The Classification of the Early Schools of Arabic Lexicography by the Orientalist John A. Haywood -A Descriptive and Analytical Study-

تصنيف المستشرق جون أ. هايوود للمدارس المعجميّة العربيّة التّراثيّة -دراسة وصفيّة تحليليّة-

La classification des premières écoles de la lexicographie arabe par l'orientaliste John A. Haywood -Étude descriptive et analytique-

Hafnaoui BALI
Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah University, Algiers 2, Algeria
hafnaoui.bali@univ-alger2.dz

الإرسال : 2026-07-05 القبول : 2026-07-07 تاريخ النشر : 2026-07-09

Abstract

The study of early Arabic lexicography confronts the researcher with a substantial body of accumulated knowledge and methodology, represented by the numerous dictionaries produced by early Arab lexicographers, which varied considerably in their subject matter, methodologies, and linguistic content. This rich lexicographical heritage has prompted scholars and researchers interested in the study of dictionaries to propose various systems of classification, differing in number, terminology, principles, typologies, and criteria.

Contemporary scholarship has tended to use the term "school" to designate these classifications that trace the different trajectories of Arabic lexicographical development, despite

considerable variation among them in terms of classification, terminology, underlying principles, and criteria.

This article examines John Haywood's contribution to the classification and detailed description of these schools by investigating the terminology he employed and the principles and criteria he adopted in classifying early Arabic dictionaries.

Keywords: Arabic lexicography school, classification, dictionary categories.

الملخّص

حين تناول مباحث الصناعة المعجمية العربية التراثية، يواجه الباحث تراكمًا معرفيًّا ومنهجيًّا تمثّله جملةُ ما خلّفه المعجميون الأوائل من معاجم متباينة في موضوعاتها، ومناهجها، ومادتها اللغوية. وقد دفع هذا النّتاج الغزير العلماءَ والباحثين المهتمين بدراسة المعاجم إلى اقتراح تقسيمات متعددة، اختلفت من حيث عددها ومصطلحاتها والأسس والمعايير المعتمدة فيها. وقد اتجهت الدراسات المعاصرة إلى إطلاق مصطلح "المدرسة" على هذه التقسيمات التي ترصد مسارات الصناعة المعجمية العربية، مع تفاوت ملحوظ بينها في التقسيم والمصطلح والأسس والمعايير.

في هذا المقال، نتناول جهد جون هايوود في تصنيف هذه المدارس وتفصيلها، من خلال النظر في المصطلحات التي استخدمها، والأسس والمعايير التي اعتمدها في تصنيف المعاجم العربية التراثية.

كلمات مفتاحية : مدارس الصناعة المعجميّة العربيّة؛ التّصنيف؛ فئات المعاجم.

Résumé

L' étude de la lexicographie arabe ancienne confronte le chercheur à un vaste ensemble de connaissances et d'approches méthodologiques, représenté par les nombreux dictionnaires élaborés par les premiers lexicographes arabes, qui se distinguent sensiblement par leur objet, leurs méthodes et leur contenu linguistique.

Cette riche tradition lexicographique a conduit les chercheurs et les spécialistes de l'étude des dictionnaires à proposer diverses classifications, lesquelles diffèrent tant par leur nombre et leur terminologie que par les principes et les critères sur lesquels elles reposent.

Les études contemporaines ont eu tendance à employer le terme "école" pour désigner ces classifications qui retracent les différentes orientations de l'évolution de la lexicographie arabe, malgré des différences notables entre elles quant à la classification, à la terminologie ainsi qu'aux principes et critères retenus.

Dans cet article, nous examinons la contribution de John A. Haywood à la classification et à la description détaillée de ces écoles, en nous intéressant aux termes qu'il a employés ainsi qu'aux principes et critères qu'il a adoptés dans sa classification des dictionnaires arabes anciens.

Mots-clés : école de lexicographie arabe, classification, catégories de dictionnaires.

• Introduction

It is well established in the literature on lexicography and lexicographical practice that the early development of Arabic lexicography was primarily practical in nature. It took the form of dictionaries compiled by early Arab linguists for diverse purposes and according to different methodologies. Theoretical reflection on lexicographical issues, by contrast, was largely dispersed across works on language that were not explicitly devoted to lexicography, including works on grammar and rhetoric, as well as foundational works in Arabic philology.

Arabic grammar *(al-naḥw)*, by contrast, followed distinct methodological trajectories, giving rise to well-defined grammatical schools *(al-madāris al-naḥwiyya)*. The schools of *al-Baṣra* and *al-Kūfa*, together with the school of *al-Andalūs*, became particularly prominent, each developing its own set of methodological criteria that came to characterize its distinctive grammatical framework.

1. Framing the Problem of Classifying Arabic Lexicographical Schools

A closer examination of Arabic lexicographical schools, however, reveals a fundamental problem of classification. Unlike the grammatical schools, whose methodological orientations became clearly defined and whose scholars, principles, and central issues have been extensively studied, Arabic lexicographical schools have been subject to a wide range of classifications and subdivisions based on divergent criteria and methodological principles. (Abū Sulaymān 2003, 111). No single classification has yet become firmly established within the theoretical and methodological heritage of the Arabic linguistic tradition. The same applies, to a considerable extent,

to contemporary scholarship, where classifications of Arabic lexicographical schools continue to vary according to the criteria and principles adopted. This diversity raises fundamental questions concerning the criteria by which Arabic lexicographical schools may be identified and classified, and the methodological basis upon which such classifications should be constructed. (Yaʿqūb, 2003, 31-32)

The questions that arise in this context are: What motivates the identification of distinct schools of Arabic lexicography? What criteria should be used to identify and delineate these schools? Do the classifications proposed by scholars rest on a clearly defined basis, and, if so, what is the nature of that basis?

What, then, are the criteria underlying these classifications? Are they based on the *geographical* or *regional* distribution of the lexicographers who compiled these dictionaries, on *religious* purposes -as was commonly the case with other works on the Arabic language - or on a *chronological* sequence or *thematic* criteria?

2. John Haywood's Approach to the Classification of Arabic Lexicographical Schools

This section examines John Haywood's methodology for classifying the traditional schools of Arabic lexicography, as set out in his book *"Arabic Lexicography: Its History, and Its Place in the General History of Lexicography"* (Haywood ,1960 28-110). The aim is to identify the methodological framework underlying his classification of these schools, as well as the criteria upon which his classification rests.

2.1. Indicators of John Haywood's Lexicographical Classification of Arabic Schools

A preliminary examination of the book's table of contents, which provides an indication of its scope and methodological

approach to Arabic lexicography, reveals Haywood's attempt to classify dictionaries according to different systems, which he designates by the following terms :

"- Kitāb al-ʿAyn

- Further Dictionaries in the Anagrammatic Arrangement of al-Khalīl

- The Rhyme Arrangement: the Ṣiḥāḥ of al-Jawharī

- Later Dictionaries in the Rhyme Arrangement: the Lisān al-ʿArab and the Qāmūs

- The Modern Dictionary Arrangement.".

(Haywood 1960, Table of Contents)

The terminology employed by *John A Haywood* reflects a range of criteria for designating the different types and stages of Arabic lexicographical arrangement. In some instances, he refers directly to the dictionary itself, as in *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*. In others, he systematically employs the term *"arrangement"*, associating it either with the name of the lexicographer, as in *al-Khalī*l and *al-Jawharī*, or with the organizing principle underlying the dictionary, as in the *Rhyme Arrangement*. In other cases, he adopts a chronological designation, as in the *Modern Dictionary Arrangement*.

Such variation in terminology points to the multiplicity of criteria underlying Haywood's classification of Arabic lexicographical traditions and their systems of arrangement.

2.2. John Haywood's Interest in the Classification of the Arabic Lexicographical Tradition

Haywood's interest in the classification of Arabic lexicographical schools is particularly evident in his explicit statement concerning the purpose of his book; he explains that the work seeks to trace the development of Arabic dictionaries

from a range of perspectives and according to different considerations, thereby drawing attention to the diversity of approaches and organizational principles that have shaped the Arabic lexicographical tradition.

> *"The purpose of this book is to give an account and an appreciation of their efforts. The story is long and complicated, the names are many and confusing; and a merely chronological account would be too rambling to be illuminating. I have therefore divided the book into chapters according to the different dictionary arrangements used, beginning with the phonetic-anagrammatic, then the rhyme arrangement, and lastly the modern alphabetical arrangement."*. (Haywood, 10,1960)

As can be inferred from the above-quoted passage, John A Haywood states that he divided the book into chapters corresponding to different methods of dictionary arrangement; these include the phonetic-anagrammatic system, the rhyme arrangement, and the modern alphabetical arrangement.

2.3. The Term "School" in John Haywood's Classification of the Development of Arabic Lexicography

A careful and critical reading of Haywood's book suggests that he does not use the term school to characterize or classify the development of Arabic lexicography. More specifically, the term does not appear to serve as a basis for identifying the different lexicographical traditions, whether in terms of the content of the dictionaries, the methods and principles underlying their arrangement, or their association with particular lexicographers.

Instead, *John A. Haywood* organizes his account primarily around the *different systems of dictionary arrangemen*t and their *historical development*, referring, for example, to the *phonetic-anagrammatic*, *rhyme*, and *modern alphabetical arrangements.*

This is particularly noteworthy because *John A. Haywood* does employ the term ***school*** explicitly when discussing the two well-established schools of Arabic grammar, namely the *Baṣran* and *Kūfan* schools.

The contrast suggests that his use of ***school*** is deliberate and context-specific: while he recognizes and explicitly identifies distinct schools in the grammatical tradition, he does not extend the same terminology to the development of Arabic lexicography.

Thus, the absence of the term ***school*** from his treatment of Arabic lexicographical development is significant for understanding the principles underlying his classification of the lexicographical tradition.

2.4. The Concept of "School" in John Haywood's Classification of the Arabic Lexicography

Since the nineteenth century, scholars and researchers who have studied the development of early Arabic lexicography, its lexicographical output, and the methodologies underlying it have generally described this development by dividing it into distinct *"schools."*. This approach has been adopted by Western scholars and Orientalists, as well as by Arab and Russian scholars (Begmatova et al 2019, 22-23), who have characterized the various trends and orientations within Arabic lexicography by distinguishing different phases or groupings and referring to them as "schools".

However, if John Haywood devoted a study to tracing the development of early Arabic lexicography and examining its history, methodologies, and lexicographical output, yet did not explicitly employ the term school in classifying this development, does this mean that he did not recognize the existence of lexicographical schools? Or does the concept of the "school" exist implicitly in his classification, but under alternative terms and conceptual categories?

In linguistic and lexicographical studies, the term school is generally used to denote a particular tendency or orientation within which a group of dictionaries is organized according to shared criteria, methodologies, principles of organization, and types of lexicographical material (ʿAṭṭār, 95-92 ,1984). Accordingly, the absence of the explicit term *school* in Haywood's work raises an important methodological question: Should this absence be understood as a rejection of the concept itself, or does *Haywood,* in fact, employ alternative terminology and classificatory categories that embody the same underlying concept?

A detailed examination of the five chapters in which *John Haywood* traces the development of Arabic lexicography, as outlined in the book's table of contents, clearly reveals that he organizes early Arabic dictionaries into distinct methodological groups or categories.

The fourth chapter, devoted to the *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, treats it as a category in its own right, since Haywood regards it as the first lexicographical work to constitute a complete linguistic dictionary. He does not assign any specific label to this category, although, in the body of the chapter, he uses several terms to describe its underlying method, including "*al-Khalīl's* method of arrangement," "the method of permutations," and "the method of phonetic permutations."

In the following chapter (chapter 5), however, he describes another group as "anagammatical arrangement," thereby identifying a unifying characteristic that connects it to the first category, as though both belonged to the same general orientation and methodological tendency. In the next chapter, by contrast, he introduces a new classificatory label based on the *qāfiya* (rhyming) arrangement, under which he groups a number of dictionaries that follow the same ordering principle. Finally, he identifies another group of dictionaries under the classification "the modern method of arrangement."

Accordingly, on the basis of the foregoing analysis, it may be argued that *John A. Haywood'* recognizes the concept of a tendency or orientation, which other scholars have designated by the term school. At its core, this concept rests on the existence of a shared methodological framework or a set of common features that characterize a group of lexicographical works.

3. An Example of the Classification of Arabic Lexicographical Schools :

Before examining *John A. Haywood's* classification of the schools of early Arabic lexicography in detail, It is useful to examine one of the classifications proposed by other scholars who employ the term "school" or equivalent terminology.

3.1. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār's Classification of the Schools of Arabic Lexicography

3.1.1. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār's Approach to the Classification of Arabic Lexicographical Schools

In the introduction to his book, *Ḥusayn Naṣṣār* explicitly states that his study of Arabic dictionaries adopts a

methodology based on classifying them into distinct groups, which he designates as al-madāris ("schools"):

> *"I chose to adopt a method based on the study of schools. Accordingly, I divided the major dictionaries into madāris ("schools") ....".* (Naṣṣār, 1968, 6-7)

Ḥusayn Naṣṣār also explained the basis on which he subdivided and classified these schools:

> *"according to the methodology underlying the organization of their divisions and sections...".* (Naṣṣār, 1968, 11)

Ḥusayn Naṣṣār also sought to identify the connections that account for patterns of dependence, influence, and shared features, taking into consideration the chronological sequence in which the dictionaries belonging to the same school succeeded one another:

> *"I also sought to establish the connections between these schools by tracing the influence of the earlier ones on the later ones. I followed each school historically, beginning with the first to emerge, then the second, the third, and so on, up to the most recent, ...".* (Naṣṣār, 1968, 6)

He provided a detailed account of his examination of the extent to which successive dictionaries shared the same underlying plan:

> *"I also attempted to identify instances in which one member of an earlier school was taken up by a member of a later school, where the latter appeared subsequently and was influenced by the former, since these schools did not each disappear with the emergence of the next; rather, they coexisted for a considerable period of time."* (Naṣṣār, 1968, 7)

3.1.2. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār's Classification of Arabic Lexicographical Schools

Ḥusayn Naṣṣār's methodology is based on dividing the lexicographical schools into four categories:

The scholar *Ḥusayn Naṣṣār* learnt all explanatory dictionaries of the Arabic language separating them into four schools. Whereas representatives of the first school compiled their dictionaries based on phonetic principle, lexicographers of the second school made explanatory dictionaries alphabetically.

Dictionaries made by the representatives of the third school were compiled based on rhyme method and this school is considered the most fruitful one in the history of Arabic lexicography. Finally, lexicographers of the fourth school followed the principles of placing words alphabetically based on the first letter of word bases, which had been used to make small dictionaries before.

These schools are as follows:

"- The *ʿAyn* School of *al-Khalīl*

- The *Jamhara* School of *Ibn Durayd*

- The *Ṣiḥāḥ* School of al-Jawharī

-The *Asās al-Balāgha* School of *al-Zamakhsharī.*

The purpose of this classification and of the procedures employed by *Ḥusayn Naṣṣār* in tracing traditional Arabic lexicography becomes evident in :

> *"in order to elucidate the features of their development, the common link connecting them all, and the characteristics that evolved through disappearance, emergence, diminution, or transformation into new forms."* (Naṣṣār, 1968, 6)

4. John Haywood's Classification of the Early Arabic Lexicographical Schools

After examining the terminological equivalent of the concept of the "lexicographical school" in John Haywood's work and considering the alternative terms he employs, we shall focus here on his classification of Arabic dictionaries, the dictionaries encompassed by each category, and the methods and principles underlying this classification.

John Haywood Different systems of arrangement have been used historically:

> *"At first, vocabularies of limited scope and uncertain arrangement were written. Then full dictionaries were written on an anagrammatic basis, according to an artificial alphabetical order based on phonetic principles, and separating roots according to the number of letters which they comprised. Later, roots were listed in rhyme order; that is, according to their final consonants. The present system -the alphabetical order of the initial- was tried by a few authors, usually with variations great or small, but it never gained wide currency.".* (Haywood, 1960, 1)

John Haywood illustrates these systems in the following diagram, in which he presents the various schools of Arabic lexicography according to the chronological sequence of the Common Era, indicating the lexicons produced by each method of arrangement. (figure 1 : p 80)

4.1. Al-Khalīl Method

Under this category, he lists seven lexicographers, namely *Al-Khalīl, Ibn Durayd, Ibn Sīda, Al-Zabīdī, Al-Azharī, Al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād*, and *al-Qālī*, indicating the lexicons produced by each method of arrangement. (figure 1 : p 80)

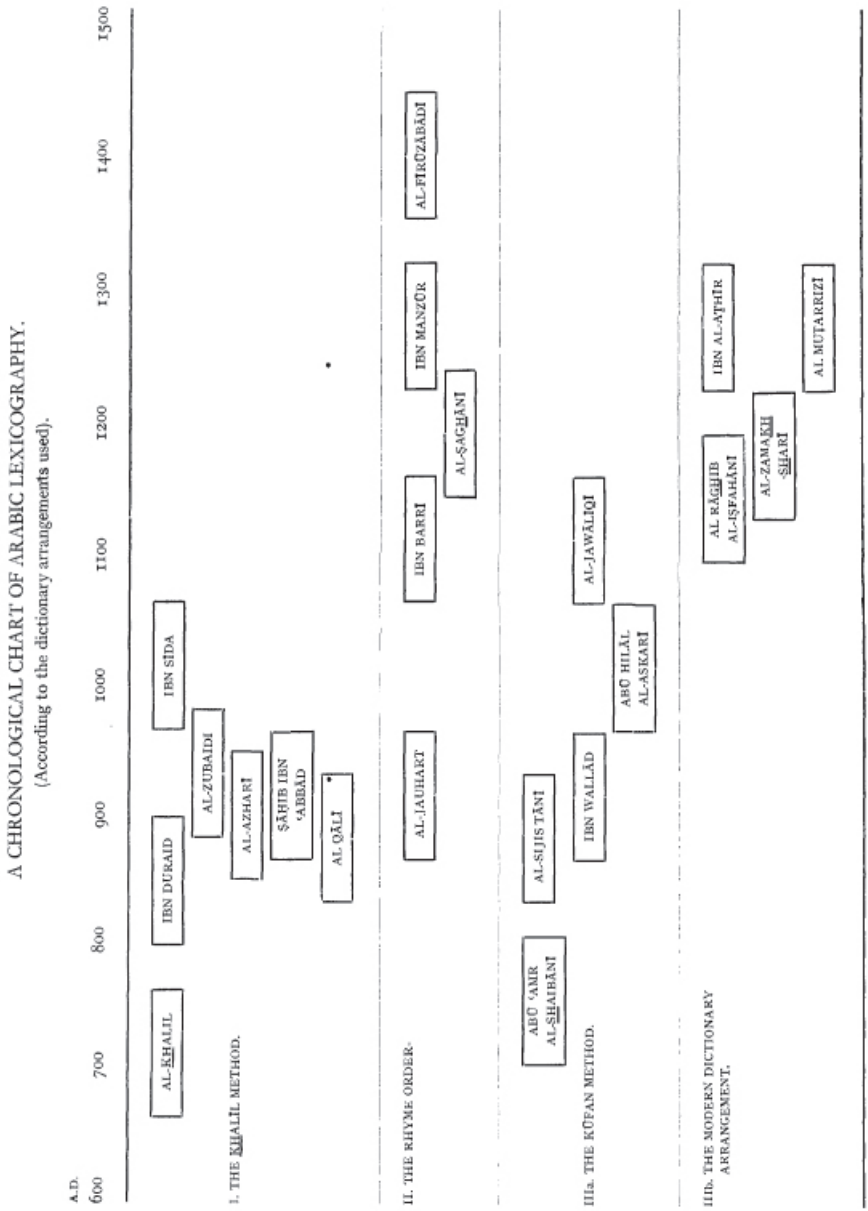


Figure 1. John A. Haywood (1960, p. 132).

At this point in his classification, John Haywood uses the term *method*, meaning a procedure, by which he refers to:

> *"Though al-Khalil was the sort of man to invent the anagrammatical arrangement, it is too much to believe that his phonetic ideas were his own.".* (Haywood, 1960, 26)

This anagrammatic method of arrangement takes the sounds of the Arabic language as its basis, with due consideration of their constituent letters.

The lexicographers whom he places under *Al-Khalīl's* method followed Al-Khalīl's general approach; nevertheless, there is no doubt that they:

> *"The fact that almost all com pilers of dictionaries in the ʿAin method made modifications, both minor and major, suggests that they felt some malaise about the system.".* (Haywood, 1960, 41)

4.2. The Rhyme Order

Under this method, John Haywood lists five lexicographers, namely *al-Jawharī* (written incorrectly al-Jawharat), *Ibn Barrī*, *al-Ṣāghānī*, *Ibn Manẓūr*, and *al-Fīrūzābādī*. (figure 1 : p 80)

For this group, John Haywood designates the category as Rhyme Order.

> *"There i no evidence that Al-Jauhari knew of this work, though this is not absolutely outside the bounds of possibility. A.B. Keith also mentions the arrangement of words according to their final consonants. as being one of the many different systems used in Sanscrit dictionaries, but he does not specify the dates of such works, and they may be later than al-Jauhari."* (Haywood 69-68 ,1960).

4.3. The Kūfan Method

Under this category, John Haywood included five lexicographers: *Abo ʿĀmir al-Shaibānī, al-sijistānī, Ibn Wallād, and al-Jawālīqī, Abū Hilāl Al-Askarī.*

He associated the works of these lexicographers with Kufa, referring to them as belonging to the Kufan method.

> *"The most obvious proof of al-Jauharts success is the fact that his dictionary held its ground for three-hundred years; and even after that, his arrangement was retained. Nevertheless, it was almost inevi table that a more exhaustive work should follow it sooner or later. From the 11nth. to the 16th. centuries ... .".* (Haywood, 1960, 77)

4.4. The Modern Dictionary Arrangement

Within this category, John Haywood mentioned four lexicographers: *Al-Rāghib Al-Aṣfahānī, Ibn Al-Athīr, Al-Zamakhsharī,* and *Al-Muṭarrizī.*

He described the method underlying these dictionaries as the modern arrangement method.

> *"After al-Zamkhshari, the modern dictionary arrangement continued to be used by compilers of lexicons of religious vocabulary, and by those who abridged the large-scale dictionaries.".* (Haywood, 1960, 170).

He described this modern method as an overlapping of methods, extending beyond the domain of language to encompass subject-specific dictionaries.

• Conclusions and Perspectives

It appears that John Haywood did not employ a consistent terminology to designate the schools; instead, he sometimes referred to them as "methods" and at other times as "arrangements."

He also employed multiple criteria in his classification. At times, he classified dictionaries according to the arrangement of the word, whether by its initial letter or by its final letter; at other times, according to geographical affiliation, as in the Kūfan method; and elsewhere according to the scholar associated with the method, as in the Khalīlian method, or according to the historical period, as in the modern method.

For John Haywood, a "school" constitutes a category that brings together a group of lexicographers before he proceeds to discuss their works.

John Haywood's book can be regarded as a rich source for tracing and documenting the development of Arabic lexicography. Nevertheless, his classification of the schools is subject to certain methodological shortcomings, foremost among them the lack of terminological precision and consistency. Moreover, the basis underlying his classification is not clearly delineated; rather, it appears to draw on a range of criteria, including historical-cultural, methodological, and geographical considerations.

It may be concluded that each category should be examined separately in order to identify the criteria and procedures adopted by Arab lexicographers and to assess them against the evidence provided by the dictionaries within a historical, analytical, and descriptive framework.

This is a highly precise and consequential issue that requires the various aspects of the subject to be investigated successively, with a view to establishing a coherent classification informed by the terminology proposed in contemporary critical studies of lexicography.

• References

- Abū Sulaymān, Ṣādiq ʿAbd Allāh. 2003. "Al-Madāris al-Muʿjamiyya al-ʿArabiyya: Dirāsa wa-Raʾy." Majallat al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya, no. 40 (December): 111-148. Cairo, Egypt: Maʿhad al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya, al-Munaẓẓama al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Tarbiyya wa-l-Thaqāfa wa-l-ʿUlūm, 2003.
- ʿAṭṭār, Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghafūr. Muqaddimat al-Ṣiḥāḥ. 3rd ed. Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 1984.
- Begmatova, Zakhra, Nodira Sadullayeva, and Nasiba Usmonova. 2019. "The Schools of Arabic Lexicography." International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science (14) 2 25–22: Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
- Haywood, John A. Arabic Lexicography: Its History, and Its Place in the General History of Lexicography. 1STed. Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1960.
- Naṣṣār, Ḥussayn. Al-Muʿjam al-ʿArabī: Nashʾatuhu wa-Taṭawwuruhu. Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1968.
- Rawāy, Ṣalāḥ. Al-Madāris al-Muʿjamiyya al-ʿArabiyya: Nashʾatuhā – Taṭawwuruhā – Manāhijuhā. 1st ed. Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya, 1990.
- Yaʿqūb, Imīl. Al-Maʿājim al-Lughawiyya al-ʿArabiyya: Badāʾatuhā wa-Taṭawwuruhā. 2nd ed. Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 1985.