

The Semantic Shift in the Vocabulary of Hadith Scholars Between Lexical Concepts and Hadith Terminology: A Study of Points of Convergence and Divergence

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Abstract:

This study traces the semantic shift in Hadith terminology between lexical concepts and technical usage, demonstrating how grasping this relationship prevents methodological errors during critical application.

The study addresses a central problematic: overlooking the areas of convergence and divergence between linguists and Hadith scholars leads researchers—especially non-specialists—into interpretive fallacies and flawed critical judgments. "Employing a comparative, inductive-analytical approach, the research is divided into two applied sections. The first examines 'points of convergence and integration' through the models of al-Shādh, al-Muḍṭarib, and al-Da'īf. The second investigates 'points of divergence and separation' via the models of al-Munkar (the denounced), al-Gharīb, and al-Ma'lūl."

The findings reveal that while Hadith terminology maintained flexibility, the critical craft necessitated an epistemological break from lexical usage to set rigorous acceptance criteria. Consequently, the study recommends that non-specialists in Islamic and human sciences isolate the psychological impact of lexical terms and deconstruct semantic overlap to safeguard scholarly research from the pitfalls of preconceived judgments

Keywords: Semantic meaning; terminological; Hadith studies; safeguarding understanding; ma'lūl hadith.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most prominent manifestations of the methodological genius of Hadith scholars lies in the precise system they established to preserve and safeguard the Prophetic Sunnah, a system that became clearly crystallized in the science of Hadith terminology. This discipline was not based on arbitrary judgments, but rather on a highly flexible yet precise semantic and linguistic framework, in which early critics utilized the capacities and breadth of the Arabic language, transferring terms from their general linguistic or conventional communicative contexts and casting them into a specialized critical, terminological form to denote the levels of Hadith in terms of acceptance and rejection.

However, this semantic shift was not in all cases a complete rupture with linguistic roots; rather, it oscillated between convergence and identity, where the term retains its linguistic shade, and

divergence and separation, where it acquires a complex and independent terminological meaning that language alone may not adequately express in its critical dimensions.

From here emerges the central problem of this study: neglecting this semantic transformation and judging the expressions of early critics solely according to their immediate linguistic meaning or contemporary usage has led some researchers into the pitfalls of “semantic projection,” resulting in errors in understanding hadith rulings and in placing their levels of authenticity in positions other than those intended by the critics.

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

This foundational study seeks to answer a central question: how is the relationship between lexical meaning and terminological meaning defined in the terminology of Hadith scholars? And how does identifying points of convergence and divergence between them contribute to safeguarding critical understanding from error? From this central question, several sub-objectives emerge:

1. Identifying terms in which lexical and terminological meanings coincide and analyzing the nature of the cohesion between them.
2. Examining terms in which terminological meaning diverges from its lexical origin and clarifying potential interpretive errors.
3. Establishing methodological guidelines to protect Hadith researchers from assuming an apparent equivalence between linguistic usage and technical terminology.

The study adopts an inductive approach to trace the language of early Hadith critics in its sources, and a comparative analytical method to classify and distinguish terms between convergence and divergence, in order to provide an applied model that serves Hadith textual analysis and criticism. Accordingly, the study is structured into a preface, two sections, and a conclusion.

Preface: On the Theoretical Grounding of Semantic Shift Among Hadith Scholars

- **First section:** The Nature of Semantic Overlap Between the Arabic Language and Hadith Scholars' Technical Usage.
- **Second section:** Causes of semantic transformation in critical terminology.

First Section: Points of Convergence and Integration between Lexical and Terminological Meanings

- **First topic:** The term al-Shādh
- **Second topic:** The term al-Mudtariib
- **Third topic:** The term al-Da‘īf

Second Section: Points of Divergence and Separation, and the Pitfalls of Misunderstanding

- **First topic:** The term al-Munkar
- **Second topic:** The term al-Gharīb
- **Third topic:** The term al-Ma‘lūl

Conclusion and Findings

Preface: On the Theoretical Grounding of Semantic Shift Among Hadith Scholars

Section I: The Nature of Semantic Overlap Between the Arabic Language and the Terminology of Hadith Scholars

The relationship between the Arabic language and the scientific nomenclatures emerging within Islamic disciplines is one of organic derivation and methodological continuity. During the formative era of Hadith sciences and textual criticism, Hadith scholars did not operate in isolation from native Arabic linguistic intuition (*al-salīqah*) and its semantic dimensions.

This paradigm directly encompasses the terminology of validation (*al-taṣḥīḥ*) and invalidation (*al-taḍʿīf*). Originally embedded in pragmatic linguistic practice, these terms were strategically transferred by Hadith scholars from their general, conventional communicative contexts into a specialized critical framework. Crucially, this transfer preserved the 'semantic overlap' that binds each technical term to its etymological root within the broader lexicon of the Arabic language (*Lisān al-ʿArab*).

The origin of terminological transfer proceeds in two directions: either restricting the general linguistic meaning through precise scholarly parameters, or borrowing the linguistic term due to a similarity between its original meaning and its newly established meaning.

Alluding to this conceptual convergence and theoretical grounding, Ibn Fāris noted:

"During the Pre-Islamic era (*al-Jāhiliyyah*), the Arabs adhered to a heritage inherited from their forefathers regarding their languages, literatures, rituals, and sacrifices. However, when Almighty God brought Islam, conditions transformed, religions were superseded, and prior traditions were abolished. Consequently, certain terms were transferred from their original linguistic contexts to alternative positions, accompanied by introduced expansions, ordained rulings, and stipulated conditions. (Ibn Fāris, 2002, p. 44)"

This semantic overlap implies that when early critics articulated expressions of acceptance and rejection, they did not formulate vocabulary *ex nihilo*. Instead, they systematically selected terms from the Arabic language that structurally mirrored the qualitative attributes of the transmitted text. Consequently, any critical term must remain conceptually anchored to its linguistic origin, even though Hadith scholars imposed additional constraints and criteria necessitated by the nature of Hadith transmission (*al-riwāyah*) and textual criticism (*al-ṣanʿah al-ḥadīthiyyah*).

Therefore, grasping this semantic overlap constitutes a foundational imperative; evaluating a technical term in isolation from its linguistic origin threatens to truncate its conceptual integrity, while interpreting it through a purely lexical lens negates the critical nuance established by the conventions of Hadith scholars.

Section II: The Causes of Semantic Shift in Critical Terminology

The migration of terms from their general linguistic environment to the specialized terminological framework of Hadith critics was by no means a superficial linguistic exercise. Rather, it was dictated by a methodological necessity central to safeguarding textual transmission and religious orthodoxy. Critics found themselves compelled by an urgent need to delineate the status of transmitted texts with a rigorous precision that left no room for

ambiguity.

The catalysts for this semantic shift can be outlined in two primary points:

First: The Need for Specialization and the Delineation of Categories

Linguistic expressions, by their very nature, possess breadth and shared meanings, whereas Hadith critical practice requires strict precision. A term in ordinary language may denote a general characteristic of reports, yet Hadith scholars transferred it to serve as an indicator of a specific category of acceptance or rejection.

In this context, Ibn Khaldun pointed out in his *Muqaddimah* the nature of the emergence and development of scientific terminologies as disciplines expanded. He states: "...until the sciences were written down and codified, and what was written became a distinct discipline and an independent science... (Ibn Khaldūn, 1988, p. 251)"

Semantic specialization thus served as a means by which Hadith scholars transformed language from a tool of general communication into an instrument for evaluating hadith transmission and regulating categories of acceptance.

Second: Semantic Compression of of Hadith Transmitters' Qualifications

Early scholars tended toward brevity and conciseness. They therefore employed single linguistic expressions and invested them with complex critical implications—a process of semantic compression.

Instead of stating, "This hadith has been transmitted by multiple hadith transmitters, each characterized by integrity in religion, truthfulness in speech, precision in transmission, freedom from negligence in performance, direct reception from the preceding transmitter, and the absence of any opposing report that would undermine its authenticity," they replaced this lengthy description with a concise term such as *sahih* (sound/authentic). This semantic transfer enabled critics within Hadith critical practice to issue judgments that were both concise and precise.

This form of abbreviation through semantic compression was later formalized by Hadith scholars in defining the conditions of authenticity. As Ibn al-Salah states: "As for the authentic hadith (*al-ḥadīth al-ṣaḥīḥ*), it is the *musnad* hadith whose chain of transmission is continuous, transmitted by a trustworthy and precise transmitter from another trustworthy and precise transmitter until its end, and which is neither *shādh* nor *ma'lūl*. These conditions exclude the *mursal*, *munqaṭi'*, and *mu'dal* reports, as well as *shādh* reports, reports containing a critical defect, and reports whose transmitter is subject to some form of criticism (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 2002, p. 79).

Thus, the critics transferred the term "*ṣaḥīḥ*" from its lexical meaning (freedom from illness or defect) and condensed within it all these complex critical conditions, in pursuit of brevity and decisive critical judgment. This demonstrates how such linguistic expressions gradually evolved over time into strict semantic rules and established methodological principles.

Accordingly, the causes of semantic transformation are fundamentally rooted in the desire of Hadith scholars to develop a descriptive critical language that combines lexical brevity with depth of critical meaning. This explains the semantic divergence that the following sections of

the study will reveal.

First Section: Points of Convergence and Integration between the Lexical and Terminological Meanings

The study of the critical lexicon among Hadith scholars reveals a wide area of cohesion and the orbital movement of terms around their derivational roots; terminological transfer was not, in many cases, a complete break with the linguistic environment, but rather a natural extension of it and a deepening of its trajectories.

This section seeks to identify the critical terms in which the hadith terminological reality converged with the lexical meaning of the dictionary, where the term retained its lexical shadow to clearly reflect the intended critical cause.

This study will examine this semantic integration and correspondence, as well as its role in safeguarding understanding, through selected applied examples, illustrating how the linguistic form is integrated with the hadith meaning.

First Topic: The Term "al-Shādh"

The term "al-shādh" is one of the significant critical terms that clearly reflects how Hadith scholars borrowed sensory meanings based on isolation and departure from the group in the Arabic language, in order to formulate a precise terminological judgment intended to preserve the Sunnah from errors that occur when reliable transmitters deviate from the established path of memorization and precision followed by the majority.

First: The Lexical Meaning of the Term

The term "al-shādh" in Arabic dictionaries revolves around the root (sh-dh-dh), which in its original derivational sense indicates isolation and separation from what is common and standard.

In Maqāyīs al-Lughah it is stated: "The letters shīn and dhāl indicate isolation and separation. Something becomes shadhdha, and shudhudh of people are those who are in a group but not from their tribes or dwellings, and shudhdhān al-ḥaṣā are the scattered pebbles (Ibn Fāris, 2002, p. 180)."

Thus, the lexical origin of shudhūdh is the departure of a thing or being from the regular structure of the group and its isolation from it, so that it becomes a distinct entity outside the common norm.

Second: The Terminological Meaning in Hadith Scholarship

In the terminology of Hadith scholars, the term was transmitted after a stable codification among early authorities (such as al-Shāfiʿī, al-Khalīlī, and al-Ḥākim) until it reached its refined formulation among later critics; a "al-shādh hadith" is a hadith narrated by an acceptable transmitter (a trustworthy or truthful narrator) while contradicting those who are more authoritative than him (in number or in precision and accuracy).

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar defined this in his Nukhbah saying: "If he (the acceptable narrator) is contradicted by one more authoritative, then the more authoritative is the preserved report

(maḥfūz), and its counterpart is the shādh (Ibn Ḥajar, 2001, p. 71)."

Thus, the judgment of shudhūdh is not based merely on the isolated transmission of a hadith by a single hadith transmitter that no one else has reported, but critics impose an additional condition, namely: contradiction of the majority of hadith transmitters and those who are more precise and better memorized. When a trustworthy hadith transmitter uniquely reports something that contradicts the majority, his solitary transmission is rejected and his hadith is described as shādh.

Third: The Point of Convergence, Integration, and Protecting Understanding from Error

The point of convergence here clearly appears in that Hadith scholars maintained the same mental image of linguistic shudhūdh; the trustworthy hadith transmitter who departs from the established path of memorization agreed upon by other reliable memorizers is exactly analogous to a man who becomes isolated and separates from his tribe and community during their course.

Since shudhūdh in Arabic usage denotes loss, error, and deviation from correctness, Hadith scholars made "hadith shudhūdh" a decisive defect that strips the hadith of its authenticity, because the solitary transmission of a trustworthy hadith transmitter in contradiction to those more reliable and more numerous is, in the critic's view, evidence that this transmitter has deviated from the established path of precision and has fallen into error.

The importance of identifying this convergence lies in protecting understanding from error in two ways:

First: it protects the researcher from confusing "mere singular transmission" with "defective shudhūdh"; the isolated transmission of a trustworthy hadith transmitter is not necessarily rejected unless that isolation contradicts the transmission of the majority and falls under the category of "separation and contradiction"; for a trustworthy transmitter may be linguistically shādh (isolated) without being terminologically shādh (his hadith is rejected) unless he contradicts.

Second: it protects the researcher's understanding from relying on the rule of "accepting the addition of a trustworthy transmitter" in an absolute, unrestricted manner; awareness of the meaning of shudhūdh prevents the researcher from authenticating anomalous narrations transmitted in isolation by some trustworthy hadith transmitters in applied criticism, since he understands that a trustworthy transmitter is human and subject to forgetfulness. Thus, when he departs from the established path of his fellow memorizers (the majority and the general body), the linguistic and terminological ruling of rejecting his shudhūdh is applied, thereby protecting the religious text from errors attributed to trustworthiness.

Second Topic: The Term "al-Muḍṭarib"

The term "al-muḍṭarib" represents a hidden defect related to the precision of the hadith transmitter and the consistency of his transmission. This term illustrates how the sensory meaning of unstable movement in Arabic language converges with the isnād and textual

disturbance identified by Hadith critics.

First: The Lexical Meaning of the Term

The term “al-muḍṭarib” in Arabic revolves around the root (ḍ-r-b), derived from iḍṭirāb, which denotes movement, fluctuation, instability, and lack of order.

Iḍṭirāb means the disruption of order and the corruption of structure. It is said: the matter became muḍṭarib when it became disordered; lightning is described as muḍṭarib in the clouds when it moves; and a rope is described as muḍṭarib among people when their words differ (Ibn Manẓūr, 193, p. 544).

The Arabs often use the example of the disturbance of sea waves or the instability of something when it loses coherence; thus, it carries the meaning of fluctuating motion that does not settle into a fixed state.

Second: The Technical Meaning in Hadith Terminology

In the scale of Hadith scholars, this lexical concept was transferred to become a marker of a specific defect occurring either in the chain of transmission or in the text. A muḍṭarib hadith is one that is transmitted in different versions of equal strength, such that reconciliation between them is impossible and none can be preferred over the other.

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ defined this concept by saying: “A muḍṭarib hadith is one in which the transmission differs, with some narrating it in one form and others in another conflicting form; and it is only called muḍṭarib when the two versions are equal in strength. (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 2002, p. 192)”

Thus, iḍṭirāb is a defect that necessitates weakening the hadith due to the inability to determine the preserved version accurately transmitted by the hadith transmitter.

Third: The Point of Convergence, Integration, and Protecting Understanding from Error

The convergence and integration here become evident in that the hadith transmitted through multiple conflicting versions of equal strength (sometimes raised, sometimes stopped, or with variation in its transmitters) is exactly analogous to something unstable that moves back and forth without settling into a fixed state; thus, physical instability in language becomes textual and isnād-based instability in terminology.

The benefit of identifying this convergence lies in protecting understanding from error, as the researcher realizes—through the lexical root—that the defect in iḍṭirāb is not merely the presence of multiple chains, but rather movement, fluctuation, and contradiction without a determining factor.

If equality is absent and a preferred version becomes clear, the terminological iḍṭirāb is removed and the hadith becomes authentic; this understanding prevents the researcher from hastily declaring iḍṭirāb in every hadith in which narrators differ in wording or transmitters.

Third Topic: The Term “ḍa‘īf”

The term “ḍa‘īf” is considered the primary term and the overarching category for rejected reports. It is one of the clearest critical terms that has preserved its general lexical shadow,

precisely expressing a terminological judgment that removes the attributes of “soundness and strength” from the hadith and assigns it to the rank of weakness and deficiency, which prevents the self from relying on it or definitively attributing it to its narrator.

First: The Lexical Meaning of the Term

The term "ḍaʿīf" in Arabic dictionaries revolves around the root (ḍ-ʿ-f), which in its original derivational sense indicates the opposite of strength, and it is used in structure and body as well as in opinion and intellect (Ibn Manẓūr, 193, p. 203).

In *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* it is stated: “The letters ḍād, ʿayn, and fāʾ have two distinct roots: one indicates the opposite of strength, and the other indicates that a thing is doubled (Ibn Fāris, Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah, 2002, p. 283).”

Thus, the lexical origin of weakness refers to something feeble from which the elements of firmness and stability have been removed, incapable of supporting itself or bearing others due to an inherent deficiency.

Second: The Technical Meaning in Hadith Terminology

In the terminology of Hadith scholars, the term was transmitted as a comprehensive judgment on every hadith in which the attributes of an acceptable hadith are not fulfilled (namely the attributes of ṣaḥīḥ and ḥasan); this occurs when a hadith falls below the level of strength due to the absence of one or more of the five conditions of acceptance (continuity, integrity, precision, freedom from shudhūdh, and freedom from defect).

Al-Bayqūnī summarized this definition in his poem, saying: “And everything that falls short of the rank of ḥasan is weak, and its categories are many (Darrār, 2025, p. 56).”

Weakness in this context is a technical judgment that applies to a narration due to a defect occurring in the main structure of the chain of transmission (such as discontinuity), or due to a deficiency in the transmitter’s capacity (such as poor memory or criticism of integrity), thereby removing the hadith from the sphere of strength and reliability.

Third: The Point of Convergence, Integration, and Protecting Understanding from Error

The point of convergence clearly appears here in that Hadith scholars maintained the same sensory and intellectual image of linguistic weakness and applied it to chain-based and textual deficiency; a hadith that loses one of its conditions of acceptance is linguistically and terminologically “weak,” incapable of bearing legal rulings (doctrinal or practical), because its chain structure has been affected by weakness, just as a weak body is unable to carry burdens. The importance of identifying this convergence lies in protecting understanding from error in two ways:

• First:

It protects the researcher from the mistake of assuming that terminological weakness is a single uniform level; just as linguistic weakness has degrees (from mild illness that may be cured to severe illness leading to death), so too hadith weakness varies: some is slight and strengthened

through corroboration (such as mild poor memory), and some is severe and cannot be strengthened (such as lying and moral corruption). Recognizing this linguistic gradation protects the researcher from conflating ranks in applied criticism.

• **Second:**

it protects the researcher's understanding from the apparent contradiction between jurists and hadith scholars regarding the "use of weak hadith"; when the researcher understands that linguistic weakness means the opposite of strength rather than total negation, he understands that the weak hadith permitted by scholars in virtues of deeds is what has slight weakness that may be tolerated, unlike severe weakness which corresponds to complete invalidity. Thus, the researcher is protected from citing rejected or condemned narrations under the label of "weak hadith."

Second Section: Points of Divergence and Separation and Sources of Interpretive Error

If the previous section revealed aspects of the integration of terminological meaning with its lexical roots, then careful extrapolation from Hadith critical literature shows that this integration is not consistent across all terms; rather, the nature of Hadith critical practice sometimes necessitated a conceptual and semantic break with common linguistic usage, either by transferring a term to new technical meanings or by narrowing its broad lexical sense into a specific critical orientation.

In this section, we examine some of those terms in which divergence and separation occurred between linguistic usage and Hadith scholarship, while clarifying that neglecting this divergence and relying solely on the lexical meaning is one of the most prominent sources of error in understanding the judgments of critics.

This divergence will be studied through three representative examples: the terms "munkar," "gharīb," and "ma'lūl."

First Section: The Term "al-Munkar"

The term "munkar" is one of the fundamental critical terms in which a precise semantic divergence occurs between common linguistic usage and the technical terminology of Hadith scholars; relying on its lexical shadow without awareness of Hadith critical practice constitutes a major source of error in understanding the judgments of critics and applying them.

First: The Lexical Meaning of the Term

The term "munkar" in Arabic revolves around the root (n-k-r), a well-established root indicating the opposite of recognition, ignorance, and the feeling of estrangement toward something due to its unfamiliarity, and it is the opposite of "known" (ma'rūf) (Ibn Manẓūr, 193, p. 232).

The letters *Nūn*, *Kāf*, and *Rā'* form an authentic etymological root indicating the antithesis of knowledge (*al-ma'rifah*) upon which the heart finds tranquility. Thus, when someone alters or rejects something (*nakira al-shay' wa-ankarahū*), it implies that their heart does not accept it, and their tongue refuses to acknowledge it (Ibn Fāris, 2002, p. 383).

Thus, in linguistic usage, “al-Munkar” refers to something unknown and strange that the self rejects due to its lack of familiarity.

Second: The Technical Meaning in Hadith Terminology

In the terminology of Hadith scholars, the term moved beyond the linguistic sense of mere unfamiliarity to become a precise indicator of an isnād-based and textual defect associated with contradiction or the solitary transmission of one whose singularity cannot be accepted.

Al-Munkar, as established in technical usage, is a hadith transmitted by a weak hadith transmitter in contradiction to a trustworthy one. Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī defined this precisely, saying: “If the contradiction occurs along with weakness, then the stronger version is called ‘known’ (ma‘rūf), and its opposite is called ‘munkar (Ibn Manẓūr, 193, p. 639).”

Thus, Hadith critical methodology transferred the term into a judgment resulting from comparison between transmissions, rather than mere ignorance of the transmitter’s identity or status.

Third: The Point of Divergence and Sources of Interpretive Error

The semantic divergence here lies in the fact that something may be “known” and familiar in linguistic and social usage, yet fall under the ruling of “munkar” in the judgment of critics; because the scale of Hadith criticism does not consider lexical familiarity or prevalence, but rather the soundness of transmission and freedom from contradiction.

The protection of understanding from error becomes evident here in correcting one of the major applied misconceptions: due to reliance on the lexical meaning (strangeness and rejection), some researchers assume that “nikārah” occurs only in fabricated or forged hadiths with objectionable contents rejected by reason, whereas the terminological reality shows that a hadith may have a sound and acceptable meaning consistent with established principles, yet still be judged *munkar* by critics because its weak transmitter has uniquely transmitted it or contradicted a more reliable transmitter.

Neglecting this distinction may lead the researcher to deem acceptable *munkar* report based on its apparent lexical acceptability, resulting in a serious methodological error that undermines the integrity of applied criticism.

Second Section: The Term “al-Gharīb”

The term “*al-gharīb*” constitutes fertile ground for illustrating the semantic divergence between linguistic and technical usage. The psychological and lexical connotations of the word evoke notions of strangeness, unfamiliarity, and ambiguity, whereas its critical usage among hadith scholars operates within the framework of “*singularity detached from any prior evaluative judgment*”, which requires careful analytical deconstruction to prevent interpretive error.

First: Linguistic Meaning of the Term

In Arabic lexicons, the term “*al-gharīb*” is derived from the trilateral root (*gh-r-b*), which denotes distancing, separation, unfamiliarity, and deviation from what is commonly known.

As stated in *Lisan al-‘Arab* by Ibn Manzur: “Gharib: one who is far from his homeland... the gharib is the lone person who has no kin with him... and gharib also refers to obscure speech.” Thus, in Arabic usage, *al-gharīb* refers to something distant, displaced, or linguistically obscure requiring clarification due to its lack of common circulation.

Second: Technical Meaning in Hadith Terminology

In hadith scholarship, however, the term was reconfigured to describe the structural nature of the chain of transmission in terms of the number of narrators, without carrying any intrinsic judgment of acceptance or rejection.

A *al-gharīb hadith* is defined as one narrated by a single transmitter at any stage of the isnād. Ibn al-Salah states that a hadith is described as *al-gharīb* when a narrator uniquely transmits it, whether this uniqueness occurs in its chain or its text. He further notes that *al-gharīb* reports are divided into authentic ones, such as isolated narrations found in *Sahih* collections, and others that are not authentic (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 2002, p. 374).

Thus, *al-gharābah* in technical usage is an isnādic structural configuration that signifies the numerical coding of singularity (the number one), rather than a description of textual ambiguity or disapproval of the matn.

Third: Semantic Divergence and Points of Misinterpretation

The semantic divergence becomes evident here in that *al-gharīb* in its linguistic sense connotes weakness, ambiguity, and estrangement, whereas in its technical usage it may refer to reports of the highest degree of authenticity and acceptance. For instance, the hadith “Indeed, actions are but by intentions” is among the most authentic and well-known narrations in Islam; nevertheless, it is classified as *al-gharīb* in technical terms, due to the unique transmission of Yahya ibn Sa‘id al-Ansari from Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, from ‘Alqama, from ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (al-Bukhārī, 2001, p. 6).

The epistemological safeguard against misunderstanding lies in separating the linguistic resonance of the term from its technical-critical function. Failure to recognize this distinction leads to two methodological errors:

1. Assuming that every *al-gharīb* hadith is necessarily weak or rejected, based on the linguistic sense of unfamiliarity and isolation, thereby leading to the unwarranted rejection of authentic narrations transmitted by reliable authorities.
2. Confusing “*al-hadith al-gharīb*” (a lexical discipline concerned with explaining rare or obscure vocabulary in hadith texts) with “*al-hadith al-gharīb*” (a technical classification of isnādic singularity).

Thus, precise differentiation prevents the researcher from rejecting an authentic Hadith merely due to its rarity, and safeguards them from methodologically conflating rarity in the chain of transmission (*gharīb al-sanad*) with obscurity in the wording (*gharīb al-lafdh*).

Third Section: The Term “al-Ma‘lūl”

The term “*al-ma‘lūl*” (or *mu‘allal*) is among the most delicate concepts in hadith criticism, requiring strict differentiation between its linguistic usage and its technical meaning. In Arabic,

‘illah is commonly associated with visible illness, whereas in hadith criticism it denotes a hidden defect detectable only by expert scholars.

First: Linguistic Meaning of the Term

Linguistically, the term *al-ma‘lūl* derives from the triliteral root (*‘-l-l*), which denotes a condition or occurrence that occupies or distracts a person.

From this root is derived the term *‘illah*, which signifies both illness and an effective cause. Ibn Faris states: “The root ‘ayn-lam-lam has three primary meanings: repetition, obstruction, and weakness in something... and *‘illah* refers to an ailment that occupies and diverts a person from their normal state... and the ill person is *mu‘tal* (Ibn Fāris, 2002, p. 8).”

Thus, linguistically, *al-ma‘lūl* refers to something afflicted by a manifest illness or evident infirmity that weakens it and removes it from a state of soundness and well-being.

Second: Technical Meaning in Hadith Terminology

In hadith terminology, however, the term was redefined to signify a subtle and concealed defect that affects a narration while its outward appearance suggests soundness. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani defines it precisely: “If the error is discovered through supporting indicators pointing to the narrator’s mistake—such as converting a *mursal* report into a connected one, or inserting one hadith into another—then this is the *al-ma‘lūl* hadith (Ibn Hajar, 2001, p. 113).”

Thus, an *‘illah* in technical usage is only recognized when it combines two conditions: concealment and its impact on the authenticity of the report. Apparent defects are not classified as *‘illah* in this technical sense.

Third: Semantic Divergence and Points of Misinterpretation

The semantic divergence becomes evident here in that *‘illah* in its linguistic sense refers to an apparent illness that can be recognized by anyone at first glance (such as a feverish patient), whereas in hadith criticism an *‘illah* is a concealed error that may occur in the narrations of trustworthy transmitters, passing unnoticed even by major scholars and only becoming apparent through comprehensive collection and comparison of routes. A *mu‘allal* hadith, in its outward appearance, exhibits complete soundness and authenticity (its narrators are reliable and its chain is continuous), Yet in its internal structure it contains a concealed defect, such as converting a *mursal* report into a connected one, or raising a *mawqūf* report to the level of a *marfū‘* narration.

The protection of understanding from error here lies in separating the natural or lexical understanding of the term from critical practice, and this appears in two aspects:

1. **The inapplicability of a *mu‘allal* hadith to strengthening through multiple chains:**
Neglecting the concept of the “hidden *‘illah*” leads some researchers into a serious methodological error, as they assume that the multiplicity of transmission routes of a *mu‘allal* hadith is sufficient to elevate it to the rank of *ḥasan li-ghayrih*, by analogy with weak hadiths affected only by minor defects in transmission.
The scholarly reality, however, is that once an *‘illah* is established in a hadith, an increase in its transmission routes only reinforces its weakness and confirms the

underlying error. This is because the multiple chains of a *mu'allal* hadith usually revolve around a single faulty point of origin in which the primary transmitter erred, and others merely followed him in that error, or they reflect a state of inconsistency resulting from poor precision among transmitters. Thus, the technical *'illah* is a decisive and invalidating defect that nullifies the hadith and is not subject to strengthening or corroboration through additional chains.

2. Distinguishing between manifest weakness and concealed *'illah*:

It is a misconception to assume that every hadith containing an apparent defect—such as the presence of a liar in the chain or an obvious discontinuity in transmission—is classified as *mu'allal* in its precise technical sense. Rather, the critical *'illah* occurs primarily in the narrations of reliable and precise transmitters, since weak narrations are not typically subjected to the search for hidden defects due to the obviousness of their weakness. Instead, scrutiny of *'illah* is directed toward the reports of trustworthy transmitters, from whom full precision is expected, yet who may nevertheless err or lapse unintentionally.

Conclusion

Praise be to God, by whose grace all good deeds are completed. To proceed: this study—after a process of induction and comparison between the frameworks of linguistic usage and hadith critical standards—has reached a set of methodological findings and recommendations, the most prominent of which can be summarized as follows:

First: Findings of the Study

1. Flexibility of terminological transfer:

The study has demonstrated that the relationship between language and hadith terminology is a dynamic and flexible one. Hadith scholars were not detached from the lexical material of Arabic; rather, their terminology operated within its semantic field. Terms either exhibited overlap and integration (such as *al-shādh*, *al-muḍṭarīb*, and *al-ḍa'īf*), where the linguistic connotation is retained and operationalized in practice, or divergence and separation, as in *al-munkar*, *al-gharīb*, and *al-ma'lūl*, in response to the epistemological specificity of hadith criticism, which required a methodological break from common linguistic usage.

2. The governing authority of the critical *'illah*:

It has been demonstrated through applied examples that the critical *'illah* among hadith scholars is governed by contextual indicators, comparative evaluation, and examination of transmission routes, rather than by the psychological or lexical connotations of the term itself. A report may have a *matn* that is linguistically and religiously well-known, yet be classified as *munkar* in its *isnād*; it may be of the highest degree of authenticity while still being *al-gharīb*; and it may possess an outwardly sound chain of transmission while in fact being *mu'allal*.

3. Specificity of the *'illah* and its non-reinforcement:

The study emphasizes that a *mu'allūl* hadith contains an internal, decisive defect that prevents

it from being strengthened through multiple chains. On the contrary, multiplicity of routes often serves only to expose the underlying error and reveal narrator inconsistency. This differs fundamentally from weak hadiths of minor defect, which may be strengthened through corroboration.

Second: Recommendations

Methodological note on the orientation of recommendations:

This study directs its set of recommendations primarily to non-specialist researchers in Hadith studies—such as scholars in jurisprudence (fiqh), legal theory (uṣūl al-fiqh), Arabic language, and Islamic history—whose research fields often involve engagement with hadith-related issues or the use of sourced narrations as evidentiary material. This is intended to safeguard their scholarly work from the pitfalls of applied misinterpretation. These recommendations are as follows:

1. Caution against projecting lexical commonality onto technical usage:

The study recommends that researchers exercise caution when transferring hadith-related judgments or engaging with critical terminology, and that they avoid relying solely on lexical or dictionary definitions. Engaging with hadith-critical discourse without awareness of its precise semantic distinctions carries a high risk of misinterpretation and of attributing meanings that were not intended by hadith scholars.

2. Separating lexical resonance from evidentiary judgment in citation:

Researchers are advised not to hastily reject or accept hadiths based on the lexical connotations of technical terms (such as assuming weakness from the term al-gharīb, or assuming reinforcement through multiple chains in a mu‘allūl report). Instead, they should refer to the practice of early hadith critics or consult field specialists in order to ensure methodological accuracy and to safeguard their research from analytical error.

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