

## Textual Appropriateness Strategy and Its Role in the Pragmatics of Discourse

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### Abstract

This article addresses the problem of *appropriateness* as a central mechanism in achieving textual cohesion and coherence, linking it to the pragmatic perspective of discourse. The study proceeds from the premise that text grammar transcends the boundaries of the sentence to encompass the text as a whole, wherein syntactic and semantic relations interact to form a cohesive structure. The article highlights the classical roots of the concept of appropriateness in Qur'anic studies, particularly in the works of al-Biqā'ī and al-Zarkashī, where it is conceived as a discipline that reveals the rationale behind textual arrangement and the interconnections among its parts. It also discusses the overlap between appropriateness and context, emphasizing that context constitutes a broader framework that facilitates uncovering the appropriate relationships among the components of discourse.

The study applies this perspective to the texts of al-Iṣfahānī, revealing the role of appropriateness in achieving coherence across multiple levels: lexical, syntactic, and semantic, in addition to its pragmatic dimension related to the horizon of reception and the authority of the sender. The article concludes that appropriateness is not merely a traditional interpretive tool but an effective analytical mechanism in modern text linguistics, contributing to the understanding of discourse as an integrated and dynamic structure.

**Keywords:** Appropriateness, textual cohesion, coherence, pragmatics, text linguistics.

### Introduction

The epistemic breadth that characterizes text grammar renders its function neither fragmentary nor confined by limits, nor subject to predetermined conditions; rather, it moves from one level to another within a comprehensive unity and in an organized form. In doing so, it addresses various textual phenomena such as grammatical cohesion relations, patterns of agreement, core and segmented structures, ellipsis, explanatory sentences, and structural variations, among other syntactic phenomena that extend beyond the scope of the individual sentence and cannot be fully and accurately explained except through the total unity of the text.<sup>i</sup>

This falls within the broader notion of coherence. Since appropriateness is one of the properties of textual connectedness, several key questions arise: How does this property contribute to the pragmatics of discourse? Do textual structures bear a relationship to pragmatics? And what is the relationship between text linguistics and pragmatics through the property of appropriateness?

### The Concept of Appropriateness

Several definitions of appropriateness have been proposed, among which the following may be noted: Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 AH), in the introduction to his exegesis *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, defines it as: "The science of correspondences (‘ilm al-munāsabāt) is a discipline through which the causes underlying the arrangement are known." Its subject matter

concerns the parts of a given entity whose interrelation is to be understood in terms of ordering, while its benefit lies in discerning the rank that each part deserves by virtue of its connection and relation to what precedes and follows it, in a manner akin to genealogical cohesion. <sup>2</sup>He further states: “The science of the correspondences of the Qur’an is a discipline through which the causes of the arrangement of its parts are known. It constitutes the secret of eloquence, as it ensures the correspondence of meanings with the requirements of the context. Its comprehension depends on knowing the intended purpose of the surah, which in turn enables understanding the purpose of all its constituent sentences.”<sup>3</sup>

Muḥammad Khaṭṭābī, for his part, considers appropriateness or (*tanāsub*) between verses as an inquiry into the relationship between one verse and another preceding it.<sup>4</sup> He also notes that the first to write on this discipline was Abū Bakr al-Naysābūrī, who laid its foundational principles through his Qur’anic exegesis, wherein he explained the wisdom behind placing one surah next to another. Al-Ḥasan al-Shaharbānī states: “The first to manifest in Baghdad the science of appropriateness of which we had not previously heard was the eminent scholar Abū Bakr al-Naysābūrī (d. 261 AH)... He used to ask: what is the wisdom behind placing this surah beside that one?”<sup>5</sup>

It becomes evident that the meaning of appropriateness cannot be separated from its function. This can be explained by the specificity of the inquiry itself: it does not question whether the text is coherent or not, but rather proceeds from the assumption of coherence and seeks only to uncover and elucidate it. This linkage between concept and function appears to be a characteristic feature of many terminologies in Qur’anic studies. Accordingly, the *science of appropriateness* investigates the various relationships between the parts of a text without distinguishing between its surface and depth, or its manifest and latent dimensions. Appropriateness thus encompasses both aspects. Since these parts are integrated and harmonious, or connected with what follows, this discipline has generated a terminological system aimed at clarifying these relationships between verses and surahs.<sup>6</sup>

This perspective led early scholars to investigate everything that contributes to establishing textual appropriateness at both the linguistic and semantic levels. This is precisely the core concern of text linguistics, which posits specific criteria that must be met for a sequence to qualify as a text. Among these criteria, cohesion and coherence occupy a central position, to the extent that textual studies are often renewed through them. It may not be an exaggeration to assert that once a text achieves cohesion and coherence, it necessarily fulfills the remaining criteria of textuality.<sup>7</sup>

From the foregoing, it may be concluded that the study of Qur’anic textual cohesion and the interrelation of its parts is not an imposition on the text; rather, it is an ancient field of inquiry addressed by early scholars. What contemporary research does is to shed new light on literary texts from a different perspective. Al-Zarkashī, in *al-Burhān*, states: “Know that appropriateness is a noble science through which intellects are refined and the merit of the speaker in what he says is recognized... Some scholars have said that one of the virtues of speech is that its parts are interconnected so that it does not appear disjointed.”<sup>8</sup> It is evident that the coherence of these relationships depends on the interpreter’s ability and insight in penetrating the horizons of the text.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Mechanism of Appropriateness in Achieving Textual Coherence**

Appropriateness presupposes the existence of a relationship between corresponding elements within the Qur’anic text. This relationship may be explicit or implicit. As al-Suyūfī suggests, such a relationship entails a form of referential linkage from one element to another. The interaction of these relational elements leads to the realization of textual cohesion. Al-Zarkashī emphasizes the analytical

benefits inherent in recognizing appropriateness, stating: “It consists in making the parts of discourse grasp one another by the necks, thereby strengthening their interconnection and rendering the composition like a well-constructed edifice whose parts are harmoniously aligned.”<sup>10</sup>

He also reports from some of his teachers the necessity of investigating the appropriateness between verses and even between surahs stating: “For every verse, one should examine whether it completes what precedes it or stands independently; and if it is independent, what is the aspect of its relation to what precedes it. In this lies abundant knowledge. Likewise with surahs: one seeks the aspect of their connection to what precedes them and to what they were preceded by.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, this discipline explores how texts achieve cohesion and coherence through the interrelation and interdependence of their units an objective that aligns closely with the concerns of modern text linguistics. Despite its significance, the concept of appropriateness has received limited attention from scholars and practitioners of text linguistics, except so far as we know in the works of Muḥammad Khattābī (*Text Linguistics*) and Ṣubḥī Ibrāhīm al-Faqī (*Textual Linguistics*), both of whom addressed the role of appropriateness in achieving textual cohesion.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Faqī notes that earlier scholars “did not explicitly identify it as a means of textual cohesion... yet, as we argue here, appropriateness indeed constitutes one of the most important mechanisms of textual cohesion.”<sup>13</sup>

He further stipulates that a relationship must exist between the corresponding elements, whether explicit or implicit, and seeks the underlying support that unifies them. Once this relationship is established, appropriateness leads to referential linkage, whereby one element refers to another. When this referentiality is achieved, cohesion between them is realized, as illustrated in the following schematic representation.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Difference Between Appropriateness and Context**

There is considerable overlap between the concepts of *context* and *appropriateness*, due to their shared features and functions. However, when examining their conceptual scope, a clear distinction between them emerges.

‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Maḥmūd al-Muthannā states: “As for the difference between context and appropriateness, the function of appropriateness is to uncover the aspects of connection between verses and passages whose linkage to what precedes and follows them is not immediately apparent. Such linkage can only be established after understanding the meanings contained in the preceding and subsequent verses this being the function of context. Through the unfolding of its successive meanings, context identifies, shapes, and determines the beginning, end, and progression of meanings. Thus, context serves the science of appropriateness, and appropriateness cannot be fully elucidated without prior knowledge of Qur’anic passages. At that point, the subject becomes defined, and the articulation of appropriateness becomes clear and evident.”<sup>15</sup>

Based on the preceding definitions of both concepts, the differences between appropriateness and context may be summarized as follows:<sup>16</sup>

- Appropriateness constitutes a specialized discipline within two fields (Qur’anic exegesis and idealized discourse analysis), whereas context is a general domain.
- Context is broader in scope than appropriateness. Appropriateness is confined to a specific subject and its relation to the Qur’anic text or to an abstract, idealized discourse, while context encompasses the circumstances of revelation as well as both abstract and real forms of discourse.

- As a discipline, the science of appropriateness is associated with a single corpus the Qur'anic text which led to its emergence; it also functions as a pragmatic procedure applied to an abstract discourse. In contrast, context applies to multiple corpora.

- Appropriateness functions as a means that serves the broader framework of context.

From this perspective, it becomes evident that the science of appropriateness cannot be separated from its function. This may be attributed to the nature of the inquiry itself: it does not investigate whether a text is coherent or not, but rather proceeds from the assumption of coherence, seeking only to reveal and clarify it.<sup>17</sup> This close linkage between concept and function appears to be a defining feature of many terminologies in Qur'anic studies.

### **The Importance of the Science of Appropriateness in Textual Analysis**

The science of appropriateness thus investigates the various relationships among the parts of a text without distinguishing between its surface level (*surface text*) and its deeper dimension (*text world*).<sup>18</sup> Appropriateness, therefore, encompasses both levels simultaneously. Given that these parts are integrated and harmoniously structured where the beginning coheres with the end this discipline has developed a terminological system aimed at clarifying the relationships between verses and surahs. Accordingly, and from this perspective, we may approach al-Iṣfahānī's text in a manner that reveals an important perhaps the most important aspect of its rhetorical inimitability. For this reason, we have chosen to retain this classical term, deeply rooted in linguistic and Qur'anic scholarship. This choice does not stem from a mere reverence for tradition or nostalgia, but rather from the absence of any compelling reason to abandon it, especially when engaging with the same analytical concerns addressed by earlier scholars.

Text linguistics, which posits specific criteria that must be fulfilled for a sequence to qualify as a text, places cohesion and coherence at the forefront of these criteria, to the extent that textual analysis is almost defined by them. It is not an exaggeration to assert that if a text achieves cohesion and coherence, it necessarily fulfills the remaining criteria of textuality. Indeed, we cannot meaningfully discuss intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, or intertextuality in any text unless it has first satisfied the conditions of cohesion and coherence that is, unless it possesses a well-structured textual architecture at both the semantic and linguistic levels.

The science of appropriateness also emerges as a direct consequence of the doctrine of *tawqīf* (divinely ordained arrangement) regarding the ordering of verses and surahs. While the ordering of verses was not a matter of dispute, scholars differed concerning the ordering of surahs. The majority of later scholars, along with some earlier authorities supported by certain transmitted reports upheld the view of *tawqīf* as applying absolutely to both verses and surahs. Given that the text under study here is not a sacred text, our task is to examine the relationships governing the appropriateness between its structural divisions such as sections and chapters and the connection between its conclusions and introductions. Since appropriateness is a stylistic discipline,<sup>19</sup> it relies on a close reading of the text itself often with an implicit analytical or even statistical orientation without recourse to external factors. It is within this process that the creativity of the reader and the analyst becomes manifest.

From the foregoing, it may be concluded that the investigation of cohesion and interconnection within al-Iṣfahānī's text is not an artificial imposition upon it; rather, it is rooted in a longstanding scholarly tradition. What contemporary analysis offers is a new perspective that sheds light on appropriateness and the resulting textual cohesion. As stated in *al-Burhān*: "Know that

appropriateness is a noble science through which intellects are refined and the merit of the speaker is discerned... Some scholars have observed that one of the virtues of discourse is that its parts are interconnected so that it does not appear disjointed.”<sup>20</sup>

### **The Role of Appropriateness in the Formation of Pragmatic Discourse Structure**

This study proceeds from the assumption that the text reflects its reality; that is, it is subject to its aesthetic conditions and its horizons of reception, while simultaneously engaging with the challenges of its society and responding to them. The text remains connected to its reality, even when the creator transcends or diverges from his own era. From this standpoint particularly in relation to al-Iṣfahānī’s texts the first feature that emerges is the central character upon which these texts are built: the figure of the learned individual, deeply aware of the vicissitudes of time, its hardships, and its fluctuations, capable of adaptation, and endowed with noble ethical qualities. At the same time, this figure aspires to depict social life in all its dimensions. This is evident in the diversity of knowledge reflected in *al-Ḥudūd*, encompassing fields such as science, literature, poetry, jurisprudence, philosophy, and other domains of knowledge that prevailed during that period.

### **The Appropriateness Between the Title (*al-Ḥadd*) and Its Subject Matter**

The title of a text is generally the first element encountered by the reader or the textual analyst. For this reason, it occupies a prominent position in highlighting textual cohesion. It is therefore necessary to examine how specific sections (*ḥudūd*) are associated with particular titles. As an illustrative example, we may consider the following:

#### **Chapter One: The Boundaries of Brotherhood**

“Some were asked about brotherhood, and he replied: it is harmony in resemblance. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī said: I asked Asbāṭ al-Shaybānī, ‘Describe brotherhood to me, briefly.’ He said: ‘Branches planted in hearts that bear fruit according to the intellects.’ A sage was also asked: ‘What are friends?’ He replied: ‘A single soul in divided bodies...’”

#### **Encouragement to Acquire Companions:**

“The Commander of the Faithful (may God be pleased with him) said: ‘Adhere to acquiring brothers, for they are a provision in both religion and worldly life.’

It is also said: ‘The most fortunate of people is he whose dwelling is continually frequented by righteous companions.’ And it is said: ‘A person is strengthened by his brother.’ Hippocrates was asked: ‘What is the best possession a person may acquire?’ He replied: ‘A sincere friend.’”

Through the title of this section, the theme of the text becomes evident, as it revolves around brotherhood, the means of attaining it, and the selection of virtuous and noble individuals. The appropriateness of lexical choices within the text serves the unity of the subject. This interconnectedness constitutes a semantic feature of discourse, relying on the understanding of each sentence in relation to the meanings conveyed by other sentences within the text. Such cohesion encompasses both grammatical (formal) linkage and semantic coherence. Thus, the stability of the text as a system reflects the continuity of its ideas and events.

Let us now consider the following lexical items within the text

#### **Lexical Items:**

- *Brotherhood (al-ikhwāniyyāt)*
- *A single soul*
- *Provision in religion*
- *The sincere friend*

The appropriateness of these expressions reflects al-Iṣfahānī's refinement in selecting his vocabulary, placing each word in its most fitting position so that it settles naturally within the text, harmonizing with neighboring expressions and aligning with the context in which it appears.

Through this precise lexical selection, each phrase or sentence becomes rich with deep ideas and far-reaching meanings, shaped by the subtle distinctions between words and the particular connotations they evoke in the reader's mind.

Accordingly, the text opens with the term *al-ikhwāniyyāt* (brotherhood-related discourse), which sets the semantic field and guides the subsequent expressions toward the central theme of acquiring and cultivating brotherhood. All subsequent statements serve this opening and contribute to the semantic cohesion of the text. For example:

Brotherhood, at the semantic level, implies resemblance and harmony. In another instance, it is likened to branches planted in hearts, since brotherhood grows over time through interaction and companionship. The reference to "hearts" signifies the locus of affection between individuals; had another term been used, the coherence of the discourse would have been disrupted. Thus, the use of appropriate lexical items reflects the development of semantic units within a unified structure.

This is consistent with al-Jāhīz's observation: "People sometimes take certain words lightly and use them, while others would be more appropriate. Do you not see that God, Exalted be He, does not mention hunger in the Qur'an except in the context of punishment or extreme poverty and manifest incapacity, whereas people commonly use 'hunger' in contexts of strength and well-being? Likewise, the Qur'an mentions 'rain' (*maṭar*) only in contexts of punishment, whereas people do not distinguish between 'rain' and 'beneficial rain' (*ghayth*). Similarly, the Qur'an mentions 'sight' (*abṣār*) and not 'hearings' (*asmā*), and when it refers to seven heavens, it does not say 'earths.' Yet common usage does not observe such distinctions, nor do people carefully select the most appropriate expressions."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Appropriateness Between the Opening and the Conclusion of the Section**

The multiplicity of sentences and the abundance of paragraphs in many texts may lead the reader to lose sight of the opening. At this point, the conclusion functions as a reminder of the beginning. This may occur through the repetition of a meaning introduced at the outset, or through the inclusion of statements in the conclusion that explicate or reinforce what was presented in the introduction, or through other relational mechanisms linking the beginning of the text to its end. In this way, textual cohesion and semantic coherence are achieved.

If we consider the previously analyzed section on *brotherhood*, we observe a clear appropriateness between its opening and its conclusion. The section begins with the chapter title "*The Boundaries of Brotherhood*" and concludes with "*The Disapproval of Standing for a Visiting Friend*." Preceding the conclusion is a logical progression: the mention of companions, their description, modes of interaction with them, and the identification of their virtuous qualities, among other related subtopics. The conclusion, framed as ethical or normative guidance, signals closure within this thematic domain. It appears as a form of advice addressed to the reader.

However, the reader actively constructs this coherence by establishing lexical connections, relying on linguistic intuition and knowledge of word meanings. This suggests that there is no rigid, mechanical criterion that definitively determines the affiliation of a word to a particular group. Rather, one can only say that a given word is more closely related to one group than another, while still maintaining connections with multiple semantic fields.<sup>22</sup>

## Results

The study demonstrates that the concept of *appropriateness* constitutes a genuine link between the Arabic rhetorical tradition and modern linguistic inquiry, revealing an early awareness of the mechanisms of textual cohesion. The findings also confirm that cohesion and coherence are not achieved solely through grammatical means, but rather through a network of deep semantic and contextual relations guided by appropriateness.

The study further highlights the clear pragmatic role of appropriateness, as it contributes to directing meaning in accordance with the horizon of the recipient's expectations and the authority of context. It also becomes evident that al-Iṣfahānī's texts represent a rich applied model, illustrating the effectiveness of appropriateness in constructing a cohesive discourse that combines aesthetic expression with depth of meaning.

Moreover, the results confirm that the distinction between appropriateness and context is procedural rather than fundamental, as both operate together within an integrated framework for understanding discourse.

## Recommendations

The study recommends the (necessity) of re-examining concepts from the Arabic rhetorical heritage foremost among them *appropriateness* in light of modern text linguistics and pragmatics, rather than confining them to their traditional exegetical framework. It also calls for the integration of this concept into discourse analysis methodologies in academic studies, given the precise analytical tools it offers for understanding textual relations.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of applied analysis of both classical and modern Arabic texts to uncover mechanisms of textual cohesion, rather than limiting research to abstract theorization.

## Suggestions

It is proposed to expand the scope of research on *appropriateness* to include various types of discourse, such as modern literary texts, media discourse, and political discourse, in order to test the effectiveness of this concept beyond Qur'anic and classical contexts.

It is also suggested to conduct comparative studies between the concept of appropriateness and parallel Western concepts such as *textual cohesion* and *pragmatic coherence*, with the aim of developing an integrative model for text analysis.

Finally, it is recommended to develop statistical and computational approaches to the study of textual relations, enabling a shift from impressionistic analysis to precise scientific analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Muḥammad al-‘Abd, *Language and Literary Creativity*, Modern Academic Press for University Books, Cairo, 5th ed., 2014, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā’ī, *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1st ed., 1995, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad Khaṭṭābī, *Text Linguistics: An Introduction to Discourse Coherence*, Arab Cultural Center, p. 189.s

<sup>5</sup> al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ ‘Īd, *Text and Discourse: A Study in Qur’anic Sciences*, Maktabat al-Ādāb, Cairo, 1st ed., 2009, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *The Concept of the Text*, p. 181.

<sup>10</sup> al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Maḥmūd Būstah, *Cohesion and Coherence in Sūrat al-Kahf*, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> Ṣubḥī Ibrāhīm al-Faqī, *Text Linguistics*, vol. 2, p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Maḥmūd al-Muthannā, *The Theory of Qur’anic Context*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Sa‘d Būlannwār, *Discourse Analysis Mechanisms in the Tafsīr “Aḍwā’ al-Bayān” by al-Shanqīṭī*, pp. 97–98 (PDF version).

<sup>17</sup> Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ ‘Īd, *Text and Discourse: A Study in Qur’anic Sciences*, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Yāsir ibn Khalīl al-Baṭṭāshī, *Textual Cohesion*, p. 214.

<sup>20</sup> al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-Udabā’*, vol. 2, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Uthmān ‘Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, vol. 1, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Muḥammad Khaṭṭābī, *Text Linguistics*, p. 25.