AL-FURŪQ AL-LUGHAWIYYAH
THE CULMINATION OF A GENRE

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Writings on al-Furūq "differences" were originally confined to works on ḥayawān "animals", dealing with the words applied to different organs of various living organisms and species. These writings dealt with the words applied to, for example, lips, nails, sexual urge, death, etc. of different animals. In later centuries the linguists adapted this format to lughah, and al-Furūq served as a natural step towards al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah in the history of Arabic semantics. The linguists developed this genre as an instrument to fight against vulgar and erroneous use of language; in the course of the history of Arabic linguistics, this instrument assumed a number of different forms.

WRITINGS ON AL-FURŪQ

In the latter half of the first century of the Hijrah, because of the intermingling of other languages and cultures with the Arabic language, there was a growing danger of the loss of the heritage of the Arabic language. The close contacts between people from different languages resulted in occurrence of lāhn² in the Arabic language.

At this time, the zeal of non-Arab Muslims to learn the language of Islam, so that they may understand the Qurʾān and the sayings of the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him), and the struggle of the scholars to safeguard and preserve the language by fighting against lāhn were the basic causes of the emergence of grammatical and linguistic studies in the Arabic language. We find in the earlier period a clear picture of experimentation of concern for the preservation of the lexicographical heritage of the Arabic language. At first the vocabularies of limited scope and uncertain arrangement were written, and then full dictionaries were written on an "anagrammatic" basis, and we are concerned here with the first phase only. The early glossaries and books of vocabularies were written in many fields; and since the essence of Arabic education was learning by ear rather than eye in the early period,
the riwayah of *lughah*, took the shape of the riwayah of *hadith*, and the linguists made various categories of: *afṣah*, *faṣḥ*, *ajwad*, *jayyid*, *daʿīḥ*, munkar and matrikh like those in *hadith*: *saḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, *daʿīḥ*, etc. and held that the language used in the Qurʾān is *afṣah* than the rest of the Arabic language, but this tradition (of oral transmission from one to the other) could not prolong or perpetuate itself among Arab linguists.

From among the early collections of vocabulary arranged under topics or dealing with a specific field, the first book was about *Gharib al-Qurʾān*, explaining uncommon and unusual words used in the Qurʾān, ascribed to *ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās* (d. 68 A.H.)6. Then a series of books started in the fields of *Gharib al-Yahdīth, Lugḥāt al-Qabāʾīl, al-Lahān, al-Hayawān* (which included *Ibl, Khayl, etc.*), *al-Hasharāt* (insects), *al-Nabāt* (plants), *Khalq al-Insān, al-Buldān wa al-Mawādāt* (cities and places), *al-Nawādīr* (strange things), and *al-Furūq*, the differences.

The following is a list of those who wrote books on *al-Furūq*:

3. Abū ʿUbaydah Muʿāmmar b. al-Muthannā ʿal-Taymī (d. 209 A.H.)
6. Ibn al-Sikkīt, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq (d. 244 A.H.). Quotations from his *Kitāb al-Farq* are found in *al-Muʿarrab al-Jawāliqī* and *al-Ubīb* of al-Saghaṇī.
7. Abū Ḥātim al-Sīstānī, Saḥl b. Muḥammad (d. 255 A.H.)
10. Abū Bakr al-Jaʿad, Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān (d.c. 311 A.H.). He was among the pupils of Ibn Kiṣān (d. 320 A.H.)
11. Abū ʿAlī al-Taṣyīr al-Wāṣḥshā, Muḥammad b. ʿAḥmad (d. 325 A.H.)
Ramadān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb published his Kitāb al-Farq at Maktābah al-Khānjī, Cairo/al-Riyāḍh, in 1982 A.D.⁹

Some of the encyclopedic works like al-Gharīb al-Musannafi of Abū ʿUbayd (d. 224 A.H.)⁹ contained chapters on al-Furūq, and al-Thaʿlab (d. 291 A.H.) in his book: al-Faṣḥ also wrote a chapter on al-Furūq, and dealt with the words applied to, for example, the lips, nails, udders, sexual urge, death etc. of different animals⁹.

It seems better to give some examples from the books of al-Furūq by some writers which would show the incentive of the writers to preserve the language, their ambition that all words should be used in their appropriate places, and that al-Furūq were a natural step towards al-Fuṣūl al-Lughawiyyah. For example al-ʿAsmaʿī says about جلس "sitting" of various living organisms:¹⁰

بعض[word: 56] يجلس جلسةً وقد يقد قعوداً وينقال للفرس كل ذي حافر رض يرض روضاً وينقال للطير جثم جثثاً ومجسمه هو الموضوع الذي يجثم فيه - وينقال للبحر برك برك بروكةً

Thaʿlab says about شفة "lips":¹¹

..هي الشفة من الإنسان ومن ذوات الخف المشفر، ومن ذوات الحافر الحافرة، ومن ذوات الظرف المفتوحة، ومن الخنزير النفضية، ومن السباع الحمام والمخرطوم، ومن الكلب البرطل، ومن ذي الجناح غير الصائد المنقار، ومن الصائد المنقار. -

Ibn Fāris adds in this regard:

اسم شفة الذباب: الذوق
Ibn Fāris says in the chapter on الشعر (hair)¹²:


AL-FURŪQ AL-LUGHAWYYAH

As far as linguistic or semantic differences between words of close meanings are concerned, the writings about them started when the linguists felt that even the people of letters and the intelligentsia were using various words without considering their
proper implications and import. For example Ibn al-Sikkît (d. 244 A.H.) wrote a book: Al-Hurîf allâti yutakallamu bihâ fi ghayri mawdi'î-hâ13. Al-Jâhîz (d. 255 A.H.) complains that people do not take care about the semantic implications when they use words like: saqhab and jâ' or ghayth and mātar11. Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 A.H.) wrote a chapter in his book: Adab al-Kitâb, about the semantically inappropriate use of words, under the title: Bâbu mā Ya'dâ'ahu al-nâsu fi ghayri mawdi'î-hâ15. Qûrub (d. 206 A.H.), however, says in this regard that people who used two (or more) words for one meaning did so just to show off their vocabulary and deep knowledge of the language16. We should not necessarily assume from this remark that all the linguists, in the early periods of Islam, who used two or more words for one meaning essentially believed in the occurrence of synonymy in Arabic, or that they did not recognize any differences (furûq) between two words of close meanings, for example šârîm and muhannad (two descriptive names for sayf)17. It is said that Abû 'All al-Fârisî (d. 377 A.H.) was in the company of Sayf al-Dawlah and there were some other linguists including Ibn Khâlawayh (d. 370 A.H.). Ibn Khâlawayh said: "I have memorised fifty names for sayf". Abû ‘All smiled and said: "I know only one name for it and that is sayf". Ibn Khâlawayh asked: "And what do you say about sayf". Ibn Khâlawayh asked: "And what do you say about šârîm, muhannad, etc.?" Abû ‘All replied: "They are descriptions (of sayf)". The same is held by Ibn Fâris who says: "In our opinion the name is one i.e. sayf, and the rest of them are descriptions; and every description implies that which other descriptions do not imply"119.

As we have said earlier, most of the linguists who used two or more words for one meaning do not deny semantic furûq between them; so they regard these words as synonymous in terms of general synonymy: (al-tarâdûf al-tâmm) but not absolute synonymy (al-tarâdûf al-tâmm). Among them al-Asmaî is the first to write on this subject in Mâ ikhtalafa al-fâzuhû wa ittâfâqa ma'ânîhî, then 'Abd al-Rahmân b. 'Isâ al-Hamadhânî (d. 327 A.H.) wrote al-Alfâz al-Kitâb iyyah20, and 'All b. 'Isâ al-Rumânî (d. 384 A.H.) wrote al-Alfâz al-Mutarâdîfah21. In the same way Abû 'Ubayd's al-Mušânnâf and Ibn al-Sikkît's Kitâb al-Alfâz contained a lot of words without discriminating between the basic îsm and its šifât. Perhaps Ibn al-A'râbî (d. 231 A.H.) was the first linguist who denied the occurrence of synonymy in the Arabic language and held that every word in Arabic has a different meaning22. His pupil Thâlab followed him and proclaimed: All words which are considered to be synonymous are not, and they are different from the others because of the descriptions they imply, e.g. in the words însân and bashar, the first implies nîsûn (forgetfulness) or mu'tânasah (intimacy), while the other implies that he has an outer skin or appearance23.
Abū Hilāl al-‘Askārī (d. 395 A.H.) in his book on the linguistic differences (al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah) denied the occurrence of synonymy in the Arabic language except when the two (or more) words which are thought to be synonyms come from the different dialects. Abū Hilāl himself claims: I have seen books in every branch of knowledge but I did not see any book about the differences between close meanings of the words e.g. ‘ādīm and ma‘ṣīfah, hītah and dhakāh, ghadaḍ and sukḥīt etc. and now these words are not being used in their appropriate sense. In accepting the possibility of synonymy when synonyms come from different dialects, Abū Hilāl follows Ibn Durustawayh (d. 347 A.H.) who says: it is impossible that fa‘ala and as‘ala forms can give similar meanings in one dialect as their form or construction is different... and in one dialect it is impossible that two different words give the same meaning. Abū Hilāl is comparatively clearer than Ibn Durustawayh. He maintains that the different expressions and the nouns (ṣaḥīḥ) employed imply a difference in meaning, because a noun (ṣīm) is a word which leads to a meaning by way of indicating it. The pointing out of something once implies something different than the pointing out of the same for the second and third time. He has also devised eight rules to understand the differences between various close meanings, which he applies in his book successfully.

**WORKS ON AL-FURŪQ AL-LUGHAWIYYAH**

Abū Hilāl was the first writer to contribute a book on discrimination between words of close meanings. After Abū Hilāl only two important books on al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah appeared; one of them by Nūr al-Dīn al-Jaṣ‘ā’irī (d. 1158 A.H.), and the other by Henricus Lammens. Although al-Jaṣ‘ā’irī claims that his is the first book on al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah, it is certain that he used Abū Hilāl’s al-Furūq as a source, imposing an alphabetical arrangement on the material that he took from it. A comparative study of al-Furūq fi al-Lughah of Abū Hilāl and Furūq al-Lughāt of al-Jaṣ‘ā’irī shows that the latter took a great deal of material from the former. Nevertheless, he also used sources other than Abū Hilāl. Henricus Lammens, in the first part of his Farā‘id al-Lughah, which is on al-Furūq, very seldom mentions Abū Hilāl’s name, but on most occasions he cites al-A‘ūmmah (i.e. the leading linguists) as his authority. There are other books on al-Furūq, in general, like Kātib al-Ta‘īṣāt of al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, al-Kulliyāt of al-‘Akbārī, al-Muṣṭalahāt of Ibn al-Baytār; all of these, however, deal only with the terminology used by philosophers, logicians, ṣūfīs, jurists, etc. and none specifically with al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah. Ḥākim Mālik Lu‘aybī considers only Abū Hilāl’s al-Furūq fi al-Lughah, out of three works on the subject, as worthy of serious comment. Al-‘Īṣāfānī (d. 502 A.H.) in his al-Muṣṭadāt discriminates between Qur’ānīc words of close meanings. Ahmad b. Muṣṭafā al-Labābīdī,
who completed his book: *Laṭā'īf al-Lughah* in 1311 A.H.\(^3\) has a detailed chapter on *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyah*, dealing with about 180 assumed synonyms, and discriminates between words of close meanings\(^3\). 'A'ishah bint al-Shāfi‘ī explains 189 words of *Gharā‘ib al-Qur’ān* which occur in *Masā‘il Ibn al-Azraq*. She explains these 189 assumed synonyms using *al-Mufradāt* of al-Īsfahānī, and *al-Nihāyah fi Gharib al-Hadith wa al-Athar* of Ibn al-Āthir al-Jazā’iri, however, she sometimes quotes Abū Hilāl, and concludes that synonymy does not occur in the Qur’ān, which was the view held by Abū Hilāl. Muṣṭafā al-‘Alwānī, in his paper on *"al-Tarāḍuf wa al-Furūq fi al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah"*, calls Abū Hilāl: Za‘īm Madrasat al-Furūq, and says about ‘A’ishah, in connection with her treatment in her book: *al-Tījāz al-Bayānī li al-Qur‘ān* of the words from *Masā‘il Ibn al-Azraq*:\(^4\)

> وكانت آراء بنت الساطع و استقصائاتها لهذه الظاهرة (الفرق) في القرآن الكريم

> إمداداً لمدرسة العسكرى

We may conclude that all the efforts of the linguists, both in medieval and in modern times, to discriminate between the meanings of words, and to encourage the appropriate use of words, were inspired by Abū Hilāl directly or indirectly. We have dealt with the two who adhere closely to the views of Abū Hilāl regarding synonymy. There is also a large number of other linguists and muḥāʃarūn who do not entirely agree with the writers of *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyah* on questions of semantics and linguistics, but nevertheless, use them as a source. For example, a most celebrated eighth-century linguist/muḥāʃir, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Zarkashi (d. 794 A.H.), believes in the occurrence of synonymy in the Qur’ān, but sides with Abū Hilāl in holding that the words: خوف and إيام and نور and خصبة and كمال and وصْل and تام، أَنْيَانَ and جَاهَةَ and خَصَبَة and وَصْلَةَ etc. are not synonyms, and discriminates between other words of close meanings\(^5\).

Two different views have been given about the beginning and development of the studies on *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyah* in particular, and Arabic linguistic and grammatical studies in general:

1. The linguists wrote on *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyah* with the same aim and intention they wrote against *laḥn* i.e. to preserve language and guard it from adulteration. The writings on *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyah* are nothing but a chapter among the chapters of *laḥn*, in the field of semantics; the linguists who wrote on it were not then aware of the phenomenon of semantic extension and thought that language was a thing which can be handed on to the coming generation as they themselves received it from the previous generation. These writings were produced with the
intention of reviving the semantic implications of the words on the basis of their roots and derivations only \( \text{al-dalālat al-asliyyah} \).^48

2. The other view implies that writings on language emerged in a natural way just like writings on other subjects, and that this was a natural outcome of the intellectual activity which was inspired by the Qur'ānic studies, rather than a reaction against \( \text{lahn} \).^49

In case of the most of the works on \( \text{al-Furūq al-Lughawiyah} \), we find that probably both of the above mentioned factors made the linguists undertake these works. With regard to the first, all these works advocate the use of words in their appropriate places—a plea made by the writers of books on \( \text{lahn} \). Moreover, dictionaries of \( \text{al-Khāṣ' wa al-Ṣawāb} \) and the series of \( \text{qul wa lā taqul} \) are a continuation of the same fight against vulgar and inappropriate use of the language in modern times. Regarding the second view mentioned above, we can very safely say that the works on Arabic semantics were inspired by the Qur'ān. For example, Abū Hilāl al-Askarī in his \( \text{al-Furūq fi al-Lughah} \), cites 360 verses or parts thereof from the Holy Qur'ān to determine meanings of words, and sometimes when he does not mention a verse from the Qur'ān to determine a meaning, he deals with that word on the basis of its meaning and use in the Qur'ān, implying that its meaning and semantic implication are already known to everybody. It is probably true to say that his principal object in writing his \( \text{al-Furūq} \) was to establish the exact nuances of the meanings of words as used in al-Qur'ān al-Karīm—the ultimate source of the Arabic language.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. \( \text{lahn} \) is to commit a mistake in the pronunciation, or grammar, or derivation, or understanding the implication of a word or phrase. \( \text{lahn} \), in the very beginning started as wrong reading of the case endings, and then it was applied to wrong implications of the words or inappropriate usages. The history of \( \text{lahn} \) can be traced back to the period of the holy prophet. *Abd al-'Azīz Māṭar, under the authority of Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Lughawī, quotes from his book \( \text{Marāṭib al-Nahwīyyah} \). A person committed \( \text{lahn} \) in the presence of the holy prophet (may peace be upon him), the prophet responded and said to his companions: "\( \text{'arshidū akhākum.....} \) \( \text{lahn} \) al-'Ammah fi Ḥāw' al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawīyyah al-Hadīthah, (Cairo, 1981), pp. 17–36. Some other reports about occurrence of \( \text{lahn} \) in the

Ibrahim al-Samarrâ'i rejects the idea and insists that all al-'Ulam al-'Arabiyyah were caused by al-Dars al-Qur'âni, "zeal to acquire the Qur'anic sciences" and not in the process of fighting against lânh. Min Assâb al-Qur'ân ('Amnâr/Beirut, 1983), pp. 5-10.


Kahhâlah, 'Umar RE*, M-Lughah d-'Ambjyah wu d-'UfIihd, p. 15.

These details are taken from Isâb Nâşîr, DhWt Lughawiyyah, pp. 177-185; and Ibn Fâb, Kâb (i-Fatq, ed. Râmaîn 'AM al-Tawwâb (Cairo/Kyadh, 1982). preface pp. 40-43.

Râmaîn 'AM al-Tawwâb has edited this work.

Husayn Nâssîr: Dirâsât Lughawiyyah, p. 185.

Ibid., p. 184.

Kâb d-Fâb, p. 51.

This book was edited by Râmaîn 'AM al-Tawwâb and published in Cairo. See: Kitâb al-Farq, preface p. 41.

Al-Bayân wa al-Tâbyîn, 1:20. ed. 'Abd al-Salâm M. Hârûn (Cairo, 1948).

Adab al-Kâtib, ed. Max Grünert (Leiden, 1900), pp. 21-42.


Al-Suyûtî: Al-Muzhîb, 1:400.

Ibid., p. 1400.

Edited by Luwîs Shaykhû al-Yasûtî (Beirut, 1911), and again published by Dâr al-Kutub al-'Îlmîyyah, Beirut, 1980.


Lu'aybi, Hâkim Mâlik, Al-Tarâduf fi al-Lughah (Baghdad, 1980), p. 198

Al-Suyûtî: Al-Muzhîb 1:399-400.

Al-Suyûtî: Al-Muzhîb 1:403.


Furûq al-Lughât: see for example:

الرب والشکل، الترتیب والتالفی، الكلب والاختزال، البيت والجزء،ملك والملك، الملك والملك، الفقه والخدم.

e tc. I have been able to consult this work only in MS. (Lughâh/439, Markaz al-Bahth al-'Ilmi, Jâmiah Umm al-Qurâ, Makkah). It has been published three times (from Tahran in 1274 A.H.; from İstanbul in 1328 A.H.; and from al-Najaf in 1380 A.H.), but I have been unable to obtain copies of either edition.

Farâ'îd al-Lughah, Part I (Beirut, 1889) Fi al-Furûq, see for example: p. 5, Beirut, 1889.

Al-Tarâduf fi al-Lughah pp. 231-232. He says of the other two:
34. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī, Min Asālīb al-Qur'ān, p. 9.