

The Role of Context in Distinguishing Between *Al-Haqiqah* and *Al-Majaz*

Ebrahim Mohammed Ahmad Eldesoky¹, Ashraf Hassan
Mohamed Hassan², Mohd Azizul Rahman bin Zabidin³

^{1,3}Arabic Language Department, Kulliyah of Theology, Quranic Sciences & Arabic Language, Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah International Islamic University (UniSHAMS) & ²Faculty of Al-Qur'an and Sunnah for Postgraduate Studies, Kolej Universiti Islam Perlis (KUIPs)

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i5/21491>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i5/21491

Published Date: 01 May 2024

Abstract

This study delves into the role of context in delineating "*Al-Haqiqah*" (literal meaning) and "*Al-Majaz*" (metaphorical meaning). It aims to clarify the precise definitions of these concepts and challenges assertions by some Arabic scholars suggesting that language is strictly literal, devoid of metaphor, versus the argument positing that language is entirely metaphorical, devoid of "*Al-Haqiqah*." Embracing a descriptive-analytical approach, the research meticulously defines "*Al-Haqiqah*" and "*Al-Majaz*" linguistically. It employs numerous linguistic examples in Arabic to illustrate the differentiation between these concepts, emphasizing the role of both situational and linguistic contexts. Organized into three sections, the study examines the concepts of "*Al-Haqiqah*" and "*Al-Majaz*," explores situational context's role, and analyzes linguistic context's impact. Key findings emphasize the association of "*Al-Haqiqah*" with meaning and clarity, highlight the importance of linguistic and situational relationships in evaluating metaphorical statements, and underscore the significant role of both contexts in establishing boundaries between "*Al-Haqiqah*" and "*Al-Majaz*."

Keywords: "*Al-Haqiqah*," "*Al-Majaz*," Relationship, Indicator, Linguistic Context, Situational Context

The Concept of Literal Meaning and Metaphorical Expression and Their Indicators

There is an important matter that we must address and determine at the beginning of this discussion. I refer to what the author of "*Al-Taraz*" decided when he said: "Know that among people, some claim that language is entirely literal, denying metaphorical expression, asserting that it is neither present in the Quran nor in speech. And among them are those who claim that language is entirely metaphorical, and literal meaning is not realized within it. Both these doctrines are flawed. Denial of literal meaning in language is an excess, while denial of metaphorical expression is a deficiency." So, saying "I saw the lion" when the meaning is a courageous man, or the saying of Allah, *وَسَّأَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ* "And ask the town" (Yusuf:

82) or وَأَخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ "And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy" (Al-Isra: 24), and other similar instances allude to this (Al-Alawiyya & Al-Taraz, 1982).

If we look at language, as Dr. Tamam Hassan puts it – any language in the world – it is limited in its verbal scope compared to the realm of ideas reflected in the minds of its speakers, the images, and nuances that come to their thoughts. Thus, customary meanings (i.e., the literal ones) of words fall short of fulfilling the requirements of linguistic expression, especially in the realm of abstract ideas, images, and nuances. Therefore, linguistic expression requires resorting to the acceptance of customary meanings to use another method called metaphor. When we examine the multiple meanings of a single word in a dictionary, we find that one meaning is understood literally, while the rest are departures from the literal meaning." (Tamam, 1971).

Given this, does the linguistic and contextual context play a role in determining whether a construction intends literal or metaphorical meaning? Perhaps, at this point, defining literal and metaphorical meanings as mentioned by Abu al-Fath Ibn Jinni would suffice: "Literal meaning is what is acknowledged in usage based on its original linguistic placement, while metaphorical expression is in opposition to that. Metaphorical expression and its substitution for literal meanings occur for three reasons: expansion, emphasis, and resemblance. The absolute absence of these qualities constitutes pure literalness. As an example, the Prophet (peace be upon him) referred to a horse as 'a sea' (Muslim, 1990). However, if there is no indication in the speech clarifying the situation, such as when no horse is present, it results in arrogance in speech, lacking clarification or explanation. If someone were to say, 'I saw a sea' intending a horse without clarifying his intention, it wouldn't be permissible because it involves obfuscation and puzzlement for people." (Ibn Jinni, 1986).

Upon reflection on Abu al-Fath Ibn Jinni's words, we find that we cannot judge a construction as metaphorical unless there is linguistic or contextual evidence indicating that the intended meaning is metaphorical. He says, "However, it doesn't lead to that except by evidence that dispels doubt." He further explains, "If the speech is stripped of any indication clarifying the situation, a sea would not befall it if the speech was arrogant without elucidation or explanation."

This aligns with what Al-Suyuti mentioned: "Among the indicators of literal meaning is the immediate understanding of the meaning when heard and absence of another indication. If we hear language experts express the same meaning using two different expressions and they choose one without any indication for the other, we recognize that the word used without an indication represents the literal meaning (Al-Suyuti, 1986).

Why isn't metaphor defined as: "A word used in a manner contrary to its established meaning, used about something other than its customary type, with a preventing indication against intending its customary type"? (Al-Sakkaki, 1983), and this indication pointing to a construction as metaphorical can be:

1. Lexical differentiation between two separate words.
2. Contextual divergence between two meanings.

Through these distinctions, it becomes evident that another meaning, different from the literal one, is intended. For instance, when someone says, "I saw a lion in the bathroom," we understand that this phrase is metaphorical rather than literal, and the speaker has used the word "lion" metaphorically, signified by his mention of "bathroom." (Al-San'ani, 1986). Similarly, when we say, for instance, as Dr. Muhammad Hamasah states, "the heart flew" and "the bird flew," we understand that the former expression is metaphorical while the latter is literal. This understanding is derived from a comparison between "heart" and "bird," regarding their potential to fly. The bird, in reality, can fly, whereas the heart's ability to do so is confined to imagination and conception, hindered by physiological and mental constraints. These constraints prompt the speaker to perceive the phrase as metaphorical rather than literal, preventing it from conveying the original meaning. The inhibiting factors are the indicators and the specific context (Hamasah, 1983). This confirms the necessity of relying on linguistic or contextual indicators to differentiate between literal and metaphorical expressions. As mentioned by Al-San'ani, there must be an indication or context that justifies the use of a metaphor. The indication strips the word from its literal meaning to adopt its metaphorical meaning (Al-San'ani, 1986).

Additionally, Al-Suyuti illustrates that emphasizing a statement through confirmation is indicative of its literal nature, not metaphorical. He explains that linguistic experts do not emphasize metaphors. For instance, they don't say, "The wall spoke clearly," or "The sun said something." In the Quran, Allah said, "And Allah spoke to Moses directly." This confirmation with the source indicates the literal sense, that Allah spoke directly to Moses (Al-Suyuti, 1986).

Ibn Jinni argues that reinforcement plays a pivotal role in distinguishing between the literal and the metaphorical. He exemplifies this with the phrase: "The prince cut the thief." If you say, "The prince himself cut the thief," you've lifted the metaphor from the action and moved toward reality. However, you still need to derive another possibility. If you say, "The thief cut his hand or leg," it doesn't dismiss the possibility that this phrase is still metaphorical. The metaphor, if present in the phrase "The prince cut the thief," is within "cut" and not within the prince. Hence, if we say, "The prince cut the thief literally," the cutting becomes a reality, not a metaphor. This confirms that attributing the cutting to the prince is based on reality, and if there remains room for interpretation elsewhere, it lies in the phrase the thief (Ibn Jinni, 1986).

The Context Of The Situation And Its Role In Distinguishing Between Literal And Metaphorical Meaning

If we examine the phrase "so-and-so is abundant in ash of the pot," and ponder as Dr. Aziz Ismail did: "What determines the correct interpretation of the abundance of ash?" We find the answer - as Dr. Aziz himself says, according to Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani: "You know that meaning through rationality rather than through the wording. Don't you see that when you looked at their saying ('he is abundant in the ash of the pot') and understood from it that they intended him to be abundant in villages and hospitality, you didn't know that from the wording, but you knew it by reflecting within yourself and said: It's a statement that has come about in their praise, and there's no meaning in praise for the abundance of ash. Instead, they intended to indicate by the abundance of ash that many pots are set up for him, and they are used for cooking for villages and hospitality. This is because when cooking is abundant in pots,

the burning of firewood underneath increases, and if burning firewood increases, ash inevitably increases."

In this text - as per Dr. Aziz Ismail's words - it's a clear indication of how the process of extracting the meaning of generosity is done from that phrase. The addressee - having known that the phrase was uttered in the context of praise - doesn't find a coherent meaning for its words that would conform to this context. Therefore, they find themselves obliged - to realize the meaning of praise as dictated by the context - to engage their mind in extracting the second connotation of the direct connotation of the phrase. In doing so, they realize that the one being praised is abundant in villages and hospitality. In this manner, the context becomes a guide for the process of thinking and inference, simultaneously merging with the experience of social norms or the cultural context. The context of the situation - and this is also stated by Dr. Aziz Ismail - thus leads the addressee to reject the first direct meaning of the phrase (because in the context of praise, the abundance of ash in itself will not have any meaning), then to infer the second meaning for this meaning (the generosity that aligns with the context of praise).

Furthermore, as Dr. Aziz also states, our knowledge of the context in which that phrase was uttered (the context of praise) doesn't necessarily impose that its second meaning is generosity. It might mean that the praised person lives in relative opulence compared to the Bedouin environment. For example, they don't eat fermented wheat or dates or drink milk as their staple food; instead, they eat cooked food regularly. Thus, the abundance of ash would imply that this person and their family don't consume cooked food sparingly, for instance, during seasons or occasions; rather, it is their constant food. Consequently, cooking processes continue in the pots, where much firewood is burnt, leaving behind a lot of ash. This inference, which Jurjani or others did not explicitly state, still relies - as it's evident - on the context of the situation (praise) within the Bedouin cultural context; it's not uncommon in an environment where a man is praised just for cooking three for his family (like Hisham who cooked three for his family), not for guests.

Thus, Dr. Aziz Ismail - and we're with him - concludes that the second meaning of the phrase "abundant in the ash of the pot," or its equivalent, is not only susceptible to multiplicity but also to change, retreat, neglect, and oblivion with time. For instance, when inhabitants of cities today hear such a phrase and have not been taught its second meaning, they might not, in most cases, be able to infer its second meaning. This isn't due to a deficiency in their linguistic proficiency (the inference of the second meaning undoubtedly depends on a kind of linguistic competence), but rather because the standard of interpretation (I mean the cultural context) has receded with time and is no longer a part of their linguistic experience.

Therefore, if we want to know how the context indicates that these aforementioned verses are metaphorical expressions, we find an explanation in the statement of the author of "Al-Taraz": "Know that these compound metaphors that we mentioned and exemplified with Allah's saying: 'And the earth casts forth her burdens' [Quran, 99:2], and His saying: 'From what they grow' [Quran, 2:61], and His saying: 'Until when the earth takes on its ornaments' [Quran, 10:24], and other examples, all of these are linguistic metaphors used in subjects other than their original ones. For this reason, we judge them to be linguistic. The clarification is that the forms 'cast forth,' 'grows,' and 'takes' are placed in the root of language concerning

the emergence of coming out, growing, and taking by the capable agent. So, if they are used in their emergence from the earth, the form has been used in a subject other than its original, so there's no objection to our judgment that they are linguistic metaphors" (al-Alawi & Al-Taraz, 1982).

The Linguistic Context and Its Role In Distinguishing Between The Literal and Metaphorical Meanings

When examining the Quran, it is evident that certain metaphorical expressions are indicated by their linguistic context. For instance, the verse "اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالََةَ بِالْهُدَى" (Buy error with guidance) from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:61) demonstrates a lexical contrast between "اشْتَرُوا" (they bought) and "الضَّلَالََةَ" (error) on one side and "الْهُدَى" (guidance) on the other. The juxtaposition implies a lexical incongruity, as an error is not an item to be bought. This leads to the understanding that "اشْتَرُوا" does not carry its original meaning but rather conveys a metaphorical sense, such as "exchanged" or "chose." The linguistic context, in this case, reveals the metaphorical meaning and signifies that the expression is not meant to be taken literally (Tammam, 1982).

Similarly, the use of metaphorical omission is exemplified in the verse "وإذا المنية أنشبت أظفارها" (When death's claws extend, every talisman becomes worthless) by Abu Dhu'ayb Al-Hudhali. Here, the lion, whose claws are metaphorically associated with death, has been omitted, attributing the claws to death itself. This linguistic construction serves as a lexical contrast, indicating that the intended meaning is metaphorical rather than literal. The omission and the lexical incongruity between death and claws become evidence that the expression is metaphorical (Tammam, 1982).

In another example, the metaphorical construction "واشتغل الرأس شيبا" (The head turned gray with concern) illustrates a lexical contrast between "اشتغل" (turned gray) and "الرأس" (head). In this context, "اشتغل" maintains its original meaning while the lexical incongruity hints at a metaphorical interpretation. The juxtaposition of the verb with the noun in the linguistic context becomes a part of the linguistic context, indicating the metaphorical sense (Tammam, 1982).

Additionally, the verse "مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا" (Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan?) from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:245) is analyzed for its metaphorical use. In this case, the term "قَرْضًا" (loan) is not to be understood literally as a financial loan but rather metaphorically as an act of devotion and self-sacrifice. The linguistic context, supported by contextual evidence, suggests that the intended meaning is metaphorical, referring to the devotees who offer their efforts and selves in anticipation of divine reward (Tammam, 1982). These examples highlight how the linguistic context plays a crucial role in distinguishing between literal and metaphorical expressions in the Quranic verses, as explained by scholars like Tammam Hassan and others.

Conclusions

1. Multiple empirical evidence indicates that the contextual linguistic reference, whether historical or current, is what governs determining whether a construction refers to truth or metaphor. The cultural context plays a significant role in distinguishing

- between truth and metaphor, closely related to elucidating meanings. Understanding the speaker's culture and beliefs clarifies this issue distinctly.
2. Contradictions between the word and its environment within a construction serve as evidence that the construction is not real. For instance, lexical contradiction serves as a linguistic indicator and contextual contradiction between two meanings, both of which are mechanisms of linguistic context used to determine whether a construction refers to truth or metaphor.
 3. Truth is what is acknowledged in usage based on its linguistic origin.
 4. The boundary of metaphor is when it conveys a meaning not conventionally used in the communicative context between the first and the second elements. Metaphor adjusts from truth based on three features: expansion, emphasis, and similitude. The lack of these attributes indicates truth.

References

- Abu Dhu'ayb, A. H. (1995). *Diwan Al-Hudhaliyyin*. Cairo: Egyptian Book Printing House
- Al-Jurjani, A. Q. (1991). *Asrar Al-Balaghah*. Cairo: Dar Al-Madani
- Al-Jurjani, A. Q. (1992). *Dalail al-I'jaz*. Cairo: Dar Al-Madani
- Al-Khatib A. Q. (n.d). *Sharh Al-Talkhis*. Cairo: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah
- Al-Sakkaki. (1983). *Muftah Al-Ulum*. Lebanon: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah
- Al-San'ani, M. I. (1986). *Usul Al-Fiqh*. Al-Risalah Foundation
- Al-Shafi'i, M. I. (n.d). *Al-Risalah*. Lebanon: Al-Maktabah Al-Ilmiyah
- Al-Suyuti. (1986). *Al-Muzhir fi 'Ulum Al-Lughah*. Beirut: Al-Asriyah Publications
- Hamasa, M. (2000). *Al-Nahw wal-Dala'ah*. Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk
- Hamouda, T. S. (n.d). *A Study of Meaning According to the Scholars of Principles*. Alexandria: Dar Al-Jami'ah Publishing
- Ibn Athir. (1990). *Al-Mathal Al-Sa'ir*. Beirut: Al-Asriyah Library.
- Ibn Junayd, A. F. U. (1986). *Al-Khasais*. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization
- Muslim, A. H. (1990). *Sahih Muslim*. Lebanon: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah
- Taher, I. A. (n.d). *Al-Tahrir wal-Tanweer*. Tunis: Dar Al-Jamahiriyah lil-Nashr
- Tamam, H. (1971). *Al-Lughah Al-Arabiyyah Ma'naha wa Mabnaha*. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization.
- Tamam, H. (1982). *Al-Usul*. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization
- Tamam, H. (1993). *Al-Bayan fi Ru'ayat Al-Quran*. Cairo: Alam Al-Kutub