



Context and Its Role in Shaping Signification, Constructing Meaning, and Its Interpretation: An Analytical Approach in the Light of Arabic Rhetoric and Pragmatic Linguistics

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Abstract:

Context is the cornerstone of pragmatic studies and one of its fundamental pillars. It is also an indispensable mechanism in the analysis of discourse and the interpretation of various texts because discourse that is capable of being understood and interpreted is discourse that can be situated within its context, in the previously specified sense. Very often, the recipient is confronted with a discourse that is extremely simple in terms of its language, yet it may contain indicators (such as pronouns or adverbials) that render it ambiguous and incomprehensible without an understanding of its context. Consequently, context plays an effective role in the communicative function of discourse and, fundamentally, in its coherence. Discourse could not possess meaning without familiarity with its context. In other words, all speech events that occur within a given context are, in reality, dependent upon the temporal and spatial circumstances in which they arose.

Interest in context among Arab scholars is as old as Arabic linguistic studies themselves. It attracted the attention of linguists, rhetoricians, grammarians, exegetes, scholars of legal theory, and others, on the basis that context is a shared concern among many disciplines. Since it constitutes an important component in uncovering ambiguous meanings and determining significations within linguistic structures, context contributed significantly to changing the course of Arabic linguistic studies. In the modern era, scholars recognized the importance of context and repeatedly emphasized its effective role in uncovering meaning and significance. They succeeded in establishing it as an independent semantic theory in its own right. Furthermore, the theory of context—when applied wisely—represents the cornerstone of semantics and has indeed led to a number of remarkable results in this regard. For example, it brought about a revolution in methods of literary analysis, enabled the historical study of meaning to rest upon more stable modern foundations, and provided us with modern technical tools. Over time, studies concerned with context developed further, and context became the focal point of linguistic studies. Its prominence spread among major linguistic schools such as structuralism, functionalism, systemic linguistics, distributionalism, and transformational-generative linguistics, among others. Context was never the product of chance; rather, it was



the outcome of rigorous work and continuous research. It is also rooted in previous linguistic experiences, drawing its existence from diverse studies and references. Even if these studies initially appeared independent from one another, they ultimately converged into a complete and autonomous semantic theory known as the Contextual Theory.

With the emergence of the pragmatic approach, context began to be discussed as an independent field of pragmatic inquiry. It became one of the most prominent elements of pragmatic discourse and an inseparable part of text interpretation. This is because context is connected to its position within the linguistic structures that constitute the sentence, as well as to circumstances, situations, events, settings, and conditions. Therefore, pragmatics does not merely focus on language use between speakers and recipients; rather, it investigates how language is employed within social contexts. Context in pragmatic and linguistic studies functions as a bridge linking structures and meanings on the one hand and the participants in discourse on the other. This process is governed by both speaker and recipient. On this basis, context is regarded as a common element shared by all pragmatic components that govern pragmatic discourse.

This study, entitled **“Context and Its Effect on the Formation of Signification, the Construction of Meaning, and Its Interpretation: An Analytical Approach in Light of Arabic Rhetoric and Pragmatic Linguistics,”** aims to highlight the central position occupied by context in the production of signification and the guidance of interpretation, considering it the foundation of pragmatic studies and one of their most important methodological pillars. Accordingly, it seeks to reveal the points of intersection and integration between the achievements of Arabic rhetoric and contemporary pragmatic conceptions in their treatment of context, and to demonstrate their joint contribution to establishing a semantic vision in which meaning is viewed as an interactive product shaped by the communicative situation and conditions of use.

Based on the foregoing, this research seeks to address a number of central issues and questions, including:

- Where is context situated within both the Arabic rhetorical tradition and contemporary pragmatic linguistics?
- How has context contributed to the construction of meaning and the guidance of interpretation within discourse?
- What are the points of convergence and divergence between the concept of **“maqām”** (communicative situation) in rhetoric and the concept of **“context”** in modern pragmatic studies?
- To what extent can Arabic rhetoric be regarded as an early precursor of the pragmatic conception of context?
- How do the speaker and the recipient interact within the contextual framework to produce meaning and achieve communication?
- What are the limits of context, and where does it begin and end in the interpretive process?



Introduction

The concept of context is one of the central concepts that has brought about a qualitative transformation in the course of linguistic studies, both ancient and modern. If we trace the path of its intellectual formation and the development of its presence in linguistic studies, we find that its roots extend deep into ancient rhetorical and critical thought, which paid considerable attention to the requirements of the situation and embraced the principle that **“every situation has its appropriate discourse.”** Consequently, the communicative situation was made a governing factor in directing discourse and determining its significance.

Arab rhetoricians realized that meaning cannot be separated from the conditions of use and that understanding discourse depends upon grasping the circumstances surrounding it. This awareness was reflected in their discussions of appropriateness, contextual clues, circumstance, consideration of the addressee, and contexts of utterance. Such a perspective demonstrates an early recognition of the impact of circumstances and communicative situations on directing meaning and determining significance. This conception intersects with contemporary pragmatic approaches, which expanded the horizon of linguistic inquiry by shifting attention from the limits of the **“closed structure”** to the broader sphere of **“living usage,”** where meaning becomes the outcome of interaction between linguistic structures and the conditions governing the production and reception of discourse.

This intellectual continuity has made context the focus of scholarly attention across different orientations, as it constitutes a methodological tool capable of unlocking textual complexities, uncovering speakers’ intentions, and revealing implicit significations shaped by the communicative situation and its circumstances. Context is thus understood as the product of a complex interaction between the utterance and the conditions of its production, and between linguistic structure and the requirements of use.

On this basis, it can be argued that the pragmatic conception of context finds early precursors in Arabic rhetoric, which helped pave the way for the development of a modern perspective that regards meaning as a pragmatic product emerging from interaction between speaker and recipient within a communicative situation. Consequently, context has become an indispensable interpretive framework for understanding and interpreting discourse, providing the means to uncover implicit significations and elicit meanings concealed behind the apparent structures of language. Discourse cannot be fully understood unless it is placed within the network of relationships that connect it to its time, place, participants, and purposes.

Building on this perspective, the present paper, entitled **“The Effectiveness of Context in the Construction and Interpretation of Meaning: A Reading in Light of Arabic Rhetorical Achievement and Contemporary Pragmatic Linguistics,”** seeks to highlight the central role played by context in the production of signification and the guidance of interpretation. It does so by examining the points of intersection and complementarity between the Arabic rhetorical conception and modern pragmatic approaches and by demonstrating their contribution to



establishing a semantic vision that views meaning as an interactive construct shaped by the communicative situation and the conditions of use.

The paper also aims to reread rhetorical concepts related to context in light of contemporary pragmatic achievements, thereby revealing the intellectual continuity between classical and modern thought and affirming the vitality of the Arabic heritage in anticipating many issues that have today become central concerns of linguistic inquiry.

Accordingly, this study belongs to those approaches that maintain that discourse can only be understood through consideration of the network of contextual relationships organizing its elements and that meaning is nothing more than an interpretive process formed through interaction between language and its users, and between the text and its pragmatic environment. Based on the foregoing, this paper raises the following central question:

To what extent does context contribute to the construction of meaning and the guidance of discourse interpretation, and how do its conceptions intersect between Arabic rhetorical achievement and contemporary pragmatic linguistics in explaining the relationship between language and its use?

1. Context: Origin and Development

Interest in context among Arab scholars is as old as Arabic linguistic studies themselves. It attracted the attention of linguists, rhetoricians, grammarians, exegetes, scholars of legal theory, and others because context represents a shared concern among numerous disciplines. Given its importance in uncovering ambiguous meanings and determining significations within linguistic structures, context contributed significantly to transforming the course of Arabic linguistic studies.

In the modern era, scholars recognized the importance of context and repeatedly emphasized its effective role in uncovering meaning and significance. They succeeded in establishing it as an autonomous semantic theory. Thus, the **Theory of Context** became “the cornerstone of semantics and has indeed led to a number of remarkable results in this regard. For example, it has brought about a revolution in methods of literary analysis and enabled the historical study of meaning to rest upon more stable modern foundations” ().

Over time, studies concerned with context continued to develop. Context became the focal point of linguistic inquiry and gained prominence among major linguistic schools, including structuralism, functionalism, systemic linguistics, distributionalism, and transformational-generative linguistics. Context was never the result of coincidence; rather, it emerged through rigorous work and continuous research. It is also rooted in previous linguistic experiences, deriving its existence from diverse studies and references. Even though these studies initially appeared independent of one another, they ultimately converged into a complete and autonomous semantic theory known as the **Contextual Theory**.

2. Context in Western and Arab Pragmatic Studies

2.1 Context and Interpretation

Context is one of the most central concepts in pragmatic studies, for discourse cannot be approached or its significations clarified independently of the circumstances and conditions surrounding its production and reception. Pragmatics, as a field concerned with the study of



language in use, is based on the premise that meaning extends beyond the apparent linguistic structure and is formed through a complex interaction between the utterance and its environment, and between the speaker and the recipient, in light of the conditions and situations surrounding the speech act.

From this perspective, context has become a decisive factor in interpreting significance and an operational tool that helps remove ambiguity, guide understanding, and uncover implicit intentions not directly expressed by linguistic structures. Consequently, context has become an inclusive framework within pragmatic studies in which multiple elements intersect and collectively contribute to the construction of meaning and the achievement of communicative effectiveness. This has granted context a central position in discourse analysis and text interpretation because “discourse capable of understanding and interpretation is discourse that can be placed within its context...” ().

Context possesses important characteristics that distinguish it from other pragmatic elements. “The first characteristic of context that must be emphasized is its dynamic quality. Context is not merely a state of utterance but rather a sequence of states of utterance. Furthermore, situations do not remain identical over time; rather, they change. Therefore, every context is a direction in the course of events” ().

In other words, all speech events occurring within a given context are dependent upon the temporal and spatial circumstances in which they arose. For this reason, **John Lyons** (1932–2020) argues that “every actual speech unit is unique in terms of the spatial and temporal framework in which it was spoken or written in a specific place and at a specific time. As long as there exists a recognized system for determining the spatial and temporal location of things, it is, in principle, possible to determine the actual temporal circumstance of any speech event” As a result of the central position that context has occupied in pragmatic studies, pragmatics has been described as a contextual approach, and previously as a situational one, in reference to the close relationship that links meaning to the conditions and circumstances of use. A number of Arab scholars have moved toward highlighting this dimension, emphasizing the contextual nature of pragmatics to the extent that it came to be viewed as a form of contextual linguistics in its very essence.

Within this framework, Ali Ait Ouchan, in his book *Context and the Poetic Text*, proposed translating the term (*Pragmatique*) as *Contextualism (al-Siyāqiyyah)* instead of *Situationalism (al-Maqāmiyyah)*, with the aim of highlighting the fundamental role that context plays in constructing meaning and directing the process of interpretation. This innovative translation reflects an intellectual orientation that places context at the center of pragmatic inquiry and emphasizes that pragmatics, at its core, is a discipline concerned with studying language in relation to its various contexts of use. In this regard, he states: “For others, pragmatics is the science of linguistic use within context; more broadly, it is the use of signs within context. In Max Black’s view, pragmatics should be called *Contextique* (contextualism), which is now more appropriate, and in order to avoid numerous divisions, two fundamental branches of pragmatics will be recognized” ().



The reasons behind Ouchan's use of the term *Contextualism* as an alternative to *Situationalism* and as an equivalent of (*Pragmatique*) may be attributed to the following points:

1. The term *context* is the most appropriate and precise translation of the foreign term, particularly from the perspective of terminological grounding. Moreover, context is broader and more comprehensive than situation (*maqām*), as the latter is merely one of its components and is referred to as the context of situation.
2. Context is a modern linguistic term associated with semantic theory and extends to encompass other theories such as pragmatics, whereas *maqām* is a traditional rhetorical term.
3. Ali Ait Ouchan was influenced by the ideas of Max Black (1909–1988), who repeatedly called for renaming pragmatics as contextualism. Françoise Armengaud confirmed this when discussing the latter group of pragmatics scholars, stating: “As for the last group, they regard pragmatics as the science of linguistic use within context and, more broadly, the use of signs within context. The importance of this latter concept led Max Black to rename pragmatics; in his view, it should be called ‘contextualism’” ().

In light of this new perspective advanced by Max Black, pragmatic linguistics became contextual in its methodology and was able to study language and its uses within communicative contexts. It investigates how language functions as a means of exchanging meanings and as an effective element contributing to influence over others. Furthermore, “the term and concept of context are almost never absent from modern works, to the point that we may confidently say that modern studies are par excellence pragmatic studies, and that modern commentaries are essentially forms of contextual analysis” ().

According to the perspective defended by Ouchan, context is understood as the space within which pragmatic elements are formed and interact with one another, thereby enabling a more precise and coherent understanding of language use in communicative situations in accordance with its living nature in everyday interaction. From this viewpoint, context is an active element that contributes to the production and orientation of meaning, making it one of the procedural mechanisms that combine the legacy of tradition with modern linguistic approaches in the study and interpretation of meaning during communication. Hence its importance in pragmatic analysis, where it is relied upon to uncover the intentions of discourse, probe the meanings of texts, interpret their concepts, and reveal the implicit meanings they contain—meanings that may remain hidden unless read in light of their various contexts. Salah Fadl states: “From a linguistic perspective, context includes only those situational elements that determine the structure of the text and contribute to its interpretation. Thus, pragmatics becomes the science concerned with the relationship between the structure of the text and the elements of the communicative situation associated with it in an organized manner, which is called the context of the text. This concept of pragmatics systematically covers the domain that classical rhetoric referred to as *the requirements of the situation (muqtada al-ḥāl)*, which gave rise to the famous Arabic rhetorical maxim, ‘For every situation there is an appropriate discourse,’ although we can find a clear precedent for it in the writings of Cicero...” ().

2.3. Pragmatics as an Equivalent Term to Contextualism According to Muhammad Enani



Among the scholars who used the term *Contextualism* (*al-Siyāqiyyah*) as an equivalent to (*Pragmatique*) is Dr. Muhammad Enani in his *Dictionary of Modern Literary Terms*. He translated the term (*Pragmatics*) through several equivalents, as reflected in the following statement:

“Pragmatics, contextualism, situationalism (*Pragmatics*): the term refers to the study of language use in various contexts and real-life situations, that is, its scientific use and its relation to those who use it, distinguishing it from the doctrine of internal relations among words (*Syntactics*) and the relation of words to the external world or their meanings (*Semantics*). This definition is based on the studies of Peirce and Charles Morris and has yielded fruitful results in linguistic sciences, enabling Saussure and his followers to distinguish between the various systems of formal rules (in syntax and semantics) and language in its actual daily use (that is, in its pragmatic existence)” ().

According to this conception, pragmatics appears in Muhammad Enani’s view as a form of context through which language is studied in use and within specific contexts and situations. It investigates speaker intentionality and the relationship between speaker and hearer, with context supervising this entire process. Thus, contextualism and pragmatics, in his view, are two sides of the same coin, both studying language from a functional perspective through the examination of language in its actual everyday use. Contextualism does not focus on a single aspect of language; rather, it encompasses all aspects, including those neglected by linguistic studies, especially language in use—that is, the study of language in its pragmatic linguistic existence, apart from structural linguistics, which studies language scientifically and descriptively for its own sake, as an autonomous system independent of its external context and separate from the various systems of formal rules.

2.4. Situation (*Maqām*) and Pragmatics in Contemporary Arab and Western Scholarship

The interest of contemporary Arab researchers in the concept of *maqām* is evident in the work of Narges Badis in her book *Situational Deictics in the Arabic Language*. When discussing the evolution of *maqām* within the pragmatic orientation, she argued that pragmatics highlights “a factor that it believes has been neglected and overlooked in linguistic studies, namely the situation (*maqām*). For it, *maqām* is the sole and genuine interpreter of the meanings embedded in communicative phenomena, to the extent that some have proposed replacing the term pragmatics with contextualism or situationalism (*Contextique*). While semantics concerns itself with meaning isolated from situation, pragmatics studies meanings that depend on situation. Thus, pragmatics is concerned with everything whose ambiguity cannot be resolved except through the situation in which it is used. It therefore studies aspects of meaning that escape semantic theory, since they can only be determined by reference to what lies outside language, namely the situation. Consequently, situational deictics constitute a pragmatic field because they are not independent at the conceptual (*Intensionnel*) level” ().

According to Narges Badis, pragmatics cannot be confined to the production of meaning that the recipient seeks to attain based on the speaker’s intention. Rather, pragmatics can only function as a theory that studies meanings dependent on situation. It is well known that pragmatics studies language within the situation in which it is used in order to arrive at meaning.



Through this study, Narges Badis seeks to establish a new conception of pragmatics, one not commonly adopted among Arab scholars, according to which “situational deictics constitute a pragmatic field whose meaning and reference are determined only at the moment of realization” ().

It should be noted that Oswald Ducrot and Jean-Marie Schaeffer were among the first to advance this idea in the *New Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language (Nouveau Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des Sciences du Langage)*. They state:

“We call the discourse situation the totality of circumstances in which an utterance emerges (whether written or spoken). By this, we mean the physical and social environment in which the utterance takes place, the image that interlocutors form of it, their identities, and the idea each has of the other (including each person’s representation of what the other thinks), as well as the events preceding the utterance, especially the relationships previously existing among the interlocutors and the exchanges of speech within which the utterance itself is embedded” ().

The situation (*maqām*) is one of the most prominent elements in pragmatic studies, and it may be difficult to understand pragmatics without taking into account all of its foundations, foremost among them the situation itself. Thus, the authors of the *New Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language* state:

“We often define pragmatics as the study of the dominance of situation over the meaning of an expression: pragmatics as a component of linguistic description. In this sense of the term, the present chapter may be regarded as a presentation of pragmatics. (There is another concept, closer to the etymological derivation and not always distinct from the first, according to which pragmatics is the study of the possibilities for action encoded in language)” ().

Accordingly, pragmatics studies situation from the perspective that “situation relates to speech rather than language, or at least to a marginal area of language that is close to its transformation into speech” ().

As for John Robert Firth (1890–1960), the pioneer of modern contextual theory, he maintained that the best use of the concept of *situation* is to employ it as an appropriate conceptual model applicable to speech events.

It appears that Firth brought about a qualitative shift in linguistic studies and advanced pragmatic inquiry significantly, such that language came to be interpreted on the basis of the situation in which speech events occur. Consequently, situation became central to speech act theory. These speech acts cannot have their performative and perlocutionary dimensions uncovered except through their context. Participants in discourse, such as persons and characters, work together with the situation in directing speech acts, interpreting them, and investigating their illocutionary force.

3. Context and Speech Acts

Apart from the role played by context in pragmatic studies, it also contributes, from another perspective, to the interpretation of speech acts and helps realize the pragmatic dimension of language. It is context that brings the social dimension of language into existence. Moreover, it is a genuine operative factor that studies speech events during communication and the



production of meaning. John Lyons argued that context determines the meaning of a speech unit on three distinct levels of text analysis: “First, it determines which sentence was uttered (if indeed a sentence was uttered). Second, it usually tells us which proposition was expressed, if a proposition was expressed. Third, it helps us determine whether the proposition under consideration was expressed with a particular illocutionary force rather than another. In all three cases, context is directly related to determining what is said according to the various meanings carried by the verb ‘to say’

Speech Acts and Context:

As a principal pragmatic pillar and a common denominator among pragmatic elements, the speech act has contributed significantly to restoring the importance of context in its various dimensions, on the basis that context has become one of the fundamental components of pragmatic studies. Thus, if we wish to understand the meaning of a given word, we are required to return to the circumstances surrounding the communicative process, for context has “a direct relationship with the interpretation of speech units at different and multiple levels” (.). Context is what brings the speech act into existence merely by being uttered. The success and realization of speech acts cannot be achieved unless certain conditions are available within the context, particularly the context of situation, because “the context of situation consists of the (specific) circumstances of the speech event, as distinguished from the linguistic context” (.).

Moreover, the speech acts performed by interlocutors carry an illocutionary force embedded within the utterance, and their intentionality can only be realized through the participants in communication.

Aouchan drew attention to this important issue, which is fundamentally related to making context a principal pragmatic component, while discussing Hansson’s (1974) classification of the various pragmatic trends, which relied on the operation of the concept of context at three levels (.):

- **First-degree pragmatics:** represented by the study of indexical symbols (*Les Symboles Indexicaux*), where context consists of attention to interlocutors and the determinants of place and time.
- **Second-degree pragmatics:** concerned with studying the manner in which propositions are expressed in relation to the uttered sentence. Here, context in its expanded sense (according to Stalnaker) extends to what interlocutors infer; it is the context of shared information and beliefs rather than mental context.
- **Third-degree pragmatics:** represented by Speech Act Theory, which is concerned with identifying what has been accomplished through the use of certain linguistic forms. The concept of context within this theory is extremely rich, as will be shown in this study.

It becomes clear here that pragmatics’ focus on the study of context led to the emergence of three divergent trends governed by pragmatic elements and causing context to fluctuate across different degrees, through which the relationship linking interlocutors and context becomes apparent.

4. Types of Context in Contemporary Western and Arab Linguistic Thought



Throughout its linguistic development, context has passed through various stages and has been employed in modern times with different meanings. Its concept has shifted from its traditional meaning, which was concerned with “the verbal arrangement of a word and its position within that arrangement” (), to broader and more comprehensive meanings that study “everything connected to the word in terms of circumstances, conditions, and non-linguistic elements related to the situation in which the word is uttered” ().

This new conception of context directly refers us to the Contextual Theory established by the linguist **John Firth** (1890–1960), who held that arriving at the meaning of any linguistic text requires ():

1. Analyzing the linguistic text at its various linguistic levels (phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical).
2. Explaining the “context of situation” (= proceedings): the personality of the speaker, the personality of the listener, and all circumstances surrounding the speech, etc.
3. Identifying the type of speech function: wishing, persuasion, temptation, etc.
4. Finally, mentioning the effect produced by the speech (laughter, belief, sarcasm, etc.).

On this basis, many scholars divided context into two types: **linguistic context** and **non-linguistic context**.

A. Linguistic Context (Linguistic Context)

This is the linguistic environment through which the meaning of a word within a sentence is determined. It is usually connected to what precedes and follows the word and helps in studying the various relationships among words. This type of context is also known as **internal context**, which examines sounds, structures, morphological patterns, syntactic constructions, semantic relations, and lexical aspects.

Abd al-Na‘im Khalil defines it as follows:

“Linguistic context refers to the meaning assigned to a word in the dictionary; that is, the meaning of the word within a sentence or expression, or in other words, the meaning understood from the word among the preceding and following words in a phrase or sentence. This is represented in the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic relations among these words at the structural level. We may find that a word’s meaning changes according to the words with which it forms a sentence or expression” ().

To clarify this concept, Abd al-Na‘im Khalil provides examples of this type of context, drawing upon Saussure’s ideas:

“Linguistic context in contextual theory is the arrangement of the word within the sentence, its position in that arrangement, and its relationship to the words preceding and following it. It appears that de Saussure conceived this relationship within the framework of linguistic context. Every word is a linguistic unit that occupies an appropriate position within the system, and this appropriate position determines the word’s meaning. The concept of context and its role become especially clear in de Saussure’s example of the game of chess when explaining the nature of relationships. He states: ‘Each piece in a chess game occupies different positions during the course of play according to its relations with the other pieces, and these positions grant it new values. For example, a pawn may assume a defensive position or leave the battle. The same



value may be acquired by linguistic units, which are distinguished by the effective role they perform” ().

Hilmi Khalil, on the other hand, maintains that linguistic context:

“Consists of sounds, words, and sentences as they occur in a particular speech event or linguistic text. Sounds, for example, are usually subject to the context in which they are composed, with each sound being affected by what precedes or follows it. An example is the emphatic *lām* in *wallāh* and the non-emphatic *lām* in *billāh*, where the pronunciation of *lām* differs according to the phoneme preceding the Divine Name, namely the vowel of the preceding letter. A similar phenomenon exists in English with what is called the *Dark L*, as in the word *Field*, and the *Clear L*, as in the word *Language*” ().

Based on all of the above, the concept of linguistic context has remained almost a shared concept among many researchers and essentially carries the same meaning. Its proponents derived it from Firth’s contextual theory, which contributed significantly to shaping this concept and directing research in this field.

B. Non-Linguistic Context

This is also referred to as **external context**, **social context**, **context of situation**, **current context**, **discoursal context**, **proceedings**, **external situation**, or **situational context**. It generally studies everything surrounding the speaker and related to him or her, as well as the circumstances surrounding the discourse and the addressee.

The British scholar **F. R. Palmer** (1922–2019) argues that the term “context of situation”:

“Is mentally associated with two worlds: the world of anthropology represented by Malinowski, and the world of linguistics represented by Firth. Both were concerned with highlighting meaning in relation to the context in which language is used, although their methods of inquiry differed to some extent” ().

Accordingly, Firth consistently emphasized that:

“The description of a language cannot be complete without reference to the context of situation in which the language performed a particular function” ().

According to Brown and Yule:

“The discourse analyst, in brief, treats his linguistic material as a (text) resulting from a dynamic process in which language has been used as a communicative instrument within a particular context by a speaker or writer to express meanings and achieve intentions (discourse). Starting from this material, the analyst seeks to describe the regularities in the linguistic events that people use to convey those meanings and intentions” ().

Dr. Mahmoud al-Sa‘ran confirms that the term “context of situation” developed through Firth’s use of it in his linguistic studies. It was Firth who brought it into existence and made it an indispensable element in understanding contextual theory:

“The ‘context of situation’ according to Professor Firth is a type of abstraction from the environment or setting in which speech occurs. Linguists undertake this abstraction in order to fulfill the requirements of their study. The context of situation encompasses all forms of linguistic activity, whether spoken or written” ().

Al-Sa‘ran concludes that:



“‘The context of situation’ or ‘proceedings’ is the totality of the elements constituting the speech situation (or speech circumstance)” ().

The elements constituting the speech situation are represented by ():

1. The personality of the speaker and listener, their cultural backgrounds, and the personalities of others who witness the speech event—if any—and the extent of their relationship to linguistic behavior, as well as whether their role is limited to witnessing or whether they participate in the speech texts produced.
2. Social factors and phenomena related to language and the linguistic behavior of those participating in the speech situation, such as weather conditions if relevant, the political situation, the place of speech, and everything that occurs during the speech event on the part of those witnessing it, including emotions or any form of response, as well as everything related to the speech situation regardless of the degree of its connection.
3. The effect of the speech text on participants, such as persuasion, pain, temptation, laughter, etc. Thus, one of the most important characteristics of the “context of situation” is highlighting the social role played by the speaker and all other participants in the speech event.

Accordingly, the theory of language based on the concept of the “context of situation” encompasses all types of speech functions. In other words, it is capable of studying and explaining all forms of speech functions and is not limited, as many older theories were, to highlighting only one or a few types of speech functions.

Abd al-Na‘im Khalil believes that Firth’s contextual theory:

“Is primarily a semantic theory, and although complete meaning is the outcome of linguistic functions at the morphological, syntactic, and lexical levels, it also requires consideration of the social context” ().

In support of this view, he cites Firth’s statement:

“The idea of situation or context of situation is the central point around which semantics revolves in the English school” ().

Farid Awad Haidar also regards Firth as the foremost teacher of general linguistics in Britain. Elsewhere, he states that Firth:

“Built his theory of context of situation on the basis of Malinowski’s ideas and made the context of situation the ‘fundamental concept in semantics.’ Indeed, he made the term semantics synonymous with contextual study. However, Firth felt that Malinowski’s notion of context of situation was not sufficiently satisfactory for a more precise and rigorous linguistic approach, and he preferred to regard the context of situation as one of the linguist’s analytical tools, much like the grammatical categories he employs” ().

Farid Awad Haidar discusses this issue at length and argues that the context of situation is one of two inseparable aspects of context:

“These two aspects are the linguistic context represented by the structure of linguistic constructions with their sounds, words, sentences, and expressions, and the context of situation, which consists of the total circumstances surrounding the speech event. This is an external context added to the text, which modern scholars call extra-linguistic context. Although



research focuses primarily on the context of situation, it has not been able to isolate or ignore linguistic context. Rather, it has compared the semantic data provided by both contexts in many instances in order to highlight the importance and semantic function of the context of situation” ().

Contextual theory, under Firth, thus became a unique theory concerned with all circumstances and contexts that may influence meaning. Its impact became evident in the work of later scholars, and various trends, theories, and schools emerged to investigate all matters related to context. Perhaps the principal reason for the emergence of contextual theory among modern scholars is that it originated from “the search for meaning and its problems, since a word does not convey its meaning merely through the context in which it appears; rather, the meaning of a word is its use in language, or the manner in which it is used, or the role that it performs” (). In conclusion, context in its various forms constitutes an essential component that cannot be dispensed with in pragmatic studies. Context, with its different levels and types, is a fundamental element in pragmatic inquiry, which has led some Arab scholars to expand its scope to the extent of making **contextualism (al-siyāqiyyah)** an equivalent of **pragmatics (al-tadāwuliyyah)**. Although each term retains its own conceptual specificity and epistemological boundaries, using pragmatics in the sense of contextualism places it within a semantic field different from that in which the term has become established in contemporary linguistic studies. Consequently, many studies that have adopted this orientation are closer in their foundations to semantic studies than to pragmatics in its precise technical sense.

Conclusion and Results:

This study demonstrates that context is a fundamental and central element in the formation of significance, the construction of meaning, and the guidance of the interpretive process. Discourse cannot be understood, nor can its true intentions be uncovered, in isolation from the circumstances and conditions that surround it. Context constitutes the framework that grants linguistic structures their semantic and pragmatic value, making meaning emerge from the interaction between the text, the situation, the speaker, the hearer, and all the conditions surrounding discourse. Through this study, a number of findings may be summarized as follows:

1. Context is considered a common element shared by all pragmatic components governing pragmatic discourse.
2. There are points of convergence and complementarity between the Arabic rhetorical heritage and contemporary pragmatic conceptions in their treatment of context.
3. The concept of context manifested itself in the Arabic rhetorical tradition through discussions of appropriateness, contextual clues, circumstance, consideration of the addressee, and contexts of utterance.
4. Context is connected to its position within the linguistic structures that compose the sentence, and it is also related to circumstances, situations, events, occasions, and conditions.
5. Context is understood as the space within which pragmatic elements are formed and interact with one another.



6. Pragmatics, in the works of contemporary Arab scholars, appears as a form of context in which language is studied in use and within specific contexts and situations.
7. Context is regarded as one of the factors influencing speech, and the use of language and verbal exchange within a particular situation determines the general framework within which pragmatics should be studied.
8. This study has shown that Arabic rhetoric paid early attention to context through concepts such as *maqām* (situation) and *muqtaḍā al-ḥāl* (the requirements of the situation), revealing a profound awareness of the pragmatic nature of language before the emergence of modern linguistics. It also demonstrated that contemporary pragmatic linguistics expanded the scope of contextual inquiry and linked meaning to the various social, cultural, and communicative dimensions governing the production and interpretation of discourse.
9. The relationship between Arabic rhetoric and pragmatic linguistics is one of convergence and complementarity, as both proceed from the belief that meaning is not derived solely from linguistic structure but is determined in light of context, conditions of use, and communicative interaction.
10. The study of context represents a fundamental approach to discourse analysis, the understanding of explicit and implicit meanings, and the uncovering of the communicative intentions underlying different texts.

In light of the foregoing, it can be said that this study has sought to contribute to strengthening the intellectual dialogue between the Arabic rhetorical heritage and modern linguistic trends, while highlighting the scientific value of the Arab intellectual tradition in anticipating many contemporary pragmatic conceptions. This opens broader horizons for more profound and comprehensive semantic and pragmatic studies.

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