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Contextual Meanings of Dābbah (دابة) in the Qur'an: A Corpus-Assisted Semantic Analysis

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Abstract

The Qur'anic term dābbah (دابة) occurs in different textual contexts, making its meaning difficult to explain solely through a single lexical equivalent. This study examines the contextual meanings of *dābbah* by analyzing all of its singular occurrences in the Qur'an using a digital corpus-assisted textual approach. The Quranic Arabic Corpus was used to identify and verify the data, while contextual semantic analysis, Arabic lexicographical sources, and Qur'anic exegesis were employed to interpret their usage. The dataset consists of 14 occurrences of the singular form *dābbah* distributed across 14 verses in 12 surahs. Based on the textual contexts of the verses and their interpretation in light of Arabic lexicographical sources and Qur'anic exegesis, the analysis identifies six contextual patterns: creation and propagation of creatures, being as a community, sustenance and protection of Allah, power and submission to Allah, punishment and consequences of human actions, and specific referents. The most frequent pattern is creation and propagation of creatures, accounting for five of the 14 occurrences (35.7%). The findings indicate that dābbah generally retains its basic reference to a living or moving creature, while its specific referent and semantic nuances are shaped by the textual environment of each verse. The study therefore distinguishes contextual variation from a complete change in lexical meaning. By combining systematic corpus-based data retrieval with contextual reading, Arabic lexicography, and Qur'anic exegesis, this study demonstrates a transparent and traceable application of digital humanities to Qur'anic semantic analysis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of Qur'anic vocabulary requires attention to context because the meaning of a word cannot always be determined solely from its lexical meaning. The textual environment, sentence structure, and relationships between a word and other elements in a verse can contribute to variations in meaning. For example, Safitri et al. examine the contextual meanings of the Qur'anic term *qadr*, demonstrating that its meaning varies across different textual contexts [1]. Morpho-semantic studies of blurring and its derivation also show the relationship between linguistic forms, context, and variations in Qur'anic meaning [2]. Similarly, corpus research on the forms رحمة and رحمت shows that differences in distribution and contextual environment can help explain the semantic function of a form in the Qur'an [3]. These findings suggest that context analysis is an important element in the semantic study of Qur'anic vocabulary.

The development of the digital corpus provides a tool that allows the linguistic study of the Qur'an to be carried out in a more systematic manner. The corpus can be used to identify the occurrence of a word, examine its distribution, and display concordances that help researchers trace the context of

its use [4]. The development of the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) extends this capability through morphological, part-of-speech, and syntactic annotations of the Qur'anic text [5]. Other sources of the Qur'anic corpus were also developed with morphosyntactic information through a combination of automatic processing and manual checking [6], while the MASAQ dataset provides more up-to-date morphological and syntactic annotations of the entire text of the Qur'an [7]. These developments show that the Qur'anic text has become an important object in the development of digital sources for linguistic research.

The use of digital sources of the Qur'an does not always have to be directed at the development of complex computational models. A systematic review of Natural Language Processing research on the Qur'an shows the use of digital technology in various needs, ranging from morphological analysis, search, corpus, to knowledge representation [8]. The semantic Qur'an also shows how the Qur'anic morphosyntactic text and information can be represented as a structured digital source [9]. In semantic research, Al-Otaibi uses the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) and concordance analysis to examine deictic verbs in their textual contexts [10], while Maula and Rizalman examine occurrences of the noun *qalb* in QAC to investigate its distribution, collocations, and semantic nuances [11]. These studies illustrate that corpus-assisted research can offer more than the retrieval of individual verses. Searching a specified root provides a systematic inventory of relevant occurrences, while examining each retrieved record and distinguishing singular from plural forms makes data selection explicit and traceable. Contextual analysis then examines how each occurrence functions within its surrounding verse, while Arabic lexicographical sources and Qur'anic exegesis help relate these contextual patterns to the basic lexical meaning and interpretations of the term. In the present study, this combination allows all 14 singular occurrences of *dābbah* identified in the specified QAC search to be examined systematically, while distinguishing patterns of contextual use from evidence of distinct lexical meanings. Thus, the corpus supports data retrieval, checking, and traceability, whereas semantic interpretation remains grounded in the linguistic context, lexicography, and tafsir.

Within this framework, this study focuses on the Qur'anic term dābbah (دابة). This term occurs in various verse contexts, including the creation and propagation of creatures, living beings as communities, sustenance, submission to Allah, the consequences of human actions, and references to specific beings. This diversity indicates that the term dābbah cannot be adequately examined through a single verse or translation equivalent alone. Previous research has also shown that dābbah can obtain different explanations according to the verses and the framework of interpretation used. For example, the study on QS. an-Naml [27]:82 specifically discusses dābbah al-arḍ in an eschatological context and i'jāz ghaybī [12]. Therefore, an analysis of the entire use of the form dābbah is necessary to obtain a more systematic picture of the variation in the context.

A search for the root د ب ب in the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) identifies 18 occurrences classified under the noun *dābbah* [14]. These 18 occurrences comprise four plural forms, الدواب, found in QS. al-Anfāl [8]:22, al-Anfāl [8]:55, al-Ḥajj [22]:18, and Fāṭir [35]:28, and 14 singular-form occurrences of دابة distributed across 14 verses. The singular forms occur in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:164, al-An'ām [6]:38, Hūd [11]:6 and [11]:56, al-Naḥl [16]:49 and [16]:61, al-Nūr [24]:45, al-Naml [27]:82, al-'Ankabūt [29]:60, Luqmān [31]:10, Saba' [34]:14, Fāṭir [35]:45, al-Shūrā [42]:29, and al-Jāthiyah [45]:4. This study focuses exclusively on the 14 singular-form occurrences to examine their contextual meanings, while excluding the four plural occurrences. The dataset therefore represents all singular-form occurrences listed in the specified QAC entry, rather than a sample of them. The limitation of the study to 14 single forms provides a clear unit of analysis while allowing the entire data to be examined without the use of sampling techniques. The Quranic Arabic Corpus itself asserts that the gloss given to each word is only a guide and that Arabic words can have a range of meanings depending on the context [14].

The study of dābbah is not a completely unexplored field. Safitri has examined the meaning of dābbah through literature research and noted 18 occurrences consisting of 14 singular and four plural forms [13], while other studies have focused more specifically on the interpretation of dābbah in QS. an-Naml [27]:82 [12]. On the other hand, corpus-based research on Qur'anic vocabulary has been conducted on objects such as deictic verbs, qalb, kabura, as well as رحمة and [11] ,[10] ,[3] ,[2] رحمت.

However, based on the literature that has been successfully searched in this study, no article has been found that specifically treats all 14 occurrences of the singular form دابة as a single digital corpus dataset, then maps the context of its use and connects these patterns with Arabic lexicographic sources and interpretations. Thus, the gap in this research does not lie in the absence of discussion of dābbah, but in the insystematic mapping of all the occurrences of the singular form with the support of the digital corpus.

Based on these gaps, this study asks the question: how does the contextual meaning of the word دابة vary in the Qur'an based on all its occurrences in the Quranic Arabic Corpus as well as lexicographic explanations and classical interpretations? This study aims to identify all occurrences of the singular form دابة, map the context in which it is used, group verses based on similarity in context, and interpret these variations by referring to lexicographic sources and interpretations. The Quranic Arabic Corpus is used as a tool for data identification and verification, not as a substitute for interpretation of the text. With this approach, the contribution of the research is limited to providing a more systematic, transparent, and verifiable mapping of the use of the word dābbah. This integration between digital sources and textual reading places research in the realm of Digital Islamicate Humanities, without demanding the use of computational methods that are more complex than the research needs [5], [8].

2. METHOD

In the implementation method section, describe clearly and concisely the methods used to achieve the goals set out in the service activities. The results of the dedication must be measurable and the writer was asked to explain the measuring instrument used, both descriptively and qualitatively. Explain how to measure the level of achievement of the success of community service activities. The level of achievement can be seen from the attitude, socio-cultural and economic changes of the target community.

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach with digital *corpus-assisted textual analysis*. This approach is used to systematically identify all occurrences of the word دابة (*dābbah*) in the Qur'an, then analyze the variations in its use based on the context of the verse. The corpus analysis in this study is not directed at computational modeling, but is used to support data collection and tracing in a structured manner. Furthermore, close *reading* of the verse is used to explain the context and meaning of each occurrence of the word. The combination of corpus-based search and contextual reading allows textual patterns to be identified without detaching data from their linguistic environment [15].

2.1. Research Sources and Data

The main digital data source of the research is the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC), which is an annotated Qur'anic corpus that provides morphological and syntactic information as well as tracing facilities based on roots, *lemmas*, and *stems* [14]. A search for the triliteral root د ب ب in the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) identifies 18 occurrences classified as nouns [14]. Of these, four are plural forms الدواب, while the remaining 14 are singular forms دابة. This study focuses exclusively on the 14 singular-form occurrences distributed across 14 verses. The four plural occurrences are excluded because the study specifically examines contextual variation in the use of the singular form دابة. Accordingly, the dataset comprises all 14 singular-form occurrences retrieved from the specified QAC root entry, rather than a sample of the nominal occurrences. The fourteen verses that were the data of the study were QS. al-Baqarah [2]:164, al-An'ām [6]:38, Hūd [11]:6 and [11]:56, al-Naḥl [16]:49 and [16]:61, al-Nūr [24]:45, al-Naml [27]:82, al-'Ankabūt [29]:60, Luqmān [31]:10, Saba' [34]:14, Fāṭir [35]:45, al-Shūrā [42]:29, and al-Jāthiyah [45]:4 [14]. Since all occurrences of a single form were analyzed, this study did not use sampling techniques.

2.2. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) entry for the triliteral root د ب ب was accessed on 24 September 2026 [14]. The initial retrieval was restricted to occurrences classified as nouns under this root entry, yielding 18 nominal occurrences. Second, these 18 occurrences were classified according to grammatical number as recorded in QAC: four plural forms,

الدواب, and 14 singular forms, دابة. The analysis included only the 14 singular-form occurrences because the study focuses specifically on contextual variation in the use of the singular form. Third, for each selected occurrence, the surah and verse number, Arabic word form, lexical form, and verse context were recorded. QAC was used to identify and check the retrieved records, while the interpretation of meaning was based on contextual semantic analysis, Arabic lexicographical sources, and Qur'anic exegesis rather than on QAC annotations alone.

2.3. Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out in three stages. First, all 14 verses were read contextually to identify the textual environment and topics that accompanied the use of the word دابة. Second, verses that showed similarity in context were grouped to obtain usage patterns. The grouping was carried out based on information explicitly contained in the verse, such as the context of creation, the life of creatures, sustenance, submission to Allah, punishment, or a particular referent. The groups were treated as patterns of contextual use, rather than directly as distinct lexical meanings. This approach kept the resulting categories traceable back to the textual data.

Third, the contextual patterns were analyzed semantically through a two-stage interpretive process. First, the basic lexical meaning and semantic range of دابة (*dābbah*) were established by consulting Arabic lexicographical sources. The definitions provided by these sources were compared to identify the core meaning and the range of reference associated with the term. Second, each occurrence was examined in relation to the grammatical construction, immediate co-text, and broader textual context of its verse. The resulting contextual reading was then compared with relevant explanations in Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) to clarify the specific referent and contextual nuances of the term in each verse. This process distinguished the term's basic lexical meaning from the ways its referent and semantic nuances are specified by the textual context and interpretation. Verses were classified according to similarities in their textual contexts, rather than assuming that each contextual pattern represented a distinct lexical meaning. The final results were presented in tables showing the surah and verse, word form, key textual context, and assigned contextual pattern. This procedure allows readers to trace the relationship between the corpus data, the classification of contextual patterns, and the resulting semantic interpretation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The search for the triliteral root د ب ب in the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) identifies 18 nominal occurrences. Four are plural forms الدواب, while the remaining 14 are singular forms دابة. The 14 singular occurrences are distributed across 14 verses in 12 surahs, as shown in Table 1. In accordance with the scope of this study, only the singular forms are included in the contextual semantic analysis.

Table 1. Distribution and context of the use of the word دابة in the Qur'an

No.	Surah and Verses	Shape	Key textual context	Initial context patterns
1	Al-Baqarah [2]:164	دَابَّةٍ	The verse links the spreading of various creatures on earth with the signs of creation.	Creation and propagation of creatures
2	Al-An'ām [6]:38	دَابَّةٍ	The term dābbah occurs alongside birds and is associated with the expression umam amthālukum (“communities like you”).	Living beings as communities
3	Hūd [11]:6	دَابَّةٍ	The verse associates every dābbah on earth with sustenance provided by Allah.	Divine sustenance and provision
4	Hūd [11]:56	دَابَّةٍ	The verse presents every dābbah as being under Allah’s power through the expression ākhidhun bināṣiyatihā.	Divine power and submission
5	Al-Naḥl [16]:49	دَابَّةٍ	The verse includes dābbah among the creatures that prostrate to Allah.	Divine power and submission
6	Al-Naḥl [16]:61	دَابَّةٍ	The verse connects the consequences of human wrongdoing with the potential destruction of creatures on earth.	Punishment and consequences of human actions

7	Al-Nūr [24]:45	دَابَّةٍ	The verse states that living creatures are created from water and differ in their modes of movement.	Creation and propagation of creatures
8	Al-Naml [27]:82	دَابَّةً	The expression dābbah min al-arḍ refers to a creature brought forth from the earth that speaks to people.	Specific referents
9	Al-'Ankabūt [29]:60	دَابَّةٍ	The verse states that creatures unable to provide their own sustenance are nevertheless sustained by Allah.	Divine sustenance and provision
10	Luqmān [31]:10	دَابَّةٍ	The verse mentions the spreading of creatures on earth as part of a description of creation.	Creation and propagation of creatures
11	Saba' [34]:14	دَابَّةُ	The expression dābbat al-arḍ refers to the creature that consumed Prophet Sulayman's staff, leading to the discovery of his death.	Specific referents
12	Fāṭir [35]:45	دَابَّةٍ	The verse connects the consequences of human deeds with the possible destruction of creatures on earth.	Punishment and consequences of human actions
13	al-Shūrā [42]:29	دَابَّةٍ	The verse links the creatures dispersed in the heavens and earth with the signs of Allah's power.	Creation and propagation of creatures
14	al-Jāthiyah [45]:4	دَابَّةٍ	The verse presents the creation of living creatures as a sign for those who believe.	Creation and propagation of creatures

Table 1 shows that the singular form دابة is not concentrated in a single surah or one context of conversation. Fourteen of its occurrences are spread from QS. al-Baqarah [2]:164 to QS. al-Jāthiyah [45]:4. Only two surahs contain the singular form more than once, namely Hūd in verses 6 and 56 and al-Naḥl in verses 49 and 61. This distribution shows that the same pronunciation is used in different textual environments, so its meaning needs to be examined by taking into account the context of each verse, rather than solely based on a single lexical equivalent [14]. Based on the initial contextual reading, the 14 data can be grouped into six usage patterns. This grouping is not intended as six separate lexical meanings, but as a way to map the textual environment in which the pronunciation دابة is used.

Table 2. Distribution of Contextual Patterns of the Term Dābbah (دابة) in the Qur'an

Context patterns	Verse	Quantity	Proportions
Creation and propagation of creatures	2:164; 24:45; 31:10; 42:29; 45:4	5	35.7%
Living beings as communities	6:38	1	7.1%
Divine sustenance and provision	11:6; 29:60	2	14.3%
Divine power and submission	11:56; 16:49	2	14.3%
Punishment and consequences of human actions	16:61; 35:45	2	14.3%
Specific referents	27:82; 34:14	2	14.3%
Total		14	100%

The most frequent contextual pattern concerns the creation and propagation of creatures, accounting for five of the 14 occurrences (35.7%). In QS. al-Baqarah [2]:164, Luqmān [31]:10, al-Shūrā [42]:29, and al-Jāthiyah [45]:4, *dābbah* occurs in contexts describing the existence or distribution of living creatures as part of the signs of creation. QS. al-Nūr [24]:45 develops this pattern by stating that living creatures are created from water and differ in their modes of movement. These textual associations with creation, distribution, water, and variation in movement support the classification of these five occurrences under the pattern of creation and propagation of creatures. The classification is therefore based on the surrounding textual context rather than on the lexical form *dābbah* in isolation [14].

The distinction between contextual patterns becomes clearer when the linguistic constructions surrounding *dābbah* are examined. In QS. al-Anʿām [6]:38, the term occurs in a restrictive construction that concludes with *illā umamun amthālukum* ("except that they are communities like you"). The

predicate *umamun* (“communities”), qualified by *amthālukum* (“like you”), characterizes the creatures and birds mentioned in the verse in terms of their communal existence. This construction supports the classification of the verse under “Living beings as communities,” because the emphasis falls not merely on the existence of creatures but on their characterization as communities comparable to humans. In QS. al-Naml [27]:82, by contrast, *dābbah* occurs in the construction *dābbatan min al-arḍi tukallimuhum* (“a creature from the earth that speaks to them”). The phrase *min al-arḍ* specifies the creature’s association with the earth, while *tukallimuhum* describes its action of speaking to people. These linguistic elements identify a more specific referent within the verse’s narrative context, supporting its classification under “Specific referents.” The two examples demonstrate that contextual classification depends on the grammatical construction and surrounding textual information, rather than assuming that every occurrence of *dābbah* has a distinct lexical meaning.

Other contextual patterns are associated with divine sustenance and provision, divine power and submission, and the consequences of human actions. QS. Hūd [11]:6 and al-'Ankabūt [29]:60 connect dābbah with sustenance provided by Allah, whereas QS. Hūd [11]:56 and al-Naḥl [16]:49 place creatures in relation to divine power and submission. Although the latter verses express this relationship differently—through divine authority over creatures in QS. Hūd [11]:56 and prostration to Allah in QS. al-Naḥl [16]:49—their textual contexts support their grouping under the same contextual pattern. Meanwhile, QS. al-Naḥl [16]:61 and Fāṭir [35]:45 associate the possible destruction of creatures with human wrongdoing and deeds. Their similar textual constructions support the classification of both occurrences under “Punishment and consequences of human actions,” without implying a change in the basic lexical meaning of dābbah [14].

The category “Specific referents” also includes QS. Saba' [34]:14, where the construction dābbat al-arḍ refers to the creature that consumed the staff of Prophet Sulayman, leading to the discovery of his death. Considered alongside QS. al-Naml [27]:82, this occurrence illustrates how the narrative context identifies a more specific referent for dābbah. The two verses are grouped according to their contextual use, not because the term necessarily acquires a distinct lexical meaning in each verse [14]. The results of the initial distribution suggest two things. First, the use of the form دابة in the Qur'an has a relatively consistent lexical basis as a reference to creatures, but its textual environment exhibits a diverse contextual function. Second, differences in context do not necessarily prove the existence of completely different lexical meanings. Therefore, the six patterns in Table 2 are treated as temporary analytical categories based on textual context. Determining the relationship between the basic meaning of dābbah and variations in its use requires further examination of Arabic lexicographic sources before the interpretation of each group of verses is carried out through interpretation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Qur'anic term دابة (dābbah) generally retains a basic meaning related to living or moving creatures, while its specific referent and semantic nuances vary according to the textual context. The 14 singular-form occurrences were grouped into six contextual patterns: creation and propagation of creatures, living beings as communities, divine sustenance and provision, divine power and submission, punishment and consequences of human actions, and specific referents. The most frequent pattern concerns creation and propagation of creatures, accounting for five occurrences (35.7%). Two occurrences, in QS. al-Naml [27]:82 and QS. Saba' [34]:14, refer to more specific beings within their respective narrative contexts. These findings demonstrate that contextual variation does not necessarily indicate a change in the basic lexical meaning of dābbah, but may instead reflect differences in its referent and textual function. The Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC) supports the systematic identification and traceability of the data, while semantic analysis relies on contextual reading, Arabic lexicographical sources, and relevant Qur'anic exegesis. The findings are limited to the 14 occurrences of the singular form dābbah examined in this study and cannot automatically be generalized to all derivatives of the root د ب ب or to every exegetical tradition. This study thus illustrates how corpus-assisted semantic analysis can support a systematic and context-sensitive examination of Qur'anic vocabulary.

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