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## SOURCES FOR THE LEXICAL-SEMANTIC STUDY OF FIQH TERMINOLOGY

**Abstract.** *This article surveys the historical development of the sources for the lexical-semantic study of Islamic jurisprudential terminology (fiqh), from the Prophetic era to the contemporary period. The study demonstrates that fiqh terminology is inseparably connected with the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the practice of the Companions, and traces the evolution of scholarly sources through four principal stages: the oral transmission of the Companions; the emergence of fiqh as an independent discipline in the second century AH and the first systematized works of Abu Hanifa and Imam al-Shafi'i; the production of dedicated terminological glossaries by scholars including Abu Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam, Ibn Qutayba, Abu Mansur al-Azhari, Abu Hafs al-Nasafi, and al-Mutarriziy; the philosophical-logical analysis of the middle periods; and the encyclopedic terminological dictionaries of the modern era. The article provides detailed analysis of the key individual sources al-Nasafi's "Tilbat al-Talaba," al-Mutarriziy's "al-Mughrib," al-Jurjani's "al-Ta'rifat," and Sa'di Abu Jayb's "al-Qamus al-Fiqhi" and assesses their methodological contributions to fiqh lexicography.*

**Keywords:** *fiqh terminology; lexical-semantic analysis; Islamic jurisprudence; Arabic lexicography; terminological dictionary; Hanafi madhhab; istilah; Qur'anic vocabulary; semantic change; fiqh sources.*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of Arabic linguistics is closely connected not only with the phonological system and grammar of the Arabic language but also with its specialized vocabulary and in particular its terminology. Among these, the study of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudential) terminology and the conduct of its lexical-semantic analysis is equally important and pressing for the advancement of both Islamic jurisprudence and Arabic linguistics. The linguistic roots of fiqh terminology trace back to the Prophetic era. In

the early Islamic period, the meanings of certain Arabic words underwent change, and for this reason the Companions would ask the Prophet (peace be upon him) to clarify the meanings of these words and learn them from him directly. In that era, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was himself a living lexicon for humanity. Even Arabs for whom Arabic was their mother tongue sometimes had difficulty understanding the meanings of certain words, and they would come to the Prophet to learn these words and better understand the religious rulings (al-Wafi & Bin ‘Aliyya, 2025:135).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was himself the first commentator and the earliest interpreter. When even some Arabs had difficulty understanding words that were rooted in the deepest strata of their language, they would ask him and obtain clarification. ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) once heard the Prophet’s answer to the representatives of the Banu Nahd tribe and said: “O Messenger of Allah! We are all children of one father that is, we are all Arabs yet you speak in such rare and subtle words of the Arabs that we do not understand many of them!” Thereupon the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) replied: “My Lord has educated me, and He made my education beautiful, and I grew up among the Banu Sa‘d tribe...” (al-Wafi & Bin ‘Aliyya, 2025:135). This hadith demonstrates that the new Islamic terminology employed by the Prophet (peace be upon him) was revealed to him through divine revelation and constitutes evidence of the eloquence of these terms. The Banu Sa‘d, moreover, were a nomadic tribe and nomadic communities, by contrast with urban populations, had less contact with other tribes, which helped to preserve the pure and ancient Arabic language.

The aim of this article is to survey the principal sources for the lexical-semantic study of fiqh terminology across the main historical periods and to assess their methodological significance for Arabic lexicography and Islamic jurisprudence.

## METHODS

This study employs a historical-descriptive and source-analytical approach, examining the principal works dedicated to fiqh terminology across the main periods of Islamic scholarship: the Prophetic and Companion era; the second century AH; the emergence of dedicated terminological glossaries; the middle periods; and the modern era. The analytical framework draws on the theoretical distinction between the lexical (lughawi) and terminological (istilahi) meanings of fiqh terms, and on the methods of lexical-semantic analysis applied to changes in meaning, etymological derivation,

and contextual usage. Primary sources include the terminological works of al-Nasafi (1997), al-Mutarriziy (1979), al-Jurjani (cited in Wikipedia, 2026), and Abu Jayb (cited in Islamic Translation Foundation, 2026), as well as the modern scholarly article of al-Wafi and Bin ‘Aliyya (2025) and the digital resources of muslim.uz (2026) and ahlisunna.uz (2026).

## RESULTS

**Stage 1: The Companion era and oral transmission.** After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas and ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud continued to teach others about fiqh terms and their meanings. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas is well known and celebrated as a scholar who studied the rare words (gharib) of the Qur’an in profound depth. The celebrated episode of “Masa’il Nafi’ ibn al-Azraq,” mentioned in al-Suyuti’s “al-Itqan” and numerous other classical sources, records the debate between ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas and the Khariji representative Nafi’ ibn al-Azraq, in which information was provided about the rare words of the Qur’an including fiqh terminology. Although fiqh terms received careful attention in the Companion era and were transmitted orally, dedicated sources devoted specifically to fiqh terminology were not created until a later period.

**Stage 2: The second century AH fiqh as an independent discipline.** In the second century of the Hijri calendar, fiqh began to emerge as an independent science. During this period, jurisprudential terms also began to receive a formal legal framework. Abu Hanifa is recognized as the first scholar to divide jurisprudential issues into distinct categories, assign names to each, and provide detailed definitions for each name. Imam al-Shafi‘i, in his “al-Risala,” distinguished the lexical and terminological meanings of terms and systematized their place within Islamic law. At the end of the second century AH and the beginning of the third century, Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam wrote his work “Gharib al-Hadith.” This work is considered the first source to analyze the linguistic roots of fiqh terms. Following Ibn Sallam, Ibn Qutayba al-Dinawari elucidated the semantic changes of fiqh terms from a lexicographical perspective in his work. In this period, fiqh terms were analyzed not in isolated dictionaries but within the body of texts (al-Wafi & Bin ‘Aliyya, 2025:135).

**Stage 3: Dedicated terminological glossaries.** In the subsequent period, dedicated terminological dictionaries devoted to fiqh terms began to be produced. Scholars created

specialized glossaries for the purpose of explaining the complex vocabulary found in fiqh texts. The first such glossary to be written was Abu Mansur al-Azhari's "al-Zahir fi Gharib Alfaz al-Shafi'i," dedicated to the terminology in the Shafi'i text "Mukhtasar al-Muzani" the earliest specialized dictionary of its kind. Another celebrated scholar who wrote a distinctive glossary for fiqh terms was Abu Hafs al-Nasafi, a prominent figure in the Islamic scholarly tradition of Transoxiana (Mawarannahr). Imam al-Nasafi wrote his work "Tilbat al-Talaba fi al-Istilahat al-Fiqhiyya" for his students. This work is divided into several chapters, the first of which is devoted to "Ritual Purity" (Tahara). In his dictionary, the scholar provides detailed attention to the lexical and terminological meanings of fiqh terms, furnishing information about the etymology, roots, and derivatives of words. Examples from the Qur'an, the Hadith, and Arabic poetry are also cited for each term (al-Nasafi, 1997:73).

A particularly instructive example of al-Nasafi's methodology is his treatment of the word "Ramadan." In the chapter on fasting, he defines the word "Ramadan" (Arabic: رمضان) as derived from the root "irmad" (إرماض) and identifies several semantic layers:

The meaning of "burning": the fast of Ramadan burns and extinguishes a person's sins. The meaning of "sharpening": Ramadan sharpens and hones the hearts for increased worship and good deeds during this month. The meaning of "awaiting" and "expectation": during this month, believers await Allah's reward and recompense with eager longing. The meaning of "exhausting" and "tiring": in Arabic usage, the expression رمضت الظبي refers to the hunter who pursues a gazelle across the scorching rocky ground until the animal's soft hooves are burned and it stops at which point the hunter catches it easily. The wisdom in naming the blessed month in this way is that the believer, commanded by Allah to fast by day and stand in prayer by night, abstains from desires and pleasures, grows weary, and surrenders himself entirely to Allah (al-Nasafi, 1997; muslim.uz, 2026). The author states his purpose for compiling the glossary as follows: "My intention here is to explain the terms cited by our associates (Hanafi scholars) and our shaykhs in their books, and therefore I have not gone beyond them" (al-Nasafi, 1997:73).

Another eminent scholar who dedicated a distinctive work to fiqh terminology was Nasir al-Din al-Mutarriziy, who wrote "al-Mughrib fi Tartib al-Mu'rib." This work is considered one of the most reliable sources in the Hanafi madhhab. In it, al-

Mutarriziy analyzed the terminology of foundational Hanafi texts such as “Mukhtasar al-Quduri” and “al-Jami‘ al-Kabir” from a lexical-semantic perspective. The work is regarded as the terminological foundation of Hanafi jurisprudence. Terms are arranged in alphabetical order. In the celebrated Hanafi fiqh terminology dictionary “al-Mughrib,” the verb “istadantu” (استدنت) derived from the root “dayn” is said to be used in the sense of “istaqraztu” (I borrowed), and “dayyantuhu” (دينته) is stated to be used in the sense of “aqraztuhu” (I lent him) (al-Mutarriziy, 1979:301). Accordingly, from “al-Mughrib” we learn that the term “dayn” can be used lexically in the sense of “qard” (loan). When the term “qard” is explained, however, it is emphasised that “qard” refers to a person giving another a specific tangible item from their own property in cash, and that this differs from “dayn,” which becomes an obligation upon a person (al-Mutarriziy, 1979, vol. 2:169; ahlisunna.uz, 2026).

**Stage 4: The middle periods philosophical-logical analysis.** With the arrival of the middle periods, terms were not merely explained but began to be analyzed in philosophical-logical depth. Philosophical-logical definitions of terminology were formulated. A prominent scholar of this era is Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, who in his work “al-Nihaya fi Gharib al-Hadith wa-l-Athar” compiled all fiqh terminology in a single place an encyclopaedia considered one of the most comprehensive of its era. Subsequently, al-Fayyumi wrote “al-Misbah al-Munir,” one of the most accessible dictionaries connecting Sharia vocabulary with linguistics. One of the foundational sources for numerous fiqh works is “al-Ta‘rifat” by al-Sayyid al-Sharif al-Jurjani. In this work, al-Jurjani aimed to present the terminology of various fields: linguistics and its branches (rhetoric, syntax, prosody), theology (‘aqida), legal methodology (usul al-fiqh), philosophy, speculative theology (‘ilm al-kalam), Sufi terminology, the various sects, hadith science, and Qur’anic studies, as well as certain terms from mathematics (hisab), geometry (handasa), and astronomy (falakiyyat). The author arranged the words in his dictionary alphabetically by their first and then second letter, without reducing words to their roots. In his definitions, he employed a style of conciseness and brevity (ijaz), though he provided more detailed explanation when necessary. In some places he cites first the lexical meaning of a word and then its terminological meaning (Wikipedia, 2026).

**Stage 5: The modern era encyclopedic terminological dictionaries.** In the later periods, attention came to be focused on writing fiqh terminology in encyclopedic

dictionary form. As the importance of fiqh terminology in the study of Islamic jurisprudence grew ever greater, there was an increasing need for such encyclopedic fiqh terminological works. One such encyclopedic work is Sa'di Abu Jayb's "al-Qamus al-Fiqhi Lughatan wa Istilahan" a work written in a modern scholarly method, encompassing and comparatively studying the terminology of the four madhhabs. The organizational methodology of this work is based on presenting verbs before nouns, placing the root verb first, and arranging verbs and nouns in alphabetical order. Witnesses (shawahid) from the Qur'an and sound hadith are cited throughout, and the terminological meaning of each word is expounded after its lexical meaning (Islamic Translation Foundation, 2026).

## DISCUSSION

The survey of sources conducted in this article reveals a consistent and coherent pattern in the history of fiqh lexicography: the development of dedicated terminological works for fiqh was not a simple linear progression but a cumulative, multi-layered intellectual achievement in which each period built on, refined, and expanded the contributions of its predecessors.

Three cross-cutting methodological features deserve particular attention. First, the consistent integration of the lexical-terminological distinction: from Imam al-Shafi'i's "al-Risala" onward, the most authoritative sources in the tradition maintained a rigorous distinction between the original lexical meaning (al-ma'na al-lughawi) and the technical terminological meaning (al-ma'na al-istilahi) of each term a distinction that al-Nasafi (1997) and al-Mutarriziy (1979) consistently applied in their dedicated glossaries. This methodological discipline prevented the conflation of ordinary Arabic usage with Islamic legal usage and served as a foundation for the subsequent development of *usul al-fiqh* methodology.

Second, the productive use of multiple textual witnesses: the practice, established by al-Nasafi (1997) and maintained by al-Mutarriziy (1979), of citing evidence from the Qur'an, the Hadith, and Arabic poetry to document both the lexical and terminological meanings of fiqh terms represents one of the most rigorous evidentiary standards in the history of Arabic lexicography. This practice ensures that terminological definitions are anchored in the actual linguistic usage of the Arabic tradition rather than in arbitrary

scholarly decision, and it connects fiqh terminology to the broader literary and revelatory heritage of the Arabic language.

Third, the relationship between terminological specificity and inter-madhab diversity: the progression from madhab-specific glossaries (al-Nasafi's work on Hanafi terminology, al-Azhari's work on Shafi'i terminology) to comparative encyclopedic dictionaries (Abu Jayb's "al-Qamus al-Fiqhi") reflects the growing recognition first theorized by al-Jurjani in his universal terminological approach in "al-Ta'rifat" that fiqh terminology could not be fully understood in isolation within a single madhab but required comparative study across the four schools (Islamic Translation Foundation, 2026).

## CONCLUSION

Fiqh terminology constitutes one of the most important components of both Arabic linguistics and the Islamic sciences. Its formation and development are inseparably connected with the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Prophetic era. From the very earliest period of Islam, certain Arabic words acquired a new religious meaning and began to be used in terminological senses, prompting the Companions to devote great attention to learning their authentic content and legal meanings from the Prophet (peace be upon him). This demonstrates that the foundational structures of fiqh terminology were shaped on the basis of divine revelation and the Prophetic Sunnah.

In subsequent periods, the Companions and Followers continued the work of explaining fiqh terms, elucidating their meanings, and transmitting them to others. In particular, the contributions of Companions such as 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas and 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud to the explanation of rare Qur'anic words and fiqh terminology were of major significance for the development of this field. From the second century AH, as fiqh consolidated itself as an independent science, the terminological system also became more refined. Great jurists such as Abu Hanifa and Imam al-Shafi'i paid particular attention to systematizing fiqh concepts and distinguishing their lexical from their terminological meanings, giving fiqh terminology a scientific and legal framework. The creation of dedicated works for the lexical-semantic study of fiqh terms by Abu Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam, Ibn Qutayba, Abu Mansur al-Azhari, Abu Hafs al-Nasafi, and Nasir al-Din al-Mutarriziy opened a new chapter in the development of Arabic

lexicography. In the middle periods, Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, al-Fayyumi, and al-Jurjani systematically compiled fiqh terminology and connected it with other Islamic and linguistic sciences. In the modern era, Abu Jayb's comparative encyclopedic approach in "al-Qamus al-Fiqhi" responded to the growing need for a comprehensive scholarly treatment of terminology across all four Sunni madhhabs.

The lexical-semantic study of fiqh terminology thus holds great scholarly significance not only for the deep understanding of Islamic law but also for the study of the historical development, semantic changes, and terminological system of the Arabic language. Through the investigation of this field, the organic connection between fiqh science and Arabic linguistics becomes ever more vivid (al-Wafi & Bin 'Aliyya, 2025:135).

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