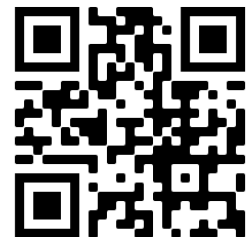


## “A SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOKS OF HOMONYMS IN ARABIC”

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## Abstract:

In this research, we are going to focus on the topic of homonyms in Arabic in the light of the oldest books written in this concern, notably Hajji Khalifa's book *Unveiling Suspicions*. We will classify these books according to the way they treated the subject of homonyms. We will also cite some examples of homonyms, taken from the Holy Quran, the Hadiths and some linguistic attitudes in order to draw the researchers' attention to this theme.

**Keywords:** Homonyms, Contronyms, Synonyms, Antonyms.

## Introduction

This research is about the books which dealt with homonyms in Arabic, as a crucial subject in linguistics. We will shed light on six books that Khalifa (1907) collected in his volume book *Unveiling Suspicions*. In the first section, we are going to study these books by focusing on the way they studied homonyms. Some of these books studied homonyms found in the Quran. One of these books is Almoubarad's book *Homonyms in the Holy Quran*, which is considered to be one of the best books in this field.

Others books studied homonyms from the Hadiths of Prophet Mohammed, Peace be Upon Him. One of these books is Abou Oubeid's *The Geneses of the Arabic Speech and Homonyms*. To write these books, the writer resorted to another book entitled *Unusual Speeches*, which contains some terms that cannot be found in other books.

Other books, however, dealt with homonyms from different sources. In this concern, there are four major books worth to be mentioned here: *Homonyms* by Ibn Shajari, *Dictums and Homonyms* by Abi Aloumeithel Alarabi, and *Homophones* by Al Ismaii. We will also display the opinions of some scholars who are either in favor of the existence of homonyms in Arabic or who are against this idea. At the end of the first section, I will make a brief history on the factors which led to the development of homonyms in Arabic.

In section two, I will focus on contronyms as another side of homonyms. I will expatiate on this idea by illustrating the opinions of scholars who disagree about this idea. I will also explain how contronyms came to existence in Arabic. In the end, I will focus on synonyms and the way they came to existence into Arabic.

## Section One: Homonyms

**Definition:** Since terms are a means of communication, each term has a specific meaning. So each meaning should correspond to its signifier in a clear and finite way in order for the language to carry out its communicative task (Dhadha, 1971). However, this idea has been debunked in our language. In fact, one term can sometimes have two meanings or more. Such terms are called homonyms.

Etymologists defined a homonym as "a single term which has two meanings or more, which is considered to be a defect in language" (Assyouti, 1314 H). Whereas Sibawhei, in addition to other linguists, argued that "a homonym has / mawjouda] means / wajadtou] which means I found, its derivative [وجدت] different meanings, as in the word [annoying, it also means love (Sibawhei, 1313 H).

Ibn Fares also defined a homonym as "a single word with different meanings." He gives the example of the word / ain] which means eye, a spring of water, a capital of money, and the pointer of a scale (Ibn Fares: 1977, 208). Linguists have explained this phenomenon as "terms having the same spelling but having two meanings or more." In this concern, Ibn Darastawhi said that "this could happen to two different words that may undergo some sort of omission of their letters or be abbreviated till these two words become identical but different in meanings. This is most of the time unknown to the speaker/listener. That is not due to the way the word is spelt, since that would be ambiguous and misunderstood (Addaya, 1985). Linguists seem to disagree about the nature of homonyms. Unlike most of the linguists, namely Alkhalil Ben Ahmed, Sibawhei, Abou Yazid Alansari (215 H), Abou Oubeid (224 H), Ibn Khatiba (276 H) and Ibn Khalawi (370 H), Ibn Darastawhi objected to the idea of the existence of such terms in Arabic.

## Major Books written about Homonyms

### A- Examples of books which studied Homonyms in the Holy Quran:

Homonyms in the Holy Quran by Abou Abbes Mohammed Ben Yazid Almoubarrad Annahwi (Dead in 285).

Critics say that “Almoubarrad was unique in his book as he started it with a short introduction in which he set forth his method and outline of work.” It is worth explaining this point piecemeal.

(1) Almoubarrad studied the Arabic speech and classified it as follows:

- Some pair of words differs in spelling and meaning, for example, in verbs [ذهب/ dhahab /go], [جاء/ ja'a/ come], [قام/ kama / stand] and [قعد/ ka'ada / sit]. In nouns, we can cite [يد/ yedon / hand], [رجل/ rijlon/ leg] and [فرس/ farason / horse].
- A pair words can be spelt differently but have the same meaning. For example, in verbs, we cite the [حسبت/ dhanantou / believe-think], [جلس/ jalassa-ka'ada / sit down]. In nouns, for example, we can have [ذراع- / dhiraon-saidon/ arm] and [أنف-مرسن/ anfon-marsanon/ nose]
- A pair of words can have the same spelling but differ in meaning. We give as an example the word [وجد/ wajda] means find, get angry, and find out. Another example is in [ضرب/ dharaba] which means beat, give an example, and work the land.

He also gave the example of [عين/ ain] which we dealt with above. Afterwards, Almoubarrad talked about some words that have the same spelling but are actually antonyms. He supported his argument with the examples of [جل/ jalal] which means both base and great, and the word [جون/ joun] which means both dark and light.

(2) Almoubarrad took some examples of homonyms from the Holy Quran. An obvious example of that is in the following verse.

”جزاء سينة سينة مثلها“ (الشوري/ Ashura: 40). Almoubarrad said that the first [سينة/ sayiaa/ sin] is not identical the second [سينة] which means ALLAH's punishment.

Same thing is with the verse «...verily, we were but but mocking...Allah mocks at them.» (البقرة/ albakhara: 14-15). Indeed, the infidels' mocking is a sin, but Allah's mocking is punishment.

We also have the same paradigm in “they were plotting and Allah was plotting, too.” (الأنفال/ Al-Anfal: 30).

- (1) In many instances, Almoubarad explains with the linguistic and phrase-making patterns in the Quran in order to facilitate the Quranic terms for readers and scholars.
- (2) Another salient point Almoubarrad dealt with in his book is the use of allegories in the Quran. For that he made reference to some allegoric terms used in the Book. He affirmed that this kind of choice is rendered to the ancient Arabs' frequent use of ellipses and figures of speeches in their daily life.

### B- Examples from the Hadiths

The Book of Genuses, Arabic Words and Homonyms, by the most prominent writer Abou Oubeid Alkhassim Bin Salem Anahwi Alharawi Albagdadi (died in 234 H).

He also wrote a book about homonyms, entitled Strange Words. It contains a lot of words which disappeared from today's dictionaries (Abou Oubeid, 1983). For example, the word [الساق/ assek] which means harshness, male pigeon and other birds, trunk of a tree, and human leg. Another homonym is [الصواب/ assaweb] which means a grey bird in Al-Hijaz,

suggestion, and true (#false). The word [الغراب/algourab] is also a homonym found in Strange Words. It means the edge of the sword, horse, femur of the horse, and crow.

### C- Examples from language in General

#### (1) Homonyms by Imam Ibrahim Bin Abi Mouhammed Yahya Al-Yazidi (Died in 225 H)

Ibn Khalawi said that Al-Yazidi's disciples think that it is an important book in which Al-Yazidi collected all homonyms. It is divided into four volumes.

Ibn Khalawi mentioned that this book is one of the most helpful references for homonyms. But unfortunately, more than half is missing. Because of its importance, some linguists took the initiative to publish it in a volume of six parts. They wished they had had its missing part.

The significance of this book lies in the following two truths. First, it was written before the late dictionaries, such as Assahah by Al-Azhari, Attahdhib by Al-Azhari, and even before Taj Al-Arous. For this reason, it is considered to be a reliable reference for homonyms as it took the language from its direct sources and in its fluent manifestation. Second, scholars have praised its writer and its confidentiality. Here are some of the homonyms found in this book:

- [الإملاء/ alimlaa] means loss, dictation, loosening a tether, and order someone to do something.
- [المولى/almawla] means friend and ally, nephew, lord, Allah, the one who grants good things

#### (2) Homonyms in the book of Ibn Shajari

This book is a collection of homonyms gathered from language books. Ibn Shajari also added other terms from the Holy Quran, old poetry, and the Hadiths. He classified these homonyms alphabetically. We cite for example the following words:

- [الأب / al-ab] means pasture, preparing to set off, civil strife, get ready to draw one's sword. (Ibn Shajari, 1992)
- [الشليل/ashalil] means a cloth used under the saddle of horses, a cloth used under a shield, and a small shield.

#### (3) Dictums and Homonyms by Abou Oumeithel Alarabi (Died in 240 H)

In this book, there are over fourteen homonyms taken from the Holy Quran and some poems. These terms are not organized according to a clear logical scientific outline (Abou Oumeithil, 1988).

**Here are some of examples of these homonyms:**

- [الحشا/al-hasha] means greediness, asthma, and next to.
- [الأتان/al-aten] means female donkey, big rock, and shallows.
- [الشركة/asharika] means a trap made for birds, and ambush.
- [الخور/alhour] means black eyes, a red piece used on the shoe-sole, and answer.

#### (4) Homonyms by Abdel Malik Bin Kharib Al-Asmai (died in 217 H)

Adhahabi (1986), the editor of this book, said that this is a five-paper book about which a few articles and papers were written in the beginning. Soon this book fell into oblivion as it was left unstudied or edited. In spite of that, this book is considered to be very precious and unique. It was first published in Damascus in 1951. It was part of an MA research by Mouthafar Sultan at Foued I University in Egypt. Its first edition was not satisfactory for its editor. So, in another attempt, Professor Majid Adhahabi edited it by providing solid references and tried to explain its ambiguous terms.

Arabic scholars and their opinions about Homonyms:

- (1) Some of them think that words are finite but their meanings are infinite, and therefore they can be considered as homonyms.
- (2) Others, however, argued that homonyms are misleading and do not convey what the speaker means exactly. So they are a defect in the language. (Ashoukani, 1937)

### The factors which led to the development of homonyms:

- (1) Early speakers of Arabic used to live in different tribes and one term is used in every tribe but with different meanings. For example, according to Ibn Khalawi and Ibn Kouteiba (1347 H), the word [الرب/arrab] means the master, the owner and Allah. The context determine which of these meanings is used. The Almighty Allah says: “فليعبدوا رب هذا البيت” / “So let them worship (Allah) the Lord of this house (The ka’bah in Makkha).” (قريش/ Kourish : 3). The word [الرب] stands for Allah, the Creator of everything.
- (2) The allegorical use of certain terms in Arabic led to the development of homonyms. Researchers think that this is the most important factor which created homonyms in Arabic. The use of allegory between early Arabs was common and spontaneous owing to the poetic culture reigning at that time. For example, the word [رأس] is allegorically used to mean [رأس الجبل] summit of the mountain, [رأس الإنسان] the human head, and [رأس النخلة] the top of the palm tree.
- (3) Homonyms are the outcome of the development of the social and intellectual life of people. Consequently, language is a system subject to all the social changes occurred over history.
- (4) The development of the meaning of words is a major aspect which led to the creation of homonyms. New meanings play a huge role in the enrichment and modernization of certain terms. This is exactly what the Holy Quran did to the Arabic language. It gave new meanings to terms which Arabs had not known before. They even called these terms as ‘Islamic term’ or ‘conceptual terms’. Some of these terms are [الكفر/alkofr/ blasphemy], [الكافر/al-kefir/ infidel], [الزكاة/ azzakeh/ almsgiving], [الحج/al-haj/ pilgrimage] and [الصلاة/essalet/ prayer].
- (5) Borrowing words from other languages is another factor which led to the development of homonyms. In fact, some borrowed words could be rooted in Arabic, but has a different meaning. This aspect was prevalent in classic Arabic. For instance, the term [السكر/assokrou] means drunkenness (#sobriety) and fixing a leak. The first meaning is Arabic, but the second one is Aramaic.
- (6) Language underwent many orthographic changes in its terms. Indeed, there were certain words which used to be spelt with a difference in one letter, whether in the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the word, and with different meanings. But due to unknown circumstances, these words were spelled the same way and yet have different meanings. In this concern, Ibn Mandhour sorted out the example of [مرد/ marada] which means both come near and dough bread. The second meaning is related to the old spelling of the word [مرت/ marata]. The letter [ت/t] changed into a [د/d] to become [مرد/ marad], i.e., one word with two different meanings.

Modernist linguists have also argued that homonyms appeared due to the wrong understanding of certain words, mainly by kids who grew with a false meaning of a given word and thus a new false uncorrected meaning was added to the main word.

### Section Two:

#### (1) Contronyms

A contronym is defined as a term that has one spelling but with two opposite meanings. There has been a huge dispute between contronyms. Some linguists deny the existence of contronyms while others confirm such a linguistic phenomenon. Darastawi, for example, disapproves of the existence of such terms in Arabic, while Alkhalif, Sibawei, Ibn Fares and Ibn Seidha recognize that.

In fact, in classic Arabic, some words had one specific meaning, but due certain unknown incidents, an opposite meaning was added. The word [الطرب/ attarab], for example, means both sadness and happiness., the word [الصريح/ assarih] means day and night, the word [الجون/ al-jun] means black and white, and the word [البصير/ a-bassir] means seer and blind.

### Factor which lead to the development of contronyms (according To Omar, 1993: 204-210):

- Some linguists think that the origin of contronyms is seemingly like all words. They were set by Arabs to indicate two opposite meanings with one word. Ibn Sheida views that such a use of opposite meaning of one term was not done deliberately.
- Others think that contronyms are the result of using one term in two different places but with opposite meanings.

- Borrowing words from other languages led to the birth of contronyms. In fact, one word could mean something and when borrowing words another opposite meaning could be added to the term.
- Some words have a negative impact on the psychology of Arabs, and in order to avoid that, they add an opposite meaning to the word, namely black, slat, and the like.
- Merging antonyms into one word and then become contronyms.
- Contronyms developed as a result of naming things with their opposites as a way to intensify the message conveyed and draw the listener's attention. In Arabic, when someone is clever is devilish, and when we want to express our inspiration of something we call it 'terrible/horrible'.
- The replacement of the orthography of certain words in the past led to the creation of contronyms. For instance, the word [الجون/aljounou] which means light was derived from the word [الجن/ al-jinou] which means darkness. The letter [ن/n] in [الجن/ al-jin] is an intensified letter, i.e, we have two ns. But over history, the first [ن/n] was replaced with a [و/wa]. Thus they became one word [الجون/aljounou] with opposite meanings.

## (2) Synonyms

Synonyms are terms which have roughly the same meaning and can replace each other in any given context. Identical synonyms are not impossible but are very rare. They rather have approximate meanings (Abou Awda, 1985). Palmer also argued that "there aren't real synonyms and that there aren't terms that have the same meanings. Indeed, if we study synonyms, we may find five differences between them at least. Yet they can replace one another" (Palmer: 1905, 104).

Due to the ambiguous nature of the signifier, in terms of the psychological aspect, a synonym cannot replace authentically the desired context of the first term used. That is why they cannot replace one other in the true sense of the word. The can replace each other in a complete, partial or minor way (Abou Awda, 1985).

Linguists have different opinions concerning synonyms. Some of them admitted their existence in Arabic, namely, Sibawei, Ibn Khalawi, Arroumani, and Assiouti. They claimed that if synonyms do not have equal meanings, we could not use them in different contexts. They supported their argument with these two examples of synonyms: [الريب/aaraib/ skepticism] and the word [الشك/ ashak/ doubt]. If fact, skepticism and doubt are synonyms and can be replaced with each other.

Others, like Ibn Darastawi, Alfarissi and Al-Asfahani, confuted the idea of the existence of synonyms in the language.

## Reasons for the existence of synonyms in language

- (1) One thing may have different names in different parts. The inter-cultural exchange between different Arabic parts led to the development of synonyms. For example, the word [بطيخ/ battikh/ water melon] is called [بطيخ/battikh] in Egypt, [راقي/ra'ui] in Iraq, [دلالة/dilleh] in Lybia and [حباب/habhab] in Saudi Arabia.
- (2) One thing can have one single meaning, but is described with different adjectives. The word [سيف/ seif/ sword] is an example of that.
- (3) Another major reason is the development of language over history. Indeed, one thing had one spelling in classical Arabic, then a change or many changes occurred to one of its letters. This is obvious in the words [حثة/houthela/ mediocre] which became [حفلة/houfela], then [حذالة/houthela], later on [حسالة/housela] and finally [حسالة/houssala].
- (4) Abou Awda (1985) has also said that borrowing words from other languages has also participated in the creation of synonyms in Arabic. For example, some words were borrowed from Farsi. To name but a few of these words, we cite the word [الدمشق/addamask] which means silk, [الرزجون/arrazjoun] and [الباذات/albathet] which mean wine, and the word [بهرج/bahraj] which means fallacious.



**Results:**

- (1) The greatest and most thorough book is Ibn Shajari's Homonyms, which is considered to be a great referential book.
- (2) The importance of these books resides in the examples they took from the Quran, the Hadiths, proverbs and wisdoms, and funny stories. In addition to being books of language, they can be considered as literary books.
- (3) We discussed the opinions of some ancient linguists, like Ibn Fares and Ibn Doureid.
- (4) Ibn Shajari's book was a discussion of some linguistic issues.
- (5) Ibn Darastawi did not reject the idea of the existence of homonyms in language but rather questioned the meaning of such a term. Ibrahim Anis, a modern linguist, vied with him in this view.
- (6) The best and most precise definition of homonyms is provided by the etymologists.
- (7) Arabic linguists have exaggerated the existence of synonyms and its proliferation in the language. Some of them admitted the existence of synonyms in Arabic but in a very limited number, while others counter-argued that words do not have synonyms at all.

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