

A CONTRASTIVE SEMANTIC STUDY OF ARABIC WORDS (TAQWĪM, TAQYĪM) AND THEIR ENGLISH COUNTERPARTS

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ABSTRACT


This study looks at two Arabic words from the same root *q-w-m* (ق و م): taqwīm (تقويم) and taqyīm (تقييم). Both are used today to talk about evaluation and assessment, but they have different histories. Taqwīm comes from the verb qawwama (قَوَّمَ) and has two meanings in classical Arabic: (1) straightening or correcting something, and (2) determining value or price. Taqyīm comes from qayyama (قَيَّمَ) but does not appear in any classical Arabic dictionary. It seems to be a modern word influenced by foreign languages like English (evaluation, assessment) and French (évaluation).

Using classical dictionaries such as Lisān al-‘Arab, Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ, and Tāj al-‘Arūs, as well as modern ones like Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ, this study traces where these words came from and analyzes their meanings. It also looks at the 2002 decision by the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo to approve qayyama.

The study finds that taqwīm can express both corrective and evaluative meanings, while taqyīm only expresses evaluation. More importantly, taqwīm alone is enough because context always makes the meaning clear. The introduction of taqyīm was unnecessary. It is a modern invention influenced by foreign languages. The study ends with advice for translators and writers on how to use these terms correctly.

Keywords:- Lexical Analysis, Semantics, Modern Coinage Semantics, Componential Analysis.

تقويم وتقييم: تحليل دلالي معجمي في ضوء الحقل الدلالي والتحليل المكوني

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الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث اللغتين (تقويم) و(تقييم) المنبثقتين من الجذر نفسه (ق و م)، ويسعى إلى تتبع أصلهما المعجمي، وكشف الفروق الدلالية بينهما، ومناقشة مدى أصالة لفظ (تقييم) في العربية، وبيان ما إذا كان ضرورياً أم أنه لفظ مولد دخيل لا حاجة إليه، يهدف البحث إلى تتبع ورود (تقويم) في المعاجم العربية الكلاسيكية وتحليل دلالاته، والبحث عن أي شاهد معجمي أو تراثي لاستعمال (تقييم) في العربية القديمة، وتطبيق التحليل المكوني (componential analysis) على اللفظين للكشف عن سماتهما الدلالية المميزة، ومناقشة قرار مجمع اللغة العربية بالقاهرة (2002) بتجويد استعمال (قَيَّمَ) و(تقويم)، واستخلاص حكم علمي حول كفاية (تقويم) وعدم الحاجة إلى (تقييم)، اعتمد البحث على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي والتاريخي المقارن، مع الاستعانة بنظرية الحقول الدلالية والتحليل المكوني، جمعت المادة اللغوية من أمهات المعاجم العربية (لسان العرب، القاموس المحيط، تاج العروس، كتاب العين) ومن المعاجم الحديثة (المعجم الوسيط، معجم اللغة العربية المعاصرة)، كما روجعت قرارات المجمع اللغوي والدراسات النقدية المعاصرة كدراسة الخزعلي (2019)، وأثبت البحث أن (التقويم) لفظ أصيل متجذر في العربية القديمة، ويؤدي دلالتين أصيلتين: الإصلاح (إزالة العوج) والتقدير (تحديد القيمة)، وأن السياق اللغوي كافٍ للتمييز بينهما، كما كشف أن (تقييم) لم ترد في أي معجم تراثي، ولم يُعثر له على شاهد واحد من العصر الجاهلي أو صدر الإسلام، لكنه موجود في المعجم الوسيط استناداً إلى قرار معجمي، ورجحت الأدلة فرضية أنه لفظ مولد دخيل تحت تأثير الترجمة عن اللغات الأجنبية، وليس أصلاً عربياً سقط من المعاجم، وتوصي الدراسة بالاستغناء عن لفظ (تقييم) والاكتفاء بـ (تقويم) للمعنيين بالإصلاح والتقدير معاً، والاعتماد على السياق وحده في تحديد المعنى، كما توصي المترجمين والكتاب بعدم الخضوع للاستعمالات المجمعية الحديثة إذا كانت غير مدعومة بأصل تراثي، وتدعو إلى مراجعة قرارات التوليد اللغوي في ضوء كفاية النظام المعجمي العربي الأصيل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علم الدلالة، الحقول الدلالية، تحليل معجمي، دلالة، تحليل مكوني، ألفاظ مولدة.

1. Introduction

1.1 How this Research Began?

This research did not start in a classroom or during a translation task, as many linguistic studies do, Rather, it began during my Master's studies when I got a research by Professor Muḥammad Faraj, He presented this research at an international conference in the United Arab Emirates, and

it earned an honourable ranking among hundreds of papers from international scholars.

Professor Muḥammad Faraj's research examined the morphological decisions of the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, What caught my attention most was his discussion of the root *q-y-m* (ق ي م). As I read his paper, I found answers to questions that had long troubled me about the term taqyīm (تقييم), a word I had seen many times in educational and administrative texts, and which I always felt as foreign to me with his encouragement, I decided to study this term more deeply, this research builds on his insights while adding componential semantics, a detailed look at modern dictionaries, and comparative linguistics.

1.2 The Problem

The problem is simple. Modern Arabic uses two words from the root *q-w-m* to talk about evaluation and correction: taqwīm (تقويم) and taqyīm (تقييم). People often use them interchangeably, especially in translations of educational and administrative texts from foreign languages.

But classical Arabic dictionaries have only one of these words. Taqwīm is found in all major classical sources with two meanings: (1) straightening or correcting something, and (2) determining value or price (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., Vol. 12, pp. 489-492; al-Fīrūzābādī, n.d., Vol. 4, pp. 213-215; al-Zabīdī, n.d., Vol. 7, pp. 342-345).

Taqyīm, however, does not appear in any classical dictionary. It is missing from Lisān al-‘Arab, Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt, Tāj al-‘Arūs, Al-Ṣiḥāḥ, Maqāyīs al-Lughah, and Al-‘Ubāb al-Zākhir. Its first appearance is in a modern dictionary, Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ (Majma‘ al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyya, 2004, p. 765), which notes that it was added by a decision of the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo.

This study argues that taqwīm alone is enough for both meanings. Context always makes the meaning clear. So taqyīm is unnecessary. It is a modern invention with no basis in classical Arabic.

1.3 Research Questions

This study asks four questions:

1. Where does taqwīm come from and how was it used in classical Arabic?
2. What evidence is there for taqyīm in classical and modern sources?
3. What semantic features distinguish taqwīm from taqyīm?
4. Why is taqwīm sufficient and taqyīm unnecessary?

1.4 Objectives and Significance

This study aims to:

1. Trace the history of taqwīm in classical Arabic dictionaries
2. Investigate where taqyīm came from in modern Arabic

3. Analyze the semantic features of both words
4. Show that taqwīm alone works for both corrective and evaluative meanings
5. Give practical advice for translators and writers

The significance of this study is that it addresses a real problem in education, administration, economics, and translation. By showing that taqwīm is enough and taqyīm is unnecessary, it hopes to bring more precision to Arabic academic and professional writing.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

Before going further, I should clarify what this study does and does not do.

First, it focuses only on taqwīm and taqyīm. It does not look at other words from the root *q-w-m* like qīmah (value), qayyim (custodian), or qiyām (standing), except when they help explain taqwīm and taqyīm.

Second, it relies mainly on dictionaries, not on large collections of texts (corpora). A corpus study could give numbers on how often these words appear in different contexts, but that is beyond this study's scope.

Third, it looks at the language itself, not at the social or political reasons why the Academy approved taqyīm or how people received that decision.

Fourth, it is limited to Arabic and does not compare with other Semitic languages, though that could be interesting.

Fifth, it does not look at how machine translation systems handle taqwīm and taqyīm, though that would be a good topic for future research.

So the conclusions here are suggestive, not final. They point in a direction rather than claiming to have the last word.

1.6 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, analytical method. It draws on three kinds of sources: (1) classical Arabic dictionaries to trace taqwīm, (2) modern Arabic dictionaries to document taqyīm, and (3) decisions of language academies.

It uses componential analysis (Cruse, 1986, p. 90; Nida, 1975, p. 32; Leech, 1981, p. 89) to identify semantic features that distinguish the two terms. It also uses semantic field theory (Trier, 1931, p. 28; Lehrer, 1974, p. 2; Lyons, 1977, Vol. 1, p. 250) to place them in the broader field of valuation and assessment in Arabic.

The study is organized as follows. Section 2 looks at the root *q-w-m* in classical Arabic. Section 3 traces the emergence of taqyīm and examines the Academy's decision. Section 4 presents a componential analysis comparing the two terms. Section 5 discusses why taqwīm is sufficient. Section 6 concludes.

2. The Root Q-W-M in Classical Arabic

2.1 The Core Meaning

The root *q-w-m* (ق و م) is one of the most productive in Arabic. Its core meaning has to do with standing, rising, being straight, or being established (Ibn Fāris, 1979, Vol. 5, p. 89). The basic verb qāma (قام) means "to stand," "to rise," or "to be upright."

From this core meaning, the root extends to related ideas. Something that stands is straight. Something straight has been corrected. Something evaluated is measured against a standard of correctness. This is why the root covers both correction and valuation.

2.2 The Verb Qawwama (قَوَّمَ) and its two Meanings

The verb qawwama (قَوَّمَ) comes from the root by doubling the middle letter. In classical Arabic, it has two distinct meanings.

First meaning: straightening or correcting

Here qawwama means to straighten something crooked or correct something wrong. Ibn Manzūr (n.d., Vol. 12, p. 489) gives the example qawwama al-‘ūda (قَوَّمَ العود), "he straightened the crooked stick." Al-Fīrūzābādī (n.d., Vol. 4, p. 213) defines it as "to make something straight after it was crooked." Al-Zabīdī (n.d., Vol. 7, p. 343) adds that it implies returning something to its original, correct state.

Second meaning: determining value or price

Here qawwama means to assign a value or price. Ibn Manzūr (n.d., Vol. 12, p. 489) gives qawwama al-matā‘a (قَوَّمَ المتاع), "he determined the value of the goods." Al-Fīrūzābādī (n.d., Vol. 4, p. 213) says it means "to set a known price." Al-Zabīdī (n.d., Vol. 7, p. 343) notes it is synonymous with sa‘‘ara (سَعَّرَ), "to set a price."

Importantly, these are not two different verbs. They are two meanings of the same verb, and context tells you which is intended. If the object is a crooked stick, it means "straighten." If it is goods for sale, it means "value." This contextual disambiguation is perfectly sufficient. No separate verb is needed.

2.3 The Noun Taqwīm (تَقْوِيم)

The noun taqwīm (تَقْوِيم) inherits both meanings from the verb.

In the corrective sense, it means straightening or correcting. For physical objects: taqwīm al-‘ūd (تَقْوِيم العود), "straightening the stick." For abstract things: taqwīm al-khaṭa‘ (تَقْوِيم الخطأ), "correcting an error."

In the evaluative sense, it means determining value. For goods: taqwīm al-baḍā‘i‘ (تَقْوِيم البضائع), "valuation of goods." For work: taqwīm al-‘amal (تَقْوِيم العمل), "evaluation of work."

This dual meaning is not a flaw. It reflects a deep conceptual link between straightness and

value. What is straight is good, and what is good has value. The same root gives us *mustaqīm* (straight, upright) and *qīmah* (value, worth). The Qur'ānic phrase *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight path) carries both literal and moral meanings.

2.4 The Noun *Qīmah* (قيمة)

The noun *qīmah* (قيمة) also comes from the same root. It means value, worth, or price. Ibn Manzūr (n.d., Vol. 12, p. 489) defines it as "the amount for which something is valued." Al-Fīrūzābādī (n.d., Vol. 4, p. 213) defines it as "what something is appraised at in terms of worth."

In classical Arabic, *qīmah* implies intrinsic or fair value, as opposed to *thaman*, the actual price paid in a transaction, which may be higher or lower ('Abd al-Tawwāb, 1999, p. 212).

2.5 No *Qayyama* in Classical Sources

Despite the productivity of the root, the verb *qayyama* (قَيَّمَ) with a *yā'* (ي) as the middle letter does not appear in any classical dictionary. I searched *Lisān al-ʿArab*, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, *Tāj al-ʿArūs*, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, and *Al-ʿUbāb al-Zākhir*. None of them have *qayyama* or *taqyīm*.

Professor al-Khazaʿī (2019, p. 156) puts it clearly:

"If we search for the root *q-y-m* in *Lisān al-ʿArab*, we will not find it, because it is a root that the Arabs did not use. Rather, we find all the derivations of *q-w-m* under the root *q-w-m*. As for *muqayyim* and *taqyīm*, they are incorrect usages without exception. The correct forms are *muqawwim* and *taqwīm*."

3. The Emergence of *Taqyīm* (تقييم) in Modern Arabic

3.1 First Appearance in Modern Dictionaries

Taqyīm first appears in a major dictionary in *Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ* (*Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyya*, 2004, p. 765), published by the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo. The dictionary defines *qayyama* as "to determine the value of something" and lists *taqyīm* as its verbal noun. It notes that this entry was added based on a decision of the academy. So *taqyīm* was not discovered in classical texts; it was approved as a modern coinage.

Later dictionaries like *Muʿjam al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah al-Muʿāshirah* (al-Ghalāyīnī, 2008, p. 568) also include it, presenting it as part of the contemporary lexicon.

3.2 The Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo's Decision:

In its sixty-fourth session in 2002, the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo approved *qayyama* in the sense of determining value (*Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyya*, 2004, p. 765, footnote). The decision was based on a recommendation from the Committee on Computers and Scientific Terminology.

The Academy's reasoning was practical. Modern Arabic needed a term for evaluation, assessment, and appraisal in educational, administrative, and technical contexts. While *taqwīm*

could do the job, its dual meaning seemed potentially ambiguous.

But this study argues that the ambiguity is not real. Context always disambiguates. When an educator says taqwīm al-ṭullāb (student evaluation), no one thinks it means "straightening the students." When a merchant says taqwīm al-baḍā' i' (valuation of goods), no one thinks it means "straightening the goods." The meaning is always clear.

So taqyīm was unnecessary. It duplicates a word that already worked perfectly.

3.3 How Taqyīm (تقييم) is Used Today:

Despite these arguments, taqyīm is now common in:

- Education: taqyīm al-ṭullāb (student assessment), taqyīm al-'adā' (performance evaluation)
- Administration: employee evaluation, project assessment
- Economics: asset valuation, risk assessment
- Translation: as a translation of English evaluation, assessment, appraisal

In all these contexts, taqwīm would work just as well and would be more faithful to classical Arabic. The spread of taqyīm reflects foreign influence, not a real need.

3.4 Two Hypotheses

Two hypotheses could explain taqyīm.

Hypothesis One: Accidental omission. Maybe taqyīm was used in classical Arabic but all the dictionaries missed it. This is unlikely. Taqyīm is a regular derivation from a common root. If it had been used, it would appear in some text and would have been recorded. The classical dictionaries are very thorough.

Hypothesis Two: Modern Coinage (the correct hypothesis). Taqyīm entered Arabic through translation from European languages. This fits the timing (late 19th or early 20th century, when translation from European languages was intensive). It also fits the need (European educational and administrative systems created a need for a specialized term) and the Academy's 2002 decision shows it was a conscious coinage, not a rediscovery.

The evidence strongly supports the second hypothesis. Taqyīm is a modern term from foreign influence. Its legitimacy comes from usage and from the Academy's authority, not from classical Arabic. But this study argues that the Academy's decision was a mistake.

4. Componential Analysis of Taqwīm (تقويم) and Taqyīm (تقييم):

4.1 Semantic Features

To distinguish the two terms precisely, I use componential analysis, breaking each word's meaning into semantic features (Cruse, 1986, p. 90; Nida, 1975, p. 32; Leech, 1981, p. 89).

Taqwīm (corrective sense):

- [+process], [+correction], [+removal of deviation], [+physical or abstract], [+rectification]

Taqwīm (evaluative sense):

- [+process], [+valuation], [+measurement], [+abstract], [+contextually disambiguated]

Taqyīm:

- [+process], [+valuation], [+measurement], [+abstract], [-classical attestation], [+neologism]

4.2 Comparison Table

Semantic Feature	Taqwīm (Corrective)	Taqwīm (Evaluative)	Taqyīm
Process	+	+	+
Correction	+	-	-
Removal of deviation	+	-	-
Valuation	-	+	+
Measurement	-	+	+
Abstract application	+	+	+
Physical application	+	-	-
Classical attestation	+	+	-
Neologism	-	-	+

4.3 Key Distinctions:

Three key differences emerge, First, taqwīm has [+correction] in its primary sense. Taqyīm does not. So taqwīm implies making something right, while taqyīm only implies determining its value.

Second, taqwīm can apply to physical objects (like a crooked stick). Taqyīm applies only to abstract things. You cannot taqyīm a stick; you can only taqwīm it (straighten it).

Third, taqwīm is found in all classical dictionaries. Taqyīm is not. This is the most important difference for this study's argument.

5. Why Taqwīm(تقويم) is Enough and Taqyīm is Not Needed

5.1 The Classical Evidence

The strongest argument against taqyīm is that classical Arabic did not have it. The Arabs did not use this form. They had qawwama and taqwīm, which did both jobs perfectly well. As Professor al-Khaza'ī (2019, p. 156) says, "The correct forms are muqawwim and taqwīm. This is what the Arabs used."

When a language academy introduces a form the Arabs did not use, it is not enriching the language. It is changing it. And when the reason is "making things easier for learners," that is a weak reason. Learners can understand that taqwīm has two related meanings, distinguished by context. They do not need a separate word.

5.2 Context Always Makes the Meaning Clear

Look at these examples:

- taqwīm al-‘ūd (تقويم العود) – "straightening the stick" (corrective)
- taqwīm al-baḍā' i' (تقويم البضائع) – "valuation of goods" (evaluative)
- taqwīm al-khaṭa' (تقويم الخطأ) – "correction of an error" (corrective)
- taqwīm al-‘amal (تقويم العمل) – "evaluation of work" (evaluative)

No native speaker would misunderstand taqwīm al-‘ūd as "valuation of the stick" or taqwīm al-baḍā' i' as "straightening the goods." Context makes the meaning clear.

So the claim that taqwīm is ambiguous is false. It is no more ambiguous than English run (which can mean to move quickly, operate a machine, manage an organization, or flow) or Arabic ‘ayn (which can mean eye, spring, spy, or the letter ع). Languages use polysemous words all the time without confusion.

5.3 An Unnecessary Neologism

Taqyīm duplicates a function that taqwīm already performs. Adding a new word for an existing concept does not enrich the language; it just adds clutter. To make things worse, it creates confusion where none existed before. Translators and writers now have to choose between two words that are often used interchangeably. They are unsure which to use. This confusion comes directly from the Academy's decision.

If the Academy had simply affirmed that taqwīm works for both meanings and that context disambiguates, no confusion would have arisen.

5.4 Foreign Influence

The introduction of taqyīm shows the influence of foreign languages on Arabic translation. English distinguishes between correction (or straightening) and evaluation (or assessment). Arabic does not need to make this distinction, but translators influenced by English thought it should.

This happens often. Translators import English conceptual distinctions into Arabic. They think so because English has two words, Arabic should have two words. But languages do not need to match each other one-to-one. Arabic has its own structure, its own semantic fields, its own way of organizing meaning.

One of Arabic's strengths is expressing related concepts through the same root is one of the strengths of Arabic language, the link between (straightness) and (value) is not a weakness to be eliminated. It is a strength to be celebrated. Taqwīm reminds us that what is straight is good, and what is good has value. Taqyīm breaks that link. It diminishes the language.

6. Conclusion:

This study set out to examine two Arabic terms derived from the same root *q-w-m*: taqwīm and taqyīm. The investigation was guided by four research questions concerning the origin, usage, semantic features, and sufficiency of each term.

The findings confirm that taqwīm is deeply rooted in classical Arabic. It appears in all major lexicons with two clearly attested meanings: straightening or correcting something physically or abstractly, and determining value or price. The verb qawwama and its nominal form taqwīm served the Arab grammarians, lexicographers, and jurists perfectly for centuries without any recorded confusion. Context alone was, and still is, sufficient to disambiguate the intended meaning. In contrast, taqyīm has no attestation in any classical dictionary. It first appeared in modern lexicons only after the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo officially approved it in 2002. The evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that taqyīm is a modern coinage influenced by translation from European languages rather than an authentic Arabic word accidentally omitted from heritage sources. The componential analysis carried out in this study highlights three key distinctions between the two terms. First, taqwīm carries the semantic feature [+correction], while taqyīm does not. Second, taqwīm can apply to physical objects (e.g., a crooked stick), whereas taqyīm is restricted to abstract contexts. Third, taqwīm enjoys full classical attestation, while taqyīm is marked as a neologism. These differences are not merely historical; they reflect a real conceptual narrowing in the modern term. The central argument of this study is that taqwīm alone is sufficient for both corrective and evaluative meanings. Polysemy is a natural feature of language, and Arabic, like English or any other language, routinely uses single words with multiple related senses without confusion. The introduction of taqyīm was therefore unnecessary. It adds nothing new to the language except redundancy and, worse, potential confusion for translators and writers who now face an artificial choice between two near-synonyms.

The practical implications of this finding are straightforward. Writers and translators who wish to adhere to classical Arabic norms should use taqwīm for both correction and valuation. Context will always clarify the intended sense. There is no need to resort to the neologism taqyīm, unless one is required by institutional style guides that have uncritically adopted the Academy's decision.

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