

## Context of Situation and the Specificity of the Quranic Text

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### الملخص

يتناول هذا المقال نوعا من أهم أنواع السياق وهو سياق الحال من جهة مفهومه وعناصره وعلاقته بالقرآن الكريم وذلك ببيان خصوصيات النص القرآني كخصوصية المتكلم والمخاطب واستحضار المقام والقارئ المصاحبة لنزوله وزمانه ومكانه ثم عرّج البحث على محاذير توظيف سياق الحال ، والتوظيف المشبوه له بمسمى تاريخانية النص وتاريخية صاحب النص.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** السياق ، الحال ، القرآن ، النص ، التاريخانية ، الهيرمينوطيقا .

### Abstract

This article deals with one of the most important types of context, which is the context of situation, as regards its meaning, components and its relationship with the Holy Quran. This is achieved through revealing the specificities of the Quranic text, like the specificity of the speaker and the addressee and taking into account the circumstance and the indications that are linked to [the Quranic] revelation, its time and place .

This study deals then with what is wrong in using context of situation and its equivocal use which is called historicism of the text and historicity of the author of the text .

**Keywords:** Context, situation, The Quran, text, historicism, hermeneutics

### Résumé:

Cet article traite de l'un des types de contexte les plus importants, qui est le contexte de la situation, en ce qui concerne sa signification, ses composantes et sa relation avec le Saint Coran. Ceci est réalisé en révélant les spécificités du texte coranique, comme la spécificité du locuteur et du destinataire et en tenant compte de la circonstance et des indications qui sont liées à la révélation [coranique], à son époque et à son lieu.

Cette étude traite ensuite de ce qui ne va pas en utilisant le contexte de situation et son utilisation équivoque qui s'appelle l'historicisme du texte et l'historicité de l'auteur du texte.

**Mots clés:** Contexte , situation , Le Coran, texte, historicisme, herméneutique

### Introduction:

Researchers divide usually context into different types, adopting the fourfold division of **K. Ammer** which is<sup>1</sup>:

- Linguistic context
- Emotional context
- Situational context
- Cultural context

For the sake of brevity, we will not use the previous division and we will instead adopt a twofold division of context: the linguistic context and the context of situation. In fact, the term "situation" encompasses the state of the speaker, the addressee, the discourse and the event which is the cause of the discourse. It includes also the environment of the discourse and that is what is called situational context. On the other hand, the term "situation" covers the psychological and emotional situations of the elements of discourse and covers also the cultural situation in which the discourse occurred.

Before going into details as regards context of situation and the specificity of the Quranic text, we will refer briefly to its counterpart: the linguistic context, as follows:

### Linguistic Context

It is all that is related to the internal aspect of language as regards its textual construction and what it contains of indications with functional effects that reveal the intended meaning<sup>2</sup>. Or, it is “the set of discursive or verbal elements of the linguistic event”<sup>3</sup>. Through them, construction and composition are achieved if the place of the word in that composition is taken into account. This meaning is extended to go beyond real words and sentences, prior or subsequent, to mean: “the whole part of it and the whole book (the text)”<sup>4</sup>. Most of those who gave examples when they described linguistic context, gave importance to its effect on the significance of the word. However, its effect extends into a semantic area that includes even omitted things by guessing how they would be in a manner congruent with their position in the text. That is what is called in the theory of context: contextual completeness, which consists of: “a sentence which is incomplete in itself, but complete if context is taken into account”<sup>5</sup>. It also explains the phenomenon of contextual variant, which is the change that occurs at the level of the morphological structure of the word according to its position in the context<sup>6</sup>, in addition to the change that is due to the semantic shift, like shift by imagery or interpretation. That is why I preferred the previous definition as it contains these meanings.

Linguistic context contains several elements which are: **the phonetic context, lexical context, syntactic context, stylistic context and textual context.**

### Context of situation

The meaning of context in the contemporary language course, exceeds the limited notion which consists of a series of sounds and words “to include, in addition to this, the environmental and psychological spaces that surround the speaker and the hearer”<sup>7</sup>. The context of position, is a set of the elements that constitute the verbal position<sup>8</sup> and it completes the linguistic context. In fact, without it, we cannot conceive the intended meaning with a clear-cut certainty. Ar-Râzi said: “Know that we cannot infer certainty from these verbal terms unless they are linked to indications that show certainty, whether these indications are apparent or reported to us consecutively”<sup>9</sup>.

**Elements of the context of situation:** context of situation is constituted of elements that have an impact on the meaning of the text, they are:

**1. The speaker:** it is the center of the communicative operation, and his intention is the axis of the semantic research. That is the principle, far from the sophistries that call to the death of the author in analyzing literary texts. For this reason, taking him (the speaker) into consideration, his characteristics, emotions and habits in speaking, is something that has an impact on understanding the meaning of his speech. It falls under this element some considerations among which:

- Considering the attributes of the speaker: whether they are attributes that denote completeness, in such case we should exalt his speech from what is unbecoming, or attributes of imperfection. Among these attributes when speaking: anger and satisfaction, happiness and sadness, or what is known about the person such as attributes of truthfulness or falsehood, or attributes related to discourse such as signs and gestures that make interpret his speech as being serious or ironic and so on.

- Considering the habits of the speaker: in that his speech is interpreted according to his habits, for instance, Ibn `Ashûr’s saying when he interpreted Allah’s –Exalted be He- word : “**Verily, those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you (O Muhammad Peace be upon him ) warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe.**” [Al-Baqara (The Cow) v: 6]. “Among exegetes, there are some who consider that “those who disbelieve” is applicable to Jew leaders..., as the surah is revealed in Medina, and there were no other disbelievers there except Jews and hypocrites, but this is far from the manner [of expression] that is customary to the Quran and turning away from context, which aim is to show those who are deprived from the guidance of the Quran as opposed to those who are guided by it. However that may be, the meaning for all (exegetes) is that a specific group of disbelievers are not expected to have faith, those on who Allah set a seal on their hearts and on their hearings”<sup>10</sup>.

- Considering the intent of the speaker: speech should be formulated to be in accordance with the speaker's intent. Context, on the other hand, is an indication to the intent of the speaker. If his intent is known from a reliable way, we should direct the meaning (of his speech) to his intention if it is equivocal, and it is from this entrance that those who intend evil to the Quran, by such allegations as the death of the author or other allegations. They do so, in order to avert the meaning into what their whims and desires require, taking as a starting point, these equivocal aspects. Ash-Shâtibi said about Quran: "Questions related to tricks are examples of this sense here, because one who understands the bottom of the message addressed to him, is not considered as someone who uses trickery as regards Allah's rulings until he alters and changes them, and the one who doesn't go beyond the apparent meaning without paying attention to the intended meaning enters those remote labyrinths. Questions of heretics are also examples, those who follow of the Book, that which is equivocal, seeking by this discord and searching for its hidden meaning"<sup>11</sup>.

**2. The addressee**: it is the second pillar of linguistic communication pillars, so if "the speaker is the one who produces words and constructs them, the hearer analyses and dissociates them and ascribes them to their abstract meanings"<sup>12</sup>. He is addressed speech according to what is known of his customs in receiving it, and it is not addressed to him until it is known that he has customary attributes and linguistic habits that contribute to understand the intended meaning, as in Allah's saying: "**and has made for you garments which protect you from the heat**" [*An-Nahl* (The Bees), v: 81]. It means [which protect you] also from cold. Only heat is mentioned because the speech was addressed to Arabs, and their countries are hot. Besides, protecting themselves from the heat is more important because it is more intense for them than cold"<sup>13</sup>, the meaning is thus understood according to a supposed added construction, starting from the usually intended meaning by the discourse".

**3. The occasion**: "it is the situation in which the speech is uttered, like when it is uttered in an occasion of sadness and weeping, happiness and joviality or in an occasion of dignifying or dispraising or other "<sup>14</sup>. It is through it that the meaning is understood, as to consider the speech in the proper sense or the figurative sense, as being serious or ironic, as in Allah's -Exalted be He- saying: "**Then pour over his head from the torment of scalding water**, [It will be said], "**Taste! Indeed, you are the honored, the noble!**" [*Ad-Dukhân* (The Smoke), v: 48-49].

**4. The verbal position**: it is the reason for speaking or its occasion, and its impact on the receiver (hearer).

**5. The spoken about and the topic of speech and its field<sup>15</sup>**: it is through it that is explained why speech is built in a certain specific manner, or it is preponderant to deviate from the apparent meaning into the meaning that fits the one spoken about, as in Allah's saying: "**Say, "Call upon Allah or call upon the Most Merciful. Whichever [name] you call - to Him belong the best names."**" [*Al-Isrâ'* (The Night Journey), v: 110]. So, the meaning of "call on" here 'Ud'u" is not invocation, but calling by the name, like when we say: his name is Zayd, and we call him Al-Ameer. Here, there is some omitted words, it would be: "Say "Call Him Allah or call Him *Ar-Rahmân* (The Most Merciful), by whichever [name] you call Him, to Him belong the best names"<sup>16</sup>. Knowing this is related to knowing the attribute of the one it is spoken about which is the unicity and the topic of the speech, which consists of the polytheists when they said we do not know who is *Ar-Rahmân* (The Most Merciful).

## 6. Time and place:

**a- Time**: the time of the text is considered among the most important elements of context that indicate the meaning. Especially, written texts, since it is through it that we know the verbal position and the elements of speech. It is also a proof as regards the chronological position of the text in comparison with the texts that are related to it; whether they are prior or subsequent to it. The aim is to exploit them semantically as regards confirmation, specification, abrogation<sup>17</sup> or other semantic markers, as the subsequent is built upon the prior. Ash-Shâtibi said: "The surahs revealed in Medina should be understood in the light of those revealed in Mecca; this is also applicable to Meccan surahs among them and surahs revealed in Medina among them, according to their revelation in chronological order. Otherwise, it will not be correct. The evidence for this is that the meaning of the discourse in Medina in general is built upon that of Mecca, as each subsequent [surah or verse] is built upon the prior

one(s). This is evidenced by observation [induction], like when something vague is clarified, something general specified, something absolute restricted or when giving details to something undetailed or completing something which is still lacking<sup>18</sup>.

By time also, we discover the stylistic characteristics, the lexical meanings, and the habitual elements of discourse whether in metonymy, metaphors or declensions.

**b- Place:** the specificity of the place affects speech as regards style, topics, choosing evidence when needed, as it is evident also that customs and usages impact on both the speaker and the addressee<sup>19</sup>, in addition to the difference in dialects with the difference of places and the difference of some lexical meanings and phonetic substitutions or others.

### Specificity of the Quranic text

The specificity of the Quranic text becomes apparent when we consider the specificity of the speaker and the circumstances of Revelation, then the specificity of the temporal significance as follows:

**1. Specificity of the speaker:** it is represented by taking into account:

#### - Knowledge of Allah's Names and Attributes:

Allah's words should be understood only in the light of what His perfect attributes require, that are derived from His Names and Attributes as He described Himself or as the Prophet –peace and blessing be upon him- described Him. Ibn Al-Qayyim said: “No one has the right to understand Allah's words and those of His Messenger according to what is acceptable by language or the conventions of some poets, speakers, writers or common people, unless it does not contradict what is known of Allah's –Exalted be He- attributes and how He is, and what is established concerning how He described Himself and how He is described by His Prophet<sup>20</sup>”.

#### - Knowledge of His meaning from a separate proof:

This is achieved by resorting to the proofs that demonstrate what Allah meant through the Sunna of the Prophet<sup>21</sup>, in accordance with Allah's saying: “**And We revealed to you the message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them and that they might give thought**”. [*An-Nahl* (The Bees), v: 44].

#### - Knowledge of how He usually speaks:

This is the stylistic context specific to the Quranic text, Ibn Ashûr said: “Revelation (the Quran) contains conventions and customs (of expressing)<sup>22</sup>”, and taking them into account has a great impact on attaining the objectives of the Quran.

**2. Specificity of the circumstances of the Revelation:** the term revelation is used here deliberately in order to distinguish between the Quran and other speeches of humans; as these circumstances go along with the Quran, but do not have any influence on it<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, this accompaniment is intended for certain aims, among them, what is in Allah's saying: “**And those who disbelieve say, "Why was the Qur'an not revealed to him all at once?" Thus [it is] that We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have spaced it distinctly.**” [*Al-Furqân* (The Criterion), v: 32]. These circumstances could be taken in terms of meaning, to apprehend the intended meaning as we will show it later on.

**3. Specificity of the temporal signification:** it is the subordination of the meaning whether verbal or stylistic to the time of Revelation. Ibn Taymiyya said: “Among the main reasons of errors in understanding Allah's Words and those of His Messenger is the fact that a person who grew up accustomed to some unprecedented meanings, so he would interpret Allah's words with these new meanings that he got accustomed to<sup>24</sup>”.

#### The wrongs of its use (context of situation)

Before applying context of situation on the Quranic text, it should be notified of two essential questions related to it:

#### 1-Context of situation and historicism of the text:

Historicism of a text is an epistemic trend that deals with how ideas emerged in their cultural, social and historical modes, that is to say, “The background of emerging ideas, their conditions that framed them in terms of their meaning and their deductive construction which is characteristic to

them, and their representations at the level of the epistemic income for each term"<sup>25</sup>. However, there is a subtle distinction between a historicism which is considered as a means to understand the conditions of constructing ideas in a given historical period, and a historicism which is "a method which aim is to bring about an epistemic breaking off with the historical legacy through developing the feeling of development and change"<sup>26</sup>. It is this meaning that is adopted by the claimers of the historicity of the Quranic text, taking from the Islamic heritage itself, what to support their claims with, like the question of abrogation, causes and circumstances of the Revelation, ways of reciting the Quran and others, justifying this tendency by evolution (development) and change as aforesaid.

As to the context of situation, it seems at first sight identical to this meaning, as it is "the set of non-linguistic elements that are related to speech outward of it. It involves the speaker, the addressee, the environment of speech, all the conditions surrounding it and the spatial and temporal relations in which it occurs"<sup>27</sup>.

However, the difference between them is important, as the historicist method deals with texts in terms of the emergence of the ideas that they contain. As to the context of situation, it discloses the meaning based on the circumstances that are concomitant to the text; as the theory of context is basically a semantic theory, it examines the meaning as it is intended by the one who expressed it, using non-linguistic elements. This difference is apparent when it concerns the Holy Quran, because Allah –Exalted be He- is the Creator of time, place, circumstances and conditions, exalted be He is over the influence of creatures.

## 2- Context of situation and historicity of the author of the text:

The proponents of this trend think that "the temporal and spatial ranges that separate the text and the reader has become an obstacle to understand the text"<sup>28</sup>, and this understanding, even if we know the circumstances of its production, the feature of relativity remains linked to it. So the issue of the origin of meaning whether it is the speaker, the text or the reader emerged, and "the answer was clear-cut in the past, that it is from the speaker, or to be more correct, from the intent of the speaker to convey a certain message. However, the fundamental change that prevailed in the study of artistic texts, is the essential role that the reader is playing as regards text reception, in the sense that we may say that is the reader who produces the text"<sup>29</sup>, so that for the same text, there are many texts and many readers, with omitting completely the author of the text and this is what is known by the death of the author which is advocated by hermeneutics. It has ambitions beyond the abstract interpretation of texts, because interpretation within this method "which aim is deconstruction, that consists of breaking the link between the text and its author and between meaning and its potentialities "<sup>30</sup> in order to reach a state of emancipation from the values contained in texts, as "one of the goals of–i.e. hermeneutics- is the distance in regard to meaning itself, that is to say, the value system on which the text is established"<sup>31</sup>, so that the view to all what is sacred will change, Arkoun said: " It is fundamental that one looks at the Quran not as a speech coming from above, but as a real event exactly like any event in physics or biology"<sup>32</sup>.

When on the other hand, context of situation **takes into account** Allah's –Exalted be He- perfect Attributes, so that the meaning will be oriented according to what these attributes require, **keeping in view** the state of the receiver, as it is the receiver who interacted with the Quranic text in terms of understanding and putting into practice. More than that, it is revealed in accordance with his (the receiver) language, circumstances, affairs and issues. Though these circumstances are specific to a certain people, yet they constitute general bases for all humanity. Moreover, they constitute landmarks concerning the objectives of the Legislator (Allah). This is the only context of situation that should be taken into account to understand what the speaker intended by his speech.

## Conclusion:

Through what preceded, we can reach the following results:

- Context of situation is the set of elements that constitute the speech position.
- The elements of the context of situation are:
  - The speaker as regards his characteristics, habits and intent.
  - The addressee, as he is a participant in the process of the linguistic communication. Moreover, the speech is addressed to him, taking into account his usage in receiving (the message).
  - The occasion, such as an occasion of sadness, happiness, irony...

- The verbal position, which is the reason for speaking or its occasion and the indications that are linked to speech as regards the Holy Quran.
- The spoken about and the topic of speech
- Time and place

-The Quranic text has specificities that should be taken into consideration when interpreting it, which consist of the specificity of the speaker (Allah), the circumstances of Revelation and the temporal signification.

-One should be careful as to the doubtful use of the context of situation in understanding the meanings if the Quran under the cover of what is called historicism of the text and historicity of the author of the text.

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