The Impact of Context on Meaning Construction in Al-Jurjani's Thought in Light of Pragmatic Linguistics

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Abstract:
This study aims to elucidate the concept of context within the rhetorical thought of Imam Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and to examine it in relation to contemporary concepts in pragmatic linguistics. The study addresses a central problem: how did al-Jurjani anticipate modern pragmatic theories in his treatment of the relationship between textual structure (al-Nazm) and the circumstances of its production (al-Maqam)?The research employs a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology to trace the impact of both linguistic and situational context on meaning construction. The study concludes that al-Jurjani's Theory of Compositional Arrangement (al-Nazm) is not merely a grammatical construct, but rather a quintessentially pragmatic act that takes into account the requirements of the situation, the speaker's intention, and the recipient's response. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that concepts such as "the meaning of meaning" and "grammatical distinctions" represent early precursors to Speech Act Theory and Conversational Implicature, thereby affirming the pioneering role of the Arab rhetorical tradition in establishing a mature contextual awareness that links language to life and communication.
Keywords: Context, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, Pragmatic Linguistics, Theory of Compositional Arrangement (al-Nazm), Meaning Construction.

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Introduction

The study of "meaning" has long constituted the core of linguistic and rhetorical inquiry across the ages. Meaning is not a static entity residing within isolated words; rather, it is a complex generative process in which linguistic structure interacts with the realities of the external world. It is within this framework that the genius of Imam Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471 AH) becomes most apparent. Al-Jurjani brought about an intellectual revolution through his celebrated Theory of Compositional Arrangement (al-Nazm), transcending the atomistic view of language that confined itself to the individual word, and advancing instead toward a conception of interdependence and syntactic composition that takes into account the conditions of the addressees. With the emergence of pragmatic linguistics (Pragmatics) in the modern era, a discipline concerned with "meaning in use" and the role of "context" in orienting signification the markedly modern dimensions of al-Jurjani's thought have become increasingly evident. Al-Jurjani anticipated a great many contemporary pragmatic concepts, consistently affirming that speech acquires its aesthetic and communicative value only through its conformity to the "requirements of the situation", the classical Arabic term that corresponds to the concept of "situational context" in modern linguistic inquiry.

The central problem this research seeks to address lies in mapping the epistemological intersections between al-Jurjani's conception of context and the propositions of modern pragmatic theory:

how did al-Jurjani succeed in making al-Nazm an instrument for the production of contextual meaning? And to what extent do his concepts regarding word order, fronting and postponement , and situational indicators correspond to the theories of Speech Acts and Conversational Implicature in pragmatics?

This research aims to trace the impact of context in both its forms the textual (al-maqali, i.e., the internal structure of the text) and the situational (al-maqami, i.e., the external circumstances surrounding discourse) on meaning construction in al-Jurjani's work, through a descriptive-analytical approach that examines his texts in the two

foundational works Dala'il al-I'jaz and Asrar al-Balagha. The research is organized around four principal axes: it begins by establishing the concept of context and its relationship to meaning, then proceeds to analyze the impact of linguistic context on the construction of al-Nazm, followed by an examination of situational context and its role in directing communicative intent, and concludes with a discussion of the recipient's role in completing the process of meaning formation ultimately demonstrating the pioneering contribution of classical Arab thought to the establishment of a mature pragmatic consciousness.

The Concept of Meaning and Al-Nazm in Al-Jurjani

Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471 AH) did not originally conceive of rhetoric according to the tripartite division through which it became known among later scholars. Yet in his effort to expound his Theory of al-Nazm and to demonstrate the inimitability of the Qur'an through it, he laid the very foundations of the science of rhetorical meaning and established its governing principles.[1]When al-Jurjani addressed rhetoric, he treated it as a unified whole. The figurative modes which later scholars would classify under the science of rhetorical meaning were not studied in isolation from the rest of his inquiry, but rather as sites upon which to apply the idea of al-Nazm and to illuminate the additional significations it entails.[2]

With al-Jurjani, one also observes the broader deployment of the expression "grammatical meanings" (ma'ani al-nahw), which served as the central axis around which the Theory of al-Nazm revolved. He examined a wide range of topics within the orbit of grammatical meaning including ellipsis and retention, fronting and postponement with the aim of identifying the subtle distinctions that emerge across different syntactic usages. As one scholar notes, "numerous passages confirm the meaning al-Jurjani seeks to establish: that al-Nazm, in its essence, is grammar in its principles not in terms of correctness and error, but in terms of distinction and excellence."[3] Unlike the grammarians, al-Jurjani moved beyond form to meaning, addressing the interplay between the formal and pragmatic properties of expressions and syntactic structures, directing his attention to syntactic constructions and the mutual interconnection of utterances. From the

outset, he defines his theory of al-Nazm: "It is well known that al-Nazm is nothing other than the linking of words to one another, and the making of some dependent upon others. Words are of three kinds noun, verb, and particle, and the ways of linking them are known, falling into three categories: a noun linked to a noun, a noun linked to a verb, and a particle linked to both."[4]

Al-Jurjani's Theory of al-Nazm thus rests on the principle that the interconnection within a sentence is simultaneously grammatical and rhetorical, and that the word follows meaning the arrangement of words in utterance reflecting the arrangement of meanings in the mind: "As for the arrangement of words, it is not analogous to the arrangement of letters, because in arranging them you follow the traces of meanings and order them in accordance with the ordering of meanings in the soul. It is therefore an arrangement in which the condition of the arranged elements in relation to one another is taken into account; it is not the arrangement that consists merely in placing things together as they happen to come."[5] He further adds: "The benefit of understanding this distinction is that, once you grasp it, you will know that the purpose of arranging words is not that their expressions follow one another in utterance, but that their significations be harmonized and their meanings meet in the manner demanded by reason."[6]

For al-Jurjani, al-Nazm is nothing other than the intentional application of the meanings and principles of grammar: "Know that al-Nazm consists solely in placing your speech in the manner demanded by the science of grammar, acting in accordance with its rules and principles, knowing the paths it has laid out and not deviating from them, and observing the prescriptions it has established for you, violating none of them... and exercising judgment in the use of definiteness and indefiniteness, fronting and postponement throughout speech, and in ellipsis and repetition, overt and covert reference hitting the mark in each case and employing each correctly and as it ought to be."[7] This passage contains, as scholars have noted, the most consequential ideas in the entire work, and exerted the greatest influence on subsequent generations, as it encompasses the entire discipline of rhetorical meaning, leaving nothing aside.

Situational Context(Al-Maqam) in Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani

Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani affirmed in numerous passages of Dala'il al-I'jaz the importance of situational context (al-maqam) and the influence of its elements on the text (al-maqal), both semantically and syntactically. He attributes the distinctive qualities of al-Nazm to the meanings and purposes for which speech is composed. Al-Jurjani also established that al-Nazm rests on two types of relations:[8]

- **Syntactic relations**, through which words are linked to one another and built upon one another in accordance with the requirements of grammar.
- **Semantic relations**, which arise within syntactic constructions and are ordered in utterance according to the ordering of their meanings in the mind. Al-Jurjani assigns precedence to semantic relations within al-Nazm, and accordingly calls for attention to patterns of construction that exhibit subtle distinctions including various forms of difference in predication, fronting and postponement, definiteness and indefiniteness, retention and ellipsis, overt and covert reference, emphasis, restriction, affirmation and negation, and conjunction and disjunction analyzing each pattern in terms of the meanings it conveys.

Context in the Pragmatic Perspective

Pragmatics defines context as the ensemble of circumstances surrounding a speech event that contribute to the determination of its meaning and the resolution of ambiguity. Pragmatics studies language in use, and pragmatic theorists hold that context divides into two types:

Linguistic Context:

This is defined as the embodiment of linguistic sequences in the form of discourse comprising phonological, morphological, and lexical units, along with their ordering and syntactic relations[9] or, more precisely, the totality of internal relations that govern the signification of a text, discourse, or even a single sentence. No linguistic output can be

understood as a mere mechanical arrangement of its constituent units; the internal principles that contribute to the cohesion and coherence of these units must also be observed, in the service of their ultimate purpose, which is meaning. For meaning is a fundamental condition that every unit at every level must fulfill in order for a linguistic form to be realized, and the meaning of any linguistic unit is determined by its capacity to align with another unit of a higher level.

Meaning and signification are thus inherently bound to linguistic context, and we invariably turn to context in order to resolve ambiguity in any linguistic product. Firth argued that "meaning is revealed only through the contextualization of the linguistic unit that is, by placing it in various contexts since most semantic units occur in proximity to other units, and the meanings of these units cannot be described or determined except by observing the other units that occur alongside them."[10]When lexical ambiguity arises, for instance, context is relied upon to determine the correct interpretation: it functions as "the operative element in clarifying speech, and indeed in validating it and bringing it to an acceptable level of meaning and form."[11]

The importance of linguistic context thus extends beyond the determination of the meaning of individual linguistic units to the identification of word meaning that enables the comprehension of sentence signification sentences which cohere and interconnect to construct linguistic form. Linguistic context is most closely associated with the dimensions of syntactic composition and arrangement, contributing significantly to the understanding of the meanings of sentences, texts, and discourses, particularly when it alone guarantees the cohesion and coherence of the various units and components. Indeed, "any sentence other than the first sentence of a discursive passage is necessarily affected in our understanding of it by the text that precedes it."[12]

The primary purpose of linguistic context is therefore to achieve harmony and coherence among the constituent parts of a sentence, text, or discourse. Consequently, it is impossible to analyze any element or unit in isolation from the framework in which it appears, since these elements and units are intimately interrelated not merely assembled

arbitrarily and it is precisely this interrelation that causes them to enter into diverse relational structures. These relations are studied above all within the fields of rhetorical meaning and figurative expression.

2. Situational Context: Situational context plays a prominent role in the determination of meaning, given that language is a product of society and the interaction among its members. This type of context endows verbal communication with the meanings and significations that linguistic expressions require but cannot convey on their own. Many situations express themselves without the need, in numerous instances, for explicit linguistic markers; they are, as Al-Shahri describes them, "a category deeply rooted in social determinants."[13]

Situational context also plays a key role with respect to texts and utterances in terms of reference to things in the extralinguistic world reference that is carried by certain linguistic elements such as pronouns, demonstratives, relative pronouns, and temporal and spatial adverbs. These are referred to by many linguists as "empty" linguistic elements, which are difficult to interpret without the support of a situational framework in which both sender and receiver are necessary parties, since it is upon these two elements that the intentional use of such linguistic signs depends as enabled by the context of the situation. As Françoise Armengaud observes: "The linguistic sign lives through use."[14]

The Impact of Linguistic Context on Meaning Construction

Al-Jurjani devoted his attention to the signification of al-Nazm (context) and to the importance of the utterance context in determining the value of the word and in accounting for the varying levels of eloquence among rhetoricians , their success in achieving the precision of al-Nazm and in employing its resources for the expression of meaning since the word acquires its meaning from syntactic composition: "Individual words, which are the designations of language, were not established so that their meanings might be known in themselves, but rather so that they might be combined with one

another, and thereby yield, in their combination, semantic benefits."[15] This meaning does not arise from the random juxtaposition of words, but from adherence to the principles of grammar, "for al-Nazm consists solely in placing your speech in the manner demanded by the science of grammar, acting in accordance with its rules and principles, and knowing the paths it has established so as not to deviate from them, observing all prescriptions and violating none."[16]

Among the ideas to which al-Jurjani consistently returned , reflecting his attentiveness to the "text" or "linguistic context" is his discussion of eloquence (fasaha) and rhetoric (balagha) and their relation to linguistic context and syntactic composition: these qualities, he maintains, are not attributes of individual words but of speech after the process of al-Nazm has been applied. He writes: "We observe that a word may be at the very height of eloquence in one position, and yet in countless other positions that same word possesses not the slightest degree of eloquence. This is because the distinction by virtue of which we describe a word as eloquent is one that comes into being after not existing, and that appears in words after they have been entered into al-Nazm. This is something that, if you seek it in the words when you have produced them in isolation, without intending any arrangement or composition for them, you have sought the impossible... In sum, we do not affirm eloquence for a word severed and isolated from the speech in which it appears; rather, we affirm it for the word as joined to others, with its meaning connected to the meaning of what follows it. Thus, when we say of the word 'ishta'ala' ['blazed'] in the Qur'anic verse ﴿ and the head blazed white with age ﴾[Maryam, 4] that it stands at the highest level of eloquence, we do not affirm that eloquence for it alone, but for it as joined to 'the head' made definite by the article and coupled with 'white age' indefinite and in the accusative."[17]

The Impact of External (Situational) Context on the Direction of Meaning

In his stylistic studies, al-Jurjani was concerned with elucidating the secrets underlying the differences between styles, and with demonstrating their effect in uncovering meaning. He relied upon situational context in his analyses as, for example, when he analyzes

"the meaning of meaning" in the following passage: "...when you reflect upon metonymy (al-kinaya), you find that its true nature and essence is the establishment of a meaning that you come to know through the path of reason rather than through the path of the word alone. Do you not observe that when you consider their expression 'he has much ash' , and you know from them that they intended 'he is generous in hospitality,' you did not learn this from the word itself Rather, you arrived at it by returning to yourself and reasoning: this is an expression used by them in the context of praise, yet there is no sense in praising a man for having abundant ash. It can only be that they intended to indicate, by the abundance of ash, that many pots are set up for him and cooked in for the purpose of hospitality and generosity; for when cooking in pots is frequent, much firewood is burned beneath them, and when much firewood is burned, ash necessarily accumulates in abundance. Such is the case with everything that functions as metonymy."[18]

This passage points to the process by which the meaning of generosity is derived from the surface of the expression. The addressee having recognized that the expression was produced in a context of praise finds that the combined meanings of its constituent words do not cohere with that context. He is therefore compelled, through a process of reasoning, to derive a second-order signification from the direct signification of the expression, in order to fulfill the meaning of praise that the context establishes. In this way, context becomes the guide to the process of reasoning and inference, operating in concert with the prevailing social conventions and cultural context.

It is the pragmatic context grounded in inferential reasoning that leads the recipient to depart from the direct meaning, since the mere abundance of pot-ash carries no meaning in a context of praise; the same context then directs the recipient toward deriving the second-order meaning, namely generosity, which is consistent with the context of praise.

This presence of context is rooted in al-Jurjani's Theory of al-Nazm, and among the examples that confirm his attention to both dimensions of context in his study of syntactic constructions including instances

involving ellipsis is the following: "Among what must also be noted here: when speech resists being taken at face value to the point where it necessitates positing an ellipsis or the suppression of something stated, it falls into two types: the first is when the resistance to taking it at face value derives from a matter pertaining to the speaker's purpose... The second type is when the resistance to taking it at face value, and the necessity of positing an ellipsis or addition, stems from the speech itself rather than from the speaker's purpose as when the omitted element is one of the two constituents of a sentence."[19]

In this way, al-Jurjani ties all grammatical indicators whether of collocation, word order, or concord to an attentiveness to both linguistic context and situational context, including all circumstances connected with the speech situation: the conditions of the interlocutors, the topic of discourse, the addressees, and whatever bears upon their feelings and dispositions. He assigns particular value to the expression, especially in Dala'il al-I'jaz. In his engagement with the question of clarity and al-Nazm, he connects the use of a word to the context of its utterance. An example of this is his discussion of the uses of the particle inna (employed for emphasis), which he argues may only appropriately be introduced into speech when the speaker perceives in the listener a degree of doubt regarding what is being conveyed. He cites a verse by Abu Nuwas and remarks:

"Rely on despair of people — for the richness of the soul lies in despair."

"You will perceive the excellence of its placement, and how readily the soul receives it. This is for no other reason than that it is generally the case with people that they do not bring themselves to despair, nor relinquish hope and desire, nor does every person acknowledge or concede that wealth lies in despair. Since this is so, the context is one that calls for emphasis; and this is why it has the excellence you observe."[20]

The pragmatic dimension in al-Jurjani's work becomes particularly evident when he underscores the necessity of drawing upon non-linguistic pragmatic mechanisms in analysis such as attention and

interest, purposes and intentions, and attentiveness to the circumstances surrounding speech for "it is through this that speech achieves excellence and distinction." This is because meanings and constructions are multiple in proportion to the multiplicity of contexts, making situational context one of the most important foundations of his methodology linking speech to its context of use and taking into account the requirements of the situation. On this basis, and in order to arrive at the intended meaning, the contexts and situations of speech must be invoked as its determinants and specifiers, for meanings are only constituted in relation to their contexts. Al-Jurjani explains the importance of drawing upon pragmatic factors in his discussion of the intentionality underlying fronting and postponement: "Know that we have not found them to have relied upon anything that might serve as a foundational principle other than attention and interest. The author, speaking of the subject and object, said: 'It is as though they give priority to that whose clarification is of greater importance and concern to them, even though both are of importance and concern.'"[21]

Al-Jurjani then cites an example drawn from the grammarians: "...the situation of the rebel (al-khariji) is that he goes out, ravages and causes destruction, and inflicts widespread harm; people seek to kill him and care not who carries out the killing, nor does it concern them. When he is killed, and someone wishes to report it, he gives priority to the mention of the rebel, saying: 'Killed the rebel, Zayd' and not: 'Zayd killed the rebel' because he knows that there is no benefit or advantage for people in knowing that the killer was Zayd. What concerns them, engages their attention, and connects to their satisfaction is what they have been anticipating and watching for namely, that the killing of the destructive rebel should come to pass."[22]

He adds: "People have come to think it sufficient to say that something has been fronted for the sake of attention and because its mention is of greater importance, without specifying the source of that attention and in what respect it is more important... And so they have proceeded in all the other chapters, confining themselves to examining ellipsis, repetition, overt and covert reference, conjunction and disjunction, and all varieties of distinctions and aspects, as one examines what is merely

preferable indeed, as though, were it left undone, no harm would result."[23]

Al-Jurjani's point is that fronting for the sake of attention and interest and for the stimulation of the addressee's mind by what is placed first serves to tie speech to its context of use. His invocation of Sibawayhi's principle of attention and interest is not incidental: it reflects his recognition that fronting the object is required by the speech context, which demands attention and emphasis a requirement bound to the dimension of al-maqam (situational context) that the speaker takes into account in relation to the illocutionary effect upon the recipient. All of this reveals the remarkable depth of al-Jurjani's engagement with the semantic-pragmatic dimension: variation in syntactic constructions constitutes a necessary transformation demanded by the situational context in which those constructions are generated. "Without the situational context, and without knowledge of communicative intentions, it is impossible to infer from a speaker's words what he intends; and if the secret and spirit of speech lies in conveying meaning, then the fullness of this conveyance is what constitutes eloquence."[24]

The Recipient and Meaning Construction (Interpretive Act and Context)

Al-Jurjani distinguished in his theory between meaning (al-ma'na)and the meaning of meaning (ma'na al-ma'na). He divides speech into two types: "One type: in which you reach the intended meaning through the indication of the word alone... Another type: in which you do not reach the intended meaning through the indication of the word alone, but rather the word indicates its meaning as established by its position in the language, and you then find for that meaning a stable signification through which you arrive at the intended purpose. The axis of this matter is metonymy, metaphor, and simile."[25] He adds: "Having established this summary, there is a concise formulation available: you may say 'meaning' (al-ma'na) and 'the meaning of meaning' (ma'na al-ma'na) — meaning by 'meaning' what is understood from the surface of

the word and to which you arrive without intermediary; and by 'the meaning of meaning,' that you comprehend from the word a meaning which then leads you to another meaning, as I have explained."[26]

He further states: "And when you see them making words an adornment and ornament for meanings, or making meanings like attendants... know that they are describing speech in which the speaker has conveyed his purposes through the path of the meaning of meaning."[27] He adds: "That what is implied and what falls within its scope is not what is explicitly stated, but rather the meaning of the word by which you indicated the second meaning, as in the meaning of: 'my dog is cowardly, my young camel is lean' which is evidence that the speaker is hospitable. The primary meanings understood from the words themselves... and the secondary meanings toward which those primary meanings gesture..."[28] He adds elsewhere: "This is because the listener cannot but be either knowledgeable of the language and the meanings of the words he hears, or ignorant thereof. If knowledgeable, it is inconceivable that the condition of the words should vary with him such that the meaning of one word is more readily received by his heart than the meaning of another. And if ignorant, this is even further from applying to him."[29]

The path to "the meaning of meaning" , the implicated meaning lies exclusively in inferential reasoning. Al-Jurjani states: "For in all of this you do not convey your intended purpose from the word alone; rather, the word indicates its meaning as its surface demands, and the listener then comprehends from that meaning, through a process of inference, a second meaning that is your purpose as one comprehends from 'one whose pot-ash is abundant' that he is hospitable, and from 'one whose sword-belt is long' that he is tall."[30]

This rich passage which implicitly acknowledges the presence of the recipient in the speaker's consciousness brings into sharp relief the pragmatic dimensions of the Theory of al-Nazm. Al-Jurjani sought through it to foreground the interactivity within discourse: a movement that begins with the manifest meaning and proceeds to the latent meaning, the formation of which requires the competence of both speaker and addressee, as well as all that surrounds them. For words, in

al-Jurjani's view, were not established merely to attach names to things, but to fulfill the function of communication and conveyance in the course of the mutual interconnection of words. This orientation is affirmed by pragmatics, given its grounding in rationality and inference inferences that are by their nature hypothetical propositions employing the rules of logical deduction, proceeding from premises simultaneously composed of conventionalized knowledge and of the perception of things in relation to the words associated with them, from which a conclusion is drawn representing a hypothesis regarding the category to which the intended object belongs. "Without this capacity for inference and deduction upon which the sender relies, among other discursive conventions any communication becomes impossible."[31]

The figurative and rhetorical modes that al-Jurjani analyzed at length in Dala'il al-I'jaz and Asrar al-Balagha notably metaphor, metonymy, and analogical representation (what Searle terms specific ways of playing with the sign) make the addressee or recipient a participant in the production of the intended meaning rather than a passive receiver of a ready-made meaning. This occurs through inferential processes in which the recipient moves, by way of the word and its recognized surface meaning, toward the meaning the speaker intends.

The rationality and inferential reasoning to which al-Jurjani refers in numerous passages in his discussion of secondary meanings find their parallel in Searle's definition of inference as "a logical process of linking utterance, contextual, conversational, and pragmatic data in order to construct signification to infer is to calculate and conclude from multiple signifying elements in order to interpret and determine a meaning.

The concept of inference applies primarily on the side of the receiver, yet inference is not merely an act of decoding, nor is it severed from the sender, since meaning is the product of a jointly contextualized utterance... In this way, inference appears as a fundamental phenomenon in linguistic interaction."

Conclusion

The research arrives at a number of conclusions, the most significant of which are:

- Context constitutes a foundational element in the determination of meaning in al-Jurjani's thought.
- The Theory of al-Nazm rests upon a contextual understanding of language.
- Clear intersections exist between al-Jurjani's thought and the concepts of pragmatic linguistics.
- It is possible to re-read the Arab rhetorical heritage in light of modern methodological frameworks.

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