which are accompanied by explanations whenever needed, and for not piling up Arabic synonyms in its definitions,(6) (Gleason 1955 :164)for presenting as many primary senses of each entry as space permits, and for including a great many idioms.

3.7.1. ORDER OF SENSES :

As is known, a monolingual dictionary may follow one of three basic methods in arranging the senses of an entry :(a) Historical order : the senses are arranged according to their chronological appearance in the language. This method is adopted, for instance, by the Oxford English dictionary.(b) Frequency order : the meanings and the parts of speech are arranged according to their frequency , as is the case in the Random House Dictionary. (c) Structural order : the arrangement is based on the relation between the senses, as it is attempted by the American Heritage Dictionary. It is regretted that Al-Mawrid's order of senses is solely based on the historical method which is interesting and important only for the specialist who is concerned with the process of semantic change.(Hoffer 1967 :80) Such a specialist would usually consult a specialized monolingual dictionary. The layman user of the bilingual dictionary is normally interested in the sense which has the most general application and utility ; therefore, the reviewer believes that a supplemented frequency method should be followed as long as it does not separate related meanings.(Mill 1970 :256-8)

. CONTEXTUAL EXAMPLES :

It goes without saying that Al – Mawrid is a pioneer among English-Arabic dictionaries in citing sentences or phrases to illustrate the semantic range or the syntactic behaviour of the word defined. But the number of its contextual examples is not satisfactory. Although it is stated in its introduction that « the great majority » of the words are used in sentences, a statistical study conducted by the reviewer showed that only a minority of senses (about 14,76%) are illustrated by phrases or sentences.(7) The trend of including carefuly chosen contextual examples should be encouraged, and every lexicographer must

aim at citing an illustrative sentence for each sense. (8) No doubt , the value of these contextual examples would be enhanced if they were proverbs or famous sayings. (9)

3.7.3. THE USE OF PICTURES :

By pictures , is meant here any visual illustrations that can appear in a book, such as simple drawings, realistic photographs, maps, and the like. A good dictionary must make as much use as possible of pictures. To utilize pictures in a purposeful and efficient way, the following points should be always regarded with care : (a) the picture must be clear and the desired part must be prominent(10) lest the whole should be confused with the part. (b) Every picture must be labeled, otherwise it might be taken as an illustration of an adjacent entry or a neighbouring sense. All Al-Mawrid's picturs are properly labeled.(c) The picture must contribute to the clarity of the translation. Some definitions depend entirely on the picture.(d) The size of the object should be indicated below its picture. This aspect is overlooked in Al-Mawrid.(e) The picture must illustrate the material culture of the speakers of the target language such as their animals, decorations, tools, houses,clothes, and the like. For example, in an English-Arabic dictionary designed for the speakers of Arabic , a picture of a church is appreciated but one of a mosque is a waste of space since Arabic equivelant conveys the message sufficiently. Strangely enough, Al-Mawrid has pictures of a mosque and a minaret but not of a church, (11) and others of a gazelle and a monkey but not of a longhorn. (f) Even when the item is common in both cultures , the target and the native, a picture might be needed to show the difference. An Arab, for instance, would rarely think of a camel as also a bactrian one (12)

3.8. GRAMMATICAL DESCRIPTION:

Grammatical information can be covered in two interdependant ways : an adequate description of the target language in the front matter , and labeling the entries by parts of speech and their subcategories to indicate their syntactic behavoir. Unfortunately,Al-Mawrid has no description of the grammar of English, and labeling by parts of speech is still incomplete:(a) it labels nouns but it does not indicate their two main subcategories, mass nouns and count nouns.(13) (b) Under verbs, it labels transitive and intransitive,but it fails to show unsaturated which requires, in addition to the object, something further to comlete its meaning. For example, « saddle » in, 'I saddled the horse'is transitive, but in, I saddled him with responsibilitie, is unsaturated.(Bolinger 1968 :291) (c) It labels adjectives but it fails to designate three important pieces of information about them : (i) the order classes :they can be labeled with numbers to show their relative positions in the noun phrase.(14) (ii) The question of comparison : it must be made clear whether an adjective is compared wither and – est or with more and most .(iii) The problem of prenominality :A serious attempt should be undertaken to differentiate between prenominal and non-prenominal adjectives. ' Content' , for instance is a non-prenominal adjective, and so we can say 'the men are content' , but not * ' the content men'.(Hill 1967 :16-7) (d) Al-Mawrid labels adverbs, but it does not indicate the items these adverbs can modify such as forms of verbs« well done, fast disappearing », adjectives and adverbs « very good , very slowly » , or sentences « usually it

works ». (Bolinger 1968 :291) .

3.9.LEVELS OF USAGE :

Al-Mawrid labels four levels of usage : American slang , British slang , obsolete , and archaic , the last two of which have very light functional load from the practical point of view. It would have been more useful if it had indicated other distinct standards of usage such as formal, informal, literary,colloquial , polite, vulgar, not among women , etc , which would guide the users of the dictionary in selecting the appropriate word for each context .(Morris 1969 : 201)

On the other hand, Al-Mawrid is remarkably efficient regarding another type of usage labeling, namely the field usage wherever necessary ; it indicateds the field of entries and senses such as physics, medicine, linguistics, music, etc .

3.10. ENCYCLOPEDIC ITEMS :

Although the reviewer is aware of the sharp disagreement among linguists and lexicographers upon the inclusion of encyclopedic materials in dictionaries, (15)he is in favour of including historical, literary, geographical and other cultural items in bilingual dictionaries.(Harrel 1967 :52 , Yorkey 1969 :285) It seems that Mr. Al-Ba'labakki is not of this opinion , and so Al-Mawrid has little to do with the common and familiar proper names of the English language. However, in later editions, Al-Mawrid added an appendix of encyclopedic items.

3.11. EDITORIAL MATTER :
3.11.1 FRONT MATTER :

Al – Mawrid's front matter consists of : (a) a preface telling us how and why the dictionary was compiled, (b) illustrated general directions on how to use the dictionary, (c) a key to pronunciation, (d) abbriviations used in the dictionary , and (e) references, solely monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, general and specialized . As pointed out in this paper (3.8), the obvious shortcoming is the absence of an adequate grammatical sketch of the English language describing its phonological, morphological, and syntactic habits .

3.11.2. APPENDIXES :

Al– Mawrid has no appendixes at all. Some of the appendixes desirable in a bilingual dictionary are lists of christian names with pronunciation and sex indicated , forms of address , tables of weights and measures with formulas for converting them into their equivalents in the native culture , and a list of common abbreviations .

IV . FORM :

Al-Mawrid has an eye-pleasing and attractive format, and a considerable amount of illustrations , the pages are large (16) and well printed, the entries in bold face, and the contextual examples between brackets. But one regrets that the key to pronunciation does not appear at the bottom of each page (Mathiews 1969 :357).

V.SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION :

In short, Al-Mawrid attempts to apply some modern linguistic principles, and at the same time retains several of the traditional lexicographical features. On the whole, it is the best available English-Arabic dictionary compiled by an Arab for the Arabs. Its merits are many : up-to-date entries, accurate definitions, and the introduction of the pronunciation rewriting and contextual examples for the first time in the world of English-Arabic lexicography.

On the other hand , its shortcomings are also many : a cumbersome pronunciation notation, imperfect front matter , impractical grouping of senses, insufficient illustrative sentences, the disappearence of syllabification, the absence of cultural words, and the lack of useful appendixes. In case that Mr. Al-Ba'labakki remedies these shortcomings in the future editions , he will not have to open his dictionary with Dr. Johnson's frequently quoted saying, « Every other author may aspire to praise ; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach » .

Footnotes

(1) This phenomenon is an aftereffect of the traditional approach to foreign language learning which favors reading for comprehension to speaking for communication .   (Harrel 1967 : 54)

(2) A third method by which a lexicographer might select his words is the use of the computer (Morris 1969 :201-2).

(3) The statistical comparison covered all the main entries that fall between (h) and (hair) and also those between (ri) and (ril) . It was calculated that there are 91 entries which are common between both dictionaries , and 58 listed in Al-Mawrid but not in Elies' ,and 38 in Elies' but not in Al-Mawrid .

(4) Cf the dictionaries compiled by Saad , Elies , Badger , and Wortabet .

(5) This may be partly due to the disagreement among morphologists concerning the boundaries of morphemes.

(6) Look up , for example , sick , heart, camel , and horse in Badger, Elies , and Al-Ba'labakki.

(7) Three pages were picked randomly ;their main entries , the separate senses of each entry, and the illustrative phrase and sentences were counted . This procedure was repeated twice with other pages ; the results were verified . The first three pages were :

No .of page examples	main entries	separate senses	illustrative
268	56	98	20
673	45	84	14
988	57	109	9
total	158	291	43

(8) Clarity's dictionary of Iraqi Arabic is an example of the dictionaries that cite at least one contextual example for each sense.

(9) Contextual examples and usage panels were essential parts of the Arabic lexicographical tradition even over 1000 years ago (Germanus 1954 :23-5)

(10) There are many **techniques** to achieve that : by shading the part , or darkening its boundaries , or pointing to it with an arrow

(11) This might be due to Webester's influence on Al-Mawrid .

(12) In relation to the other topics in this paper,« the use of pictures » is treated at length , because , as far as the reviewer knows , it has not been dealt with elsewhere.

(13) The Advanced Learner's Dictionary , one of Mr . Al-Ba'labakki's references, indicates mass and count nouns . Other subcategories such as collective nouns , nouns ending with -ics should be indicated in a good dictionary .

(14) Dr . Archibald A . Hill numbers them according to their closeness to N in a noun phrase ; his illustrative example is :

VI   V   IV III   II   I   N
All   the   ten fine old stone Houses . (Hill 1958 : 176)

(15) Generally speaking , most publishers supports a move in this direction .

(16) Al-Mawrid has two printings ,   6½ × 9 ½ and (9x13)

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