



IS IRAQ ANOTHER VIETNAM? A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEXT OF TWO WARS

**Asst .prof.
Lubna Riyadh Abdul Jabber
University Of Baghdad**

Abstract

A contextual analysis is part of sociolinguistics. It deals with events which are culturally recognized as social activities .In these activities, context plays specific and rather specialized roles such as weddings, death ceremonies, wars, etc. A context of any situation comprises different factors such as :(1)Field(the topic and setting),(2) Tenor (participants and attitudes) and (3) Mode (medium of communication and the language in use) .The present research will shed some light on those factors and the points of similarities they carry in both wars, namely, Iraq and Vietnam.

المستخلص

التحليل السياقي هو جزء من تحليل اللغة الاجتماعي. يتعامل هذا التحليل مع الأحداث المعروفة حضاريا كفعاليات اجتماعية والتي يلعب فيها سياق الأحداث دورا خاصا ومهما. وهذه الفعاليات تتمثل بمناسبات الزواج، مراسم الدفن، حفلات الميلاد، ودمار الحروب وغيرها. إن سياق أي حدث يحنوي على عدة عوامل وهي: (١) الساحة، والتي تشمل صلب الموضوع والمكان الذي به فيه هذا الموضوع (٢) العلاقات الاجتماعية والتي تشمل المشتركين بها وارئهم (٣) وأخيرا طريقة الاتصال ونوع اللغة المستخدمة. إن البحث الحالي يلقي الضوء على هذه العوامل ويشير إلى نقاط التشابه التي تحملها هذه العوامل في اثنين من حروب الدمار ألا وهي حربي العراق وفيتنام.

1.1 Introduction

Two types of similarity can be tackled in Iraq and Vietnam wars: shallow and deep. The shallow similarity is obvious and can serve to signal human attention. However, it is the deeper similarity what must be concerned about for it shapes policy and drive alternatives



that signal our fears for the future. Iraq war points to the possibility of an outcome perhaps even more dangerous than in Vietnam. Vietnam costs the lives of not only 58,000 Americans but of three million Vietnamese. Neither the US nor the Iraqi people nor the world needs another such horror. The research will try to answer the question: How many similarities are there between America's involvement in Vietnam and, its "war against terrorism" in Iraq? The answer to this question has been done through a contextual analysis of the main features of those two wars.

1.2 The Concept of Context of Situation

The concept of context of situation was first developed by Malinowski in 1923; and subsequently elaborated by number of linguists such as Leech (1970), Hymes (1972), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983); van Dijk (1984,1985,1990,1998,1999,2000,2001), Haynes (1989) Ilie (1994,1999) ,Fiske and Taylor (1991), Bayley (1998) and Verschueren (1997).

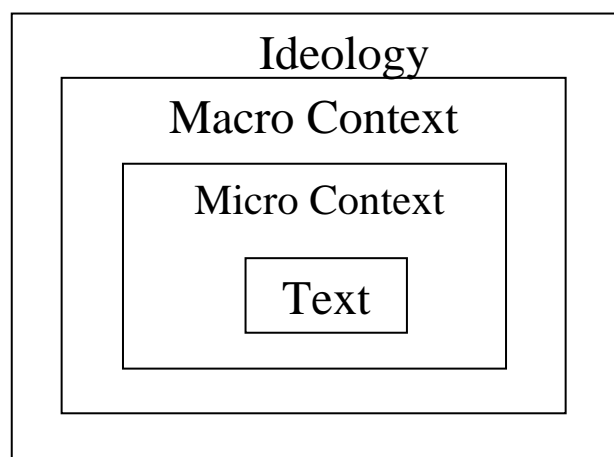
They all agree that contexts of situation state the relationships of utterances to the situation or environments in which they are said or could be said or as Leech (1970:126) puts it:

In a context of situation the utterance or the successive sentences in it are brought into multiple relations with the relevant components of the environment

He (ibid.) asserts that normal discourse operates within a describable communicative situation, from which an important part of its linguistic meaning derives.

Hymes (1972) develops an approach emphasizing the importance of the context of situation in speech event⁴ within communities. He (cited in Levinson, 1983:279) asserts that speech event is "a culturally recognized social activity in which context plays specific and rather specialized roles".

The general view of Haynes (1989:4) states: "All texts fit into a situation which always has some effect on how the text is constructed and understood." By situation he means the environment as well as the speakers involved in the text. In short, language does not work in a vacuum. Language works in a context. It is language in use and of use. The context of the language determines the setting in which the text takes place, the attitudes, the intended audience and the intended effect of the author. Haynes (ibid.:14) classifies the meaning of context of situation in the following diagram:





Diagram(1) Classification of Context Of Situation

Van Dijk (1999:12) believes that context should not be defined in terms of social situation in which discourse takes place but rather as a mental representation, or model, constructed by the participants themselves. He states that social situation as well as their properties including gender, age, power, roles...etc., can not influence how people write, speak or understand discourse or text. For him, the communicative events of the social situations become relevant to discourse only when the participants construct them as such. Therefore, in van Dijk's own words,

Contexts are not out there, but in here: They are mental constructs of participants; they are individually variable interpretations of the ongoing social situation .Thus, they may be biased, feature personal opinions, and for these reasons also embody the opinions of the participants as members of groups. (ibid.).

In other words, the term in here represents the participant's Episodic Memory where people store their personal experiences, including the way they interpret the events they read or hear about. People usually recall those experiences when arguing, debating, discussing or /and fighting. van Dijk (2001) further classified the context into two types : Micro and Macro. The micro context deals with detailed situations and concentrating more on the speeches of the participants whereas the macro context



focuses on the general situation .The following section is devoted for the those contextual components .

1.2.1 The contextual components

Classification of the contextual components varies from one approach to the other; but most approaches recognize the central role played by the following factors: subject matter, setting, participants, activity, channel, code, message form; Each of these plays an important part in the identification of a communicative event. For example, a sermon (activity) is normally given in a church (setting), by a preacher addressing a congregation (participants) primarily using speech (medium), involving religious forms and genres (message form), and about a spiritual topic (subject matter) (Crystal; 1991:48)

van Dijk(2001) classifies his contextual categories under the headings of the macro and micro levels. The macro categories involve more global structures such as Domain, Global Action and Institutional actors. While the micro categories takes the Setting, Local Action, and participants its main concern.

Each communicative event is closely associated with a specific social domain. This means that there are different social domains. The social realm involves domains such as politics, business, education, health care, justice, wars and so on. Social interaction and discourse, institutions, social roles, professions, power relations as well as many other societal structures are, in fact, related to such domains. For example, social actors, when engaging in talk or text together, implicitly or explicitly



attend to such domains (van Dijk, 2001:23) .The contextual knowledge about such domains is of great importance for the participants for the following two reasons:

1.The domains accomplish the management of functions and circumstances of the communicative events .

2. They are preferred when things go wrong when discourses are perceived to cross domain boundaries, or when domains need to be defended against members of other domains (Gies, 1987:5).

The domains may be associated with ideologies (system of beliefs).Ideological domains are sites of domains ,interests, conflicts ,and struggles that are protected by the individual or the group of their own.

Institutional Actors is a major element of van Dijk 's (2001) contextual model. It is obvious that speech acts ,topics, genres, and many interactional features of the dialogue are controlled by the participant's role and the legal professional role .In Ilie's own words "If global domains are the scenes of global actions ,the logic of action requires there to be also global actors" (1999:109). This means that wars are not understood in terms of members but rather as a confrontation between countries ,political parties, nations and so on . (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 1998:134).

Leech (1970:187) puts it in another way and states that the situation of any text may be described by answering the following questions:

1. Who are the participants?



2. What objects are relevant to the communication?
3. What is the medium of communication?
4. What is the function of communication?

In order to answer these questions, Gregory and Carroll (1978:7-8) classify the macro context of situation in the following components:

1. Setting and Topic
2. Participants and attitudes
3. Medium of communication

1.2.1.1 Setting and topic

Gregory & Carroll (ibid.:7) state:

Field of discourse is the consequence of the user's purpose role, what his language is 'about', what experience he is verbalizing, what is 'going on', through language.

More specifically, field of discourse encompasses two situational factors. The first is the setting, the particular time and place in which event takes place . . . The second factor is the topic or succession of topics that rounds of the event. (Haynes, 1989: 12).

The setting for Vietnam War is defined by the Wikipedia as follows

The Vietnam War (known in Vietnam itself as "The America War") was a military conflict in present day Vietnam occurring from 1959 to April 30, 1975. The conflict was a successful effort by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam) and the indigenous National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, (also known as the Việt Cộng, or more informally as the "Charlie", "VC" or "Cong") to impose on



Vietnam a communist system, defeating the South Vietnamese Republic of Vietnam (RVN). To a degree, the Vietnam War was a "proxy war" between the U.S. and its Western allies on the side of the RVN, with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China supporting the DRV on the other. As a result of this it is often considered part of the Cold War.

But both Iraq and Vietnam wars quickly became guerilla wars. In Vietnam, the battlegrounds were jungles, rice paddies, and small rural hamlets. In Iraq the battlegrounds are city blocks with houses, apartments, stores and schools. Almost no place could be driven out as a peace area; even the green zone¹ has been attacked several times and used as a battle field.

The topic ,on the other hand , is meant the subject matter of the event sometimes the subject matter can be determined and easily picked out, such as in an essay or an academic seminar, presidential speeches while in other instances a series of topics may be picked out, as in gossip and general conversation, and wars (Gregory & Carroll, 1978:30).

The main topic concerning Iraq and Vietnam wars is that both of the wars were founded on lies. In Vietnam, the original lie was that the primitive and simple nation of pre-industrial age farmers posed a threat to the most powerful country of the world the U.S.A. the excuse that led the U.S,A to set a war and jump with all its guns blazing is that the Gulf of Tonkin hoax. The U.S.A. wanted to stop the spread of the communism and . if it was not stopped there, the rest of south-east Asia would fall like a row of



dominos under the power of the communists. As with Iraq, The lie is even more obvious and can be seen in Freeman (2006) announcement

The Iraq War was lost even before it was begun. The reason is that it was founded on lies, it was begun in delusion, and it has been prosecuted with incompetence. As a result, it has metastasized vastly beyond the scope for which it was ever conceived, even as the means to fight it have shrunk dramatically.

The lie is not only to reduce the global terror but different kinds of topics were put on the surface as could be seen below:

1. Weapons of Mass Destruction,
2. Connections to Al Qaeda,
3. Complicity in 9/11,

Those topics were the reasons for the invasion of Iraq and when each of them was exposed for being a lie ,another excuse was offered up in its stead as follows .

1. "No weapons of mass destruction? Saddam was a bad guy anyway.
 2. No Iraqi complicity in 9/11? We're bringing freedom to the Iraqi people.
 3. No connection between Saddam and al Qaeda? We're fighting a global Islamic jihad".
- (ibid.)

Generally speaking, the war against Iraq has been always presented as part of a war against Islamic terrorism. So it may be concluded that "There was no provocative second attack in the Tonkin Gulf, and there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq." (Brigham, 2006:55)



The second main topic is that both wars used the palpable fiction of “democracy”. In Vietnam, “democracy” is raised against the ruler of Vietnam who was wealthy, urban, Catholic dictators running a country of poor, rural, Buddhist peasants. After the US had its puppet, Diem, assassinated in 1963, it took two years and seven different governments before a suitably brutal but still obeisant figurehead could be found.

In Iraq, there was an effort to establish Iraq as a symbol for the western-style democracy in the Middle East. Mr. Bush states²:

Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast, and I have a message for them. If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and NOT against you. As our coalition takes away their power, we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and FREE. In a free Iraq, there will be no more wars of aggression against your neighbors, no more poison factories, no more executions of dissidents, no more torture chambers and rape rooms. The tyrant will soon be gone. The day of your LIBERATION is near

Signals of Democracy in President Bush' speech is clear in his repetition of phrases like, in a free Iraq there will be,

1. no more wars of aggression against your neighbors,
2. no more poison factories,
3. no more executions of dissidents,
4. no more torture chambers and rape rooms.
5. The tyrant will soon be gone.



6.The day of your LIBERATION is near

But the problem with this kind of democracy is that democracy arose in western civilization centuries after law and order had been established. But it is done in Iraq in the reverse order (Sowell :2007). So the result is a chaos

1.2.1.1The ideological topics

Elias (2003) states:

Whether it's communism or terrorism, we are launching a war against a single group of people because they belong to a larger ideology

Since context is mainly concerned with the social situation, then, there must be a major ideological category. Indeed, the 'aims' or 'intentions' of the speakers represent an ideological category This category takes place both in the production as well as in the comprehension process involved in the interactional situation (Hasan, 1989:78).In other words, it involves the notion of knowledge that is defined as "the certified beliefs shared in an epistemic community"(van Dijk, 2002: 4). Knowledge may be shared by one or several persons, by groups, nations, societies, or cultures.

In both Iraq and Vietnam, the situation is misread on the ground. In the war in Vietnam, It was believed that the communist ideology was behind the North's desire to unify the country .But, in fact, it was nationalism and determination to get out the invaders that led the Vietnamese sacrifice more than a million of their people before the war was finally over³ . (Friesen, 2005).



The same holds true with the Iraqi. Although Iraq has a historical lack of cohesive and stable society, the combination with religious fervor has revealed the true difficulty of establishing peace in Iraq. The difference between the two situations lies in the fact that Iraq is an explosive mix of ethnic and religious fragmentation which is hardly found in Vietnam. Another difference could be seen in Vietnam and not in Iraq is that Vietnam stabilized after the war was over but Iraq seems to go in a big chaos for years to come which indeed threatens its peaceful future (ibid .)

1.2.1.2 Participants and attitude

Many treatments of language tend to emphasize that the main function of language is the topic. Or, in other words, language is about something. But language has other functions to perform. It tells us, for instance, of the relationship existing between two people communicating. Tenor of discourse refers to this type of relationship. Haynes (1989:14) describes the tenor of discourse as: the basis for the actual interaction of the speaker, their social roles, statuses, personal attitudes and intentions. . . The tenor, then, is the personal 'atmosphere' in which the conversation takes place.

In short, the relationships among people are involved in what they are saying. For instance, the structure and the lexical items in the language used between a mother and her child are different from the language used between the same mother and her manager.



Haynes (ibid.) classifies the participants' relations into two types: Immediate tenor (the personal relations established face to face), as when the participants are at a party or have met on the train; and wider tenor (the expected roles that society allots to the speaker), such as the relations between parents and children, teachers and pupils, commanders and soldiers, invaders and people , etc. but the exact nature of these relationships depends upon the division of the social structure, on the way which every society is organized (Gregory & Carroll, 1978:50). For instance, if we look at the way an oriental society is organized and compares it with the American society in paternal relationship; we will find that an oriental society will mainly show a powerful domination of the father on the level of the family. His discourse is, therefore, authoritative and commanding to the rest of the family. In an American society, however, the role of the father is different. It is more relaxed and friendly; thus the discourse will be more persuasive than coercive.

Concerning comparison between the participants and action in both wars, Elias (2003) statement could be used as a good start :

In Vietnam, there was no front. We fought pockets of resistance, left, then returned to retake the same ground over and over in a series of costly battles. There was no way to know who was winning, because there was not clear line of conflict. Instead, we fought the war based on body count. In this respect, our current wars are unquestionably of the Vietnam variety.



In both wars, the participants are the fighters of the invaded country, the USA soldiers and the civilians .Those anti wars fighters control the timing, scale, and place of engagements. They shoot opportunistically and quickly melt away into their surroundings. Fighters are indistinguishable from civilians with the result that eight civilians are killed for every fighter in Vietnam. Every civilian death means that another family turns against the Americans. This type of relationship, of course, will separate the civilian population from its “liberators” while increasing its support for the resistance or as sowell (2007) puts it

When push comes to shove, people will support tyranny rather than suffer lethal chaos that makes normal everyday life impossible for themselves and their children.

In Vietnam, this process became to be known as “winning the hearts and minds of the people.” Though It hasn’t been given any name in Iraq, it takes place in the minds and hearts of most Iraqis. So we may conclude that both wars cause the same dilemma for the Americans i.e., how to separate the fighters from the bystanders, this time in run-down towns and cities rather than tropical jungle.

The American troops - just like their predecessors in Vietnam start to lose control and this is clearly shown in their low morals .The reason is that

In both Vietnam and Iraq, the motivation is suspect. In both cases the official explanation deals with a war against an abstract

(Elias ,2003).The number of the killed Americans rises every day. The soldiers can sense that life isn't improving



in Iraq; they are moving around Baghdad with their backs against the walls. Furthermore; many of soldiers are beginning to lose faith in their mission because they feel that this war lacks the element of progress necessary to be considered hopeful. Consequently it has led many of them to commit suicide (ibid.).

Another type of relationship emerged in both Vietnam and Iraq which is to hand over more and more military responsibility to the local troops. In Vietnam, this policy was called "Vietnamisation" which proved to be ineffective, unable to stop the communist onslaught(ibid.). In Iraq today, there is a policy of "Iraqisation" which the attempt to shift responsibility to Iraqi troops and this could be seen in a Alshawa troops and local police . But still those groups has not been able to stop the bombing , kidnapping and the killing.

1.2.1.3 Medium of communication

It is also called the mode of discourse, it is the “medium used as a channel of communication.” (Haynes, 1989:17). The most important distinction to be made in this dimension is between written and spoken language. Abercrombie (1967:1-2) presents the relation between spoken and written language in the following manner:

If we compare a piece of written English with a piece of spoken English, regarding them simply as physical objects or events and forgetting for the moment the fact that they convey meaning to us, it is apparent at once that they bear no resemblance to each other whatever. The piece of written English consists of groups of small black



marks arranged on a white surface, while the piece of spoken English consists of a succession of constantly varying noises. It would hard to possible for two things to be more different. However, we have only to recall the fact that both of them convey meaning.

But when we want to consider the difference between, for instance, conversations in real life and dialogues in novels and plays or between the mode of lectures and articles, a further distinction is needed. Gregory & Caroll (1978:38) divide the mode of discourse into spontaneous and non-spontaneous. And within the spontaneous, an important distinction could be made between conversing and monologuing. Benson and Greaves (1973:82) contrast monologuing and conversing as follows:

Monologuing is the speaking by one individual in such a way as to exclude the possibilities of interruption by others. Conversing is speaking in such a way as to invite participations of others.

Instances of monologue can be seen in the language used by people whose professions are highly verbal ones such as journalists, preachers, presidents and lawyers, etc.; while conversing can be picked out between two people exchanging ideas and thoughts.

Non-spontaneous speech may be subcategorized either as reciting or as speaking of what is written (Gregory & Caroll, 1978:42). Recitation involves things like telling a story, reciting poems, and singing a song with no written version behind; while speaking of what is written can be found in performance of plays and in films, radio and



television. Citing the difference between the two, They) states:

The fundamental difference between the speaking of what is written to be spoken as if not written and ordinary speech is that the one is planned, prepared behaviour, the other spontaneous; a play or film largely creates its own situation and patterns of contextual relations, has a definite beginning and end, and is remarkably and significantly more compact and self-contained than the situations in which conversing and monologuing occur.

Another feature of the mode of discourse is the ‘code’ (or ‘code of conventions’) which David Crystal (1991:48) defines as “the formal systems of communication shared by participants.” such as a metrical poem, war operations, the minutes of a meeting or the signs of deaf languages

In both Iraq and Vietnam wars , all types of medium of communication have been used ; the visual , oral , and written via Television , Radio , Press .All of them are used to convey news, comparisons , conferences , interviews, facts from the field of the wars , civilians feelings and situation , etc. The code of war is the dominant one asserted by items such as : battle fields , army , troops , commanders , soldiers , death , killing , blood , frustration and many others items that signal the destruction and bewilderment of the two wars

Table (1): A Breakdown of the Contextual Components of the Two Wars

Contextual components	Classification of the contextual components of Vietnam war	Classification of the contextual components of Iraq war
Field	<u>Settings:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the place is Vietnam occurring from 1959 to April 30, 1975.	<u>Setting:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the place is Iraq occurring in 2003 and not finished yet
	<u>Topics:</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1-Posing a threat to the USA by<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Imposing on Vietnam a communist system and the U.S.A. wanted to stop the spread of the communism2- bringing freedom and democracy to the Vietnamese.3- Fighting the global Communist ideology	<u>Topics:</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1-Posing a threat to the U.S.A by<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weapons of Mass Destruction,• Connections to Al Qaeda,• Complicity in 9/11,• Saddam was a bad guy2-bringing freedom and democracy to the Iraqi people.3-fighting a global Islamic jihad Ideology.
Tenor	<u>Participants:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• American and other European troops , fighters and civilians <u>Attitudes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The war stimulated a national resistance. The U.S. attempted a two-sided mission: exterminate the pockets of resistance that threaten the mission while winning the hearts and minds of the local population.	<u>Participants:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• American and other European troops , fighters and civilians <u>Attitudes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The war stimulated a national resistance. The U.S. attempted a two-sided mission: exterminate the pockets of resistance that threaten the mission while



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The result is the two missions undermine one another because the two groups of people involved - the one they try to befriend and the one they try to kill - are immersed within each other and comprise a single cultural and sociological entitystruggle . 	<p>winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The result is the two missions undermine one another because the two groups of people involved - the one they try to befriend and the one they try to kill - are immersed within each other and comprise a single cultural and sociological</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A great deal of frustration and bewilderment among the troops that fight it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entitystruggle • A great deal of frustration and bewilderment among the troops that fight it.
Mode	<p>medium of communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All types have been used ; the visual , oral , and written via Television , Radio , Press .All of them are used to convey news, comparisons , conferences , interviews, facts from the field of the wars , civilians feelings and situation , etc. • The war code is used 	<p>medium of communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All types have been used ; the visual , oral , and written via Television , Radio , Press .All of them are used to convey news, comparisons , conferences , interviews, facts from the field of the wars , civilians feelings and situation , etc. • The war code is used

2.0 Conclusions

The research has shown a number of similarities between Iraq and Vietnam wars, they both share the same contextual components, namely, Field, Tenor, and Mode.

Within the field of the context of situation, both wars share the same type of topics for both are built on phony excuses: the main one is the threat for the united states



.The Vietnam threat is based on their communist ideology and the spread of this ideology all over Asia, whereas , the Iraq threat is based on the Islamic Jihad Terrorism (Al Qaida as they call it) which once hit them in their heart and made the complexity of the 9 of 11 incident ,The second main topic is to spread freedom and democracy in both Vietnam and Iraq

The tenor of the two wars focuses on the participant and their attitudes toward what's going on. The participants are the American troops on one side, and the civilians and fighters of the invaded countries on the other hand. The U.S. attempted a two-sided mission: demolish the pockets of resistance that threaten the mission at the same time winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The result is the two missions indulge in one another because the two groups of people involved - the one they try to befriend and the one they try to kill - are immersed within each other and comprise a single cultural and sociological entity struggle .A great deal of frustration and bewilderment among the American troops that fight it.

The medium of communication that have been used in both wars have taken all shapes and types in order to reveal the code of the war such as visual , oral , and written media via Television , Radio , Press .All of them are used to convey news, comparisons , conferences , interviews, facts from the field of the wars , civilians feelings and situation , etc.



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Footnote



1- It is a place situated in Baghdad where the USA embassy and the Iraqi government and parliament practice their jobs.

2- 1 May 2001:Speech at National Defense University

3- It was only 30 years later that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara admitted that the U.S. was “wrong, dead wrong” in its assessment of the conflict in Vietnam. (Friesen, 2005).