MODERN WRITTEN ARABIC IN HANS WEHR'S
ARABISCHES WÖRTERBUCH FÜR DIE SCHRIFTSPRACHE DER GEGENWART (1ST – 5TH EDITIONS)

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1. The excellence of Wehr' s Arabic-German dictionary was recognized in leading centers of Arabic studies almost immediately after the appearance of the first edition (1952). The dictionary, compiled on sound lexicographical principles, presents the vocabulary and basic phraseology of Modern Written Arabic (MWA), sometimes referred to as Modern Standard Arabic, the only codified variant of present-day Arabic and the only one with an indisputable pan-Arab validity. MWA, as a medium of prestigious written and, to a somewhat lesser degree, oral communication over a vast geographical area, with many culturally and politically markedly differing countries, operates as a powerful unifying factor. It contributes to creating among millions of Arabs – literate, semiliterate or illiterate – an awareness of identity derived from their common cultural heritage.

Arabic, as a language with a dual system of communication (diglossia) confronts the lexicographer with a variety of unexpected problems whose solution is not always easy. MWA, as a constitutive part of this system, occupies the synthetic or 'high' (Ferguson 1959:325-340) pole of the typological space of diglossia, and stands under a strong everyday impact of regionally differentiated colloquial varieties of Arabic, situated at the analytic or 'low' pole of this diglossic space. Apart from this basic dichotomy, another prestigious variant of Arabic is rapidly gaining ground in our days. Since it mostly operates as a prestigious oral medium of the Arab intellectual elite, it will be tentatively called here Prestigious Oral Arabic (POA). Despite a relatively great assortment of names, given to this elusive and unstable linguistic entity by various authors (Mitchell's ESA /1986:7-32/; Ryding's FSA /1990/), none of them seems to be quite adequate in expressing all vital attributes of this promising *'i'rāb*-less linguistic medium that has a good chance of becoming a sort of tacitly accepted analytic standard, if it is possible to say so. POA, is a link connecting both poles of the typological space of diglossia – the synthetic norm of MWA, on the one hand, and the regionally differentiated

analytic variants of Colloquial Arabic, on the other – without reaching, however, the full identifiability with any of them. In this position, it seems to be, besides the immediate lexical influence of local colloquials, another efficient channel to provide the lexicon of MWA with very various types of colloquialisms.

Furthermore, the lexicographer of MWA has to face another, perhaps a still more intricate problem. MWA, closely akin to Classical Arabic and, in basic linguistic structures, even identical with it, is a language whose truly miraculous survival and continuity is primarily due to the impact of cultural heritage and to its affinity with the Koran. The well-deserved pride of the Arabs in their civilization which had reached its highest point in the period of the European Dark Ages, contributed to the creation of the classical ideal with all its lexical and stylistic implications. It became a matter of cultural prestigue clearly observable in very various strata of the present-day Arab society: writers, media-men and all types of sophisticated language users. Here are the roots of another channel feeding the MWA lexicon with massive amounts of archaisms, mediaevalisms and various sorts of lexical rarities. The overflow of synonymous units, certainly welcome in the pre-Islamic odes of the Arab pagan poets or, say, in the mystical poetry of Ibn al-ʿArabī, is of no great use for communication in the recent industrial and technological era.

Before venturing any further step, the lexicographer had to solve the cardinal question: What is MWA and what should its lexicon look like? Or, in other words, the lexicographer has to define the identity of MWA in terms of its lexicon. Hans Wehr had to set a sound strategy in the very initial stages of his work with primary sources while collecting, filtering, classifying and lexicographically arranging the material. The lexical material included had to be modern and yet it had to secure access to the main intellectual and aesthetic values of the past. Wehr succeeded in finding the right solution: the principle of attestability of any single unit – old or new, borrowed or native, classical or colloquial – in the representative 20th-century corpus of primary sources and, what is perhaps still more important, he succeeded in rigorously adhering to this principle. MWA as defined by Wehr is a really modern linguistic medium. It is modern in the sense that simultaneously with absorbing great amounts of indisputably modern units from various branches of human knowledge, it has been judiciously relieved of the heavy burden of archaisms and mediaevalisms without thereby totally slamming the door that leads to the treasury of the past. MWA as presented by Wehr is modern and vigorous in yet another sense: with a number of judiciously filtered colloquialisms, incorporated in the lexicon, together with the added true-to-life ring, it succeeded in preserving its prestigious nature.

Summarily, it may be asserted that the crucial methodological problem – defining the identity of MWA in terms of its lexicon, was successfully solved with the first edition of the *Wörterbuch* in 1952. The linguistic contours of MWA, constantly blurred by the pervasive phenomena of diglossia and the lexical impact of the surviving classical ideal, gained a much clearer and much more easily recognizable shape than at any time before. This newly presented identity of MWA is reflected, without any substantial modification, in all subsequent editions of Wehr's

and Wehr-related lexicons. And, more than that, the 1st edition of the *Wörterbuch* has been recognized as a model worth following by a number of leading lexicographers (cf., Schregle 1981, in reference to the 1st ed. of Wehr's *Wörterbuch* and Kh.K. Baranov's *Arabsko-russkiy slovar',* Moscow–Leningrad 1940-46: *zwei ausgezeichnete und richtungsweisende Werke der modernen arabischen Lexikographie*).

2. The vocabulary of any living language is the most closely bound with the evolutionary progress of the community of its users and, for that matter, the first to display the unconcealable symptoms of aging. Seven years after the 1st edition of the *Wörterbuch* appeared a large *Supplement zum arabischen Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart,* as a result of extensive collection from the writings of several representative Arab authors and various contemporary newspapers and magazines from various Arab countries. In the meantime several MWA lexicons became available, especially the comprehensive and soundly conceived Baranov's *Arabsko-russkiy slovar'* (1957), which offered Professor Wehr another opportunity to test his own lexical material by way of comparison with the latter.

The excellence of Wehr's work was soon recognized on a world-wide scale. Shortly after the publication of the *Supplement,* a comprehensive English (or rather American) version of the *Wörterbuch* appeared with inclusion of the material contained in the *Supplement.* (Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic.* Edited by J Milton Cowan, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz 1961). This challenging project has been made possible by the initiative and financial support of the American Council of Learned Societies. Apart from the new lexical material, added to this edition, a number of improvements have been introduced: an increased number of crossreferences, a new type font for Arabic, some changes in transliteration, etc. The American version found wide acceptance in universities and various scholarly institutions all over the English-speaking world and subsequently appeared in several stereotype reprints (1966, 1971 and 1974).

For a number of reasons, the American edition reached the date of another substantial updating several years before the German version, at that time reprinted without any modifications (the edition of 1958 merely integrated the two volumes of the 1st edition into one, and the lexical material of the *Supplement* was not included in the main corpus, at that time).

The 4th edition of the English version, 'considerably enlarged and amended by the author' (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz 1979), contains all the material of the original German version and that of the *Supplement,* as well as a considerable number of further additions. Besides a considerable number of recent coinages, the author has also included older lexical units newly attested in present-day contexts. With its original typesetting maintained, the 4th edition has been considerably limited in securing the proper arrangement of the enlarged entries. The additions were inserted into separate entries by cutting and pasting-in instead of the economically too demanding new typesetting of the entire book. Of course, all this was done with the understanding that the 4th edition, in its present shape, is only a temporary solution to the challenging need of a more substantial and technically more adequate innovation. In spite of this, the 4th edition of the English

version remained for a couple of years the unsurpassable champion in MWA-related lexicography.

The amount of the additions has soon proved to be insufficient and the rapidly progressing linguistic growth of MWA, especially in the domain of the lexicon, called for a really substantial revision of the whole Wehr-collected corpus. It is worthwhile remembering that the German version, disregarding the independent publication of the *Supplement,* remained intact in its maiden shape up to the appearance of the 5th German edition (Hans Wehr, *Arabisches Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart.* 5. Aufl. Unter Mitwirkung von Lorenz Kropfitsch. Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz 1985 (last reprint at the time of this review: 1998)).

The bulk of primary sources, newly evaluated for the 5th edition, come from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, inclusive of Iraqi and Maghribi newspapers and periodicals. This newly enlarged corpus faithfully reflects multiform evolutionary features of the MWA lexicon, typical of the lexical usage in seventies and afterwards. The 5th edition, in an entirely new typesetting and with an innovated code for Romanized transcription, includes great numbers of newly created neologisms and borrowings of very various types, as well as other lexical and phraseological units, new or old, that efficiently fill in gaps and complete the material previously recorded with more precision and explicitness. As already observed with any new edition, in addition to the new lexical material, the number of crossreferences has further increased. How useful to the current lexicon user this added number of crossreferences is, may shortly be illustrated on two randomly selected entries from the 4th and 5th editions respectively:

4th/5th: *barmaǧa* to program / programmieren;
            barmaǧa programing; program planning / Programmierung; Programmplanung;
            mubarmaǧ programed, scheduled, etc. / programmiert, etc.;
5th: *barāmiǧ²* pl. zu *barnāmaǧ,* siehe Buchstabenfolge.

Under *barnāmaǧ,* the automatically unretrievable singular form related to the plural *barāmiǧ,* the user will be guided to additional information and will, no doubt, better understand both the paradigmatical and derivational relationships involved. In both editions, it would have been perhaps useful to include another derivative, namely *mubarmiǧ* Programmierer (in Datenverarb.) / programer, of no negligible interest in our age of informatics.

The user will certainly be better guided by the more realistic Romanized representation of foreign names and lexical borrowings, such as *al-'Ingilīz, al-Inglīz* die Engländer (5th), as against *al-inglīz* the English (4th). Nevertheless, more liberality with terms like *'influwanzā,* admitting an alternation with *'infulwanzā,* even with the educated speakers, would be much closer to the realistic usage. Transcriptions involving consonants missing in Arabic which, furthermore, occur in consonant clusters, typically inadmissible in Arabic, like *psīkolōǧiyā, psīkolōǧī* (substantially the same in both editions), certainly signal no more than one of the possible phonetic rendering. Similar environments typically involve a *p/b* alternation mostly accompanied by a syllabic restructuring by epenthesis or prothesis.

214

Of course, all these and similar trifles are hardly worth mentioning. Summarily, the system of transcription, adopted in the 5th edition, is markedly better than before. The most useful innovation occurs with the graphic representation of the glottal stop: *hamzat al-qaṭᶜ* is consistently transcribed irrespective of its position in the word, hence *'islām,* while *hamzat al-waṣl* is elided as before, as in *istilām, istislām,* and the like.

There are, however, some features, mostly associated with formal presentation of a number of inflectional and/or derivational phenomena that would admit, in our opinion, a more consistent and, as well, a more uniform treatment. The following remarks concern all editions of the *Wörterbuch.* The treatment of the derivational system of collective (CN) and unit nouns (UN), frequently alternating with an exclusively inflectional singular (S) - plural (P) relationship, is one of these cases.

The treatment of *karm* (CN) may serve as an illustrative example:

karm (CN), with a satellite plural *kurūm* (as part of the CN-UN system), is said to denote 'Wein, Weinstöcke, Reben Weinberg; Garten', while *karma* (UN, not explicitly labelled as UN in the lexicon) is associated with 'Weinstock; Rebe'.

The correct representation, in our opinion, would be:

karm (CN) - *karma* (UN), with a (satellite) plural *kurūm,* as part of the CN-UN system: 'Wein, Weinstöcke, Reben', as against a parallel S-P relationship, outside the CN-UN system:

karm (S) - *kurūm* (P) 'Weinberg; Garten'.

The treatment of *ᶜadas - ᶜadasa,* on the other hand, correctly distinguishes between the two relationships and so it marks them:

CN-UN: *ᶜadas* (koll.; n. un -*a*) Linse (Lens culinaris, Lens esculenta, bot.);

S - P: *ᶜadasa* pl. *ᶜadasāt* Linse (auch anat.) Vergrößerungsglas; Objektiv.

In the former case, we have to do with a CN-related, in the latter, with an UN-related resystematization.

There is still another type of CN-UN - related restatement that is not represented in the *Wörterbuch,* notably the reclassification of CN-UNs in terms of sex-gender pairs which leads to a parallel occurrence of a derivational (CN-UN) and an inflectional (sex-gender) system. Both systems are attested in all variants of Arabic:

Classical Arabic: (Lane, 1863-1893/ Beirut reprint 1968, I, 636-7) *ḥamām,* the n. un. is with -a) which is applied to the male and female, ... because the -a is added to restrict unity, not to make fem.; but to distinguish the masc., you may say *ra'aytu ḥamāman ᶜalā ḥamāmatin* "I saw a male (pigeon) upon a female (pigeon) ... or a verse *wa ḏakkaranī ṣ-ṣibā baᶜda t-tanā'ī - ḥamāmatu 'aykatin yadᶜū ḥamāman* "and a female pigeon of a thicket, calling the male pigeon, reminded me of youth, after estrangement".

Colloquial Arabic: Takrūna Arabic, Tunisia: *ḥmām* 1. CN, masc. "pigeons";

2. "male pigeon", as in: *ḫallāni nenᶜi məṭl-əlḥmām frīd* "il m'a laissé réduit à gémir comme le pigeon mâle qui a perdu sa compagne" ('he left me crying like a male pigeon which had lost his companion'); *ḥmāma* 1. UN, fem. "a (one) pigeon";

2. "female pigeon, dove" (Marçais – Guīga, 1958-1961; see vol. ii, 1958, p. 925-6).

In spite of this evidence, the sex-gender interpretation is omitted in the *Wörterbuch* (all editions): *ḥamām* (koll. n. un. -*a*) pl. -*āt, ḥamā'im²* "Taube (Familie Columbidae; *zool.*)", etc.

Perhaps an atypical usage. But an equally atypical sex-gender interpretation with *ṭayr* (koll.; bisweilen als n. un. gebr.) pl. *ṭuyūr, 'aṭyār* "Vögel, Vogel, etc." and *ṭayra* "weiblicher Vogel", is noted.

Root reconstruction, possibly involving an alternation of mono- and multi-morphemic units as one of its special cases, has to be formally signalled one way or another. In some cases, however, the distinction between the original and the reconstructed roots is blurred (all editions):

* *m-d-n* : V *tamaddana / tamadyana* "zivilisiert sein od. werden; etc.", as well as its derivatives *tamaddun / tamadyun, mutamaddin / mutamadyin*

As evident, *tamadyana, tamadyun and mutamadyin* cannot be related to the root *m-d-n* , since the whole set is evidently derived from the assumed derivational basis *madīna* "Stadt" (as a symbol of urban civilization) which gave rise to a new, restructured root *m-d-y-n.*

In most cases, however, the reconstructed roots are properly noted, as in:

* *r-k-z* : *rakaza,* with all verbal (II, V, VIII) and nominal derivatives, inclusively, of the crucial root-giving *markaz* "Ort, Stelle, etc." co-occurring with:

* *m-r-k-z* : II *tamarkaza* "sich konzentrieren, etc."; *tamarkuz* "Konzentration; etc.", with an extremely helpful crossreference to the original root *r-k-z,* with *markaz, markazī* and *markaziyya.*

Some new and newest coinages, involving root reconstruction, are missing in the *Wörterbuch,* e.g. the neologism *ta'liya* "automatization" (Rabat 1977, vol. I, p. 7):

In contrast to the additive root reconstruction * *r-k-z > * m-r-k-z,* the latter case is of a substitutive type:

(i) * *'-w-l,* as in *'āla* pl. -*āt* "Werkzeug; Gerät; Apparat; Instrument; Maschine; etc.";

(ii) * *'-l-y, w*ith a presumable derivational basis *'ālī* "mechanisch; mechanisiert; motorisiert; selbstätig (Gerät); automatisch; automatisiert; etc."

It must be recognized, however, that reconstructions of the latter type, even if attested in terminological vocabularies published by authoritative norm-giving centers, are nevertheless dubious in their actual terminological usage and, as such, they may oppose Wehr's criteria of acceptability.

In presenting some types of verbal abstracts along the lexical axis *causativity / reflexivity* which can here perhaps better be represented in terms of *conditionning* (c) and *spontaneity* (s), the Wehr-proposed treatment seems to be too normative in avoiding interpretations brought into being by the progressive neutralization of the causative/reflexive opposition, observable in some types of verbal abstracts. In some quite evident cases where the affiliation of a given unit with any particular pole of the c/s opposition is semantically supported, no lexical ambiguities arise, as in:

(c) *taqwīm al-ʿiẓām* "osteoplasty (surg.)" where the c-orientation of the term (Pattern II) is related to the assumed surgical intervention of an orthopedist; or, in an opposite sense:

(s) *inqisām* "division" in *inqisām al-ḫalāyā* "division of cells (in biology)" where no immediate, terminologically relevant external stimulant may normally be present.

In a number of cases, however, the lexicographical treatment of what we symbolize as a c/s opposition, may be problematic and some lexicographers and codificators prefer quoting all members of the c/s-relationship to avoid too one-sided interpretations, as in:

c-oriented (pattern II): *taḥwīl* "version (of foetus, in obstetrics, i.e. with an assumed reference to external factors, e.g. to the obstetrician), co-occurring with:

s-oriented (pattern V): *taḥawwul* "version (of foetus, with reference to itself)" (Cairo, vol. ii, 1960: 142).

The ambiguous c/s variation may be attested at all levels of communication: (journalistic Arabic):

at-taṭwīrāt / at-taṭawwurāt al-hāmma (al-ʾaḫīra) "the important (last) developments"; *at-taġyīrāt /at-taġayyurāt al-hāmma* "the important changes", etc.;

(scientific Arabic):

ʾammā waǧbat al-ġiḏāʾ fa-mutanawwiʿ tanwīʿan kaṯīran (instead of the expected *tanawwuʿan*); or the undue c/s alternation of *taskīr / tasakkur* in terms like *as-sukkariyyāt waḥīdat (ṯunāʾiyyat, ʿadīdat) at-taskīr / at-tasakkur* "mono- (di-, poly-) saccharides" (ʿAzmī 1961: 174, 181, 203, etc.); or cases like *takwīn / takawwun al-ǧibāl* "orogenesis"; *taḥwīl (tamṯīl) / taḥawwul (tamaṯṯul) ġiḏāʾī* "metabolism" cannot normally be attested in the Wörterbuch, the latter being rather selective in this respect, as in:

takwināt ǧiyulōǧīya "geologische Formationen", in a selected c-featuring despite the fact that an s-orientation seems to be of more imperative terminological relevance; or:

takwīn in the phrase *ǧamīl at-takwīn* "wohlgestaltet", where the c-featuring does not seem to point to any terminologically relevant external factors, either.

Were the c/s distinction not overtly marked in Arabic, its neutralization with verbal nouns would not deserve any attention. At any rate, the problem should rather be relegated to the responsibility of the Arab norm-giving centers.

3. The Wehr-initiated lexicographical project may summarily be characterized as a first really successful attempt at defining the linguistic identity of MWA by way of its lexicon. One of the greatest merits of Wehr's lexicons, whatever may be their edition or date of issue, is their unprecedented trustfulness and transparence The project reached its distinct mark of excellence with the 1st edition of 1952. Despite the whole series of successive additions and innovative improvements, the basic descriptive frame, clearly delimiting the linguistic contours of MWA, remained always the same.

The project reached its climax with the 5th edition of the *Wörterbuch.* Owing to its descriptive and methodological qualities, delimiting the linguistic entity of MWA, it is decidedly more than a current bilingual lexicon. It will be used with

profit not only by Arabists, students and scholars alike, but lexicographers and general linguists will also find valuable thought-provoking stimuli in it.

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