

**A LINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF  
CONTEXTUALIZATION IN RELIGIOUS  
DISCOURSE**

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**Abstract**

The study is an attempt to investigate contextualization through examining a number of factors. It aims at focusing the phenomenon theoretically by addressing the above contextualization factors in particular. The study hypothesizes that the factors investigated have a respectable impact in the milieu of the discourse. For verifying the hypotheses of the study, Bevens' (2002) model of translation is adopted. The finding of the study reveals that all the factors under study play a big part in discourse and tables show that they show sort of convergence in building and understanding discourse. Findings also show that users tend to involve contextualization when speaking and link it to deeds for avoiding ambiguity to achieve understanding and communication as well. The study comes up with a number of conclusions.

**Keywords:** discourse, contextualization, translation model, ambiguity, factors.

**المستخلص:**

يعد هذا البحث محاولة لدراسة السياق من خلال عدة عوامل. فهو يهدف الى التركيز على هذه الظاهرة نظرياً من خلال توجيه العوامل آنفة الذكر بشكل محدد. وتفترض هذه الدراسة بأن للعوامل قيد البحث تأثيراً كبيراً على النصوص. ومن أجل التحقق من فرضيات هذه الدراسة، فقد تم الاعتماد على نموذج بيفان (2002).

تكشف نتائج هذا البحث بأن كل العوامل قيد الدراسة لها دوراً كبيراً في النصوص، وتشير الاحداثيات الى أنها تظهر نوعاً من الإقبال على بناء وفهم النص. وتظهر النتائج أيضاً بأن مستخدمي اللغة يحاولون تضمين السياق عند الكلام وربطه بالأفعال لتجنب الغموض ولتحقيق الفهم والتواصل على حد

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سواء. وقد تم التوصل الى عدد من التوصيات والملاحظات والتي تم ذكرها في الخلاصة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النص، السياق، نموذج الترجمة، الغموض، العوامل.

## Section One

### 1-1 Definition of Contextualization:

To set the definitions of the term " contextualization", different approaches can be outlined: starting with Hasselgrave & Rommen's (2007) viewpoint; meaning concluded it is a process of three elements (words of the source; i.e., language user, its interpretation, and meaning concluded when applying by the listener.

Throughout the different definitions that researchers could find, they agree on the idea that concrete logical implications of language helps being understood by learners and make the final product accepted by society members involved.

### 1-2 Religion:

From Wittenstein's viewpoint, it is "a possible and legitimate language game which is meaningful within its own context". This can be interpreted in the light of his theory according to which language is known as a 'game'; i.e., just like there are rules for each game as to decide what should and should not be done, similarly the contexts of language have rules of deciding "what is and is not meaningful".

### 1-3 Definition of Religious Language:

It is defined as the "statements or claims made about God or gods" and including divine attributes, features, and deeds. It also refers to the written texts in which truths about God are proclaimed.

### Problem: 1-4

Many trends are involved here: it is how to use symbolism and interpret religious stores, how to devote the timeless, functional imperative and dealing with human characteristics when referring to divine standards.

More significant is how to convince people of some non-seen situations- or even mysticism- empirically.

### The Translation Model: 1-5

The significance of model on contextualization is because of connecting society and culture to language.

Whiteman (as cited in the encyclopedia ) has stated that " the vocabulary of contextualization dates back only to the early 1970s.

Though there are many models, yet the translation model is the most fruitful and highly used for " there is always a content to be adopted or accommodated to a particular

culture" ( Bevans, 2002: 37). This model utilizes the connotative meaning rather than the literary one (especially for the sake of communication).

In this respect, Kraft (1979:271) states that there are sacred words to change, while Sanneh's (1989:53) viewpoint is language could " transcend the cultural biases of the translator so that it takes root in any recipient language and culture.

The reason behind choosing the translation model is best described by Bevan's (2002:37) words as: "There is always a content to be adapted or accommodated to a particular culture". It investigates the idiomatic use and not the literary one. This idea is supported by Sanneh's (1989: 51) viewpoint in that "Christians never accept a thought of God to speak in a special language He generalizes.

This is so to make use of the language to meet the needs of people at each age. Besides, throughout investigating different studies and models, it has been found that contextualizing via translation model is workable with different religions, and religious texts : bible, gospel, and Quran.

Ferguson ( 1972) in his study focuses on the idea that the religious discourse of each society has some generalized characteristics that make it understood by users, and at the same time provides opportunity for analysis, specially its structures, socio-aspects, and patterning.

#### **1-6 Different Perspectives & Approaches**

Whether regarding contextualization a dynamic or static process, different ideas have been lighted here:

1-Bruce J. Nicholls: when interpreting the bible for e.g., that resembles " the deepest of culture... and live the life of faith, and consequently the correct use leads to communicational society.

2- Jurgen Moltmann's viewpoint is since the mission used awakens hope in people as well as political perspectives are concerned with society.

3- Whereas Kraft has used the simile of filtering reality when dealing culturally. Moreover, the cultural common knowledge helps facilitate interpretation.

There are cases when conflict could be a result of incorrect use of language , like:

Hanger, racism,...etc. this occasion is urgently leading to interpret a speech by Miguez-Bonino which underlines that any revolution or change occurs on the economic, political, cultural, or social levels, this is so when centering contexts and relate the society needs to real ideal situations learned either academically or/ and from life structures.

Signal Detection Theory (SDT) 4-

Such a theory is based on computer- based tutorials (Wickens, 1997), which is firstly used by doctors as an attempt to make a decision on the patients sickness test results. This is done by applying different situations.

Practically this theory could be used by students when describing the problem context. Many experiments have been illustrated in this aspect, but the easiest one is that done by using an "active tone" and they have to choose either " you" or "he" according to the situation involved.

Personalization is highlighted here on a purpose which is providing a 'learner- centered design' which is a consequence for their motivation. Moreover, when applying this theory, many linguistic tutorials could be achieved and as it has been focused in the above mentioned resource. The application of this theory results in motivation along with compromising transfer.

In fact, Son and Goldstone (2008) have provided different experiments, but the most useful one is that called – as they mentioned- conversational narration by which learners are engaged in conversation which, in turn, is supposed to be connected to the content.

#### **De-contextualization: 1-7**

What is significant about de-contextualization is that it could be generalized and involve variant occasions, that enables it to cover a wide range of learning and results in productivity.

This term dates back to the literary theory and it means the " process of abstraction through which texts are separated from their real world context of their origins".

Hamiton (1988) raises a question; Is it really possible to take something out of context without putting it into another one? She asserts that cannot be, and "all discourse is contextual and meanings are always created in reference to some context", and every text could be related to more than one context and this is what the translation model asserts.

This is one of the reasons behind not preferring de-contextualization for the lack of appropriate language acquisition in such cases. The contrary situation (i.e., with contextualization) helps learners create planned description, and for teachers enable them have more effective lessons.

### **Section Two**

#### **Contextualization and Cognition: 2-1**

Cognition can be looked upon in two perspectives {as it is referred to by (Baranes, Perry, and Stigler, 1989; Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Wason and Shapiro, 1971): Context-dependent and context- independent aspects.

Through these studies, it has been assured that with the context- dependent trend the matter of problem solving would be easiest for the details provided and the environment treated. Plus, such contexts could be of long term memory for the learners and/or language users since they are concretely related to life and experience. Yet, the matter of transforming from what is read to what is lived could be a great challenge for users.

#### **The Significance of Interest: 2-2**

The best statement said in this aspect is that stated by (Son and Goldstone, 2008) " direct experience, perspective, and interests offer straightforward means of couching concepts in meaningful experiences" and they " have been fruitful for both a basic understanding of cognition and pedagogical inquiry".

It could be said that when involving such elements when investigating contexts, added to real acting that could strengthen the individual's comprehension. As a proof for that is the point raised by (Chi, Roy, and Hausmann (2008)) when they highlight the idea of interacting would be as effective as actually being tutored" and if the individuals play the role of an observer, they would be "fostering multi-perspective view of a situation."

Moreover, there are cases when individuals remember past experience, that might highly reflect their current situations, and such a case is due to contextualizing the language of texts they pass through.

In spite of the agreement of most linguist, scholars and teachers viewpoint regarding the engagement is connected to the validity of interest, yet, Fernald, 1987, Velasco & Bond, 1988 have witnesses that "interest may not be necessary for enhanced learning". This specially occurs when learners depend on mental building of texts.

### **Strong Debate: 2-3**

An issue worth mentioning here is the argument concerning the effects of society as well as culture on contextualization. It is better to start with Forquin's (1989, 10) belief that states " the contemporary pedagogical thinking cannot run without a debate on cultural issues and cultural elements of different types of educational choices". This belief can even be practically supported from the real situations the researcher has when teaching the skills (especially: writing and speaking) through (conversation and essay writing) topics; i.e., the students' interaction is great when it evokes real and daily situations. It is even referred to as {intercultural education pedagogical device} by Forquin.

Thomas's perspective also focuses on the impact of social matters and humanism to be centered when learning.

### **2-4 Factors for Understanding Religious Language**

1-Symbolism: when meanings are faraway things of human's belief and mind, it is better to use symbolism to make the language and the concepts of its pictures or stories nearer to belief.

Gilkey (as cited in the encyclopedia) outlined the religious language as having three characteristics:

- Its symbolism is of 'double focus' in that it links empirical aspects with abstract ones.
- It shapes very important issues of community as well as the individual's.
- It presents the life standards and how to be lived.

2- Myth: The language of religious stories is powerful for it represents things from different ages and to be applied in other ages. For example, Paden (1994) amplified the creation myth- which is something shared in all religions- which should be differentiated form the scientific theories. For example how to create 7 skies and the earth in a short time. Besides, how the creator provides the accurate details in His creation of any component in the universe!

This view has been argued by the philosopher Smedes (1992 ) who states that " to believe means to accept a conviction, and he denies the conflict between science and religion. In other words, he argues "that people can still believe in God, even though He cannot be compared to anything in the world."

It is obvious that difficult opinions interpret the acceptance of the religious language details in regards to other standards that could be empirical, scientific, and hypothetic for the human's mind and beliefs.

#### **2-4-1 Meaning and Use:**

This approach is adopted by Braithwaite (2004) as belonging to Wittgenstein's view, when they regard the religious statement like the moral ones for they both still have a use and a meaning. This is so because the religious language is full of linguistic tools like: metaphors, description, functional structures, parables, comparisons,...etc.

How to Fill the Gap: 2-4-2

When investigating the behavior to fill a gap might be created, three points are taken into consideration: the sender- communicational message- its interpretation or response by the listener. This circulation is not easy to be completed unless the three points are adopting the intended function by each.

Reflecting contextualization in Society: 2-4-3

Hesselgrave & Rommen ( 2007) have stated two culturally affecting issues in this respect which are:

- a)The shared cultural heritage of users.
- b)Development on the received message.

### **Religious Language Challenges: 2-5**

Many challenges are highlighted here:

- How to verify and apply reality by experience.
- Talking about God in human terms; which descriptive ways should be used.
- Convincing believers of non- seen issues, linguistic structures that can't be met; for example to make inanimate things have features of animate things, like the stones to talk, Mousa's stick to move!, in addition to the ability of speaking by an infant (the prophet Jesus) and that I typically and in normal cases is somehow impossible!
- Working on logic as much as possible to make even unbelievable things believable and accepted as true stories occurred.
- Religious language must use meaningful statements to prove or deny the existence of a certain affair.

Consequently, the language of different religions play great roles in shaping the way of thinking and deciding the standards for living of their communities.

The topic of this study is regarded a communicational challenge that passes across different cultural boundaries. The core of its challenges is when and how to relate it to cultures through the daily detailed performance.

Though many studies have investigated such issue, yet Whiteman's study sheds light upon the gap between the theoretical and practical aspects of contextualization. After explaining his experiment about a Christian student, he uses the expression " contextualization was the key that unlocked to door in the students understanding to keep her Christianity bound up in a Westernized room. But now,...a burst of sunshine has come into her room that affirmed Buddhist teaching on her love for God.

### **2-6 Paradigms:**

Hasselgrave and Rommen (2007) made an attempt to cover the related matters of contextualization; they present seven paradigms :

1-Worldviews: this means how any individual "looks out upon the world", of course such a view is a collection of traditions, experience and corrections.

2-Cognition: ways of people's thinking.

3-Linguistic expressions of ideas: it focuses on situations when being aware of the absence of the identical meaning of two words while changing situations.

4-Behavioral Pattern: it involves: gestures, facial expressions, movement and positioning).

5-Ways of interpreting the message.

6- Social aspect: how to interact with each other depending on understanding all the elements involves (like: speaker, listener, previously known or not...)

7- Motivation to make decision: this could be done with the existence of advisors, instructors,...etc.

#### **2-7 Functions:**

a)It attempts to communicate the society in word and deed taking care of the societies distinctive cultural context as a way to reveal people's needs.

b) A situation with the absence of contextualization, or the poor one, leads to offending culture, and consequently full understanding or communication would be under suspense.

c) developing expression contextually results in making these expressions universal even with no previous experience.

It is worth mentioning here that how to organize the messages and speech is highly valued.

#### **2-8 Solutions:**

a) Dealing with meaningless statements: it is to depend on perception, observation, and experience as it is emphasized by Carnap (1966), for example, in the Holly Quran there is a statement " The owner of the last day" indicates that believers should observe that God is the only one that could decide the fate of human beings, and they should do their best and be ready for that dy.

Besides, Carnap argues the verification of metaphorical issues like "the principle of the world is water" and he assists it can be meaningful when depending on one of the three aforementioned principles.

b) Interpretation and translation: when dealing with a statement like "God is not a body" it is interpreted as being different from human's. moreover, passages in which reference to God's "body parts" are translated in view of God's actions. Both Bible and Quran involve the word "eye" to refer to God's power of observing the human's behaviors and attitudes and even his ability to observe the "inner" intentions and mentality.

#### **2-7 Conclusion:**

Throughout this research, many remarks have been concluded and recommended:

1- Though there are many models, yet the translation model is the best fitted for treating and investigating the religious texts and contextualizing their meanings and indications.

2- Problems regarding the religious language have been highlighted and defended logically.

3- Meaningless and meaningful statements are dealt with in respect to observation, perception, and experience to convince believers of God's supreme features and powers.

4- Religious contexts have certain features that differ from political and socio contexts for they shape the relation between the creator and creatures in specific doctrines, and consequently shape the life styles of the whole community.

5- Though no general satisfaction could be achieved by all religious communities, still linking what is abstract to empirical views supplying appropriate phrases could solve such a problem.

6- The religious contexts play a great role in spreading religions across the worlds.

7- Improving awareness of different doctrines available in societies and enhancing understanding of the appropriate ways of exchanging information.

Motivating users to involve contextualization when speaking and link it to deeds for avoiding ambiguity and to encouraging sensitivity towards other shapes of cultures and traditions.

Filling the gap between the theoretical and practical aspects when using language.

Implying a communicational challenge that passes across different cultural boundaries; its core is when and how to relate culture to the daily performance via linguistic expressions of ideas.

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