

## THE EVOLUTION OF LEXEME CODIFICATION AND DICTIONARY-MAKING

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16892144>**Abstract**

This article examines the historical development, theoretical foundations, and practical significance of lexemes within the context of dictionary-making traditions from ancient civilizations to modern times. By analyzing the epistemological and semiological aspects of lexemes, the study affirms their central role as the primary naming and meaning-bearing units in any language. The research traces the progression of lexicographic traditions from early inscriptions on stone and animal hides, through Arabic, Persian, and Turkic classical dictionaries, to European lexicographic standardization following the invention of the printing press. Special attention is given to the influence of European lexicographic methods on Russian, Turkish, and Uzbek dictionary-making, particularly in the 20th century during script reforms. The article concludes that national explanatory dictionaries are essential for standardizing the orthographic, semantic, and grammatical norms of lexemes, thus serving as vital instruments in language planning and preservation.

**Keywords:** lexeme, lexicography, dictionary, etymology, phonetics, semantic codification, Uzbek lexicography, printing press, historical linguistics

**1. Introduction**

In linguistic theory, the lexeme represents the basic unit of meaning and naming, forming the backbone of any language's vocabulary. As a linguistic sign, the lexeme is both a semantic and functional entity, acting as a medium of cultural, historical, and intellectual preservation. Throughout history, the systematic recording of lexemes in dictionaries has not only safeguarded linguistic heritage but also facilitated standardization, language planning, and scholarly analysis.

The study of lexemes from epistemological (gnoseological) and semiological perspectives reveals their significance as the foundational units in a language's lexicon. Once codified in dictionaries, lexemes become cultural monuments, preserving the linguistic realities of their time.

The emergence of writing systems in human history enabled the recording of words on diverse media such as stone, clay tablets, and animal skins. These early inscriptions served as the precursors to modern dictionaries, capturing the vocabulary of their era.

In antiquity, philosophical debates—most notably by Aristotle and Plato—addressed the nature of the word and its meaning, laying conceptual foundations for the lexeme's linguistic status.

The Islamic Golden Age (8th–10th centuries) marked the rise of practical lexicography in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic traditions. Early milestones include:

- Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi – *Kitab al-'Ayn*, the earliest known Arabic dictionary, arranged phonologically.
- Ibn Manzur – *Lisan al-'Arab*, still a cornerstone of Arabic lexicography.
- Ismail al-Jawhari – *As-Sihah*, a seminal 10th-century work.

In the Turkic world, Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Dīwān Lughāt at-Turk* (1072–1074) stands as the first comprehensive Turkic dictionary, containing over 7,500 lexemes and dialectal forms, scientifically classifying and preserving the linguistic richness of Turkic languages.

### 3. European Lexicographic Traditions and the Printing Revolution

European lexicography entered a systematic phase in the 18th–19th centuries, driven by rapid social and scientific progress. The emergence of new concepts and terms necessitated their codification. The invention of the printing press in the 15th century profoundly influenced dictionary-making, enabling:

- Wider distribution of standardized lexemes.
- Increased accuracy in spelling, meaning, and usage.
- Growth in the number of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries.

Significant European lexicographic milestones include:

- Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) – 40,000 words with standardized spelling and definitions.
- Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall* – the first English explanatory dictionary (1604) with 2,500 “hard words.”
- *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694) – the French Academy's authoritative dictionary.
- *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by the Brothers Grimm (1854–1960) – a monumental work in German lexicography.

The printing revolution thus standardized national languages, codified scientific and technical terminology, and provided a framework for translation studies.

### 4. Influence on Russian, Turkish, and Uzbek Lexicography

European lexicographic practices influenced Russian and subsequently Central Asian traditions. In Uzbekistan, the adoption of Russian lexicographic principles was particularly significant during the 1930s script reform from Arabic to Latin script. This period saw the publication of the first bilingual Russian–Uzbek and Uzbek–Russian dictionaries.

The mid-20th century marked a milestone with the compilation of the first monolingual explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language, which set orthographic, semantic, and grammatical norms for lexemes.

However, script reforms—occurring three times in one century (Arabic → Latin → Cyrillic → Latin)—created challenges for lexeme standardization, causing phonetic and orthographic inconsistencies.

National explanatory dictionaries serve as:

- Tools for normalizing orthography and phonetics.
- Codifiers of semantic precision and contextual usage.
- Archives of cultural and historical heritage.
- Reference sources for terminology development.

The evolution of both Eastern and Western lexicographic traditions demonstrates the universal necessity of dictionaries in maintaining language integrity and fostering linguistic scholarship.

### 6. Conclusion

From ancient inscriptions to digital lexicography, the journey of the lexeme reflects the intertwined history of language, culture, and technology. The codification of lexemes in

dictionaries—whether in the form of bilingual glossaries, explanatory compilations, or specialized terminological references—remains central to language preservation.

For the Uzbek language, the development of national explanatory dictionaries represents not only a linguistic achievement but also a cultural imperative, ensuring that the language's phonetic, semantic, and grammatical integrity is maintained amidst political and technological transformations.

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