

THE MAQAMA IN THE NOVELS OF ABDUL RAHMAN MAJID AL-RUBAIE A STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF TEXT LINGUISTICS

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Abstract:

Contextuality (*al-maqāmiyyah*) is one of the central concepts in text linguistics, as it relates to the circumstances in which discourse is produced and to the situational factors that determine its meaning and communicative function. It reveals the relationship between the speaker, the addressee, and the external context of the text, and explains how language is adapted to suit the pragmatic situation. Through analysing contextuality in the novel, it becomes possible to uncover the mechanisms guiding narration and to understand how the text achieves coherence with its social, cultural, and political environment.

Keywords: Contextuality, linguistics, discourse, language, novel, narration.

Introduction:

Classical Arab scholars devoted considerable attention to the art of *maqāmāt* (rhymed prose narratives). Speaking of *maqām* brings to mind a well-known saying from our cultural heritage: “For every situation, there is an appropriate discourse” (Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, 1985, 2/430). It has long been customary to address each person according to their social and cultural status—that is, the language of discourse should correspond to the speaker’s environment, linguistic repertoire, knowledge, and understanding of reality. One does not address a learned person with the words of the ignorant, nor the ignorant with the expressions of the learned, for such discourse would contradict the epistemological logic of each one’s linguistic competence.

This is precisely what concerns us in this study of contextual linguistics, for the situational context ensures textual coherence and cohesion—especially within novels that portray the events of society through the writer’s intellect, vision, and linguistic culture, as manifested in the speech of the characters, each according to their own social and communicative position.

First: Definition of Contextuality (al-Maqāmiyyah)

1. Linguistic Definition

Ibn Manẓūr, in his *Lisān al-‘Arab*, defines *maqām* (context or station) as “a gathering place or sitting area.” He states: “The *maqāmāt* of people are their gatherings. Al-‘Abbās ibn Mirdās said—recited by Ibn Barrī: *Whichever of you is more evil, let him be taken to the maqāmah where he shall not be seen.* The term is also used for a group gathered in one place, as in the verse of Labīd: *And a gathering where proud men stood as though they were jinn by the gate of the palace, the standing place of kings.* The plural is *maqāmāt*. The term *maqāmah* or *maqām* also means the place where one stands, and *maqāmah* can refer to nobles or eminent persons” (Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram, 1873, 12/506).

Thus, *al-maqāmiyyah* is a derived nominal form from *maqām*, indicating the situational or locational setting of discourse—the position from which speech emerges. In linguistics, it refers to the situational framework of linguistic expression, which helps reveal textual cohesion and coherence within novels.

2. Terminological Definition

In terminology, *maqāmiyyah* has been associated with *standardisation* or *contextual appropriateness* that is, adherence to linguistic situationality. This standardisation is

manifested “in the context, which serves as the axis around which the surrounding elements revolve, such as the environment of the text, in addition to the crucial role it plays in textual analysis, especially in the absence of explicit cohesive markers” (Ullmann, Stephen, 1990, p. 66).

In this research, *maqāmiyyah* is examined as one of the criteria of textual coherence within linguistic discourse, through which we distinguish the appropriateness of speech to the addressee, a core dimension of pragmatic and stylistic alignment.

Second: Manifestations of Contextuality in Novels

Al-maqāmiyyah refers to the contextual harmony of language within a text. In this study, we explore how contextual coherence is realised in the novels of ‘**Abd al-Raḥmān Majīd al-Rubay ‘ī**, focusing on the degree to which linguistic levels achieve textual cohesion.

1. The Language of Formal Discourse

The language of formal discourse in al-Rubay ‘ī’s novels achieves coherence through an artistic style that adheres to rhetorical precision, establishing the writer’s identity and literary stature. As Aḥmad Mukhtār ‘Umar asserts, “Textual meaning is not revealed except through the contextualization of the linguistic unit—placing it in its appropriate situational contexts” (‘Umar, 1982, p. 69). These contexts help clarify the *maqām* of the speaker—whether narrator, character, or author.

An example appears in *Al-Washm (The Tattoo)*, where the narrator employs similes to express, with refined rhetorical artistry, the theme of sensuality in human relationships:

“She pierced him with the sparkle of her eyes, and he fell like a shooting star. He approached her as she stood waiting for the bus, imposing her sharp presence upon those around her, who appeared beside her like cheap statues arranged in a deserted temple.”

(al-Rubay‘ī, 1995, p. 30)

As Maḥmūd al-Sa‘rān observes, “In written texts, we often lack the situational circumstances of their utterance—the tone and delivery that reveal deeper meanings” (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 265). Yet al-Rubay‘ī compensates for this through poetic language that harmonises form and content. In the above passage, two similes—“he fell like a shooting star” and “they appeared like cheap statues”—reveal the writer’s linguistic mastery and his ability to craft stylistic unity. Such cohesion between the narrator’s and the author’s voices exemplifies al-Rubay‘ī’s control over linguistic form and textual harmony through adherence to linguistic and grammatical conventions (Jughaym, Nu‘mān, 2014, p. 75).

A notable feature of his stylistic contextuality is his meticulous attention to descriptive detail, producing vivid imagery that animates the narrative world:

“It was the first time I met Asīl within four walls, in a locked room. Oil paintings of southern life scenes hung on the walls, and a calendar dangled beneath the portrait of a famous actress in the corner facing the door.”

(al-Rubay‘ī, 1995, p. 50)

Here, the descriptive discourse mirrors the characters’ actions and settings, achieving congruence between linguistic expression and narrative function. Such aesthetic expression strengthens textual unity through “the extension of meaning within the text” (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 149):

“And Hassūn al-Salmān prepared my bed beside him; it was our first night in the new prison—a closed night in which the moon had no scent. Through the window before me, I began to watch two shivering stars drawing near to each other to break the frost of the depths.”

(al-Rubay‘ī, 1995, p. 36)

This rhetorical language reveals the writer’s ability to sustain a coherent narrative rhythm, where “the sequence and continuity make the reader feel constantly drawn toward a goal, each

section preparing for the next until the events and scenes culminate in the intended conclusion” (Naṣīr, 1992, p. 109).

These linguistic patterns represent shared conventions within a “linguistic community” (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 28), ensuring cohesion and textual harmony.

In *Al-Qamar wa al-Aswār (The Moon and the Walls)*, the linguistic register reflects al-Rubay‘ī’s contextual mastery in depicting inner emotions with clarity and simplicity, aiming at explanation and reasoning:

“One day, he travelled to his village, whose name still lingered in his memory. He introduced himself to its people and found that the elders had died, including his uncle’s wife. The children had grown, and some had aged prematurely. They could hardly believe that this dignified man, in his fine clothes and unkempt black beard, was ‘Alī ibn Hilāl.”

(al-Rubay‘ī, 1995, p. 24)

The variation in the levels of formal discourse reflects the author’s explanatory intent:

“Since language is a means of communication and understanding among people, it is governed by the conventions of meaning agreed upon by its speakers, the stylistic habits they adopt, and the circumstances surrounding each act of speech.”

(Jughaym, 2014, p. 75)

In *Naḥīb al-Rāfidain (The Lament of the Two Rivers)*, al-Rubay‘ī’s formal discourse reaches a high level of expressive eloquence, revealing his own persona through the voice of his characters:

“All this brings me back to the beginnings. When you started writing, you did so in the language of modernity. You must remember that—and so must we. Your early writings were poetic, marked by lyrical influence. We, your generation, were captivated by poetry and all that was poetic. Today, I interpret that language, with its artistic qualities, as another form of escape—not from reality, but from the *language* of reality.”

(al-Rubay‘ī, 1988, p. 11)

The linguistic reality in al-Rubay‘ī’s narratives shifts stylistically without losing its intellectual resonance. As van Dijk asserts, “Linguistic theory deals with the natural systems of language—its actual and possible structures, historical development, cultural variation, social function, and cognitive foundation” (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 28).

Thus, the linguistic system presumes that each character, as a cultural entity, expresses their worldview through language. This alignment between speech and identity ensures textual coherence. If characters were to speak in linguistic forms alien to their environment or culture, the narrative purpose would collapse, and the expressive contextual balance would be lost. Each character, therefore, must possess a distinctive linguistic register appropriate to their social and psychological position—an essential condition for maintaining textual and stylistic cohesion.

2. The Language of Popular Discourse

Popular discourse is closely tied to the social and individual classes whose linguistic expressions al-Rubay‘ī captures with remarkable fidelity, shaping their speech according to their intellectual and social positions. This is particularly evident in his novel *Al-Washm (The Tattoo)*, where he writes:

“The place was swept by a flood of lust, by the jungle’s cries. A river of desire howled, drowning everything in its path. Shouts of ecstasy and frenzy rose:

—Another tremor!

—Curse your father!

—You equal my grandfather and my tribe!

—I would die for your legs!

—May my family burn!”

(Fendris, Joseph, 1950, p. 312)

This passage exemplifies the **popular linguistic register**, which mirrors the vernacular expressions of café patrons, whose language is coarse and uninhibited. Those who frequent such places are unlikely to display refined manners or eloquent restraint. Rather, their utterances—such as “You equal my grandfather and my tribe”—align with the situational context of a dancer’s performance. Thus, the colloquial imagery reflects social reality and class distinctions with accuracy (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 29).

According to van Dijk, “Utterances are not to be described merely as internal linguistic structures, but as performed acts resulting from their production” (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 31). This correspondence between **speech acts and social identity** achieves textual cohesion, ensuring that both action and expression are consistent with the character’s class and cultural background.

Al-Rubay’ī’s narratives, particularly at the level of linguistic representation, are rich with popular expressions that embody class structures, narcissism, and social taboos—often exposing the hypocrisy of societies clinging to moral codes they do not practice. For example: “She danced and smiled with the confidence of one who had lit the fuse and subdued beauty beneath his will. Yet her attention was fixed solely on Jābir al-Mawṣilī’s table, where he would rise, raise his glass in salute whenever she smiled at him from afar, and exclaim to himself:

—Long live Jābir al-Mawṣilī, the magician of dancers!

And Maḥmūd would echo:

—What an honourable glory!”

(Abū Shuhbah, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Suwaylim, 1983, p. 584)

The phrase “*What an honourable glory!*” diverges from its conventional meaning of moral elevation. In this degraded setting of night cafés, it becomes a sarcastic expression of moral decay and social corruption. This shift reveals “the relationship between contextually acceptable sentences and the thematic content they convey” (al-Rubay’ī, 1996, p. 18). Hence, the lexical choice aligns precisely with the character’s **social class** (Naṣīr, 1991, p. 33).

This class-conscious contextuality also appears in *Al-Qamar wa al-Aswār (The Moon and the Walls)*, where the author depicts the voices of impoverished characters seeking stability:

“Abbās said:

—I got ninety-five in English.

He spoke while chewing a piece of warm bread dipped in stew, savouring it. Pride was evident on his tanned, round face—his features radiating a manliness beyond his fourteen years. Ḥamīd looked at him with joy, then turned to Ḥasnah and whispered:

—I can’t believe they’ll grow up, become employees, and free me from guard duty.

—I’ll study until I can buy medicine for my mother.”

(al-Samarra’ī, Fāḍil Ṣāliḥ, 2000, 4/28)

Here, the **social function of language** dominates, as it serves the communicative process essential to expressing solidarity and aspiration among lower-class characters (al-Rubay’ī, 1996, p. 19). Their speech reflects temporal hope through the use of the future markers *sa-* and *sawfa*, since “the concise context is conveyed by *sa-*, while the extended temporal context is conveyed by *sawfa*” (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 10).

Moreover, the **popular linguistic context** often integrates religious and cultural traditions, especially in expressions of faith and fertility. For instance, Ḥasnah recounts:

“Kāmil was a year younger than his brother, and I would say:

—As soon as I finished my forty days of purification, I conceived Kāmil. As for Najībah, she stopped having children about three years after giving birth because I became very ill. I went

to the shrines of al-Ḥusayn, al-‘Abbās, and the Kāzimayn, offering vows to them, to the unknown saints, to Sayyid Khudayr, and to Fawwādah Umm Hāshim. Shaykh ‘Alī—may God prolong his life—wrote me dozens of supplications, but nothing worked; it was the will of God Almighty. Then I conceived ‘Abbās—God did not disappoint me.”

(Qur’an, *Sūrat Yāsīn*, 36:82)

This popular discourse highlights both the **author’s narrative design** and the **character’s performative role** (‘Alī, Jawād, 2001, p. 9/68). The colloquial expression “*Allah lam yaksir bikhāṭrī*” (God did not break my heart) conveys deep faith and echoes the Qur’anic verse: “*His command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it ‘Be,’ and it is*” (*Yāsīn* 36:82). Such expressions reveal the reliance of poor communities on supplication as their verbal means of hope and endurance.

Similarly, the popular **register of hospitality** with phrases such as “*Ahlan*” (welcome) and “*Tafaḍḍal*” (please come in) reflects Arab social customs. The duty of the host extends beyond offering food to include protection and honour: “*It is not only the host’s duty to provide food and welcome but also to ensure the guest’s safety as long as he is under his roof*” (*al-Tawbah* 9:51). This is illustrated in *Al-Qamar wa al-Aswār*:

“Someone knocked on the door. Kawthar opened it:

—Welcome, uncle. Please come in.

—Is your father here?

—Yes.

Ḥamīd entered, greeted his cousin warmly:

—Blessing be upon our house!

He sensed that his cousin had come with a serious matter. After they drank tea, he told him about it. Shaykh ‘Alī declared:

—I share your opinion. Tomorrow morning, I will travel to Abī Hāwn. God’s decree shall unfold.” (Qur’an, *al-Tawbah* 9:51)

The phrase “*al-maktūb yajri*” (God’s decree shall unfold) carries religious connotations, resonating with the Qur’anic verse:

“*Say: Nothing will befall us except what Allah has decreed for us; He is our Protector, and in Allah let the believers place their trust.*” (*al-Tawbah* 9:51) (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 34).

Such utterances characterise the speech of **faithful social classes**, who face events with trust in divine will. Van Dijk emphasises that achieving cohesion requires identifying the **type of meaning** involved (al-Sultān, Nāji ibn Dā’il, 1997, p. 96); in this context, the meaning is both **cultural and religious**, reflecting the speaker’s psyche and environment.

In *Naḥīb al-Rāfidain (The Lament of the Two Rivers)*, the popular linguistic context remains faithful to the character’s social position, yet does not prevent expressions of moral reflection: “I only made minor edits before publication, as required by Iraq’s new reality. I end with our popular supplication: *O God, no gloating.*” (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 37).

The **popular linguistic level** thus mirrors the content most vividly, embodying the characters’ class-based expressive modes. It reflects **al-Rubay’ī’s mastery** of psychological realism and his deep linguistic awareness of how speech relates to its social environment. This, in turn, ensures **textual cohesion at the contextual level**, achieved through (Naṣīr, 1990, p. 52):

– The interrelations between thematic components.

Conclusions:

After analysing the phenomenon of *contextuality (maqāmiyyah)* in the novels of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Majīd al-Rubay’ī, it became evident that this concept constitutes a fundamental pillar in the construction of his texts. It guides the course of narration, determines the nature of syntactic and stylistic choices, and anchors the literary work within its political, social, and cultural realities. The main findings of this study can be summarised as follows:

1. The contexts in al-Rubay'ī's novels vary between political, social, and emotional dimensions, reflecting the deep interconnection between the text and its surrounding reality.
2. The selection of vocabulary and stylistic forms is closely linked to the spatio-temporal setting (e.g., war, exile, the city) and to the nature of the speaking character.
3. Contextual shifts direct the flow of narration, ensuring smoother transitions between description, dialogue, and retrospection.
4. Contextuality contributes to textual coherence and reveals the narrator's ideological stance toward both the self and the other.
- 5.

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