

Conversational Implicature in Amal Fahim Dunqul's Poem 'Weeping Before Zarqa al-Yamama'

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Received: 2026-08-02 | Accepted: 2026-10-04 | Published: 2026-10-17

Abstract

This study examines Amal Dunqul's poem 'Weeping Before Zarqa al-Yamama' through the mechanism of conversational implicature. It seeks to uncover the different intentions the poet wishes to convey. How effective is this pragmatic mechanism in analyzing the stages of the poem and identifying the implicit meanings that emerge from them?

Keywords: conversational implicature; transition; Zarqa al-Yamama.

Introduction

Ancient and modern Arab and Western scholars maintain that language conveys both explicit and implicit meanings. The context of use plays the main role in revealing these meanings, together with all the elements of the communicative process. Context gives an expression its meaning and identifies the speaker's intention. An expression is literal when it retains the meaning for which it was originally established. It is figurative when it moves beyond that original meaning. Classical Arab scholars addressed this distinction through the concepts of literal and figurative meaning. In Western thought, the corresponding distinction is between natural and non-natural meaning.

A speaker turns to secondary, implicit meanings for a particular purpose. Such indirectness may leave the addressee struggling to interpret an utterance that has departed from its conventional meaning. The addressee must draw on pragmatic competence and the circumstances shared with the speaker. Linguistic and non-linguistic clues also help recover the speaker's intentions. Without shared interpretive rules, misunderstandings may arise from:¹

- Overinterpretation.
- Underinterpretation.
- Misinterpretation.

Such movement from natural to non-natural meaning is common in Arabic. It appears in simile, metaphor, kinaya (allusive expression), metonymy, and non-declarative and declarative forms. These devices give rise to secondary meanings. In modern pragmatic terminology, this is referred to as conversational implicature²

We therefore use conversational implicature as a practical pragmatic procedure for analyzing Dunqul's poem 'Weeping Before Zarqa al-Yamama.' This approach enables us to explore the poet's world and the intentions he seeks to communicate.

I. The Concept of Conversational Implicature

The logic of conversation requires conditions and rules that support proper dialogue and communication among participants. These rules also concern the circumstances and dimensions of language use. Paul Grice argues that the semantic interpretation of ordinary utterances cannot rely on their surface form alone. He proposes that attention be paid to the following:³

- The meaning of the uttered sentence and its relationship to the addressee.
- The context in which the sentence is uttered.
- The cooperative principle.

On this basis, conversational implicature is a meaning derived from an expression's original signification. It therefore goes beyond the literal limits of the sentence⁴

II. Conversational Implicature in 'Weeping Before Zarqa al-Yamama'

1. Figurative Imagery Beyond Literal Meaning

The relationship between wording and meaning has long been a difficult issue for Arab rhetoricians such as al-Jurjani and al-Sakkaki. In their view, the meaning of an expression is not confined to its surface form. It extends to an implicit sense, or the 'meaning of meaning.' Context and the communicative situation have a major role in identifying the speaker's intentions. Allusive expression also gives the addressee a sense of pleasure and curiosity. It encourages the addressee to examine the speaker's perspective and discover the essence of the discourse.

1.1 Allusive Expression (Kinaya)

In his poem, Amal Dunqul moves from literal to figurative meaning through allusion. This allows him to communicate the meanings he intends faithfully and precisely. His examples of kinaya express particular qualities and states:

*** Qualities such as defeat, humiliation, and misery are accompanied by signs that indicate them, such as a lowered banner or bowed heads. The poet writes:⁵**

I came to you ... covered with stab wounds and blood.
About my severed arm ... still holding the lowered banner
About the mouth stuffed with sand and blood!!

*** Qualities such as misery and marginalization appear in the following example:**

My food: a piece of bread ... water ... and a few dried dates⁶

*** Qualities of blame and reproach appear in the following lines:**

How did I carry the shame?⁷
And then I walked on? Without killing myself? Without collapsing?

*** A quality of suspicion and doubt:**

Why are the camels walking so slowly ...?!

Are they carrying rocks or iron ...?!⁸

These allusive expressions have a strong emotional effect because they can be understood both literally and figuratively. They appear frequently in the poem, as they represent reality and offer compelling evidence of it. The Arab defeat in 1967 at the hands of the Zionist entity represents a bitter reality experienced by Arabs. Through kinaya, the poet directs sharp criticism at the Arabs for their submission and humiliation. He also condemns the collusion of their rulers with their enemy against their own people.

The poet links the conditions of his own time with those of the past. He recalls what happened to Zarqa al-Yamama's people. She warned them before disaster struck and they suffered defeat. The poet and his people experienced a similar situation, which Arabs continue to experience in the present. Kinaya thus brings past and present together. It presents a tragic image of defeat, collapse, and disgrace. Faced with the enormity of the disaster and the severity of the defeat, people find little beyond patience and consolation.

Through kinaya, Dunqul moves beyond the visible wording to search for hidden meanings. These meanings are revealed not by the surface expression but by its underlying sense. Context and the communicative situation disclose them. This movement constitutes conversational implicature and is among its essential features. The poet seeks to create a profound psychological impact on Arabs, in the hope of awakening their resolve and prompting them to free their land from their enemy's oppression. He also invokes Zarqa al-Yamama to draw a parallel in circumstances and fate. Her fate mirrors his, just as her people's failure to heed her parallels his people's failure to heed him.

1.2 Metaphor

Metaphor depends on two main elements: transfer and resemblance. Conversational implicature can arise when an expression moves from its apparent meaning to a secondary one. An example appears in this line:

How did I carry the shame?⁹

The line has a literal form but communicates an indirect meaning. Shame is not a physical object that can be carried. The image instead expresses astonishment at the speaker's ability to endure and remain patient. Linguistic context and the circumstances of use reveal this implication. The recipient must therefore identify the utterance's indirect illocutionary force. This requires attention to the chosen words, the situation, and the speaker's intention.

Elsewhere in the poem, Dunqul writes:

And when they were suddenly faced with the sword's edge, they bartered us away¹⁰

The communicative situation indicates that the poet uses this image to convey the bitter reality experienced by him and his people. They have become cheap commodities that rulers can barter whenever they wish. This suggests the extent of those rulers' collusion and betrayal.

Metaphor is thus a principal means of transferring meaning from the abstract, imagined realm to the sensory world through personification or embodiment. Dunqul gives abstract ideas a tangible form that corresponds to his troubled inner world and profound sorrow. Metaphor allows him to express his emotions and his rejection of every form of humiliation in Arab reality.

1.3 Simile

Simile also carries implied meanings that become clear through context. The two elements of a comparison share a particular quality, although one may possess it to a greater degree. The relation is one of resemblance rather than simple identity. The poem offers a single example:¹¹

About your ruby mouth¹²

Drawing on his mental lexicon, Dunqul uses an emphatic simile to describe Zarqa al-Yamama's mouth as a ruby. The implied meaning is that her words and prophecies resemble rubies and pearls in their preciousness. The poet places her speech and the ruby on the same level of value. The comparison thus carries a context-dependent implied force, which is understood through the relationship between its two elements¹³

2. Conversational Implicature Arising from Speech Acts

As noted earlier, speech acts broadly correspond to the distinction in Arabic rhetoric between declarative and non-declarative expression. The following examples illustrate some of the implied meanings produced by each form¹⁴

2.1 Declarative Forms

Declarative forms dominate the poem because the poet describes the humiliation, submission, and weakness experienced by Arabs after the defeat of 1967. These forms largely describe his emotional state. He is filled with hatred and resentment toward Arab rulers, while grieving over the condition of the people. Examples include:¹⁵

I came to you ... covered with stab wounds and blood.

Here I am, my blood spilling onto the earth.

And women led away in chains of captivity, clothed in shame.

In these poetic lines, the poet does not intend only the meanings conveyed by their literal forms. He moves beyond them to other indirect speech acts that are understood through the context of use. In terms of conversational implicature, the utterances may be analyzed as follows:

Literal illocutionary force: the explicit wording of the poetic lines.

Implied illocutionary force: an expression of weakness and humiliation resulting from defeat.

A further shift leads to the expression of sympathy and compassion. The poet meets a young girl by chance and remembers her father, who died as a martyr and left her orphaned and alone. The poet expresses this in the following lines:¹⁶

A wide-eyed little girl leaps around me ... sweetly mischievous.

He used to tell us about you, little one ... when we were in the trenches.

And when he died of thirst in the sunlit desert.

Literal illocutionary force: the direct meaning of the lines.

Implied illocutionary force: sympathy and compassion.

2.2 Non-declarative Forms

Non-declarative forms also depart from their apparent meanings and convey context-dependent implicatures. This can be seen in the poem 'Zarqa al-Yamama.' Questions change their intended force according to the context in which they occur. They thereby convey implied meanings through indirect speech acts, as in the following examples:

A shift toward the expression of weakness:

Literal illocutionary force:

Why are the camels walking so slowly ...?

Are they carrying rocks or iron ...?¹⁷

Implied illocutionary force: an expression of weakness.

A shift toward weakness and abasement:

Literal illocutionary force:

I ask ...

About the woman's cry amid captivity ... and flight.

Where can I hide my face, accused and condemned?¹⁸

Implied illocutionary force: weakness, abasement, and humiliation.

A shift toward lamentation:

Literal illocutionary force:

O sacred seer ...

What use are these wretched words?¹⁹

Implied illocutionary force: lamentation.

Consider also the following passage:²⁰

Speak, O sacred prophetess ...

Speak ... by God ... by the curse ... by Satan.

Do not close your eyes, for the rats ...

Do not be silent ... I have remained silent year after year.

An examination of these three poetic lines shows that they contain intentions that are not apparent from the utterances' outward form. The communicative situation reveals a range of implicit and suggestive meanings in these indirect speech acts. The direct address urges Zarqa al-Yamama to speak. It also conveys the poet's complaint about his weakness and his sorrow over harsh conditions and bitter reality. The imperative 'Speak' is an appeal for Zarqa al-Yamama to continue speaking and reveal her prophecies. The poet hopes to draw from them guidance for the problems of his time and the humiliation suffered by the Arabs. The prohibitions 'Do not be silent' and 'Do not close your eyes' are two speech acts that convey non-natural meanings. Their implied illocutionary force expresses blame and reproach toward Zarqa al-Yamama for her continuing silence. These expressions also reveal the poet's weakness and humiliation.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the meanings of utterances are not always stated explicitly. At times, speakers communicate their intentions indirectly. Recipients must then draw on their pragmatic and other interpretive resources to recover those intentions. Context plays a central role in this process. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- If Arabic rhetoric concerns knowledge of language in use, pragmatics examines language as it is used. The two approaches therefore complement one another.
- In Grice's view, natural languages often involve a movement from natural to non-natural meaning. This corresponds to a movement from what is implied to what entails it. It also recalls the Arabic distinction between 'meaning' and the 'meaning of meaning.' This is referred to as conversational implicature.
- Grice's analysis of conversational implicature is reflected in the poem's figurative images. Context and the communicative situation disclose the implied meanings produced by these images.
- The distinction between declarative and non-declarative forms broadly parallels the theory of speech acts. The secondary meanings generated by these forms may be understood as conversational implicatures.

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Notes

¹ See Sa'id Yaqtin, *Tahlil al-Khitab al-Riwa'i* [Analysis of Novelistic Discourse] (1st ed., Arab Cultural Center, Beirut, 1989), p. 17.

² The declarative/non-declarative dichotomy has its counterpart in the distinction between speech acts.

³ Al-'Ayyashi Adrawi, *Al-Istilzam al-Hiwari fi al-Tadawul al-Lisani* [Conversational Implicature in Linguistic Pragmatics] (1st ed., Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf, Algiers, 2011), p. 17 ff.

⁴ See 'Abd al-Hadi ibn Zafir al-Shahri, *Istiratijiyyat al-Khitab: Muqaraba Lughawiyya Tadawuliyya* [Discourse Strategies: A Linguistic-Pragmatic Approach] (1st ed., Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid al-Muttahida, Beirut, 2004), p. 78.

⁵ See Amal Dunqul, *Al-A'mal al-Kamila* [Complete Works] (1st Dar al-Shorouk ed., Dar al-Shorouk, Cairo, 2010), pp. 95-96.

⁶ Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 98.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁹ Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 96.

¹⁰ Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 99.

¹¹ Abu Ya'qub al-Sakkaki, *Miftah al-'Ulum* [Key to the Sciences], ed. Na'im Zarzur (1st ed., Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1983), p. 332.

¹² Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 95.

¹³ See 'Ali Mahmud Haji al-Sarraf, *Fi al-Baragmatiyya: al-Af'al al-Injaziyya fi al-'Arabiyya al-Mu'asira* [On Pragmatics: Illocutionary Acts in Contemporary Arabic] (1st ed., Maktabat al-Adab, Cairo, 2010), p. 143.

¹⁴ See Mas'ud Sahrawi, *Al-Tadawuliyya 'inda al-'Ulama' al-'Arab* [Pragmatics among Arab Scholars] (1st ed., Dar al-Tali'a, Beirut, 2005), p. 49.

¹⁵ See Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 95 ff.

¹⁶ See Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 97.

¹⁷ Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Dunqul, *Complete Works*, p. 99.

²⁰ Dunqul, *Complete Works*, pp. 96-97.