



Definition (Ḥadd) and Definition (Ta' rīf) in Linguistic Thought: A Conceptual and Epistemological Approach

Dr. Hadjer Achour

University of Médéa

hadjerachour56@gmail.com

Dr. Yassine Mahroug

University of Médéa

yassinemahroug1987@gmail.com

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Abstract

Ḥadd (essential definition) and ta' rīf (definition) are among the most fundamental epistemic tools employed by the sciences to construct concepts and standardize terminology. Perspectives on these notions have varied according to different intellectual traditions. Philosophers viewed them as means of revealing the essence of things and distinguishing them from one another, whereas scholars of uṣūl al-fiqh (Islamic legal theory) devoted particular attention to them because of their role in ensuring precision and eliminating ambiguity. Linguistics, in turn, has reappropriated these concepts within its own scientific framework, using them to establish a coherent terminological system and to define the relationships among linguistic concepts.

Keywords: Ḥadd (essential definition), definition, conceptual approach, semantics.

Introduction

Definition constitutes one of the fundamental epistemological pillars upon which the cognitive structure of all scientific disciplines is built. It is impossible to conceive of a science possessing an organized conceptual framework without relying on a system of definitions that regulate its concepts, establish its terminological boundaries, and clarify the relationships among its conceptual units. From this perspective, definition is not merely a linguistic device for explaining words or approximating their meanings; rather, it has become an epistemic mechanism that underpins the discipline itself, determines its subject matter, and guides its theoretical and methodological orientations. The more precise, coherent, and capable a definition is of capturing the essential characteristics of a concept, the more robust the scientific structure to which it belongs becomes. Conversely, vague or inconsistent definitions lead to terminological instability, resulting in divergent interpretations and understandings.

The issue of definition assumes even greater significance in linguistics because this discipline is fundamentally based on the construction of an interconnected conceptual network. This network encompasses concepts such as language, langue, parole, the linguistic sign, the phoneme, structure, semantics, pragmatics, and many other notions that collectively form the terminological framework of linguistic inquiry. Consequently, these concepts can only be accurately established through precise definitions that take into account the distinctive



characteristics of each concept and determine its position within the theoretical framework to which it belongs. Accordingly, the development of modern linguistics—from Ferdinand de Saussure onward, through structuralist, generative, functional, pragmatic, and cognitive approaches—has been closely associated with the reconstruction of the discipline’s conceptual apparatus and the reformulation of its definitions in accordance with the epistemological and methodological transformations that have shaped linguistic scholarship.

In contemporary linguistic studies, definition is no longer regarded as a simple lexical correspondence between a term and a concept. Instead, it has become a scientific practice that integrates logical, terminological, semantic, and pragmatic considerations. The linguist seeks to formulate definitions capable of encompassing the distinctive features of a concept, revealing its function within the linguistic system, and clarifying its relationship with neighboring concepts. Thus, the construction of definitions has become an integral part of the production of linguistic knowledge itself and a key indicator of the maturity of linguistic theory.

Although logical and philosophical traditions have devoted considerable attention to the notions of *ḥadd* and *taʿrīf*, distinguishing, for example, between complete and incomplete definitions, linguistics has drawn upon these conceptualizations while adapting them to the specific nature of its subject matter. Linguistic concepts often transcend the rigid boundaries of classical logic, becoming dynamic constructs defined through networks of systemic relations or sets of distinctive features.

Within this context, linguistic dictionaries emerge as scientific spaces for the production of terminological knowledge rather than as mere repositories of terms. A linguistic dictionary does more than provide lexical equivalents; it reflects a particular epistemological and methodological perspective on the concepts it contains. It also reveals the theoretical foundations governing the formulation and organization of definitions, as well as the linguistic traditions upon which they are based. Consequently, the study of definitions found in linguistic dictionaries constitutes an important gateway to understanding the nature of linguistic thought, uncovering the mechanisms through which terminology is formed, and explaining how concepts are transformed from theoretical constructs into lexicographical formulations.

First: The Conceptual Framework of *Ḥadd* (Definition) and *Taʿrīf* (Definition)

It is impossible to discuss the construction of scientific knowledge independently of the concept of definition, as it constitutes the instrument through which knowledge is transferred from the level of sensory perception to that of conceptual precision. Concepts are not ready-made entities; rather, they are the product of processes of abstraction, classification, and organization. They acquire scientific value only when they are formulated into definitions that reveal their essential characteristics and distinguish them from related concepts. From this perspective, definition has been closely associated with the history of science and has occupied a central position in philosophy and logic since ancient Greek thought. Aristotle sought to establish a theory of *ḥadd* (essential definition) based on determining the essence of a thing through its genus and differentia. This conception remained influential in the Arab intellectual tradition through scholars such as Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Al-Ghazālī, and others, who regarded *ḥadd* as the means by which the true nature of a thing could be disclosed.



1. The Linguistic Meaning of Hadd

The term hadd is derived from the triliteral Arabic root ḥ-d-d. In Arabic lexicons, the linguistic meaning of hadd is not confined to a single semantic sense. Despite the close relationship among its various meanings, the term encompasses several interrelated significations.

A survey of the classical Arabic dictionaries reveals that the meanings of separation and barrier are consistently associated with the notions of limit and extremity in defining hadd. This is because the boundary or extremity of an object serves as a sign that separates and distinguishes it from another object.

In Kitāb al-‘Ayn, it is stated:

"Hadd is the separator between any two things, and the limit or end of everything is its hadd." ⁱ

Similarly, Al-Şiḥāḥ defines it as:

"Hadd is the barrier between two things, and the hadd of a thing is its ultimate limit. One says: 'I defined (ḥaddadtu) the house,' meaning that I established its boundary, and taḥdīd (demarcation) bears the same meaning." ⁱⁱ

In Lisān al-‘Arab, Ibn Manẓūr explains:

"Hadd is the distinction between two things so that one does not become mixed with the other or transgress upon it. The division between any two things constitutes their hadd. The end of everything is its hadd. Hence the expressions 'the boundaries of lands' and 'the sacred boundaries (ḥudūd) of the sanctuary.' In a Prophetic tradition concerning the description of the Qur'an, it is stated: 'Every letter has a hadd, and every limit has an end; the end of everything is its hadd'" ⁱⁱⁱ

Likewise, Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ defines hadd as:

"The barrier between two things and the limit or extremity of a thing." ^{iv}

The foregoing definitions indicate that the separation between two things signifies their distinctness and prevents their intermingling. This understanding appears to have influenced Ibn Jinnī in defining the linguistic term ḥarf (letter), which he describes as the edge or extremity of a thing. In Sirr Şinā‘at al-I‘rāb, he writes:

"As for the term ḥarf, wherever it occurs in speech, it denotes the boundary and extremity of a thing; the ḥarf of something is its limit and its side. The letters of the alphabet are called ḥurūf because each letter marks the point at which the sound terminates and reaches its limit, just as the edge of a mountain marks its extremity." ^v

Linguists further maintain that the primary meaning of hadd is prevention or restraint. Al-Şiḥāḥ states:

"Hadd means prevention. Hence the gatekeeper is called ḥaddād, and the jailer is likewise called ḥaddād because he prevents people from leaving, or because he deals with iron shackles. One says: 'I imposed the legal hadd upon a person,' because it prevents him from repeating the offense." ^{vi}

Similarly, Jamharat al-Lughah records:

"The original meaning of hadd is prevention. One says: 'ḥaddanī ‘an kadhā'—that is, 'he prevented me from doing such-and-such.'" ^{vii}

In Maqāyīs al-Lughah, Ibn Fāris explains:



"The punishment of a sinner is called hadd because it prevents him from repeating the offense. Likewise, it is said that a woman ḥaddat or aḥaddat after the death of her husband when she refrains from adornment and the use of henna. The term muḥādāh (opposition) also conveys the notion of resistance or prevention."^{viii}

These lexical meanings clearly indicate, as Ibn Fāris emphasizes, that the fundamental sense of hadd is prevention. This conception later became one of the principal technical terms employed by scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, particularly in the chapter on prescribed legal punishments (al-ḥudūd al-sharʿiyyah), which are so named because they deter individuals from repeating prohibited acts.

A third meaning of hadd also appears in Arabic lexicons, namely that of the edge, extremity, or endpoint of a thing. Al-Jawharī states, "The hadd of a thing is its utmost limit." Likewise, Ibn Manẓūr explains in Lisān al-ʿArab that "the hadd of everything is the edge of its sharpness, such as the edge of a knife, sword, spear, or arrow," while also affirming that "the end of everything is its hadd."

References

In summary, the term ḥadd (limit/definition) is used either in the sense of a boundary or separation, an end or limit, or prevention and prohibition. These meanings are semantically interconnected, all converging on the notion of a limit or endpoint. The limit of a thing constitutes a boundary that separates it from, and prevents its confusion with, other things or other limits.

2. Ḥadd (Definition) in Terminology

It should first be noted that the term ḥadd is employed across several fields of knowledge. Although the same lexical form is used, each discipline invests it with its own semantic significance. Since jurists have primarily been concerned with legal rulings and their implications, they defined ḥadd from the perspective of its relationship to Islamic law. Likewise, philosophers approached the concept through metaphysical inquiry, universals, demonstration, and logical affirmation. In reality, the influence of jurisprudential and philosophical concepts on linguistic and grammatical thought—particularly Arabic grammar after its interaction with logic—has been profound. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the concept of ḥadd more broadly within these two disciplines.

2.1 Ḥadd According to Jurists

In juristic terminology, the author of Al-Taʾrīfāt states that: "According to the people of spiritual knowledge (ahl Allāh), ḥadd is the separation between you and your Lord, represented by your state of servitude and your confinement within the limits of time and place."^{ix}

This definition clearly emphasizes the meaning of separation. Although the technical meaning of ḥadd differs according to its disciplinary context, it remains closely connected to its original linguistic meanings. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that this definition approaches the concept exclusively from the standpoint of Islamic law, implying the establishment of clearly defined temporal and spatial boundaries between the servant and the Creator.



The term also conveys the meaning of limit or boundary, as Ibn Manẓūr explains: “The limits (ḥudūd) of God are the matters whose lawful and unlawful status He has clarified, commanding that none of them be transgressed by exceeding what He has prescribed or prohibited.”^x

The juristic meaning of ḥadd is not confined merely to preventing the violation of God's prohibitions. It also denotes prescribed punishment. Jurists define ḥadd as “a legally prescribed punishment established by Islamic law for the protection of the rights of God.”^{xi} This applies to punishments such as those imposed on a thief or a false accuser, as stated in Al-Muḥkam: “The limits of God are the matters that He has clearly established and commanded not to be transgressed, forbidding. A ḥadd, such as that imposed upon a slanderer, is the punishment carried out against him.”^{xii}

Jurists unanimously agree that these punishments are called ḥudūd because they serve the purpose of prevention and deterrence, discouraging the repetition of acts that God has prohibited. Accordingly, al-Azharī classifies the divine limits into two categories:

“The first consists of the limits prescribed for people concerning their food, drink, marriage, and other lawful and unlawful matters, requiring them to refrain from what God has forbidden and prohibiting transgression. The second consists of punishments imposed upon those who commit prohibited acts, such as the punishment for theft, namely the amputation of the right hand for theft reaching a quarter of a dinar or more; the punishment for adultery committed by a married person, namely stoning; and the punishment for false accusation, namely eighty lashes.”^{xiii}

A careful examination of these definitions reveals the close semantic relationship between the linguistic and technical meanings of ḥadd. The juristic concept preserves the original linguistic notions of separation, boundary, and prevention. This demonstrates that the technical definitions of ḥadd in Islamic jurisprudence ultimately derive from its linguistic and lexicographical usage.

2.2 Ḥadd According to the Scholars of Uṣūl al-Fiqh

The preceding discussion has shown that ḥadd is a well-established concept among jurists, retaining its linguistic sense of preventing the transgression of God's commands, prohibitions, and conditions in all aspects of life. Any violation of these limits entails a prescribed punishment.

Among scholars of uṣūl al-fiqh (Islamic legal theory), however, ḥadd acquires a more specialized meaning. It is defined as:

“That which comprehensively includes what detailed explanation has distinguished, while preventing the inclusion of anything that does not belong to it.”^{xiv}

It is also defined as:

“That which distinguishes a thing from everything else in such a way that it encompasses all the individuals belonging to that thing while excluding everything that does not belong to it. According to them, definitions are classified into real (ḥaqīqī), formal (rasmī), and verbal (lafẓī).”^{xv}

Another definition states:



“That by which the defined object is distinguished and comprehensively described, such that it prevents others from sharing its defining characteristics while preventing it from sharing the defining characteristics of others.”^{xvi}

In fact, among scholars of legal theory, the term ḥadd is synonymous with mu‘arrif (defining expression), as al-Tahānawī explains:

“According to the scholars of legal theory, ḥadd is synonymous with mu‘arrif (definition), namely that which distinguishes one thing from another. The object being defined is called maḥdūd or mu‘arraf.”^{xvii}

Similarly, ḥadd denotes that which differentiates a thing from everything else, just as in Aristotelian logic. A valid definition distinguishes only by including every individual belonging to the defined category while excluding everything outside it. The first condition clarifies the concept of definition itself, whereas the second explains its essential property, expressed by al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī as:

“A comprehensive definition (al-ḥadd al-jāmi‘) includes all the individuals of the defined object, while an exclusive definition (al-māni‘) excludes everything that does not belong to it.”^{xviii}

In other words, ḥadd consists of the set of necessary characteristics and essential attributes through which a defined object is distinguished from all other objects. These distinguishing features are fundamental because they unify all entities sharing the same defining characteristics while excluding everything that differs from them. The relationship between the definition and the expressions used to formulate it depends entirely on these essential attributes. As stated in the sources:

“Were it not for these meanings and attributes inherent in the things described, expressions would not reveal their realities, nor would conventional agreement among scholars concerning them have any value. For example, if someone describes an object as black when no blackness exists in it, such a description is meaningless and invalid.”^{xix}

Thus, the concept of ḥadd in legal theory differs from its juristic usage. Here, it signifies distinction between one defined object and another, with the criterion of distinction being the essential attributes and characteristics. Objects sharing the same defining features belong to the same category under a single designation, whereas those lacking these features belong to different categories. For this reason, scholars of legal theory require that a valid definition satisfy the conditions of comprehensiveness (jāmi‘) and exclusiveness (māni‘).

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the technical meanings of ḥadd ultimately remain rooted in its linguistic meanings of separation and prevention. We have also noted that ḥadd is a concept shared by numerous branches of knowledge. Before examining its meaning in the tradition of logicians and philosophers, it is appropriate to consider its usage within the scientific and mathematical disciplines.

2.2. The Concept of Definition (Ḥadd) in Mathematics

In mathematics, a limit is defined as: “the ultimate value of variation. The final limit of a variable quantity is a constant value such that the difference between it and the variable becomes smaller than any predetermined quantity. This means that the limit is the value which



the variable approaches indefinitely without ever becoming equal to it. By way of metaphor, one may also say that psychological states have limits at which they come to an end; for example, nature is the final limit of a movement that contradicts habit.”^{xx}

From this definition, it can be understood that, in mathematics, the concept of a limit refers to a fixed value toward which a variable quantity progressively converges. The variable remains bounded by this value while the magnitude of its variation becomes increasingly small, provided that the rate of change remains constant and the variable never actually becomes equal to the limit itself.

2.3. Definition (Ḥadd) According to Philosophers

Islamic philosophy enjoyed a unique distinction throughout the past centuries. Its earliest foundations can be traced back to the scholars who translated the works of Plato and Aristotle into Arabic and enriched them with numerous commentaries, interpretations, and conceptual adaptations that harmonized with Arab-Islamic culture.

It is well known that Aristotle's philosophical system is founded upon the discovery and comprehension of the true nature of things through their genus (jins) and specific differentia (faṣl naw‘ī). This approach stems from his theory of knowledge (théorie de la connaissance), according to which genuine knowledge is attained through universal concepts rather than particular instances. As Abd al-Rahman Badawi explains:

“Following the Socratic and Platonic traditions, Aristotle held that the universal concept is a direct intellectual apprehension of reality and the eternal nature of things. The complete concept is expressed through definition; therefore, a definition must provide a complete, final, comprehensive, and exclusive characterization of the object of conception.”^{xxi}

This statement implies that, for Aristotle, attaining truth and achieving complete conceptual knowledge is accomplished through definition (ḥadd), which removes ambiguity and obscurity from things. Consequently, he regarded one of the principal objectives of logic—within which definition and description constitute fundamental subjects—as the discovery of the essential nature and intrinsic reality of things. This is confirmed by Yusuf Mahmoud, who states:

“The purpose of logic is to attain unknown conceptual and propositional knowledge, or to arrive at unknown conceptual knowledge through explanatory discourse or through definition.”^{xxii}

Accordingly, Aristotle's logical definition is based upon genus and specific differentia, making it essentially a search for essence (māhiyyah). It represents the ultimate objective of conceptual knowledge, to the extent that conception and definition are regarded as two equivalent notions.^{xxiii} This reflects Aristotle's metaphysical understanding of definition, since its purpose is to attain the universal conception of the essence and reality of things.

Aristotle defined a definition (ḥadd) as: “the statement that describes the essence of a thing, or the exposition and specification of the essential attributes shared by the individuals to which a universal applies.”^{xxiv}

Another definition explains it as follows:

“A definition is a statement indicating the essence of a thing. Since the essence of a thing consists of genus and specific differentia, the definition must likewise be composed of genus and specific differentia. This is necessary in order to determine the essence of the thing and



distinguish it from everything else. The genus determines its essential nature, while the specific differentia distinguishes it from the other species falling under the same genus.”^{xxv}

A further definition states:

“Definition by ḥadd is a statement that signifies the essence of a thing.”^{xxvi}

These definitions clearly demonstrate that the technical meaning of ḥadd in Aristotle's philosophy is fundamentally essentialist. Its significance is not derived from ordinary linguistic usage but rather from its capacity to express the very essence of a thing. Aristotle's conception of definition profoundly influenced many later philosophers, particularly Arab philosophers, whose definitional formulations often follow the same Aristotelian pattern. This influence is unsurprising, given Aristotle's foundational role in establishing the theory of logical definition.

Second: Definition in the Linguistic and Terminological Sense

1. Definition in the Linguistic Sense

A review of the word definition (taʿrīf) in Arabic lexicons reveals a multiplicity of meanings and variations in its semantic content. The root ‘-r-f in Lisān al-‘Arab denotes knowledge and cognition. Ibn Sīda states that ‘irfān means knowledge, while ‘arūf or ‘arūfa refers to a person who is knowledgeable and well acquainted with matters, even if one has seen him only once. Likewise, al-‘arīf and al-‘ārif carry the same meaning as ‘alīm (all-knowing) and ‘ālim (learned). Furthermore, taʿrīf signifies informing or making something known, and it also refers to announcing a lost item in search of its owner. In another sense, taʿrīf denotes standing at ‘Arafāt during the pilgrimage. Thus, it is said, ‘arafa al-qawm, meaning "the people stood at ‘Arafah." Aws ibn Maghrā’ said:

They remain steadfast at the station of ‘Arafāt,

Until it is proclaimed: "Depart, O people of Ṣafwān."

Here, al-mu‘arrif refers to the place of standing at ‘Arafāt^{xxvii}

Similarly, Kitāb al-‘Ayn states:

"I knew (‘araftu) the thing through knowledge (maʿrifah) and cognition (‘irfān). An acknowledged matter (amr ‘urf) is something well known. The Day of ‘Arafah is the day when people gather at ‘Arafāt, and taʿrīf refers to their standing there and honoring that day. Taʿrīf also means finding an object and announcing it by calling out: 'Who recognizes this?'^{xxviii}

The same definition appears in Al-Ṣiḥāḥ, where taʿrīf is defined as standing at ‘Arafāt. It is said, ‘arafa al-nās when people attend ‘Arafāt, and al-mu‘arrif denotes the place of standing

^{xxix}Likewise, the author of Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt provides the same explanation while adding another meaning: taʿrīf is the opposite of indefiniteness (tankīr) as well as standing at ‘Arafāt^{xxx}

From these lexical explanations, it is evident that the term taʿrīf revolves around several meanings: informing, standing at ‘Arafāt (the most common usage, derived from Mount ‘Arafah), and definiteness in Arabic grammar. In grammatical usage, a noun may be definite through the definite article (al-) or annexation (idāfah), in contrast to the indefinite noun (nakirah), which lacks markers of definiteness. The term also denotes announcing a lost object, that is, guiding the one who has gone astray and informing him of the correct course.

Accordingly, definition is the opposite of indefiniteness or obscurity, because defining something means perceiving and knowing it. Therefore, the term applies only to things that are



known or to the clarification of something that was previously unknown. This meaning is reflected in the Qur'anic verse:

"Had We willed, We could have shown them to you, and you would have recognized them by their marks; and you will surely recognize them by the tone of their speech. And Allah knows your deeds." (Qur'an 47:30)

That is, they would be recognized through distinctive signs that set them apart from others, whether by their physical appearance, personal characteristics, or manner of speech.

A similar meaning appears in the famous verse by 'Antarah ibn Shaddād:

Have the poets left any place untouched,

Or have you recognized the dwelling after mere conjecture?

Here, recognition signifies distinguishing the dwelling from others after doubt and uncertainty.

In foreign dictionaries, the term definition appears in the Larousse Dictionary as follows:

Définition: Explanation of the meaning of a word; the set of characteristics of the being or thing designated by that word; consult the dictionary for its definition^{xxxix}

This indicates that a definition is an explanation of the meaning of a word or the object intended to be identified by specifying its characteristics and distinguishing features.

The Le Robert Dictionary provides a similar understanding but adds philosophical and mathematical dimensions, offering illustrative examples and quotations from scholars. It defines definition as follows:

Définition (Philosophy): A proposition whose first part is the term to be defined, while the second consists of known terms that determine the characteristics of the first through its proximate genus and specific difference. A definition is a judgment in which the subject and the predicate are two equivalent concepts.^{xxxix}

Accordingly, philosophers regard definition as the process of identifying the essential characteristics and attributes of a concept in order to clarify its meaning. The first entity is determined through the genus and distinguishing characteristics of the second, based on the specific difference between them, so that the definition and the concept defined are logically equivalent.

Regarding the term limit, both dictionaries define it as follows:

Limite: A line separating two adjoining pieces of land or territories; the extreme boundary of a period of time.^{xxxix}

This definition closely corresponds to the meaning of ḥadd (limit) in Arabic lexicons, where it denotes both the boundary separating two lands or regions and the endpoint or boundary in time.

2. Terminological Definition

Defining the concept of definition in its terminological sense reveals a variety of meanings that differ according to intellectual orientations and historical periods. It does not rest upon a single methodological foundation, which makes establishing a precise and universally accepted definition a difficult task.

Among linguists and grammarians, the concept of definition is understood in opposition to indefiniteness. The author of Al-Dustūr explains that a definite noun refers to a specific entity,



as is the case with pronouns, demonstratives, proper nouns, nouns marked with the definite article (al-), and nouns annexed to definite nouns. Accordingly, the term definition denotes linguistic expressions that refer to a particular, identifiable entity, including pronouns, demonstratives, and similar forms. Al-Tahānawī likewise adopts this understanding, defining definition in Arabic grammar as making an entity refer to an external object through conventional linguistic indication, in contrast to indefiniteness.

This concept differs in the discipline of uṣūl al-fiqh (Islamic legal theory). Al-Jurjānī defines definition as: "the statement of something whose knowledge necessarily leads to the knowledge of another thing."^{xxxiv} He classifies definitions into two categories. The first is the real (essential) definition, whose purpose is to acquire a concept that is not already present in the mind. The second is the verbal definition, which aims merely to indicate a concept that already exists in the mind. Jurjānī presents the notion of ḥadd (logical definition), while giving it a broader scope. In its general sense, a definition leads to the knowledge of another, previously unknown, thing. This is further clarified by Hillām Al-Jīlālī in his commentary on Al-Jurjānī's definition, where he states that, through this formulation, scholars of legal theory moved beyond the Aristotelian model toward a more comprehensive conception that accepts everything capable of producing knowledge of a thing or a name, whether through its essence, description, or example.^{xxxvi}

In any case, these definitions agree that a definition is a statement that accurately expresses the reality of a thing. Simply put, a definition is a concept that explains the definiendum by specifying its genus, attributes, and distinguishing characteristics until it becomes comprehensive enough to include everything that belongs to it while excluding everything that does not. At that point, the definition becomes fully equivalent to the object defined. This process is essentially a reformulation of the meaning of a word through an explanatory statement that clarifies and elucidates it.

Despite the diversity of the definitions presented above, they are, in general, derived from Aristotle's original formulation of the logical definition. Before examining Aristotle's conception of logical definition, it is worth noting that philosophical dictionaries define it as a statement that explains the essence of a thing. It is regarded as a complete definition or a thorough analysis of the concept denoted by the term to be defined, such as defining the human being as "the rational animal."^{xxxvii} Another definition states that: "Definition is the determination of a universal concept by mentioning its essential properties and distinguishing characteristics. A complete definition is one that is exactly coextensive with the definiendum and is therefore described as both comprehensive and exclusive."^{xxxviii}

It is evident from these definitions that the concept of definition closely overlaps with that of ḥadd (logical definition), since both seek to determine the essence of a thing through its genus and differentia.

Fourth: The Difference between Ḥadd (Logical Definition) and Definition

The terms ḥadd (logical definition) and definition are so closely intertwined that distinguishing between them becomes a challenging task. The primary source of this difficulty lies in the fact that each term is frequently used in place of the other. The French word *définition* is derived



from the prefix de- ("with regard to") and finis ("boundary" or "limit"),^{xxxix} a meaning that corresponds to the notion conveyed by the word *limite*, referring to the boundary or extremity of a thing.

Muṣṭafā Al-Nashshār points out that Arabic translations of Aristotle's works sometimes use the term *ḥadd* to denote the definiendum and at other times the definition itself, even though Aristotle's term definition originates from the Greek word *horismos*, while *horos* fundamentally means "boundary" or "limit" and is occasionally translated as "definition."^{xl} This indicates that the principal term employed by Aristotle was *ḥadd*. Furthermore, because the original concept has been translated into two different Arabic terms that are often used interchangeably, and since both terms are employed across a variety of disciplines, arriving at a precise and unified concept becomes even more difficult. As Hillām Al-Jīlālī observes, defining the concept of *définition* is among the most difficult terminological tasks because of its close association with almost all the humanities and natural sciences. Consequently, its meaning varies from one field to another, and even among different dictionaries within the same field^{xli}

2. Terminological Definition

Determining the concept of definition in its terminological sense reveals multiple meanings that vary according to different schools of knowledge and historical periods. Since it does not rest upon a single unified methodological foundation, providing a precise definition is a challenging task.

Among linguists and grammarians, the concept of definition has a specific meaning, as it is contrasted with indefiniteness. The author of *Al-Dustūr* explains that definition refers to a noun denoting a specific entity, such as pronouns, demonstratives, proper nouns, nouns with the definite article (*al-*), and nouns annexed to definite nouns. Accordingly, the term definition refers to expressions that designate a particular and identifiable entity, including pronouns, demonstratives, and similar forms. Likewise, Al-Tahānawī states that, in Arabic grammar, definition is "the process of making an entity refer to an external object through a conventional linguistic indication," in contrast to indefiniteness.^{xlii}

Among scholars of Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), however, the concept differs. Al-Jurjānī defines definition as: "The mention of something whose knowledge necessarily leads to the knowledge of another thing." He further distinguishes between two types of definition. The first is the real definition, whose purpose is to acquire concepts that were previously unknown. The second is the verbal definition, which aims merely to indicate a concept that already exists in the mind.

It is evident from this passage that Al-Jurjānī presents the concept of definition through the notion of *ḥadd* (logical definition), while simultaneously giving it a broader scope. In its general sense, a definition leads to the knowledge of another previously unknown thing. This understanding is clarified by Hallām Al-Jīlālī in his commentary on Al-Jurjānī's definition, where he explains that scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh* moved beyond the Aristotelian formula toward a comprehensive conception that accepts anything capable of conveying knowledge of a thing or a name, whether through its essence, description, or example.^{xliii}



Despite these variations, the definitions generally agree that a definition is a statement that fully expresses the true nature of a thing. Simply put, a definition is a concept that explains the object being defined by identifying its genus, attributes, and distinguishing characteristics until it becomes an all-inclusive and exclusive description, encompassing everything that belongs to it while excluding everything that does not. At this point, the definition becomes fully equivalent to the definiendum. In essence, this process resembles reformulating the meaning of a word through an explanatory statement that clarifies and elucidates it.

Although the formulations of the above definitions vary considerably, they are, in general, derived from Aristotle's original conception of logical definition. Before examining Aristotle's notion of logical definition, it is worth noting that specialized philosophical dictionaries define it as a statement that explains the essence of a thing, constituting a complete definition or a full analysis of the concept denoted by the term being defined, such as defining the human being as a rational animal.

Another definition describes it as follows: Definition is the determination of the concept of a universal by identifying its essential properties and distinguishing characteristics. A complete definition is one that is exactly equivalent to the definiendum and is therefore described as both comprehensive and exclusive.

These definitions clearly demonstrate the close relationship between the concepts of definition and ḥadd (logical definition), since both aim to determine the essence of a thing through the identification of its genus and differentia.^{xliv}

Fourth: The Difference between Ḥadd (Logical Definition) and Ta'rif (Definition)

The terms ḥadd (logical definition) and ta'rif (definition) are so closely intertwined that distinguishing between them becomes a difficult task. The main source of this difficulty lies in the frequent use of one term in place of the other. The French word *définition*, for example, is composed of *de* ("with regard to") and *finis* ("boundary" or "limit"), a meaning that corresponds to the notion conveyed by the word *limite*, which signifies a boundary or the edge of something. Mustafa Al-Nashshār observes that Arabic translations of Aristotle's works sometimes employ the term ḥadd to denote the definiendum and, at other times, the definition itself, despite the fact that Aristotle's term for definition derives from the Greek word *horismos*. The related Greek term *horos* originally means "boundary" or "limit" and is sometimes translated as "definition." This suggests that the term most commonly used by Aristotle was ḥadd. Furthermore, the translation of a single concept into two different Arabic terms, each often used interchangeably, has led to their widespread application across various disciplines, making it difficult to establish a precise and unified concept.^{xlv}

In this regard, Hallām Al-Jilālī remarks that defining the concept of *définition* is among the most difficult terminological tasks because of its close association with almost all fields of the humanities and natural sciences. Consequently, its meaning varies not only from one discipline to another but even among different dictionaries within the same field.

This means that:

Every ḥadd (logical definition) is a definition,



but not every definition is a ḥadd, because this also includes the incomplete ḥadd and the descriptive definition (rasm).

2. Definition in Terminological Usage

Determining the concept of definition in its terminological sense reveals multiple meanings that vary according to different intellectual traditions and historical periods. Since it does not rest upon a single methodological foundation, establishing a precise definition is itself a difficult task.

Among linguists and grammarians, definition (taʿrīf) has a specific meaning, as it stands in contrast to indefiniteness (tankīr). The author of *Al-Dustūr* refers to this concept by explaining that a definite noun denotes a specific entity, as is the case with pronouns, demonstratives, proper nouns, nouns with the definite article (al-), and nouns annexed to a definite noun. Accordingly, the term definition refers to linguistic forms that denote a specific and identifiable referent, including pronouns, demonstratives, and similar categories. *Al-Tahānawī* likewise explains this meaning by defining taʿrīf in Arabic grammar as assigning a referent to an external entity through conventional linguistic indication, in opposition to indefiniteness.^{xlvi}

This concept differs among scholars of legal theory (uṣūl al-fiqh). *Al-Jurjānī* defines a definition as “the mention of something whose knowledge necessarily leads to the knowledge of another thing.” He further classifies definitions into two types. The first is the real definition, whose purpose is to produce a conception that was previously absent. The second is the verbal definition, which merely points to a conception already present in the mind.

It is evident from this passage that *Al-Jurjānī* presents the concept of definition through the notion of ḥadd (logical definition), while simultaneously adopting a more comprehensive formulation. In its general sense, a definition leads to the knowledge of another previously unknown thing. This understanding is clarified by *Hallām al-Jīlālī*, who comments that, through this formulation, scholars of legal theory departed from the Aristotelian model toward a broader conception that accepts anything capable of producing knowledge of a thing or a name, whether through its essence, description, or example.^{xlvi}

In any case, these definitions agree that a definition is a statement that fully expresses the true nature of a thing. Put simply, a definition is a concept that explains the object being defined by mentioning its genus, characteristics, and distinguishing features until it reaches a level of completeness that includes everything belonging to it while excluding everything that does not. At that point, the definition becomes fully equivalent to the object defined. This process resembles reformulating the meaning of a word through an explanatory statement that clarifies and elucidates it.^{xlvi}

Despite the diversity of the definitions mentioned above, they are, in general, derived from Aristotle's original formulation of logical definition. Before examining Aristotle's own conception of logical definition, it is worth noting that specialized philosophical dictionaries define it as a statement that explains the essence of a thing. It is regarded as a complete definition or a full analysis of the concept of the term to be defined, such as defining the human being as a rational animal.



Another definition states that definition is the determination of a universal concept by specifying its essential properties and distinguishing characteristics. A complete definition is one that is exactly equivalent to the object defined and is therefore described as both comprehensive and exclusive.

These definitions clearly demonstrate the close relationship between the concepts of definition and ḥadd, since both seek to determine the essence of a thing through genus and differentia.^{xlix}

Fourth: The Difference Between Ḥadd and Definition

The terms ḥadd (logical definition) and definition are so closely intertwined that distinguishing between them is often difficult. The primary source of this difficulty lies in the frequent use of one term in place of the other. The French word *définition* is derived from the prefix *de* ("with regard to") and *finis* ("boundary" or "limit"), a meaning that corresponds closely to the notion conveyed by the word *limite*, which signifies a boundary or the edge of a thing.

Muṣṭafā al-Nashshār points out that Arabic translations of Aristotle's works sometimes use the word ḥadd to refer to the object defined and at other times to the definition itself, although Aristotle's original term for definition derives from the Greek *horismos*. Furthermore, the Greek word *horos* fundamentally means "boundary" and is sometimes translated as "definition." This indicates that the term commonly employed by Aristotle was ḥadd. Moreover, because the same concept has been translated into two different Arabic terms that are often used interchangeably, both terms have come to be employed across various disciplines. This multiplicity of usage makes it difficult to arrive at a single precise concept. As Hallām al-Jīlālī observes, defining the concept of definition (*définition*) is among the most challenging tasks because of its close association with virtually all humanistic and natural sciences. Consequently, its meaning varies not only from one discipline to another but even from one specialized dictionary to another within the same field.¹

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that although scholars have attempted to establish clear distinguishing criteria between ḥadd and definition—such as considering ḥadd to be merely one type of definition—this distinction has largely remained theoretical. In actual usage, both terms are frequently employed interchangeably to convey the same meaning.

Having examined the logical and philosophical dimensions of ḥadd and definition, as well as the role these conceptions played in establishing concepts and regulating terminology, it is now appropriate to shift the discussion to the field of linguistics, which reinterpreted the notions of ḥadd and definition and reformulated them in a manner consistent with the nature of linguistic phenomena.

Ḥadd and Definition in Linguistic Thought:

Modern linguistic thought was not isolated from the issues raised by logic and philosophy concerning the concepts of ḥadd (definition/delimitation) and definition. Rather, it drew upon them in constructing its conceptual framework while reorienting them in a manner consistent with the nature of linguistic inquiry. Whereas, in the logical tradition, ḥadd aims to reveal the essence of a thing by specifying its genus and differentia, modern linguistics no longer regards definition merely as a statement of essence; instead, it considers it a methodological tool for establishing and regulating concepts. Since its inception with Ferdinand de Saussure, modern



linguistics has advanced a new conception of linguistic concepts based primarily on systematic relations rather than on the determination of essences. Linguistic concepts derive their value not from their intrinsic properties but from their positions within the linguistic system and from the network of relations connecting them with other concepts. Consequently, hadd is no longer viewed as a rigid logical definition but rather as an operational description that identifies the functional properties of a concept.

A close examination of the conceptual apparatus of linguistics reveals that it has continuously evolved from one stage to another and from one linguistic school to the next. Concepts such as language, speech, system, structure, competence, and meaning have all undergone theoretical reformulation. This demonstrates that definition is an essential instrument for reconstructing concepts and extends far beyond being a mere explanation or interpretation of meaning.

From a linguistic perspective, therefore, definition is not simply a direct characterization of a concept but rather the establishment of concepts within a theoretical framework. Saussure's definitions of language (*langue*), speech (*parole*), human language (*langage*), and the linguistic sign are functional definitions that emphasize the relationships among the various components of the linguistic system. In his discussion of language and human language, Saussure states:

"But what is language? It must be distinguished from human language as a whole. Language is a definite part of human language, although it is an essential part of it. It is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions adopted by a community to enable its members to exercise that faculty." ^{li}

Accordingly, it becomes evident that "linguistic definitions do not merely describe terms; they seek to determine the relationships that connect them within the linguistic system." ^{lii}

On this basis, it is clear that definition, from the linguistic perspective, possesses characteristics that distinguish it from logical reasoning. In addition to its systematic nature and its integration within a conceptual network, it also has an operational character that transcends lexical meaning. It functions as a methodological tool for analyzing linguistic phenomena and can therefore be employed in description, explanation, and hypothesis formation. This understanding corresponds to the concept of hadd presented by Sibawayh in *Al-Kitāb* and later adopted by Abd al-Rahman Haj Saleh in the Khalilian Theory. Here, hadd is an operational definition concerned with the structural organization of words rather than with their meanings. For Sibawayh, hadd is not a definition of the meaning or conceptual content of a word; rather, it is a description of the procedures required to produce a particular pattern or form of speech. It is closely connected with the course or method followed by words and utterances within the Arabic linguistic system. This implies that the pathways (*majāri al-kalim*) identified through analogy possess definable boundaries. Consequently, the concept of hadd in *Al-Kitāb* may be defined in accordance with Abd al-Rahman Haj Saleh's formulation:

"It is a distinctive description of the course of words and syntactic structures, and consequently a description of the method of their production, formulation, and construction." ^{liii}

This definition may be understood to mean that, for Sibawayh, hadd is concerned with tracing the successive operations through which words and utterances are generated and describing those operations independently of meaning or conceptual content.



Furthermore, a careful examination of Sibawayh's concept of hadd reveals its close association with qiyās (analogy). Linguistic usage may undergo transformational operations such as fronting, postponement, and deletion. Although the resulting expressions remain fully consistent with the rules of the language, Sibawayh was nevertheless able to determine the boundaries of speech through analogy and by extending judgments to comparable forms. He states:

"Among such examples are your saying: I was amazed at people's agreement, their black and their red alike, which follows the pattern of the people agreed, their black and their red alike. Likewise, you say: I heard the sound of his teeth striking one another, following the pattern his teeth were above one another. You may also say: I was amazed at the striking of his teeth against one another, following the pattern I caused his teeth to strike one another." ^{liv}

Conclusion

The present study has shown that the concepts of definition and delimitation in modern linguistic thought are no longer regarded merely as mechanisms for explaining terms or specifying their meanings. Rather, they have become fundamental components in the construction of linguistic knowledge and the formulation of its conceptual framework. Definition has evolved from being a fixed determination of essence into a scientific procedure that is intrinsically linked to the theoretical and methodological framework within which concepts are organized. Likewise, delimitation has become a means of establishing the operational boundaries of linguistic terms within the linguistic system, thereby ensuring their precision, coherence, and suitability for scholarly use.

Furthermore, the value of a definition is derived not from its independence but from the network of relationships it establishes within linguistic theory. Consequently, delimitation and definition should not be viewed merely as attempts to determine meaning; rather, they constitute an essential gateway to understanding the epistemological foundations upon which linguistics is built, as well as the ways in which concepts are generated and analytical tools are systematically defined.

ⁱ Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, Kitāb al-ʿAyn, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1st ed., 2003), root ḥ-d-d.

ⁱⁱ Al-Jawharī, Tāj al-Lughah wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyyah, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAṭṭār (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 4th ed., 1980), root ḥ-d-d.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿArab, eds. ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī al-Kabīr, Muḥammad Aḥmad Ḥasb Allāh, and Ḥāshim Muḥammad al-Shādhilī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), root ḥ-d-d.

^{iv} Al-Fīrūzābādī, Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ, rev. Anas Muḥammad al-Shāmī and Zakariyyā Jābir Aḥmad (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2008), root ḥ-d-d.

^v Abū al-Faṭḥ ʿUthmān Ibn Jinnī, Sirr Ṣināʿat al-Iʿrāb, ed. Ḥasan Hindāwī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2nd ed., 1993), Vol. 1, pp. 13–14.

^{vi} Al-Jawharī, Tāj al-Lughah wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyyah, root ḥ-d-d.

^{vii} Ibn Durayd, Jamharat al-Lughah, ed. Ramzī Munīr Baʿlabakkī (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1st ed., 1987), root ḥ-d-d.

^{viii} Aḥmad ibn Fāris, Maqāyīs al-Lughah, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), root ḥ-d-d.



- ^{ix} Al-Jurjānī, Al-Taʿrīfāt, p. 87.
- ^x Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿArab, s.v. ḥ-d-d.
- ^{xi} Bakr b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUthmān b. Yaḥyā, Al-Ḥudūd wa al-Taʿzīrāt ʿinda Ibn al-Qayyim, p. 23.
- ^{xii} Ibn Sīdah, Al-Muḥkam wa al-Muḥīt al-Aʿẓam, vol. 2, p. 504.
- ^{xiii} Al-Azhārī, Tahdhīb al-Lughah, vol. 3, p. 270.
- ^{xiv} Abū al-Walīd Salmān b. Yakhlaf al-Qurtubī, Al-Ḥudūd fī al-Uṣūl, p. 45.
- ^{xv} Abū Zakariyyā al-Rahūnī, Tuḥfat al-Masʿūl fī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar Muntahā al-Sūl, vol. 1, p. 203.
- ^{xvi} Al-Qurtubī, Al-Ḥudūd fī al-Uṣūl, p. 95.
- ^{xvii} Al-Tahānawī, Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn wa al-ʿUlūm, vol. 1, p. 264.
- ^{xviii} Tawfīq al-ʿAjam, Encyclopedia of the Terminology of Uṣūl al-Fiqh among Muslims, vol. 1, p. 548.
- ^{xix} Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 546–547.
- ^{xx} Al-Muʿjam al-Falsafī (The Philosophical Dictionary), Jamil Saliba, Vol. 1, p. 450.
- ^{xxi} Abd al-Rahman Badawī, Formal and Mathematical Logic, Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, 4th ed., 1997, p. 7.
- ^{xxii} Yusuf Mahmoud, Formal Logic: Concepts and Judgments, Doha: Dār al-Ḥikmah, 1st ed., 1994, p. 65.
- ^{xxiii} Ali Sami al-Nashshar, Formal Logic from Aristotle to the Present Age, Dār al-Maʿrifah al-Jāmiʿiyyah, 2000, p. 198.
- ^{xxiv} Yusuf Mahmoud, Formal Logic: Concepts and Judgments, pp. 65–66.
- ^{xxv} Abd al-Rahman Badawī, Formal and Mathematical Logic, p. 80.
- ^{xxvi} The Philosophical Dictionary, Academy of the Arabic Language, p. 447.
- ^{xxvii} Lisān al-ʿArab, Ibn Manẓūr, root ʿ-r-f.
- ^{xxviii} Kitāb al-ʿAyn, al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, root ʿ-r-f.
- ^{xxix} Al-Jawharī, Al-Ṣiḥāḥ, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAṭṭār, Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, Beirut, 4th ed., 1990, root ʿ-r-f.
- ^{xxx} Al-Fayrūzābādī, Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt, root ʿ-r-f.
- ^{xxxi} Larousse Super Major: Dictionnaire alphabétique de la langue française.
- ^{xxxii} Le Robert: Dictionnaire de la langue française, New Edition, Montréal, Canada, 1992.
- ^{xxxiii} See: Larousse and Le Robert.
- ^{xxxiv} Al-Jurjānī, Al-Taʿrīfāt, p. 304.
- ^{xxxv} Ibid., p. 304.
- ^{xxxvi} Hillām Al-Jīlālī, Techniques of Definition in Contemporary Dictionaries, p. 39.
- ^{xxxvii} Jamīl Ṣalībā, The Philosophical Dictionary, Lebanese Book House, Lebanon, 1982, Vol. 1, p. 447.
- ^{xxxviii} Arabic Language Academy, The Philosophical Dictionary, Al-Amīriyya Press, 1983, p. 48.
- ^{xxxix} Muḥammad Būḥamdī, "How to Formulate Definitions According to Al-Sakkākī," Terminological Studies, International Journal, Institute of Terminological Studies, No. 1, 2001, p. 54.
- ^{xl} Muṣṭafā Al-Nashshār, Aristotle's Theory of Science, p. 91. He also notes that Aristotle uses the concept of definition through the term horos ("boundary") and sometimes through the term logos, although not every logos constitutes a definition.
- ^{xli} Hillām Al-Jīlālī, Techniques of Definition in Contemporary Dictionaries, p. 37.
- ^{xlii} Al-Jurjānī, Al-Taʿrīfāt (Definitions), p. 304.
- ^{xliii} See: Ibid., p. 304.
- ^{xliiv} Hillām Al-Jīlālī, Techniques of Definition in Contemporary Dictionaries, p. 39.
- ^{xliv} Jamīl Ṣalībā, The Philosophical Dictionary, Lebanese Book House, Lebanon, Vol. 1, 1982, p. 447.
- ^{xlvi} Jamīl Ṣalībā, The Philosophical Dictionary, Lebanese Book House, Lebanon, Vol. 1, 1982, p. 447.
- ^{xlvii} Academy of the Arabic Language, The Philosophical Dictionary, Al-Amīriyya Press, 1983, p. 48.
- ^{xlviii} Muḥammad Būḥamdī, "How to Formulate a Definition According to Al-Sakkākī," Terminological Studies: International Journal, Institute of Terminological Studies, No. 1, 2001, p. 54.



^{xlix} See: Muṣṭafā Al-Nashshār, *Aristotle's Theory of Science*, p. 91. The author also notes that Aristotle uses the term *horos* (boundary/definition) to denote definition, and that the term *logos* is sometimes translated as "definition," although not every *logos* constitutes a definition.

ⁱ Hallām Al-Jīlālī, *Techniques of Definition in Contemporary Dictionaries*, p. 37.

ⁱⁱ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Yu'ayl Yūsuf Ghāzī, Dār Āfāq 'Arabiyyah, Baghdad, Iraq, p. 27.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Lyons, *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 16.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Abd al-Rahman Haj Saleh, *The Logic of the Arabs in the Sciences of Language*, Mofem Publishing, Algeria, 2012, p. 121.

^{liv} Sibawayh, *Al-Kitāb*, ed. Abd al-Salām Hārūn, Vol. 1, p. 154.