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Mahmud Al-Zamakhshari's Work "Al-Faiq Fi Gharib Al-Hadith" as an Important Source for Studying Rare Vocabulary

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Abstract: This article explores the methods of linguistic and semantic analysis in Mahmud al-Zamakhshari's work "Al-Faiq fi Gharib al-Hadith", which holds a significant place in the history of Arabic lexicography. The research reveals how the scholar effectively utilized phonetic, morphological, and syntactic semantics, as well as text context and the evolution of social meaning, in interpreting rare words within hadiths. The results of the analysis demonstrate that Zamakhshari's lexicographic approaches and views on semantic transformations fully correspond to the early theoretical foundations of modern pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cognitive semantics.

Keywords: Mahmud Al-Zamakhshari, "Al-Faiq Fi Gharib Al-Hadith," Rare Vocabulary, Lexicography, Semantic Analysis, Context, Pragmatics, Semantics

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1. Introduction

In the history of Arabic linguistics, the formation and development of lexicography are inextricably linked to the need to correctly understand and interpret the texts of sacred Islamic sources – the Holy Quran and the noble Hadiths. The process of interpreting rarely used, complex, and rare words within these sources gave rise to an independent and highly important branch of Arabic lexicography [1]. From a linguistic perspective, such words belong to the passive layer of the vocabulary, and revealing their semantic, etymological, and morphological features is considered a complex scientific task. Even in the early Islamic period, as a result of the mixing of dialects of various Arab tribes and the acceptance of Islam by non-Arab peoples, difficulties began to arise in understanding the original meanings of ancient and rare words characteristic of the pure Arabic language [2].

In this regard, numerous works aimed at explaining the rare vocabulary within the hadiths were created. Among them, the work Al-Faiq fi Gharib al-Hadith by Mahmud al-Zamakhshari – a great linguist, exegete, and writer who emerged from the Khorezm oasis – stands out for its deep linguistic analyses, unique lexicographic method, and original approaches to word semantics [3, 4]. This work serves as an important source for determining the etymology of ancient Arabic words, demonstrating the impact of sound changes on meaning, and conducting semantic analysis through context.

2. Materials and Methods

Imam Zamakhshari's linguistic heritage, particularly his contribution to lexicography, has been studied from various perspectives by Eastern and Western scholars. In Western oriental studies, scholars such as C. Brockelmann and J. Haywood evaluated Zamakhshari's principles of dictionary compilation as one of the highest peaks in the evolution of Arabic lexicography. In local oriental studies, scholars like U. Uvatov and A. Rustamov provided a broad description of the scholar's general scientific activities, including his works on linguistics. However, one of the deepest studies directly regarding the purely linguistic aspects of *Al-Faiq*, specifically the semantic and morphological analyses in the work, was carried out by the Sudanese scholar T. A. M. Yasin, which revealed the phonetic, syntactic, and pragmatic features of the work .

The methodological basis of this research is formed by the comparative-historical, lexico-semantic, and contextual analysis methods of modern linguistics. During the research, a descriptive-analytical method was used to compare Zamakhshari's approach to interpreting rare words with dictionaries created in previous periods, as well as diachronic analysis methods to determine the semantic development of lexical units in the work.

3. Results and Discussion

Etymologically, the concept of *gharib* in Arabic lexicography expresses meanings such as "alone," "distant," and "unfamiliar." From a terminological point of view, this concept is used for the lexical layer that is not actively used in daily communication, belongs to the specific narrow dialects of certain tribes, or requires special linguistic preparation and vocabulary knowledge to fully understand its meaning. In the early centuries of Islam, the necessity to correctly interpret such rare words in hadith texts caused great debates and research in the scientific environment. While these studies initially existed orally in the form of scattered explanations by various scholars, they were later systematized and took the form of comprehensive dictionary works.

In the period before Mahmud al-Zamakhshari, numerous works were written in the field of *gharib al-hadith* (rare hadith vocabulary), and their evolution clearly demonstrates how the methods and principles of Arabic lexicography gradually developed. Among the early representatives of this field, Abu Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthanna (d. 824) and Abu Ubayd Qasim ibn Sallam (d. 838) can be mentioned. In particular, the work of Abu Ubayd Qasim ibn Sallam was a major scientific turning point for its time, as rare words in it were classified according to the subject of the hadiths or the names of their narrators. Later generation scholars, such as Ibn Qutaybah and Al-Khattabi, further enriched this field, making corrections to words that had been omitted or misinterpreted in previous dictionaries [5].

Nevertheless, by the time Zamakhshari lived (11th-12th centuries), the structure and search systems of the dictionaries created in this field presented certain inconveniences for users. Most previous works were organized according to the narrators of the hadiths or historical figures in Islam, so in order to find the meaning of a rare word, the reader had to know in advance who narrated the hadith containing that word or to which companion it belonged. This was considered an arduous process for linguists and philologists. Deeply understanding this very problem, Mahmud al-Zamakhshari took a revolutionary step in the history of lexicography and compiled his work *Al-Faiq fi Gharib al-Hadith* based on a completely new, purely linguistic, and alphabetical principle .

The most fundamental distinctive feature of Zamakhshari's work is that, in order to facilitate word searches, he arranged lexical units in the order of the Arabic alphabet based on their roots. In doing so, he took into account the first and second letters of the root, dividing the text into chapters and sections. This method not only drastically simplified

finding unfamiliar words in the realm of hadiths but also granted the work the status of a fully-fledged linguistic dictionary.

The analyses in the work indicate that Zamakhshari employs a comprehensive approach to interpreting rare words. He first provides the pure lexical meaning of the word, then dwells on its morphological measure (*wazn*) and etymology. Only after that does he reveal the figurative, metaphorical, or pragmatic meaning of this word within the specific hadith text. Such an approach by Zamakhshari serves to clearly demonstrate the subtle boundary between a word's static state in the language and its dynamic state in the text. The scholar's observation of how phonetic changes affect word semantics can be evaluated as one of the early manifestations of phonosemantics [6].

In the history of linguistic research, the issue of the correlation between sound and meaning has long been the focus of scholars' attention. As we study Imam Zamakhshari's methods of analyzing rare vocabulary, we witness his highly nuanced approach to the nature of sounds in the Arabic language and their role in shaping the semantic field. In the work *Al-Faiq fi Gharib al-Hadith*, phonetic semantics, that is, the meaning-carrying characteristic of sounds, manifests itself in various places. Zamakhshari substantiates that the articulatory features of consonants in a particular word—such as voicing, voicelessness, plosiveness, or fricativeness—directly correspond to the intensity, heaviness, or duration of the action or state expressed by that word.

For instance, according to the "Greater Derivation" (*al-Ishtiqaq al-Akbar*) theory founded by Ibn Jinni in Arabic linguistics, a group of words composed of the same root consonants but with rearranged positions shares a common semantic core. Zamakhshari skillfully applies this theory in interpreting unfamiliar words in hadiths. Likewise, by deeply analyzing the phenomenon of sound alternation, he demonstrates how phonetic changes differentiate the nuances of a word's meaning. In *Al-Faiq*, comparing words containing the sounds ش (*shin*) and س (*sin*), the author emphasizes that the articulatory diffuseness (*tafashshi*) of the *shin* sound indicates the comprehensiveness of the action in the words it is part of, whereas the *sin* sound points to a relatively lower intensity [7].

At the same time, in the analysis of onomatopoeic words found in hadiths, the correspondence of sounds to natural acoustic realities is revealed. Zamakhshari does not limit himself to providing pure lexical definitions when explaining such lexemes. He explains from a cognitive perspective how a combination of sounds forms a specific visual or acoustic image in the human mind. This, in turn, confirms the existence of the germs of psycholinguistics and cognitive semantics in Arabic linguistics as early as the 11th-12th centuries [8].

Since Arabic belongs to the family of inflected languages, morphological patterns, or measures (*wazns*), play a decisive role in shaping word meaning. In the work *Al-Faiq*, Zamakhshari devotes significant space to issues of morphological semantics, systematically analyzing how every change in word formation creates an innovation in meaning. The famous rule in Arabic linguistics, "An increase in structure indicates an increase in meaning" (*Ziyadat al-mabna tadullu 'ala ziyadat al-ma'na*), stands at the center of Zamakhshari's morphological analyses.

Subtle semantic shifts expressed by different verbal forms are presented in the work within the context of hadiths. For instance, Zamakhshari proves through the textual environment in hadiths that the *tafā'ala* (تَفَاعَلَ) form expresses not only mutual participation but also the meaning of feigning a state or artificiality. Or, along with the feature of verbs in the *af'ala* (أَفْعَلَ) form to convert an intransitive verb into a transitive one, he deeply reveals that they also signify the swiftness and inevitability of the action [9].

As an example, attention is paid to the use of rare words found in the dictionary in the forms of the active participle (*ism al-fā'il*) or passive participle (*ism al-maf'ūl*). While analyzing why exactly the intensive active participle (*sīghat al-mubālagha*) was used in a given hadith text, Zamakhshari asserts that this grammatical choice serves the purpose of

emphasizing the state of the doer and increasing the emotional impact of the event. He also differentiates the unique pragmatic meanings of the diminutive forms of nouns (*al-taṣghīr*) as well as plural forms like the plural of paucity (*jam‘ al-qilla*) and the plural of abundance (*jam‘ al-kathra*) [10]. These morpho-semantic analyses act as a key in correctly understanding complex religious-legal and moral texts .

In short, Zamakhshari perceives the external morphological shell of a word as an inseparable entirety from its internal semantic core. The explanation of each lexicographic entry in the work demonstrates that mere lexical translation of unfamiliar and complex words is insufficient; rather, the true intent of a word can only be brought to light by determining which morphemes it is composed of and which derivational model it fits into.

In Arabic linguistics, the mutual syntagmatic relations of sentence parts and their correct placement are regarded as the main criterion for expressing a specific thought clearly and comprehensibly. Imam Zamakhshari successfully applies his grammatical expertise, particularly his theoretical views from his work *Al-Mufassal*, during the lexicographic analyses in *Al-Faiq fi Gharib al-Hadith*. In his view, syntactic semantics implies the additional layers of meaning that emerge through a word's position in the sentence and the grammatical function it occupies [11].

Zamakhshari extensively investigates the shifts in meaning that arise from determining the grammatical position of rare words while interpreting them in hadiths. In harmony with the "Nazm" (word order) theory founded by 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, Zamakhshari proves that a change in the word order within a sentence can drastically alter the pragmatic purpose of a hadith. Meanings such as strict emphasis, specification (*takhsīs*), or restriction (*qasr*) are expressed precisely through syntactic means. The author demonstrates with concrete examples how the grammatical governance (*'amal*) of unfamiliar verbs and the prepositions they are paired with can steer the meaning in a completely different direction [12]. Considering that the change of a single preposition can lead to the alteration of an entire religious-legal ruling, Zamakhshari's syntactic-semantic research in this regard serves as an invaluable source for the sciences of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*).

Comprehending the difference between a word's pure lexical meaning and its meaning in a concrete speech situation is the primary object of study in modern linguistics, particularly in pragmatics and discourse analysis. We encounter the fundamental bases of the context theory advanced by scholars like J. Firth and B. Malinowski in the 20th century as early as the 12th century in Zamakhshari's work *Al-Faiq*. In the Arabic linguistic tradition, the concept of *siyāq* (سياق – context, text flow) is understood to encompass the linguistic environment surrounding the word as well as the extralinguistic factors related to reality [13].

Zamakhshari never analyzes a rare word in isolation from the text. First, he cites the full text of the hadith, determines the word's position in the sentence, and only then reveals its intended meaning within that specific text. There are many polysemous words in the work. While listing all their lexical meanings, Zamakhshari selects only one—the most appropriate for that specific situation—based on the *siyāq* (context) of the hadith. This approach helps prevent artificial interpretations that deprive the text of its naturalness and serves to correctly decode the pragmatic purpose of the words of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) [14]. The author also relies precisely on *siyāq* when explaining the phenomena of metaphor and figurative language (*majāz*). He relies on logical presuppositions within the text during the process of transitioning from a word's literal meaning to its figurative meaning.

Language, as a social phenomenon, directly reacts to cultural, political, and religious changes in society. The emergence of Islam fundamentally changed the socio-cultural environment in the Arabian Peninsula, and this process found a vivid reflection in the lexical layer of the language. The work *Al-Faiq* is a unique historical-etymological source

that allows observing the semantic transformations during the transition period from the vocabulary of the Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic) era to Islamic terminology [15].

When Zamakhshari analyzes rare words denoting religious concepts, he consistently elucidates their evolution from physical, material meanings associated with the pre-Islamic Bedouin lifestyle to new, abstract, and spiritual meanings formed under the influence of the Quran and hadiths. In historical lexicology, this process is explained through the phenomena of semantic narrowing, semantic broadening, or semantic shift. For example, while the Arabic word "salat" (prayer) originally meant heating over a fire or supplicating, in the Islamic context (siyāq), it transformed into an act of worship with specific conditions and pillars. Zamakhshari conducts a unique cognitive analysis to find the organic connection between the original etymological root of such words and their new religious terminological meaning [16].

The issues of social semantics analyzed in the work are explained by how words are used among different strata of society, and how new realities that emerged in a certain time and space are named in the language. Zamakhshari carefully observes tribal dialects and the process of their penetration into the literary language; as a result, the work *Al-Faiq* forms a valuable database not only for understanding religious texts but also for studying the history of the Arabic language and sociolinguistics.

4. Conclusion

During this research, it was confirmed that Mahmud al-Zamakhshari's work *Al-Faiq fi Gharib al-Hadith* does not merely fall into the scope of a traditional dictionary explaining Islamic texts; on the contrary, it is an encyclopedic source embodying fundamental linguistic theories. The scholar's efforts in the field of lexicography and semantics initiated a new stage in the history of Arabic linguistics. First of all, the introduction of an alphabetical system based on the morphological root in dictionary compilation practice drastically facilitated the search process, elevating lexicographic technique to an entirely new level. This methodological turning point served as a solid foundation for major dictionaries created in subsequent centuries, including monumental works such as Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-Arab* and Al-Fayruzabadi's *Al-Qamus al-Muhit*.

Zamakhshari's methods of semantic analysis are distinguished by their evaluation of word meaning as a systematic, multifaceted, and continuously changing process. The scholar's observations regarding phonetic, morphological, and syntactic semantics revealed the organic connection between sound, form, and meaning. By proving that a specific logical and pragmatic purpose lies behind every sound change or grammatical shift, Zamakhshari demonstrated the only accurate way to properly decode complex religious-philosophical texts.

Furthermore, the research results demonstrated that the early seeds of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and cognitive semantics—which only took shape in European linguistics in the mid-20th century—were sown as early as the 11th and 12th centuries in the linguistic school of the Khorezm oasis. Zamakhshari's practice of analyzing words directly through context, independent of their original lexical meaning, confirms the massive role of extralinguistic factors in understanding the nature of a text. His documentation of the historical development of words and their semantic transformations in the transition from the Jahiliyyah to the Islamic period within the framework of social semantics fully meets the requirements of modern diachronic linguistics and sociolinguistics.

In conclusion, the work *Al-Faiq fi Gharib al-Hadith* proves that Imam Zamakhshari was not only a great exegete and grammarian, but also a lexicologist and semantic scholar who profoundly understood the nature of the word along with its internal and external laws. A deeper study of the linguistic features of this work from the perspective of modern

linguistic paradigms, particularly linguoculturology and psycholinguistics, remains one of the most promising directions for future scientific research.

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