

## Application of Linguistic Context in Exegesis

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### ABSTRACT

Context in a linguistic sense (*siaq*) is the only sign that always accompanies a text (*qarinah lafzi muttasil*). It has such an important role in exegesis that failure to observe it has led to misinterpretation of the verse and presentation of unacceptable meanings. Some important functions of linguistic context in exegesis include identification of pronoun referents, ascertainment of grammatical case, determination or preference of the true recitation, and discovery of omitted parts of a verse. Context cannot be utilised in all cases though. It is also important to realize where it should or should not be implemented. The aim of the present article is to shed light on linguistic context in exegesis in terms of its numerous roles and applicability. It aims to show that not only is context a significant element in any exegesis, it also has many more applications than examined in books on *tafsir*. In short, utilising cases of actual exegesis, this research develops on previous ideas regarding linguistic context and presents exegetes with a new, comprehensive framework for application of contextual signs in order to prevent inaccuracies and deviations in the interpretation of the Quran.

**KEYWORDS:** textual sign, linguistic context, siaq, exegesis, role.

### INTRODUCTION

Consideration of indications, references, and relationships and comprehension of the roles thereof can greatly influence understanding of Quranic verses. Exegetes need to take these factors into account when interpreting Quranic verses since misuse of or disregard for such elements can potentially lead to faulty or invalid exegetic exposition. One of these signs is linguistic context which – as the only literary sign that always accompanies texts – plays a significant role in comprehension of the words of God.

Many researchers and scholars stress the importance of using such contextual elements. According to Zarkishi, in order to understand parts of the Quran that are not explained in valid traditions it is important to consider the meanings of the individual words as well as their pragmatic meaning according to the context of the verse.<sup>[1]</sup> In his exegesis, Rashid Rida also emphasises the significance of *siaq*.<sup>[2]</sup> With reference to the differences in the thought of Islamic denominations, Sadr asserts that the directive approach to Quranic exegesis, which ignores the context as well as the links between words and phrases, has led to contradictory positions among schools of thought in the Islamic world throughout history.<sup>[3]</sup>

Linguistic context is so important that some exegetes, including Allamah Tabataba'i (1904 – 1981 CE), give precedence to contextual indications over the literal meaning (*zahir*) of narrations. In fact, in cases where he deemed the literal meaning of a narration contradictory to the context of the Quran, Allamah Tabataba'i would reinterpret the literal meaning of the narration so as to resolve contradictions with the linguistic context.<sup>[4]</sup> On the other hand, some exegetes who ignore such factors and functions have presented seemingly incorrect interpretations of Quranic verses.

A number of questions may be raised in this regard. What is context? What are its functions? How does disregard for context damage interpretation of Quranic verses? Besides defining and enumerating numerous functions of context, the present article shows the inaccuracy of some exegetic expositions so as to demonstrate the importance and necessity of context and its exegetic functions. It is also important to discuss the criteria for application of linguistic context since disregard of these principles can lead to incorrect interpretation of Quranic verses. For example, it seems that some Sunni exegetes such as Alusi and Rashid Rida have erred in their exposition of verses related to the household of the Prophet (S), specifically the verse of Tathir (33:33) and the verse of Ikmal (5:3). It is worth noting that books that discuss the roles of *siaq* only mention four functions for linguistic context,<sup>[5]</sup> whereas taking an analytical and comparative approach, the present article describes eleven roles for this mechanism. Rajabi names two in *Ravish-e Tafsir-e Quran*. Some books, namely *Tahlil-e Zaban-e Quran va Ravish-shinasi-e Fahm-e An* by Saeedi Roshan, *Pizhuhishi Piramun-e Tadabbur Dar Quran* by Purfar, and *Ravish-haye Tafsir-e Quran* by Muaddab do not even mention *siaq*.

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It is important to note, however, that context does not apply in every case. There are conditions for its relevance to a specific set of Quranic verses or sentences which are discussed herein. The article shows that the uses of linguistic context are not limited to a few areas and also that there are criteria for its applicability to any piece of text that must be considered in exegesis. This article examines eleven functions of *siaq* along with examples of application in exegesis. It shows that the usage of *siaq* is not as limited as previously thought. It indicates how mistakes are possible in tafsir when the exegete does not consider this factor. It shows the significance of this indicator and aids exegetes and common people alike in contemplating Quranic verses with a focus on the thematic cohesion among them. Because it is the view of the author that ‘Allamah Tabataba’i took linguistic context to the next level in his exegesis, his perspectives form the core of this research. The matter at hand does not directly relate to ‘Allamah Tabataba’i; however, in view of the fact that he is considered to be among the eminent exegetes and thinkers of the modern era and that he has given particular consideration to *siaq* in his exegesis – which is numbered among the most important exegeses in all of Islamic history – his views are foregrounded in this paper.

In short, this article develops a novel framework for implementation of context in exegesis of the Quran that is much more comprehensive than earlier ideas. To start with, it is necessary to define what is meant in this paper by linguistic context or *siaq*.

### Definition of *Siaq*

*Siaq* (originally *sawaq*) is an infinitive, and its root is *sauq* meaning ‘to move or drive.’<sup>[6]</sup> An example of its usage in an Arabic sentence is *tasawaqat al-ibil tasawaqa idha tataba‘at* (lit. The camels started to move in succession). Moreover, *al-mosawaqah* means to follow.<sup>[7]</sup>

Terminologically, *siaq* is defined as a certain feature of a word, a phrase, or a statement that is created through concurrence with other words, phrases, or sentences. For example, the meaning of the sentence *idhhab ila al-bahr* (lit. go to the sea) changes when it is followed by the statement *wa istami‘ haditha-hu bi-ihitimam* (lit. and listen to his speech attentively). If the first sentence is expressed individually, it means ‘go to the sea’ in the literal sense. However, when the first sentence is accompanied by the second one, it takes on a metaphorical sense: ‘go to a scholar.’<sup>[8]. [9]</sup> In short, words and sentences that are about the words or statements under interpretation are called context. With this definition, linguistic context is also equivalent to literal signs accompanying the text.

Before proceeding to the functions of linguistic context, it should be noted that linguistic context is just one of the signs that an exegete should take into account in interpretation. Non-verbal signs (e.g. circumstances of revelation (*sha’n nuzul*) and status of utterance (*maqam kalam*)) as well as rational (*lubbi*) evidence must also be utilised.

### Roles of Linguistic Context in Exegesis

Linguistic context serves a number of functions in exegesis. Some of these functions include determination of (1) referents of pronouns, (2) whether a verse or chapter is Medinan or Meccan, (3) the true recitation of a word or phrase, (4) the verity of exegetic assertions, (5) omissions, (6) addressees, (7) derivational structures, (8) grammatical case, (9) scope of verses, (10) purposes of verses and chapters, and finally (11) validity of narrations. As part of the framework, each of these roles has been discussed systematically in the ensuing passages.

### Determining the Referent of a Pronoun

In some of the verses of the Quran, pronouns have unclear referents with a range of possibilities. Each of these options leads to a different interpretation of the respective Quranic verse. One of the ways to determine the referent of a pronoun is to consider the context of the respective verse. For example, regarding the verse ‘And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death’ (4:159), different interpretations have been offered due to the ambiguity of the referents of the pronouns ‘in him’ and ‘his death.’ These interpretations have been discussed below.

One way to interpret the verse is to consider the referent of ‘in him’ to be Jesus (A) and the referent of the pronoun in ‘his death’ to be the implied subject (*mubtada muqaddar*),<sup>[10]</sup> ‘the Person of Book.’ In other words, the verse should be rendered, ‘And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in Jesus before the death of the Person of Book.’<sup>[11]</sup> According to this opinion, the meaning of this verse is that all People of the Book will come to believe in Jesus before their (i.e. People of the Book) deaths. This happens when the person is on the threshold of death so their connection with this world fades, their connection with the other world strengthens, and the veils of secrecy are lifted. In this moment, they perceive the status of Jesus (A) and come to believe in him, but this last-minute faith does not benefit them.

Another method of interpretation is to regard the referent of ‘in him’ as the Holy Prophet (S) and the referent of ‘his death’ as the implied subject, ‘the person.’ In other words, the verse should be rendered, ‘And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in Muhammad before the death of the Person of the Book.’<sup>[12]</sup> According to

this view, the meaning of this verse is that all the People of Book will come to believe in Muhammad (S) before their (i.e. People of the Book) deaths.

A third rendition is to consider the referent of both of the aforementioned pronouns to be Jesus (A). That is, the verse should be rendered, 'and there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in Jesus before the death of Jesus.' According to this suggestion, the meaning of this verse is that all the People of Book shall come to believe in Jesus (A) before the death of Jesus. This will happen when Jesus descends from Heaven in the End Times (*akhir al-zaman*) and after performing his role, passes away.

Although all three interpretations – without considering the context – provide acceptable meanings for the verse, when the context is taken into account, the second meaning cannot be satisfactory. Tabari (840 – 923 CE) writes:

The phrase 'must believe in him' is presented within the linguistic context of Jesus (A), his mother (Mary (A)) and the Jewish people. Therefore, it is not right to place this statement (which is about Jesus and his mother) in a different context and to consider it about one who has not been mentioned.<sup>[13]</sup>

Moreover, regarding the referent of the pronoun in 'his death,' it should be mentioned that both suggestions, i.e. Jesus and a Person of the Book, are congruent with the context and it is not possible to discard either of them. Therefore, it is necessary to refer to other narrations and signs in such cases.

The second example in this regard is the verse, 'The People of the Book know this/him as they know their own sons' (1:146). Regarding the referent of the pronoun in the phrase 'know this/him,' different possibilities have been mentioned, including the Holy Prophet (S), the issue of the qibla, the Sacred Mosque, the Knowledge, and the Quran.<sup>[14]</sup> Some exegetes including Mulla Fathullah Kashani (died circa 1580 CE) and Alusi (1802 – 1854 CE) have offered the Holy Prophet (S) as the respective referent based on the phrase, 'as they know their own sons,' because the comparison of this knowledge with knowing one's own children can only be correct if the other side of the comparison involves a human being.<sup>[15]</sup>

As demonstrated, consideration of contextual clues may aid in resolving ambiguity in the text being examined by establishing antecedents of pronouns.

#### **Determining whether a Quranic Chapter or Verse is Medinan or Meccan**

One of the ways for determining whether a Quranic chapter or verse is Medinan or Meccan – especially when there are no valid narrations in this regard or the present narrations are in contrast to each other – is to use linguistic context.<sup>[16]</sup> For example, there is controversy over whether chapter *Dahr* is Medinan or Meccan. Some exegetes consider this chapter as totally Meccan<sup>[17]</sup> and others as totally Medinan.<sup>[18]</sup> Allamah Tabataba'i takes the linguistic context into consideration as shown below.

The context of the verses of this chapter, especially the verse *yufun bi-al-nadhr...* (lit. they perform their vows) and the verse *wa yat'amun al-ta'am...* (lit. and they feed), refers to real events in the past. Here, the word *asir* (lit. captive) is the best evidence that shows these verses had been revealed in Medina because in Mecca, Muslims did not possess the power to have captives... However, regarding the part of the chapter from verse *inna nahnu nazzalna 'alayka al-qur'an tanzila* (lit. It is We Who have sent down the Qur'an to thee by stages) (76:23) onwards, it is strongly probable that this group of verses, which have an independent and complete context, have been revealed in Mecca... Therefore, it must be stated that the first part of this chapter has been revealed in Medina and the second part in Mecca.<sup>[19]</sup>

Similarly, Allamah Tabataba'i considers some verses of the *Nahl* chapter as Medinan and others as Meccan due to their different contexts.<sup>[20]</sup>

Understanding a verse or chapter's place of revelation may aid in better understanding said segments of the Quran. Though it is not the only factor in determinacy of revelational locus, apposite use of contextual elements provide significant assistance in this area.

#### **Determination of the Correct Recitation or Preference of One over Another**

Different recitations have been cited for some verses of the Noble Quran. Consideration of the contexts of these verses can be a good criterion for preference of some recitations over others or determination of the true recitation. For instance, there is controversy over the correct recitation of the phrase *la nufarriq* in verse 285 of the chapter of *Baqarah*. Some reciters utter the statement as *la yufarriq* (that is, they consider the verbal subject to be male third person singular instead of first person plural). Taking into account the context of this verse, Sheikh Tusi (1018 – 1067 CE) has opted for the popular (*mashhur*) recitation (i.e. *la nufarriq*).<sup>[21]</sup>

Another example in this regard concerns the verse *min faza' yawma'idhin aminun* (27:89). If *faza'* (lit. terror) is recited with nunnation (i.e. *faza'-in*), a certain terror among all terrors of the Day of Judgment is intended.<sup>[22]</sup> Non-Kufi reciters, however, utter the term genitively without nunnation (i.e. *faza'-i*) in which case it covers all terrors on the Day

of Judgment.<sup>[23]</sup> Consideration of context shows that the genitive recitation is preferable, and therefore, the Righteous are secure from all terrors on the Day of Judgment. Tabari (840 – 923 CE) explains this as follows.

In my viewpoint, addition of the word *faza* ' to the word after it as a genitive construction is better, because this terror is a known one, and when it is added, it becomes definite, because this terror comes in this context of the verse, 'And the Day that the Trumpet will be sounded – then will be smitten with terror those who are in the heavens, and those who are on earth, except such as God will please (to exempt)' (27:89). It is, thus, clear that the intention of Allah from the word 'terror' in the verse 'and they will be secure from terror on that Day' (27:89) is the same as has been mentioned in verse 87.<sup>[24]</sup>

It is clear that an incorrect recitation can lead to misconstrual of the Quran and thus this function of context is an important element in the framework.

### ***Rejection of Interpretive Ideas of Exegetes***

One of the functions of context is to judge the verity of exegetic theories.<sup>[25]</sup> In many cases, consideration of context can resolve ambiguities and disprove exegetic views. For example, different opinions and interpretations have been offered regarding the statement 'cut off the way' in the verse, 'Do ye indeed approach men, and cut off the way, and practice wickedness (even) in your councils?' (29:29). Some exegetes consider the statement 'cut off the way' to be indicative of thievery and brigandage,<sup>[26]</sup> while others have taken the aforementioned statement to mean 'blocking the way of pedestrians.'<sup>[27]</sup> However, by consideration of context – especially the previous phrase 'approach men' and the next 'and practice wickedness (even) in your councils' – it makes more sense that the term in question means to cut off the line of progeny. In other words, it refers to men's abstention from women and from marriage. Other opinions are incongruent with the context.<sup>[28]</sup>

In short, when presenting a theory about an exegetic element, the interpreter should take contextual clues into account to enable a theory that is closer to the truth.

### ***Discovering Omitted Parts of a Verse***<sup>[29]</sup>

It seems that in some verses of the Noble Quran, especially ones dealing with the history of the prophets (A) and former nations, there exist cases of omission where some details have not been mentioned for various reasons. One of the ways to discover these cases of omission is to consider the context of the respective verse. For example, on the story of Moses' (A) infancy and his sister's efforts to find him after he was thrown into the river, a translation of chapter *Qasas* states:

And we ordained that he refused suck at first, until (His sister came up and) said: 'Shall I point out to you the people of a house that will nourish and bring him up for you and be sincerely attached to him?' (28:12)

In this regard, Allamah Tabataba'i writes the following.

The context shows that there is an omission here. Taking the omission into consideration, the verse might be translated, 'Before the arrival of Moses' sister, we forbade nursing women – other than his mother – for him, so Moses did not suck milk from any nursing woman brought to him. Meanwhile, his sister arrived and upon seeing the situation she told the pharaoh, "Shall I point out to you..."<sup>[30]</sup>

The phrases 'other than his mother' and 'so Moses did not suck milk from any nursing woman brought to him. Meanwhile, his sister arrived and upon seeing the situation' are omitted in this verse. However, they can be understood from the context of the verse.

Therefore, some cases may exist where the context facilitates understanding of the text. Using context, the exegete may expand on the ideas presented in the Quran.

### ***Discovering Addressees of Statements***

In some verses, it is not clear who the addressees are. Hence, various possibilities might be considered. One of the main ways of ascertaining the addressees is to take the context into consideration. For instance, in the verse 'And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men' (22:27) there exists controversy about the addressee of the verse. Some exegetes consider the Holy Prophet (S) as the addressee.<sup>[31]</sup> However, the context of the verse shows that its addressee is Ibrahim (A) because in the previous verse the following has been stated.

Behold! We gave the site, to Abraham, of the (Sacred) House, (saying), 'Associate not anything (in worship) with Me; and sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer)' (22:26).

In this verse, after issuing two orders to Ibrahim (A) – i.e. associate not anything (in worship) with Me and sanctify – and talking about the *Ka'bah*, he is also ordered to 'proclaim the Pilgrimage among men.' Thus, in the light of the context, the addressee of the aforementioned verse is Ibrahim (A).

Without taking note of the context, it may be easy to mistake the addressees and thus the meaning of an entire segment.

### ***Understanding the Derivational Structure of Words***

Another function of context is that it helps the exegete understand the derivational structure of those words in the Noble Quran that have several derivational possibilities. For example, some exegetes have taken the word *mansak* – an Arabic term which might be taken to mean either a way of worship or a place of worship – in the verse ‘and to every nation We have appointed a way (or a place) of worshipping so as to worship God by it’ (22:67) to be an adverb of place.<sup>[32]</sup> However, in light of the clause ‘so as to worship God by it,’ *mansak* should be taken as type of infinitive (*masdar-i mimi*). By consideration of the verse context, Qurtubi states:

And the Quranic phrase ‘so as to worship God by it’ refers to and is evidence for the fact that the word *mansak* is an infinitive [Notice that the singular pronoun ‘it’ has been used without the preposition *in*]. If it was an adverb of place, [grammatically] Allah should have said, ‘to worship God in it’ [Hence, one might read the verse, ‘and to every nation We have appointed a worshipping place to worship God in it’]. However, Allah has not stated the latter, but has rather said, ‘and to every nation We have appointed a way of worshipping so as to worship God by it.’<sup>[33]</sup>

### ***Identifying Grammatical Case***

Different grammatical cases have been specified for some words or statements in the Noble Quran. Consideration of context can help the exegete determine or prefer a case. For instance, there is controversy over the grammatical case of the word *qayyima* (lit. *straight*) in the following verses.

Praise be to God, Who hath sent to His Servant the Book, and hath allowed therein no Crookedness, (He hath made it) straight (and clear) in order that He may warn (the godless) of a terrible Punishment from Him (18:1, 2).

Some exegetes consider it to possess the accusative case of an implied verb. Therefore, the meaning would be ‘and hath allowed therein no Crookedness, and has made it straight.’<sup>[34]</sup> Others believe that some displacements have been made in the verse and the verse means, ‘Who hath sent to His Servant the straight (and clear) Book, and hath not allowed therein any Crookedness.’<sup>[35]</sup> Allamah Tabataba’i considers the word ‘straight’ as a circumstantial accusative following the circumstantial clause ‘allowing therein no Crookedness’ and regards other suggestions contrary to the context.<sup>[36]</sup> The reason is that in this passage Almighty Allah praises himself on two points. First, because He has revealed a book free of crookedness and second, since it is a book founded upon the idea of providing the best interests of the human society. Therefore, both features of the Quran must be taken into account equally. This requires the clause ‘allowing therein no Crookedness’ as well as the term ‘straight’ to both be circumstantial.

A second example in this regard is related to the verse ‘Their salutation on the Day they meet Him will be “Peace!”; and He has prepared for them a generous Reward’ (33:44) where the context of the verse clearly shows that *salutation* is an infinitive which has been added to its object in a genitive construction (*idafah*), not to its subject. Hence, the verse means that on the day they meet their God, they are saluted by God and the angels. This is clear from the previous verse which is about the salutation and mercy of God and the angels upon the faithful, and it seems that the salutation in the present verse is also from God and the angels on the Day of Judgment.<sup>[37]</sup>

### ***Determining the Scope of a Verse***

Another function of context is determination of the true scope of a verse, which may differ from that of its literal meaning.<sup>[38]</sup> For example, some exegetes have taken the word ‘wrangle’ in the verse ‘If they do wrangle with thee, say, “God knows best what it is ye are doing”’ (22:68), as any type of wrangling about religious affairs.<sup>[39]</sup> The context of the verse, however, is incongruent with this meaning, because it has been stated in the previous verse ‘and to every nation We have appointed a way of worshipping so as to worship God by it; let them not then dispute with thee on the matter’ (22:67). The wording of the verse shows that some people wrangled with the Holy Prophet (S) because Islamic rites were different from those of other religions. Therefore, wrangling in a general sense is incompatible with the context of the verse.<sup>[40]</sup>

### ***Understanding the Intention of the Verse***

Each chapter of the Quran seeks a certain intention or set of intentions. Consideration of the context of the verses in a chapter can sometimes help the exegete discover those intentions. In the introduction of his interpretation to the Luqman chapter, Allamah Tabataba’i writes the following.

The intention of this chapter, as its beginning and conclusion as well as the context of all its verses show, is to invite [people] to monotheism, belief and faith in the Day of Judgment, and performance of all religious laws.<sup>[41]</sup>

### ***Verification or Rejection of Narrations***

One of the main roles and functions of context is to judge the validity of exegetic narrations.<sup>[42]</sup> The Infallible Imams (A) have ordered us to accept those narrations which are congruent with the Quran and decline those which are incompatible with it.<sup>[43]</sup> After assessing some verses of chapter *Nahl* as Medinan and the others as Meccan due to context, Allamah Tabataba'i writes, 'Although this idea is not congruent with narrations, the context confirms it, and verse context [as opposed to narrations] is more suitable to be accepted and followed.'<sup>44</sup> As can be seen, exegetes may use the context of verses to verify or reject narrations. For instance, following verse 48 of chapter *Anfal*,<sup>[45]</sup> which mentions a conversation of Satan with pagans, some narrations have been recounted stating that Satan appeared in human figure, approached the pagans in the shape of Suraqah ibn Malik, and urged them to participate in the battle of *Badr*. However, when he observed angels descending, he fled.<sup>[46]</sup> Some exegetes consider these narrations weak and believe that this event (Satan's conversation with pagans) happened through inward temptations.<sup>[47]</sup> Considering the context of the verse, which confirms the respective narrations, Allamah Tabataba'i states, 'The context of this noble verse – especially the statements "while I am near to you," "But when the two forces came in sight of each other, he turned on his heels," and "I see what you see not" – is closer to the second meaning (i.e. embodiment of Satan which is clearly declared in the verse).'<sup>[48]</sup>

### ***Applicability of Linguistic Context***

It must be noted that in cases of inconformity between linguistic context and narrations, especially narrations dealing with the circumstances of revelation, context can only be utilised in specific cases. If the conditions for this preference are not realized, and numerous or *sahih* narrations relevant to the verse exist, it is quite clear that narrations must be employed and context disregarded.

Two conditions for appropriacy of employing linguistic context include thematic consistency and discursive continuity.

### ***Thematic Cohesion***

If context is to be used, verses and sentences must be related thematically and conceptually as well as be focused on the same subjects and purposes. If the verses or sentences are issued about two or more independent matters, it is not unreasonable to assume these sentences are unrelated and conceptually different. In other words, the basis for acceptability of context is that it is irrational for a wise speaker to express unrelated or disproportionate statements in a single discourse. Hence, context obtains only where all statements revolve around a singular subject and seek to convey a specific matter creating a united whole. For example, if one or several parenthetical sentences are located among other sentences, context cannot be applied to reinterpret the apparent meaning of the parentheses with the attempt of coordinating them with previous and subsequent sentences since there is no thematic cohesion or unity between them. A case of such verses and sentences are found in the Quranic chapter Resurrection (*qiyamah*), verses 16 to 19. A translation of these four verses, which follow verses on the resurrection, is as follows.

Move not thy tongue concerning the (Quran) to make haste therewith. It is for us to collect it and to promulgate it. But when we have promulgated it, follow thou its recital (as promulgated). Nay more, it is for us to explain it (and make it clear).

It seems that these four verses are parenthetical statements among the verses that come before and after. They concern divine courtesy commanding the Prophet of Allah (s) not to enunciate verses before they have been completely revealed. They are thematically related to the verse below, which is in a completely different chapter, but not to the verses alongside them.

...Be not in haste with the Qur'an before its revelation to thee is completed... (20:114)

These verses are comparable to statements unrelated to the discourse at hand which speakers sometimes express amid their speech. For instance, a person presenting a speech, realizing that front spaces are mostly empty but the back is full, may interrupt their speech to ask the audience to gather closer so that those coming in later may have a place to sit. As another example, a teacher that notices a student's inattention may pause to advise them before continuing. A person not aware of this, listening to a recording of the lecture may misunderstand and wonder at the irrelevance of the statements. However, by considering the circumstances of the gathering, the reason behind such utterances becomes clear.

In the case of these four verses, God temporarily breaks off discourse on resurrection and the state of the faithful and unbelievers therein to present a short notice to His Prophet (s) about the Quran, and then proceeds with the eschatological discussion and other features of the Resurrection.

### *Discursive Continuity*

In a collection of related utterances, the contextual elements that seem to exist due to the succession and concomitance of sentences are valid only if the sentences were originally issued from the speaker consecutively. This is because, as indicated above, the validity criterion for linguistic context is that semantically disproportionate utterances are not issued from wise speakers in a single discourse. This criterion obtains when a group of sentences is issued by the speaker in succession or, in other words, exhibits 'discursive continuity.' Where the status of continuity in a given set of sentences is unclear, the context that may seem to hold does not in fact exist and cannot be considered as a textual indication to aid in the understanding of terms and sentences. Hence, in exegesis of sentences from the Holy Quran, if it is shown conclusively that the entire Quran was revealed at the same time and in the same order that exists in current the version or Mushaf, discursive continuity of all verses and chapters of the Quran will be proven as well. However, if this arrangement is not substantiated, and there exists the possibility that a set of verses, or even sentences within a verse, in the current Mushaf do not follow the original order of revelation, then discursive continuity of the set is uncertain. Thus, discursive continuity must be demonstrated for a given set of Quranic verses or sentences before linguistic context can be utilised for interpretation.<sup>[49]</sup> An example of lack of discursive continuity can be seen in verse 33 of chapter Ahzab.

And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger. *And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless.* (33:33)

Considering the style, content, and tone of speech as well as narrations on the conditions of revelation, it is clear that the sentence in italic typeface above is independent of the rest of the verse. The style and tone of this sentence in addition to the features of the terms and pronouns used in it clearly show that the final sentence in the verse is unrelated with and independent of previous sentences. Furthermore, according to numerous and *sahih* narrations cited in both Shia and Sunni sources, revelation of this sentence was separate from sentences surrounding it. Narrations (over seventy in number) demonstrating that this sentence pertains specifically to the Prophet (s), Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn (a) leave not even the slightest doubt about its independence and the fact that it was revealed separately.

Therefore, the sentence being discussed (i.e. the verse of Tathir), is not revelationally connected to the part about the wives of the Prophet of Allah (s). In fact, there is absolutely no evidence that this sentence was revealed beside the others; rather, the evidence indicates that the sentence was placed alongside the others when the verses of the Quran were being gathered and compiled into a whole, either at the time of the Prophet (s) or afterwards. Supporting this possibility is the fact that if the sentence of Tathir is altogether removed from the verse, verses 33 and 34 will be perfectly cohesive and integrated as shown below. The ellipsis shows where the sentence of Tathir has been omitted.

And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger...And recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes, of the Signs of Allah and His Wisdom: for Allah understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). (33:33-34)

Another example of this separateness can be seen in verse 3 of chapter Ma'idah presented below. Clearly the part in italic typeface is contextually disconnected from the rest of the verse, which discusses things that are forbidden to be eaten.

Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than Allah; that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which hath been (partly) eaten by a wild animal; unless ye are able to slaughter it (in due form); that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety. *This day have those who reject faith given up all hope of your religion: yet fear them not but fear me. This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.* But if any is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, Allah is indeed Oft-forgiving, most Merciful. (5:3)

## Conclusion

Consideration of linguistic context and comprehension of its functions in exegesis helps the exegete understand the meaning of Quranic verses, whereas ignoring it leads to faulty and invalid exegetic expositions. Therefore, though exegetes must not ignore other indications, they must certainly take account of the context and its functions as the only sign accompanying the text.

As opposed to previous compositions that merely name four functions for linguistic context in exegesis, the comprehensive framework elaborated on within this article comprehends eleven functions for linguistic context in addition to two conditions for application in exegesis of elements that seem to be contextual clues. Exegetes have provided seemingly unsound interpretations due to lack of knowledge or awareness regarding this textual indication, especially since these functions and principles are not directly discussed in the literature. Among the functions discussed in this article, some assume crucial roles in the process of semantic analysis of Quranic terms and verses. Others pinpoint the grammatical aspects of the Quran such as determination of pronoun antecedents and discovery of derivational structures of words. *Siaq* can even function as a criterion for gauging the veracity of narrated traditions as well as Quranic interpretations by exegetes.

There are standards for application of linguistic context in exegesis, specifically thematic cohesion and discursive continuity, which are not discussed in previous works. Disregard for these criteria may led to inapt and perhaps overt usage of *siaq* by the exegete as indicated by the interpretations of various Sunni exegetes regarding verses about the Household of the Prophet (s).

It is proposed that this framework be used by exegetes in order to bring their exegetical expositions closer to the truth as well as to decrease the possibility of egregious errors.

Terms without Diacritics	Terms in Arabic	Terms with Diacritics
siaq	سياق	sīāq
qarīnah lafzi muttasil	قرينه لفظي متصل	qarīnah lafzī muttaṣil
zahir	ظاهر	zāhir
tathir	تطهير	taṭhīr
ikmal	اكمال	ikmāl
sha'n nuzul	شان نزول	sha' n nuzūl
maqam kalam	مقام كلام	maqām kalām
lubbi	لبي	lubbī
mubtada muqaddar	مبتدا مقدر	mubtadā muqaddar
akhir al-zaman	آخر الزمان	ākhir al-zamān
asir	اسير	asīr
mashhur	مشهور	mashhūr
mansak	منسك	mansak
masdar-i mimi	مصدر ميمي	maṣḍar-i mīmī
idafah	اضافه	iḍāfah
sahih	صحيح	ṣaḥīḥ

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## Notes

[1] Badr al-Din Muhammad ibn Abdullah Zarkishi, *Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1989), vol. 2, p. 313.

[2] Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim (Al-Minar)* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 2006.), vol. 1, p. 22.

[3] Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr, *Muqaddamat fi al-Tafsir al-Mawdu'i li-al-Qur'an*, p. 12.

[4] See: Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Qum: Daftar Intisharat Islami, 1996), vol. 17, pp. 7, 9.

[5] Ali Akbar Baba'i et al., *Ravish Shinasi Tafsir Qur'an* (Qum: Pazhuhishgah Hawzah, Danishgah, va Samt, 2000), pp. 268-276.

- [6] Muhammad Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1993), vol. 10, p. 167.
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Some researchers have offered a definition for linguistic context (*siaq*) which covers all accompanying indications including both literal (*lafziah*) and circumstantial (*haliyah*) ones (see: Sadr, *Durus fi Ilm al-Usul*, p. 103). However, the usage of this term in the works of scholars is incongruent with this wide definition.
- [9] See: Baba'i et al., *Ravish Shinasi Tafsir Qur'an*, p. 120.
- [10] When the subject of a sentence is omitted by the speaker for any reason, it is called *mubtada muqaddar* or *mubtada taqdiri*.
- [11] See: Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1991), vol. 6, p. 14.
- [12] Ibid.
- [13] Ibid, p. 17.
- [14] See: Abu Ali Fadl ibn Hasan Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Tehran: Intisharat Nasir Khusru, 1993), vol. 1, p. 423; Abu al-Fath Husayn ibn Ali Razi, *Rawd al-Jinan wa Ruh al-Jinan* (Mashhad: Astan Quds Radawi, 1987), vol. 2, p. 251.
- [15] See: Mullah Fathullah Kashani, *Minhaj al-Sadiqin fi Ilzam al-Mukhalifin* (Tehran: Kitabfurushi 'Ilmi, 1957), vol. 1, p. 324; Sayyid Mahmud Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1994), vol. 1, p. 411; Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 1, p. 326.
- [16] Baba'i et al., *Ravish Shinasi Tafsir Qur'an*, pp. 268-276.
- [17] See: Razi, *Rawd al-Jinan*, vol. 20, p. 66; Abdullah ibn Umar Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath Al-'Arabi, 1997), vol. 5, p. 269.
- [18] See: Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan*, vol. 10, p. 612.
- [19] Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 20, p. 135.
- [20] See: Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 12, p. 203.
- [21] Muhammad ibn Hasan Tusi, *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath Al-'Arabi, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 383.
- [22] See: Fathullah ibn Shukrullah Kashani, *Zubdah al-Tafasir* (Mu'assisah Tahqiqat va Nashr Ma'arif Ahl al-Bayt (A), n.d.), vol. 5, p. 130; Muhammad ibn Muhammad Rida Qumi Mashhadi, *Kanz al-Daqa'iq wa Bahr al-Ghara'ib* (Tehran: Sazman Chap va Intisharat Vizarat Irshad, 1989), vol. 9, p. 600.
- [23] See: Baghawi, Husayn ibn Mas'ud, *Ma'alim al-Tanzil fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath Al-'Arabi, 1999), vol. 3, p. 520.
- [24] Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, vol. 20, p. 17. See also: Razi, *Rawd al-Jinan*, vol. 15, p. 86.
- [25] Baba'i et al., *Ravish Shinasi Tafsir Qur'an*, pp. 268-276.
- [26] See: Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan*, vol. 8, p. 280.
- [27] See: Muhammd Jawad Mughniyyah, *Tafsir al-Kashif* (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 2003), vol. 6, p. 105.
- [28] See: Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 16, p. 123.

<sup>[29]</sup> We do not mean that Quranic verses have been distorted, but rather, we contend that Allah has not mentioned some details in some Quranic verses due to considerations of brevity. These details, however, can be grasped through context.

<sup>[30]</sup> Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 16, p. 13.

<sup>[31]</sup> See: Tusi, *Al-Tibyan*, vol. 7, p. 310.

<sup>[32]</sup> Mughniyyah, *Al-Kashif*, vol. 5, p. 345.

<sup>[33]</sup> Muhammad ibn Ahmad Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Tehran: Intisharat Nasir Khusru, 1985), vol. 12, p. 93; Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 14, p. 405.

<sup>[34]</sup> Mahmud Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1987), vol. 2, p. 703.

<sup>[35]</sup> Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan*, vol. 6, p. 693.

<sup>[36]</sup> See: Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 3, p. 273.

<sup>[37]</sup> See: Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 16, p. 329; Naser Makarem Shirazi, *Tafsir Nemooneh* (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah), 1995, vol. 17, p. 355.

<sup>[38]</sup> Baba'i et al., *Ravish Shinasi Tafsir Qur'an*, pp. 268-276.

<sup>[39]</sup> See: Alusi, *Ruh Al-Ma'ani*, vol. 9, p. 188.

<sup>[40]</sup> See: Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 14, p. 406.

<sup>[41]</sup> Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 16, p. 209.

<sup>[42]</sup> Baba'i et al., *Ravish Shinasi Tafsir Qur'an*, pp. 268-276.

<sup>[43]</sup> Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh, *Al-Amali* (Tehran: Nashr Kitabchi, 2007), p. 231.

<sup>[44]</sup> Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 12, p. 203.

<sup>[45]</sup> Remember Satan made their (sinful) acts seem alluring to them, and said, 'No one among men can overcome you this day, while I am near to you.' But when the two forces came in sight of each other, he turned on his heels, and said, 'Lo! I am clear of you; lo! I see what ye see not; Lo! I fear God: for God is strict in punishment' (8:48).

<sup>[46]</sup> See: Tabarsi, *Majma' Al-Bayan*, vol. 4, p. 844.

<sup>[47]</sup> See: Alusi, *Ruh Al-Ma'ani*, vol. 5, p. 211.

<sup>[48]</sup> Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 9, p. 98.

<sup>[49]</sup> Mahmood Rajabi, *Ravish Tafsir Qur'an* (Qum: Intisharat Hawzah va Danishgah, 2004), p. 104.