

## Contribution of linguistic meaning in inferring the denotation from words

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### Abstract:

This study aims to shed light on a topic closely related to the understanding of the meanings of the Arabic language, both in terms of words and structures, as well as to highlight the efforts of Arab scholars in semantics in serving Arabic vocabulary. The key to dealing with any human language initially lies in the word within and outside its context, in order to derive additional meanings through this precise step. This paper seeks to uncover the mechanisms of semantics, focusing specifically on the linguistic meaning within the framework of both ancient and modern studies from an Arab perspective, while also addressing some of its scattered elements found in lexicons and linguistic works.

After reviewing and analyzing the examples and applying semantic mechanisms, it was concluded that activating, understanding, and tracing linguistic meaning helps in anticipating the perspectives of lexicographers, refining meanings, and moving beyond mere wording. All of this is achieved by examining the details of the lexical sources used, analyzing them, and deriving insights from them.

**Keywords:** Semantics, linguistic meaning, inference, vocabulary.

### Introduction:

The concern with inferring the meanings of words has deep-rooted origins in Arab scholarship; it is neither a product of contemporary research nor merely the focus of modern academics. It must be acknowledged that the study of meanings, words, structures, and their foundations, as well as the discussions surrounding them and the attention given to them, were purely Arab endeavors. The West later came to build upon them, often unnoticed by Arab researchers.

Among the earliest roots that paved the way for this interest in words and the inference of their meanings was the care shown by the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, in understanding the implications of certain terms in the Qur'an. Whenever a word proved difficult, they would ask the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. After his passing, it became necessary for them to determine the meanings themselves and comprehend their implications. Through this step, linguistic efforts gradually emerged and consolidated, forming a foundation for research and authorship, with the existing heritage on the shelves standing as the best proof.

Generally, these efforts took two forms: the collection of words of the language, and then the precise scientific determination of their meanings. This scientific determination of words followed several approaches, such as interpreting a word in its context with another word in a different structure without comparing the two meanings, explaining through etymology, or clarifying by synonym or approximation. Before this, the collection of language itself had been undertaken through various methods: some preferred the lexicographic construction of the word, others chose the semantic field approach. They would then examine all uses of a structure to establish a core meaning around which all other meanings revolved and to which they referred.

From this period onward, linguists became increasingly concerned with developing mechanisms for comprehension and inference, which are manifested today in what is known as semantics, a field now detailed and established in books and studies, denoting the means of studying meaning and its theories in general<sup>2</sup>.

In this pause, we address a number of issues related to semantics and linguistic meaning, as well as its history and the disciplines that intersect with it or, if you will, the terms that overlap with it. Some have considered semantics and the science of meaning as one and the same, while others have distinguished between them or argued that it is more appropriate to refer only to semantics. In any case, the course of research clarifies these ambiguities.

### **Research Problem**

Based on the foregoing, the central problem can be posed in the form of the following main question, which this paper seeks to answer:

**Does linguistic meaning play an active role in inferring and determining the denotation of words?**

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its coverage of an important aspect of semantics and contemporary lexicography, which has not received its due share of research and examination. Its importance also stems from placing the researcher in direct contact with essential linguistic issues employed in Arabic lexicons. Moreover, it highlights the efforts of early Arab scholars in caring for their language and theorizing about it.

### **Methodology of the Study**

To answer the questions raised and test the hypotheses, the inductive method was adopted by tracing suitable examples. In addition, the historical method was applied by examining heritage books, particularly lexicons, along with the analytical method, which was employed in handling quotations and analyzing concepts and opinions.

### **1. The Concept of Linguistic Meaning**

**Linguistically:** It is stated in *Lisan al-Arab*: “Al-maana (meaning), tafsir (interpretation), and taawil (exegesis) are one, and the meaning of every utterance is its intended purpose.” And in *Taj al-‘Arus* it is stated: “The meaning of speech is its indication, its content, its concept, its purport, its implication, and the intent of the utterance that is, what is meant by it. And al-maanawi (the conceptual) refers to that which the tongue has no part in, but is a meaning known by the heart.”<sup>4</sup>

And the comprehensive or general meaning of the two syntactic usages is severe retention, restriction, or continuity with some manifestation. This is derived from the usages cited and their interpretations:

- ana fihim fulanan asiran yanu, wa uniya fihim yuna: he remained among them in his captivity and was detained. al-ana: imprisonment in hardship and humiliation.
- ana fihi al-aklu yanu, wa uniya fihim yuna ka-say: food remains in the stomach and leaves its effect there; this represents severe retention<sup>5</sup>.
- anat al-ardu bi-l-nabat tanu wa tani: it produced it. Ma anat al-ardu shayan: the land did not produce anything, i.e., it did not sprout<sup>6</sup>.

**And such retention exists only in the mind**, for we feel the presence of the meaning of the word within our minds. The utterance is outward and audible, while the meaning is retained behind it.

**Terminologically:** meanings are mental images for which words have been assigned. The correspondence between the terminological concept and the linguistic one is as follows: The construction (anu / ana) denotes the retention of something with severity and aversion in the inner self, such that there appears something indicating its presence there. Hence their saying: ana fihi al-aklu ka-ramy wa-say the food had an effect, took hold, and left its trace in his inner self with force and clarity until it appeared upon his body. Likewise, anat al-ardu bi-l-nabat the earth produced vegetation: it sprouted roots that held it firmly to its depths, while its rest grew and appeared upon the surface.

This meaning of the word maana is consistent with the terminological sense of being the mental image corresponding to words. We have said that it is retained, while the words are apparent. And to avoid confusion, let us draw attention to what has been mentioned in some lexicons<sup>7</sup>:

It is stated in Maajam al-‘Ayn: “The meaning of everything is its trial and the state to which it turns.”<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that here the meaning is not confined to speech. This can be understood from the phrase “everything”, since one may say: “What is the meaning of this behavior?” and it is not restricted solely to utterances.

It is also mentioned that the ma‘nawī (abstract) is that which the tongue has no share in; rather, it is a meaning perceived by the heart, and it remains so on the condition that it is of the heart.

Among their terminologies, mana was also used in contrast to ayn (the concrete), that is, in contrast to what is corporeal and perceptible by the senses. Thus, Ibn Faris said that mana is "the intention that emerges and appears in a thing when it is examined." Al-Raghib also said: "The meaning is the manifestation of what the utterance contains." Hence, it is but the appearance of something that was originally retained.

### 1- Forms of Expressing Meaning in the Lexicon

The need to understand words and structures is an undeniable necessity, since the obscurity of some of them is inevitable. For this reason, scholars devised what came to be known as lexicons (maajim). Perhaps the beginnings of interest in lexicons were themselves the collection and documentation of the language, which passed through three stages all of which represent lexicographic effort.

- **The first stage:** collecting words wherever they were found. The scholar would travel to the desert, hear a word about rain, hear another word about the name of a sword... and record them all as he heard them, without any order except the order of hearing.
- **The second stage:** collecting words related to a single subject in one place. What led to this in language was that they noticed words close in meaning and wanted to determine their distinctions. This stage was crowned by books written on single subjects: Abu Zayd authored a book on rain and another on milk, while al-Aṣma‘ī wrote many small treatises, each devoted to one topic.
- **The third stage:** compiling a lexicon that includes all Arabic words according to a specific method, to which one could refer when searching for the meaning of a word. The first to conceive of this idea was al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad<sup>9</sup>.

Such was the effort exerted in collecting and preserving the Arabic language. Yet one may ask: what was the purpose of collecting the language through lexicographic effort alone? The answer is that, at the outset, the task was limited to gathering the words and examining their semantic similarities, without the sole aim of explaining and interpreting them. Reflect on the first stage as we cited earlier from Aḥmad Amīn. But later, the need arose to clarify some obscure words, and the idea was crystallized by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, which later expanded and evolved into a linguistic heritage that fills our libraries today.

However, the work carried out by al-Khalīl and others did not follow a single pattern, as their methods of explaining a given word differed. Some explained it through a detailed phrase, others by citing its synonym or antonym, some by providing textual evidence, and others merely by

mentioning a related term. This is what we will attempt to present, since it lies at the core of the semantic issues intended by this paper, which we have entitled Forms of Expressing Meaning in the Lexicon.

Thus, the modes of expression in explaining a word in the lexicon can be reduced to the following:

### 1. Through a detailed phrase:

In explaining certain words, it is necessary for the lexicographer to go beyond merely approximating the meaning by a single equivalent term. If he were to attempt such approximation, the meaning sought would certainly fall short. An example of this type is found in al-Azhari's al-Tahdhib:

“Hashama: al-Layth said: al-hashm is the breaking of something hollow or something dry. You say: hashamtu anfahu (I smashed his nose) if you broke the nasal bone. He said: al-hāshima is a wound that crushes the bone, and the like.<sup>10</sup>”

Here, al-Azhari did not suffice with mentioning the close synonym *kasr* (to break) as equivalent to *hashm*<sup>11</sup>, but rather employed a more detailed phrase, which better conveys the intended meaning, since the expression required such elaboration.

### 2. By Mentioning the Synonym:

This type of expression of meaning received considerable attention to the point that Arab scholars devoted independent works to it. Before addressing the details, however, let us pause at its concept.

**Linguistically:** *taradof* (synonymy) comes from *radf*; *al-ridf* is what follows something, so it is its *ridf* (follower). When something follows another in succession, it is called *taradof*. Collectively, it is referred to as *al-ridafi*. This is likely the intended linguistic mechanism, signifying the succession and multiplicity of meanings for a single word, as will appear in its technical definition<sup>12</sup>.

**Terminologically:** Fakhr al-Dīn said: “It is the use of individual words that denote one thing from the same perspective.” We excluded by “individual words” terms such as the definition (*ḥadd*) or description (*ism*), for they are not synonyms. And by “one perspective” we excluded unrelated words, such as *al-sayf* (sword) and *al-ṣarim* (the cutter), for although both refer to the same object, they do so from two different perspectives: one indicating the entity and the other a characteristic<sup>13</sup>.

The difference between synonymy and emphasis is that in synonymy, one of the two words conveys the same as the other, as in *al-insān* and *al-bashar* (human being), whereas in emphasis, the second word strengthens the first. The difference between synonymy and the dependent (*tābi‘*) is that the dependent alone conveys nothing, as in the phrase *‘aṭshān naṭshān* (very thirsty).

Synonymy (*tarādof*) was also a matter of dispute among linguists, with some supporting it and others rejecting it:

“The positions of Arab linguists varied regarding the existence of synonymy in the Arabic language. Some denied it, such as Ibn al-A‘rābī, Tha‘lab, Ibn Fāris, and Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, seeking to identify subtle differences between words at times, distinguishing between nouns and adjectives at other times, or attributing synonyms to different dialects. Meanwhile, others affirmed its existence, such as al-Aṣma‘ī, al-Rummānī, Ibn Khālawayh, and others.<sup>14</sup>”

In any case, synonymy was one of the mechanisms employed to uncover the meanings of words in Arabic lexicons. To illustrate this point more clearly how did Arab scholars rely on synonymy to analyze words?

For example, in the entry (‘-l-t): “‘alt: al-alt means deficiency. In the Qur’an: ...” ﴿ وَمَا أَلْتَنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ ﴾ Al-Ṭūr 21: “Alata fulanan fulanan ya‘tlihi alatan” that is, he bound him by an oath<sup>15</sup>.

Ibn Manẓūr said: “‘Alata, al-alt: an oath... al-Farrā’ said: al-alt is deficiency.<sup>16</sup>”

Their sufficing with merely mentioning the synonymous word indicates that synonymy was considered the most reliable type of interpretation suitable for this term. There was no expansion

into crafting a descriptive phrase or illustrative indication; rather, the synonym was deemed closest to its meaning compared to other forms.

### 3. By Mentioning the Antonym:

**Linguistically:** *didd* (antonym) is the plural of *didd*, and the antonym of anything is that which opposes it, such as whiteness and blackness, generosity and miserliness, courage and cowardice. Yet not everything that differs from something else is its antonym. Do you not see that strength and ignorance are different, but they are not antonyms? The true antonym of strength is weakness, and the antonym of ignorance is knowledge. Thus, difference is broader than antonymy, for every pair of antonyms are different, but not every pair of different things are antonyms<sup>17</sup>.

**Terminologically:** In the usage of linguists, *al-adad* (antonyms) refers to words that express two opposite meanings with a single word. For instance, the word *al-jawn* can denote both white and black<sup>18</sup>.

Thus, among the forms of expressing meaning in lexicons is that they mention the word along with its antonym, dispensing with a phrase or synonym. This is because antonymy possesses an important characteristic. Do you not see how often we suffice with mentioning the antonym rather than listing numerous synonyms or descriptive phrases? Consider the word *strong* (*qawi*): its antonym springs to mind unconsciously, which demonstrates the positive effect of this mechanism. Nevertheless, linguists did not agree on its validity. Their disagreement regarding its occurrence in the Arabic language parallels their disagreement about lexical polysemy (*ishtirak lafzi*). It was natural for Ibn Durustuya, who denied polysemy altogether, to deny antonymy as well, even dedicating a book to supporting his opinion entitled *Ibtal al-Adad* (The Refutation of Antonyms). Another group, however, affirmed its frequency and cited evidence, including al-Khalil, Sibawayh, Abu Ubayda, al-Tha'alibi, and al-Suyuti. Some even composed independent works devoted to listing examples of antonymy, the most famous of which is *al-Adad* by Ibn al-Anbari.

In truth, many words claimed to be antonyms can be interpreted differently, thus removing them from this category. In some cases, a word was used in its opposite sense purely out of optimism for example, *salim* (literally "safe/healthy") used for someone bitten by a snake, or *al-rayyan* and *al-nahil* used for the thirsty. In other cases, it was used sarcastically, such as calling a fool or madman *aqil* ("sensible"). Sometimes the apparent antonymy arises from the varied meanings of a single term depending on context, as with the word *fawq* ("above"), which was said to be used in the sense of its opposite, below, as in the verse:

(إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا) [Sūrat al-Baqara 2:26], meaning: something smaller/less than it.<sup>19</sup>

### 4. By Example and Evidence:

Very often, the lexicographer may refrain from using a descriptive phrase, a synonym, or an antonym in explaining certain words. This may be because the recipient might not grasp these methods. The recipient usually falls into one of two categories: either a layperson with little or no knowledge of linguistic sciences, or a well-versed scholar.

For the layperson, only the synonym easily settles in the mind, as it holds cognitive authority and is readily retained. Yet many laypeople often demand examples to solidify understanding. Thus, this lexicographic method providing examples becomes an indispensable supplement to all the previously mentioned methods. This is because the words of the Arabs, both in poetry and prose, are a rich source of inspiration for the language as a whole.

Examples, however, are not restricted to the lay audience alone. Poetic and prose citations are central to linguistic study. Do you not see that **the cited example, attributed to its author, is the ideal model** since it meets grammatical and rhetorical conditions within the literary context it represents? In lexicographic practice, the function of the citation is twofold:

1. To clarify the word whose meaning is being explained, thereby resolving the ambiguity of its expression.

2. To serve as proof of its usage.

In this way, the recipient not only understands the meaning of the word but also gains confidence that it is authentically used in Arabic literary tradition, and that it remains viable for application and interpretation. This authority is reinforced when the citation is linked to a renowned literary figure whose eloquence and poetry are acknowledged, such as Tarafa, al-Nabigha, Humayd ibn Thawr, Kuthayyir Uzza, al-Qatami, or Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him).

Indeed, this reliance on literary citations was among the precursors to the emergence of the discipline of marifat al-gharib (understanding rare/obscure words), or more specifically, the gharib al-Quran. This is exemplified in the questions of Nafi ibn al-Azraq to Ibn Abbas. For instance, Nafi ibn al-Azraq said: "O Ibn Abbas, tell me about the words of Allah Almighty: (عُرْبًا اَنْرَابًا) [al-Waqia: 37].<sup>20</sup>"

He replied: "They are women passionately loving their husbands, created from saffron; and al-atrāb means those equal in age."

Nāfi' asked: "Do the Arabs know this usage?"

He said: "Yes. Have you not heard al-Nābigha of Banū Dhubyān say...?"

### **I knew Sa'dā when she was still a young maiden**

#### **A loving, devoted woman, strolling gracefully among fair maidens<sup>21</sup>.**

From here, it became clear that the interpretative effort was initially this very endeavor, which was later consolidated and expanded to become an independent science. And if we realize that the three foundations upon which the Arabic lexicon is built consider the citation (shāhid) as the cornerstone of the lexicographical process a fact evident through the tracing and examination of Arabic dictionaries we can summarize them as follows:

- The words that constitute the lexicon.
- The method of arranging these words.
- The methodology of explaining these words<sup>22</sup>.

And the last element is the core of the semantic process intended in our research in general, and in this particular section in specific.

Perhaps we may cite an example from the lexicons to make the matter clearer. Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi says: "Aḏaz: al-ʿaḏa is the retreat of the coward, the bending of the arrow and its trembling in flight if it is not aimed." He then cited Ru'bah who said:

#### **"When they saw us, their arrows wavered, and they believed the preachers."**

And it is said in the proverbs of the Arabs: "Do not preach to me while you yourself fail to take heed" that is, admonish yourself and leave off admonishing me. And al-az means severity in war, as if derived from "the war bit him," but they did not distinguish between the two just as they did not differentiate between al-dath and al-daa due to the difference in formation. The poet said:

#### **"Skilled in hardship and in severity."**

And it is said: al-ḥarb ʿaḏat-hu means "the war bit him." And the cowardly man yaʿḏiz ʿan muqātīlihi when he retreats from it. Al-ʿAjjāj said:

#### **"The coward and the snarling dog trembled and shrank back."**

Thus, the variation of citation between poetry and prose has a profound effect in conveying the lexicographical import of the word, as we have previously mentioned<sup>23</sup>.

### 1- Means of Clarifying and Refining Meaning:

This topic differs from the previous one in that it is concerned with refining meaning, not merely expressing it. Here, we will briefly present some mechanisms or sources that help clarify meaning and uncover its dimensions:

#### 1- Lexical Polysemy:

The scholars of language dedicated themselves to serving Arabic, exhausting their efforts and time, and investing all their energies and capacities in researching and delving into its sciences. Most of the sciences if not all have matured and reached completion, except for the science of exegesis, or rather, the sciences related to the Holy Qur'an. Every day, new benefits and unique insights emerge from it, for it is the Book whose wonders never cease. All of this may be considered either in terms of the whole that is, the verses or in terms of the part that is, the words. From the latter arose what was known in ancient times as *al-wujūh wa-al-naẓā'ir*, which is referred to by modern scholars as lexical polysemy. This reveals one of the aspects of the miraculous nature of this exceptional language, for a single word, through the variety of contexts, conveys different meanings. Thus, the language displays eloquence, beauty of expression, and stylistic refinement that astonish minds and confound intellects. From the time it was compiled and recorded until the present day, it continues to yield insights and discoveries. The most prominent proof of the strength of this language is that the final divine Book was revealed in it to the final Prophet, to establish what Allah Almighty has decreed for His servants.

- It is necessary, in this regard, to pause at an important principle, namely the diversity of approaches to this mechanism. Some scholars focused on studying it in the Quran, which is referred to as *al-wujūh wa-al-naẓair*. This science is a type of exegesis that is based primarily on the Quranic word. *Naẓair* means that a single word is mentioned in different places in the Quran in the same form, but in each place it carries a meaning different from the others. The word in one place corresponds to (is the *naẓir* of) the word in the other place, while interpreting these words with their various meanings is the *wujūh*. Thus, the science of *al-wujūh wa-al-naẓair* relies on the concept of lexical polysemy<sup>24</sup>. The earliest works that have reached us in this discipline are: *Al-Wujūh wa-al-Naẓair* (or *al-Ashbah wa-al-Naẓair*) by Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. 150 AH).
- *Al-Wujūh wa-al-Naẓair* by Harun ibn Musa al-Awar (d. 170 AH), among others.

There were also those who directed their attention to studying it in the Noble Hadith. Of what was written in this field, nothing has reached us except the book: *Kitab al-Ajnas min Kalam al-Arab wa-ma Ishtabaha fi al-Lafz wa-Ikhtalafa fi al-Mana* by Abu Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam (d. 224 AH). It is a small treatise containing no more than 150 words and not exceeding 22 pages. He summarized it so greatly that he merely mentioned the word and its meaning without citing any example for it.

As for the third type those who directed their study of polysemy toward the Arabic language itself its pioneers included al-Asmai, al-Yazidi, Abu al-Amithal, and Kura al-Naml. From this field, the works that have reached us are the books of al-Amithal and Kura al-Naml:

- *Ma Ittafaqqa Lafzuhu wa-Ikhtalafa Manahu* by al-Amithal Abd Allah ibn Khalid (d. 240 AH).
- *Al-Munjid fi al-Lugha* by Kura Ali ibn al-Hasan al-Hanai (d. 310 AH)<sup>25</sup>.

The most prominent indication of the importance and greatness of this linguistic phenomenon is that it was given independent treatment in dedicated works<sup>26</sup>, such as Al-Suyuti in his book *Muataarak al-Aqran*, and Al-Mushtarak al-Lafzi fi Daw Gharib al-Quran and Al-Mushtarak al-Lafzi fi al-Haql al-Qurani, both authored by Dr. Abdel Aal Salem Makram.

Moreover, we cannot fully enumerate the importance and benefit of lexical polysemy, given its wide use by exegetes, linguists, jurists, and scholars of *usul*, but we may summarize its value in the following points:

- 1- Lexical polysemy raises various semantic issues for a single word depending on the context.
- 2- It is one of the reasons behind the differences among exegetes.

- 3- It contributes to the expansion of word meanings.
- 4- This phenomenon encompasses nouns, verbs, and particles of meaning.
- 5- It is one of the reasons behind differences in juristic rulings.
- 6- It plays a role in the inimitability of the Quran.
- 7- It contributes to the miraculous nature of this remarkable language.
- 8- It includes other linguistic phenomena such as antonyms, and the distinction between literal and figurative usage<sup>27</sup>.
- 9- It enriches the lexicon, as it constitutes a fundamental resource for word analysis.

### **The Relationship between the Word and its Meaning – Derivation (Ishtiqaq):**

Scholars have paid great attention to analyzing the vocabulary of the Holy Quran, relying on the efforts of the skilled imams before them who employed methods to clarify, analyze, and simplify the Qur'anic word. Since the Quran was revealed in the language of the Arabs, it can only be understood through its sciences. Thus, the scholars of the Ummah who were concerned with exegesis engaged in this field and attempted to uncover its secrets. Their starting point was the study of unfamiliar words, and their primary reliance was on the language of the Arabs in which it was revealed. They employed as much of the sciences of language as possible to enable them to understand it. We can say that among the most important of these sciences is the science of derivation (Ishtiqaq), in which the greatest masters of Arabic wrote due to its significance and necessity, as they sought to trace words back to their roots in order to make their meanings clearer. Derivation is “an original phenomenon in the Arabic language that occurs within a scientific and practical methodology based on the conventional relationship between the signifier and the signified, as assumed by the early scholars of Arabic. It is a kind of linguistic analogy of words, from which speakers of the language benefit to meet their needs for expressions that serve the meanings they wish to convey. It is the process of generating some words from others and tracing them back to a single root that determines their substance and suggests their shared original meaning, while also suggesting their specific new meaning. The reason for derivation lies in the nature of the Arabic language as a derivational language capable of enriching itself by increasing its vocabulary, enabling it to achieve expressive power and to keep pace with modernity in addressing new topics.<sup>28</sup>”

Al-Shawkani, explaining the importance of derivation, said:

“Indeed, a science that enables its possessor to uncover these secrets is of great significance and noble worth. And an art through which one attains such subtleties is of high rank and lofty status. Yet, how disgraceful it is for a scholar well-versed in the various sciences related to the Arabic language to be ignorant of a discipline counted among its sciences, not subsumed under any of its other branches. For a group of the most precise scholars have classified the sciences related to the Arabic language into six: grammar, morphology, derivation, semantics, rhetoric, and stylistics. And another group has limited the literary sciences to several, among them derivation. One of them even versified the enumeration of the literary sciences in lines of poetry, including the following:

**“Language, morphology, and derivation with its grammar,  
The science of meanings, rhetoric, and stylistics <sup>29</sup>.”**

It is sufficient for us, in highlighting the importance of derivation, to say that it is a science that helps in knowing the roots and origins of words. It also contributes to the generative capacity of the Arabic language not merely for recognizing words and their roots, but also for keeping pace with the expression of new ideas and the innovations of life. “The feature of derivation in Arabic has endowed it with a wealth of words that do not conflict but rather support one another, that do not diminish but rather grow throughout the ages. It has given the language flexibility, enabling it to



respond to the demands of the era and of life, and to what emerges in it of meanings, ideas, tools, and inventions...<sup>30</sup>”

The importance of derivation becomes even clearer when it is compared with other sources of lexical enrichment, such as analogy (qiyas) and transmitted usage (samaa). Ibn Jinni said: “If it is asked: why is speech established upon what can stand completely independent, while expression may stand on its own but may also need something else? Was it derivation that determined this, or was it rather a transmitted usage received with acceptance and adherence?<sup>31</sup> It is said: no; rather, derivation determined this, not mere transmitted usage.”

Moreover, the most complete method for identifying the meanings of words is the method of derivation<sup>32</sup>. Among the benefits of derivation are:

- -Recognizing the linguistic differences and precise semantic nuances of words.
- Gaining confidence in words and certainty in their authenticity and originality.
- Supplying the language with many new words such as creating new terms for innovations and newly invented things<sup>33</sup>.
- Distinguishing between Arabic words and those that are not.
- Revealing one aspect of the vast Qur’anic language.
- Tracing the roots of words.
- Brevity; this is evident in the fourth type according to the classification of Abdullah Amin known as “al-naht” (compounding).

The importance of derivation is greater than can be counted or enumerated, but we have sufficed with what has been mentioned here.

### **The Limits of Meanings in Terms of Generality and Specificity (al-‘Aam wa al-Khaas):**

Ibn Faris defined generality and specificity by saying: “The general is that which covers the whole and leaves nothing outside of it... and the specific is that which is broken down so that it applies to one thing and not another.<sup>34</sup>”

Imam al-Raghib, in the introduction to his exegesis, placed a section entitled “A Chapter on Generality and Specificity in Terms of Meaning”<sup>35</sup>. Under this section he mentioned types of generality: an absolute general, which is the genus, such as our saying “animal”; and a general in one sense and specific in another, such as “human being”, for it is specific when compared to “animal” but general when compared to “Zayd” or “‘Amr.”

He then mentioned a general principle needed by every exegete: “When the exegete interprets the general by way of the specific, his aim is to indicate a particular specification by mentioning an example, not to claim that it is the only meaning and nothing else.<sup>36</sup>”

Al-Qarafi, may Allah have mercy on him, was the first to author a book devoted specifically to generality and specificity, in which he criticized all those who preceded him, arguing that they had not set a precise definition for it, and that they confused it with al-mutlaq (the absolute). Likewise, he criticized those before him in their uses, distinguishing between al-‘aam (the general) and al-a‘amm (the more general), and between universality (al-kulliya) and the universal (al-kulli)<sup>37</sup>.

In any case, generality has a concept agreed upon by all who have addressed it, though some may add to or subtract from its elements. If we say that al-‘aam is “the expression that indicates inclusion of all the individuals to which its meaning applies, at once, without restriction, whether by linguistic convention or by contextual indication,” we are very close to encompassing the concept that covers all the parts of what is mentioned.

Generality and its forms are central linguistic issues that were studied by linguists in lexicons and books of language. This is because the work of linguists came before most of the so-called instrumental sciences. One should not claim, for instance, that the science of usul (principles of jurisprudence) existed in the time of the Prophet. All the religious sciences existed then in substance without their later designations, which only came to be formulated and expanded as the need arose.

But this is not the case with the sciences of language, for language and expression preceded these sciences. Do you not see that Allah challenged Quraysh with a miracle from the very domain they mastered eloquence and expression just as He granted Moses miracles in the field of medicine, which his people excelled in?

Thus, language and its sciences are as old as humanity itself, and Arabic is as old as eloquence in the pre-Islamic era and the early days of Islam. On this basis, generality and specificity, which we are discussing here, belong to the issues of semantics a wide-ranging field that Arabic scholars included in their books and works. Among these are what is found in lexicons, books on Gharib al-Quran (rare words of the Quran), and Mushkil al-Quran (problematic expressions in the Quran). As an example, al-Farra mentioned in his book Maani al-Quran saying: "Al-Kisai recited to me:

**“Sawaun ‘alayka al-nafr am bitta laylatan bi ahl al-qibab min Namir ibn Amir.”**

And some recited it as: “aw anta bait”. The use of aw here is permissible because of the word al-nafr. This is like saying: “It is the same for you, good and evil”, where aw may replace wa because the meaning is one of equivalence, as when you say: “Strike him, whether he stands or sits.” Thus, aw may carry the meaning of generality, just as wa does. His directing of the second narration of the verse (“aw anta bait”) means that aw may substitute for am, and may also replace wa among the particles of meaning. This substitution is governed by their usage, and in this case it conveys the sense of generality.

Another example is the Qur’anic verse:

(فَلَمَّا آتَاهُمَا صَالِحًا جَعَلَا لَهُ شُرَكَاءَ فِيمَا آتَاهُمَا فَتَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ) al-A‘raf 190

Had it referred to Adam and Hawwa, it would have said yushrikan instead of yushrikun. This indicates generality. Thus, his use of the plural form, which denotes generality, was spontaneous, to establish that the address was to all in general, not to Adam, peace be upon him, and his wife.

### **Conclusion and Findings of the Study**

This brief presentation of issues related to linguistic meaning, its importance, and its Arabic dimensions, brings the reader back to the foundations of original Arabic linguistic studies and reveals the efforts of its scholars, who were meticulous and cautious in preserving the language of the Holy Quran.

From the presentation and analysis, the study reached the following findings:

- Linguistic meaning, from both its linguistic and technical perspectives, shows its importance as a tool for understanding and precision.
- By reflecting on the attitudes of the Arabs in dealing with their daily lives, we conclude that the words they used were not arbitrary but carefully chosen.
- The beginnings of linguistic interest coincided with the emergence of semantics or at least its mechanisms, although the term itself is modern.
- Semantics is a science scattered throughout books of language, dictionaries, and other scholarly disciplines.
- The variety of ways of expressing meaning in dictionaries is due to the nature of the word itself whether superficial or profound, eloquent or borrowed.
- Refining and analyzing meaning is often derived from determining it within context, unlike in the initial lexicographical stage.

Accordingly, the following recommendations may be made:

- Revisiting the books of language and dictionaries to extract the mechanisms of dealing with words and expressions, as is the case with the different modes of expressing meaning in the lexicon in other words, re-reading the entire lexicographical heritage.
- Moving beyond a superficial view to a deeper scientific perspective in dealing with heritage in general and with linguistic dictionaries in particular.

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