CHAPTER 2

*Mubawwab* (Onomasiological) and Specialized Lexica

1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter we discussed early philological activity and the factors that led to the emergence of lexical writing. We also discussed the process of data collection and concluded that the philologists regarded the speech of the Bedouin *fuṣahāʾ* as the “purest” form of Arabic and that much of their effort concentrated on strange and uncommon usage. In this and the following chapter we shall trace the historical development of the two types of lexica which began to appear in the second/eighth century, namely, those of the *mubawwab* (onomasiological) type and the *muǧannas* (semasiological) type. The present chapter is devoted to the first of these two types, which we shall generically refer to as *mubawwab*. It embraces lexica and thesauri in which meaning leads to sign, and includes specialized dictionaries, such as those that deal with Arabized words, solecism, morphological patterns, etc. Each of the next nine sections of the chapter will deal with a particular genre of single-topic lexica, whereas Section 11 discusses multithematic works, some of which are comprehensive thesauri. As we have seen above, each of the two types, the *mubawwab* and the *muǧannas*, serves a different purpose, and the appearance of the *muǧannas* type shortly after *mubawwab* lexica did not result in their discontinuation; accordingly both types coexisted throughout the tradition. Indeed, some works which are devoted to particular subjects – such as Qur’anic *ġarīb* or proverbs – were themselves arranged according to form (*lafz*, e.g. alphabetically), and these, along with books of the same genre which are not formally arranged, will be considered in their respective sections in this chapter. In contrast with *muǧannas* lexica which are relatively few in number, there is a vast literature of *mubawwab* writings, though a sizable portion of which is made up of short *risālas* restricted to specific topics. The vastness of this literature dictates that our survey cannot always be exhaustive (in spite of the fact that this chapter is considerably longer than the one on *muǧannas* lexica). The discussion shall include all the sources that we believe are representative of each genre, particularly those that had the greatest impact on that genre and on subsequent authors.
As mentioned earlier, there was clear interest in ġarīb and nādir material at a very early stage of philological activity. It should be remembered that the philologists and grammarians alike cast their net very wide indeed so as to include in the corpus of what they call ‘Arabiyya a large variety of dialects which naturally comprise a great deal of irreconcilable characteristics and idiosyncrasies. For example, Sībawayhi (d. 180/796) refers to a dozen or so dialects, most notable among which are the Ḥiǧāzī and the Tamīmī ones, each of which covers substantial areas of the peninsula and most probably comprises a number of sub-dialects. Other dialects cited by Sībawayhi include those of Asad, Bakr b. Wā’il, Fazāra, Ġaniyy, Ḥaṭ’am, Huḍayl, Ka’b, Qays, Rabī’a, Sa’d, Sulaym and Ṭayyī’. Similarly, lexical works of the mubawwab type include a huge body of dialectal data which constitutes a large portion of the material on ġarīb and nādir. This is due to the fact that the philologists who collected the data from the tribes were keen to record dialectal variants and lexemes peculiar to specific tribes and not known to most others. In this respect, the philologists drew most of their data from poetry, in particular rağaz. The conservative nature of poetry must have contributed to its status as the ultimate source of strange or uncommon usage, and the philologists and grammarians expressed their awareness of this special status not only through the concept of poetic license (iḍṭirār, ḍarūra), but also by trying to interpret and justify aberrant material which poetry, in contrast to other genres, preserves.

2 Note also that the dialects of Ḥiǧāz and Tamīm can agree on one aspect of a larger issue on which they differ. Thus, the pattern faʿāli in the Ḥiǧāzī dialect always ends with a kasra, whereas it is normally treated as a diptote in the Tamīmī dialect, except in the case of a final -r, which takes a kasra throughout as in Ḥiǧāzī usage. In some cases, even a final dama is attested in words of this pattern ending with -r, as in a line by Aʾšā. See Sībawayhi, Kitāb III, 277–279; cf. Baalbaki (1990: 21, 25).
3 See, for example, Sībawayhi’s chapter on poetic license, entitled bāb mā yaḥtamil al-šiʿr (Kitāb I, 26–32). Cf. above, 32.
4 Ibn Ǧinnī (d. 392/1002), for example, cites the occurrence, mainly in poetry, of anomalous forms, such as ḏaninū instead of ḏannū (they grudged) and atwalṭi instead of atalti (you prolonged), and formulates the principle that they are an indication (manbaha) of the original forms which preceded the introduction of change peculiar to their class of words (Ḫaṣāʾīṣ I, 160–161, 256–264). For further examples and for the role of the dialects in anomalous forms, see Baalbaki (2005: 89–95).