

Notes

A Survey of Quranic Arabic-Urdu Lexicons

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The tradition of compiling dictionaries, explanatory glosses and philological investigations of varying length, taste and application dates from the second century AH with the composition of the great works of Khalil b. Ahmad [*Kitab al- 'Ayn*] and Sibawayhi [*Al-Kitab*].¹ These were originally Arabic grammars but were so vast in their range that they covered the extensive gamut of historical philology, lexical variation and incorporated a special focus on the grammar of the Quran. The Muslims can be proud of their strong lexicographical traditions, which are one of their intellectual gifts to world civilization.

As time passed and non-Arabs began entering the fold of Islam, the need for, and composition of bilingual works became a necessity. This was met by great Arab and non-Arab scholars all over the Islamic world.²

In the South Asian subcontinent which had been ruled over by benevolent Muslim dynasties, the official and popular language was Persian and several Arabic-Persian dictionaries were composed. When Urdu began to replace Persian as the language of educated Muslims in the early nineteenth century, the need for Arabic-Urdu dictionaries became acute. Urdu had emerged into prominence and academic acceptance only when the first Urdu translation of the Quran was made by Shah Rafi'uddin [d. 1828].

The composition of Arabic-Urdu dictionaries was done chiefly to explain the vocabulary of the Quran to Muslims of all levels of educational achievement. The origin and development of Arabic-Urdu

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¹ Khalil b. Ahmad [d. 175 AH] and Sibawayhi [d. 194 AH] were the pioneers of Arabic grammar being teacher and pupil.

² John Haywood, Arabic lexicography: its history and its place in the general history of lexicography, Leiden, 1960, pp.77-110.

lexicography is a twentieth-century phenomenon [thus of recent occurrence] and merits closer study.

After the War of Independence [1857], the Muslims struggled to secure the preservation of their religious knowledge by the establishment of *madressahs* at Deoband, Saharanpur and the reopening of ancient seminaries of Firangi Mahal and Delhi. In the initial stages, the students were directly taught the prescribed texts [consisting largely of Arabic works – Quran commentaries [*tafsir*], logic [*mantiq*] and grammar [*nahw*]]. Later, the large number of students who were uninitiated in Arabic and the replacement of Persian by English necessitated the composition of works in Urdu that would transfer Arabic knowledge to the Muslim masses who had been deprived of the opportunity of studying their own languages by the colonial power [the British]. All such compositions, covering all fields of specialized religious knowledge, were achieved by the private endeavors of Muslim scholars without any patronage of any kind.

The *Sahih Lughat al-Quran* by Moulvi Shahiduddin Banarsi [1900] is the earliest traceable attempt at presenting the meanings of the Quran in Urdu.³ The Arabic words are given alphabetically. No verses are cited completely or otherwise. The meanings are simply given with related words stemming from the same root given together. For example, *itteba* ' [to follow] is given in 12 forms as it appears in the Quran with meanings. As a brief [370 pp.], simple and handy Quranic dictionary, the work can be used with facility by elementary users.

The *Matalib al-Quran* [1331 AH/1913 CE] by Syed 'Ali Hasan, a retired magistrate and judicial officer in the state of Bihar, British India, is an early and useful lexicon for Urdu-reading Muslims.⁴ It is crammed with information and contains several useful lists and appendices. The Quranic text is not given but each paragraph [*ruku*'] is summarized and the subsequent debates are elaborated. Legal issues attract the compiler's attention because of his own legal background. The discourses are learned, with quotations from Persian and Urdu poetry but phrased in lucid language. It is assumed that the reader has the Quran text before him while consulting this work. No references to earlier works of similar nature or of Arabic-Arabic dictionaries are given. Covering over 1000 pp., the work is useful and valuable and pioneering in nature.

The first detailed and erudite Arabic-Urdu Quranic dictionary, titled *Lughat al-Quran*, was compiled by Abdur Rashid Nomani [d.

³ Shahiduddin Banarsi, *Sahih Lughat al-Quran*, Karachi [reprinted 2005].

⁴ Syed Ali Hasan, *Matalib al-Quran*, Lahore, 1913.

1999] in 1945. The author was a *Shaykh al-Hadith* and issued this erudite work in 3 massive volumes [6 parts] covering a total of 2162 pages [of two columns each] in a recent reprint.⁵ The compiler does not claim precedence for his work but asserts that it is a comprehensive study with all the derivatives [*mushtiqaat*], combinations [*murakkabat*] and tenses [*sighat*] – with their meanings in Urdu – of the words used in the Quran although these various forms may not all be actually present there. All Quranic references are given but these are to paragraph [*ruku'*] and section [*juz*] – which mode of reference is now out-of-date being replaced by *surah* and verse. Complete verses are not quoted in all cases in the book but only the *ruku'*-*juz* numbers are given. The words are not given according to their stems [*masadir* sing. *masdar*] but according to the form in which they appear in the Quran – the reason being that it may not be possible for an ordinary person to know all by himself the *masadir* of all words in the Quran. The compiler, who taught at many noted Islamic institutions, states in the Preface:

A teacher can take this book in hand and teach the Quran;
a student can learn the lesson his Quran teacher has taught
him;
an ordinary person can use it to further his understanding
of the Quran.⁶

The earlier Arabic-Arabic lexicons of Imam Raghīb, Ibn Qutayba and Abu Obaydah are referred to with citations from books of geography, poetry and history being given. For example, the name 'Ilyas' is detailed in historical and lexical terms in 11 columns covering 7 pages. The first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* is also referred to and criticized often. As an early, if not the very first, work of this nature in Urdu, it is remarkable that the *Lughat al-Quran* transcends the concept of a word-for-word dictionary and is more of an encyclopedia of Quranic knowledge containing a preponderant portion of lexical/linguistic data.

Mira't al-Quran [1954] is another Quranic dictionary compiled by Abdul Hayy.⁷ After certain introductory material, it starts by giving words in alphabetical order followed immediately by their variations in various Quranic verses e.g. the word 'abu' [father] has 32 appearances [in various forms] which are given with their Urdu translation. As a result of this, the size of the book has increased greatly and the printer has had to reduce the size of the fonts making it almost unreadable –

⁵ Abdul Rashid Nomani, *Lughat al-Quran*, 3 Vols., Lahore, n.d. [1st edition 1945].

⁶ Introduction p. 5. The author kindly inscribed my set in 1414 AH [1994].

⁷ Abdul Hayy, *Mir'at al-Quran*, Karachi, n.d. [1st edition 1945].

although this is a very useful lexicon especially for advanced students and scholars. The reference numbers of *surah* and verse are also given. In short, this is an early and copious source of Quranic information and reference.

The *Mu'jam al-Quran* [1985] by Syed Fazlur Rahman⁸ is much like the traditional dictionaries with the exception that the Quranic vocabulary is given in *surah* and verse. As the compiler writes, the chief inspiration for its preparation was the Arabic-Arabic work – the *Kalimat al-Quran* of Husayn Muhammad Makhluḥ – in which selected words from the Quran [in *surah*-order] are elaborated. However, the compiler has not produced a simple translation but has all words having common stems at one place and also given their brief grammatical details in the form that they appear whether *madi/mudari*'. For example, the word 'yunsuru' [to help] is given in 16 forms with Quranic references of variations as they appear. Thus the *Mu'jam al-Quran* is a useful book which beginners and middle-order students can use with advantage.

Quran Majid ka 'Arabi-Urdu lughat [1995 1st edition] by Dr. Muhammad Mian Siddiqui⁹ was compiled for those students and teachers who did not have a vast knowledge of the Arabic language as well as those who were engaged in writing or compiling Islamic material. For this reason, words have not been given by their stems but according to the form in which they occur in the Quran. The grammatical details regarding *sighat* [tenses], singulars/plurals, *damir* [referent] and *i'rab* [diacritics] have been given. The book is a handy compendium of useful information helpful to students, teachers and researchers alike.

Anwar al-bayan fi hall lughat al-Quran by Chaudhary Ali Muhammad [1995] is a detailed linguistic analysis of the entire Quran from start to finish in 4 volumes.¹⁰ The author is a retired PCS officer who has devoted his post-retirement time to a study of the Quran. Every word and construction in the Quran [except for repetitions] has been thoroughly examined with extensive details of grammar and lexis. This work is not primarily a dictionary though it gives the meanings of the words/phrases examined. The details given will be of use only to advanced students and not to beginners, as a note given as an introduction says. The note was written by a former Chairman, Department of Arabic, Islamic University of Bahawalpur. Nevertheless

⁸ Syed Fazlur Rahman, *Mu'jam al-Quran*, Karachi, 1987 [1st edition 1985].

⁹ Muhammad Mian Siddiqui, *Quran-i-Majeed ka 'Arabi-Urdu lughat*, Islamabad, 2001 [1st edition 1995].

¹⁰ Chaudhary Ali Muhammad, *Anwar al-bayan fi lughat al-Quran*, 2 Vols., Lahore, 1995.

the value of such research is high and creditable and interesting for those who wish to study grammar as an aspect of the *i'jaz al-Quran*.

Among the new variety of dictionary is *Mutaradifat al-Quran* by Abdur Rahman Kaylani [1995]. This is a massive [1006 pp.] compilation of Quranic synonyms with the degree of difference between them.¹¹ All the words are those that occur in the Quran; there is no extra-Quranic vocabulary. Verses where they occur are cited and their meanings given. The stems of the words are also given as well as their form as it appears in the Quran. The novel aspect is that the headings are given in Urdu according to the common meaning e.g. the heading is given in Urdu as '*adami*' [man] and this is followed by the various words used in the Quran for this such as '*ins*', '*insan*', '*nas*', '*bashar*' with the difference brought out. The last hundred pages give a host of supplementary material. This is the largest venture of its kind to have appeared and by 2007 it had passed through 9 editions.

The *Qamus al-alfaz al-Quran al-Karim* [2003] by Dr. Abdullah Abbas Nadvi, a scholar attached to the Umm al-Qurra University in Mecca and resident for several decades in Arabia, is a one-volume [520 pp.] handy dictionary containing much more than the meaning of words.¹² The last 50 pages give the triliteral stems of all words included; the dictionary itself gives the words as they normally appear in the Quran. Each word is followed by its grammatical details and the category [*bab*] of verb where necessary. The words are given alphabetical order but in the triliteral form with their stems and derivatives in the *madi/mudari* form. The work was intended for English speakers but the whole text was translated into Urdu and printed in Pakistan. The compiler has had the valuable experience of living in the country where the official language is Arabic and where the Quran was revealed.

Kalimat al-Quran [2003] is a simple and direct dictionary that gives the meanings of various words and phrases of the Quran *surah* by *surah* not only separately but in combination with other words that precede or follow it.¹³ There is no indication as to which word in a phrase is being explained. For example, the phrase '*wa bi'l akhirate hum yuqinun*' is given as one entry with the translation following it. No separate lexical/grammatical details are given. Each *surah* is prefaced by

¹¹ Abdur Rahman Kaylani, *Mutaradifat al-Quran*, Lahore, 2007 [1st edition 1995].

¹² Abdullah Abbas Nadvi, *Qamus al-alfaz al-Quran*, Karachi, 2003.

¹³ Haqqani Mian Qadri, *Kalimat al-Quran*, Karachi, 2003.

a brief introduction summarising its contents. The compiler is Haqqani Mian Qadri.

Farhang-i-Istilahat-i-Quran [2003] by Dr. M. M. Siddiqui (q.v.) is a glossary of Quranic terms and concepts in alphabetical order.¹⁴

The various entries have explanatory notes containing, in some cases, extensive material. The compiler/author not only gives a linguistic analysis of the word but a comprehensive study of its evolution [e.g. Islam] and historical associations [e.g. *ashab al-fil*]. This is an early work of its kind in Urdu and should be followed up by works of the nature of *Encyclopedia of the Quran*. One feature is that the page has been divided into two columns – which makes reading difficult and strained. The *Farhang* ends at the letter *nun*. There is only one entry for *nun*; no entry for *mim* at all. Also, there is only one entry for *ghayn* and *qaf*. This gives a sense of incompleteness as though this is a hurried work with the author losing interest. Other titles for *wav* (و) such as *wahy*, *wali*, *wudu*, *wasiyyah* and for *ya* such as *yatim*, *yamin*, *yaum* could have been included. It is a matter for regret that this early work on Quranic concepts ends on an incomplete and unsatisfactory note.

A new addition¹⁵ to the list of lexicographical literature in Urdu is a dictionary of Arabic synonyms titled *Alfaz mutaradifa ke darmiyan faraq* by Muhammad Husayn Qasmi [2004]. This is a very useful reference tool that needs to be consulted for the valuable information it gives regarding the degree of difference between Arabic synonyms mostly taken from the Quran but also from Persian and Urdu as well. The vocabulary given covers not only nouns but verbs, prepositions, phrases and shades of meaning between them. For example, the difference between ‘*nabi*’ and ‘*rasul*’, ‘*iman*’ and ‘*islam*’ deal with the fundamentals of Islam. But also given are ‘*inna*’ and ‘*anna*’, ‘*idh*’ and ‘*idha*’ in grammar and things like ‘the English mile’ and the ‘*shar‘i* mile’. This is a work of novel design and provides a fund of knowledge based on citations from learned authorities.

The *Lughat al-Quran* [2007] by Muhammad Naim is among the latest of Quranic lexicons and takes a novel approach to the subject.¹⁶

It also makes full use of modern computer technology with different fonts for Arabic and Urdu and different colours to highlight words and phrases and their particularities. The book is divided into four parts:

¹⁴ Muhammad Mian Siddiqui, *Farhang Istilahat al-Quran*, Islamabad, 2003.

¹⁵ Muhammad Husayn Qasmi, *Alfaz-i-mutaradifa ke darmiyan faraq*, Karachi, 2004.

¹⁶ Muhammad Naim, *Lughat al-Quran*, Karachi, 2007.

1. those Quranic nouns [*asma*'] that are frequently used [more than 10 times];
2. those Quranic *asma*' that are sparingly used [>10];
3. those Quranic stems [*masadir*] that are frequently used [<10];
4. those Quranic stems that are sparingly used [>10].

The reason for this fourfold division, according to the compiler, is that as regards the *asma*', these are not derived from other stems but are absolute in themselves [*asma*' *jamida*]. The *masadir* are those stems which may not appear in their original form in the Quran but in the shape of verbs in *madi/mudari*'. The first two categories are thus analysed:

Asma' → meaning → quantity → Quranic quote/s → Urdu translation.

The next two categories are thus analysed:

Masdar → meaning → quantity → verbs that issue from it
→ Quranic quote/s → Urdu translation.

For example, the frequently-used *masdar* – '*al fey*'lu' [= to do] – occurs 108 times in 31 different tenses [*sighat*]. The rarely-used *masdar* '*al-sawwada*' [= to blacken] is used 7 times in 6 different forms.

This certainly is an advance on existing dictionaries as it deals with an area of specialisation not previously undertaken. It covers the vast categories of Quranic *asma*' and *masadir* and their different forms. The compiler has followed this useful venture with a Quran teacher titled *Mu'allim al-Quran* [2008].

Lisan al-Quran [first 2 volumes by Muhammad Hanif Nadvi up to the letter *dal*, subsequently continued by Muhammad Ishaq Bhatti (1998)], is a *taudihi* [explanatory] dictionary that does much more than give the simple meanings of the Quranic words.¹⁷ It is arranged according to stem e.g. it begins with '*alif ba*' followed by '*alif ba ba*', then '*alif ba dal*' and so on. The entries that follow are not just the words that occur in the Quran but also other related expressions, metaphors and variations which help in understanding the application of the Quranic words in their context with ramifications. That is why it is subtitled '*taudeehi lughat*' [explanatory lexicon]. Verses from Arab poets are also cited to explain shades of meaning contained within one word in the manner of Imam Raghīb's *Mufradat*. There are also historical notes on various Quranic personalities and explanations of technical terminology as well – the latter being extremely useful. In his preface, the compiler [a scholar of the *Ahl-i-Hadith* school] gives three elements which are the prerequisites of Quranic study:

¹⁷ Muhammad Hanif Nadvi, *Lisan al-Quran*, 2 Vols. [3rd compiled by M. Ishaq Bhatti] Lahore, 1998.

1. the knowledge of the application of the Quran in the time of the Holy Prophet;
2. the command over the Arabic language;
3. a deep attachment to the Holy Quran.

These three preconditionalities are then expounded at length. It is a matter of satisfaction that the compiler demonstrates his accomplishment in these. A more detailed essay on the qualities of the Quranic style and the *i'jaz al-Quran* would have been welcome. Regrettably, the compiler passed away in 2005 after completion of the entries under the letter *dal* (ﺩ). The remaining volume was completed by the compiler's fellow associate, Muhammad Ishaq Bhatti, but only up to the letter *za* (ﺯ). The standard of the earlier two volumes has been maintained but the dictionary has been left incomplete. Nevertheless, the three volumes that are available are a valuable contribution in this academically-demanding area.

Conclusion

It will be noted that Quranic Arabic-Urdu lexicography is of recent date. However, the pace has quickened and a host of such dictionaries has made their appearance not only in Pakistan but also in India [such as the work of Abdul-Karim Parekh (first edition 1952)]. We have not considered partial works or those that are tendentious – such as the works of Ghulam Ahmad Pervez. The profusion of lexical works has led to the composition of surveys such as that of Qari Mohammad Tahir titled '*Pakistan main taba' hone wali lughat-i-Qurani*' in '*Uloom al-Quran* [bi-annual, Aligarh, July, December, 2009].

What is urgently required is a dictionary of Quranic stylistics both in English and in Urdu.