

A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF CONTEXT TYPES

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Annotation: *This article examines the concept of context as a multidimensional and dynamic system in modern linguistics and literary studies. Moving beyond the traditional understanding of context as the immediate verbal environment of a word or expression, the text argues that context includes a wide range of factors such as speaker intention, communicative situation, cultural codes, ideological background, and relations to prior texts. The study identifies four major types of context: situational, cultural, pragmatics, and intertextual. Although discussed separately for analytical purposes, these categories are shown to function in constant interaction within literary discourse. The article draws on theories from linguistics, pragmatics, stylistics, discourse analysis and literary criticism, while also referring to literary works by Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan, Zadie Smith, and Toni Morrison to illustrate how context shapes interpretation and meaning. Special attention is given to the role of context in producing psychological depth, ideological ambiguity, and aesthetic effect. The article concludes that context should not be seen as a passive background to meaning, but as an active mechanism through which meaning is created, reconstructed, and negotiated in discourse. In this sense, context becomes one of the central forces determining the semantic and discursive structure of literary texts.*

Keywords: *context, situational context, cultural context, pragmatic context, intertextual context, discourse analysis, literary theory, meaning construction, pragmatics, stylistics.*

Introduction

In modern linguistics, one of the most important and multifaceted concepts is “context”. For many years in the field of linguistics, “context” was understood simply as the immediate textual environment of a word or expression, but since the second half of the 20th century, this concept has taken on a broader meaning. In modern linguistic theory, context is not limited to the words immediately preceding or following a word; rather, it is defined as a system that incorporates factors such as the speaker's intention, cultural codes, the communicative situation, reference to prior text, and the ideological background. For this reason, context is the intersection of fields such as stylistics, pragmatics, linguistics, cognitive poetics, discourse analysis, and literary theory.

Main part

In linguistics and the analysis of literary texts, context is presented not as “extratextual conditions”, but as a multi-layered system that influences the creation, change, and understanding of meaning. Therefore, the study of context is conducted according to 4 main types:

1. Situational context
2. Cultural context
3. Pragmatic context
4. Intertextual context

In a real text, these types operate in interaction, so this classification is of a conventional nature.

The most concrete, immediate and easily observed type of context is the situational context. This type clarifies the time and place of the speech, the physical and emotional state of the participants, the relationship and mutual position of the speaker and the listener, the nature of the communicative situation, the stage of the event, and the specific purpose of the speech. The situative context can be understood as the sum of the circumstances in which the speech occurs.

The same sentence can convey different meanings in different contexts. For example, 'You are late', although at first glance it appears to be a simple, factual statement, can, depending on the circumstances, imply disapproval, sarcasm, concern, worry, accusation or even a joke. When said by a friend, it can imply gentle reproach; when said by a loved one who has been waiting a long time, it can express emotional tension.

Within the situative context, there are visible traces such as ellipsis, pauses, pronouns, diegetic markers, and so on. The reader or listener can infer from the situative context who or what pronouns refer to, and can complete incomplete sentences.

In a literary text, situative context is of particular importance because the author, by providing only certain details without fully explaining the event, compels the reader to reconstruct the situation. Therefore, it is incorrect to refer to the situative context in a literary work simply as an explanatory background. It is also considered a means of creating psychological depth [Verdonk, P., 2002.].

Thus, the situative context draws the reader out of passive perception and into an active process of interpretation, compelling them to look for clues such as the conversational setting, the emotional tension at play, and the characters' relationships with one another. A prime example of such a work is Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *The Remains of the Day*. The protagonist, Stevens, conceals his emotional reactions behind a façade of professional ethics, always speaking with great courtesy, composure, and professionalism, and never expressing himself openly. However, despite this apparent composure, the reader can discern Stevens's true state from the context and tone of his speech [Ishiguro, Kazuo, 1989].

In many episodes of the novel, it is possible to determine Stevens's attitude towards other characters by the situational context. For example, remarks that take on a formal and restrictive character under Lord Darlington's rigid hierarchy can sound like sincere confessions and emotional intimacy in ordinary conversation. Thus, Stevens's speech, in addition to conveying information, serves to maintain a social boundary, control his emotions, protect himself, and render his inner turmoil invisible. Therefore, we can conclude that by concealing the emotion within the situational context, the author allows the reader to understand the points at which Stevens is unable to confess. This demonstrates that context is a mechanism that creates psychological depth.

A key characteristic of situative context is that it is usually presented from a particular perspective rather than as an objective, unchanging reality. An example of this is Briony's misinterpretation in the fountain scene in Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*. Although the participants, event and text remain the same, Briony's characteristics, such as her age, the event she witnesses, and her emotional experience, cause a distortion of the situational context, i.e., a model of the context in which the misinterpretation occurs [McEwan, Ian., 2001]. From this, we can conclude that the

situative context, in addition to external circumstances, also depends on the character's consciousness, experience, and expectations. The author's lack of explanation in the work is one of the factors that makes it more powerful, as the reader is then engaged not just in an act of protection, but in the process of reconstructing meaning.

In this respect, we can also apply G. Leech and Mick Short's ideas on foregrounding to the situative context. According to their theory, for any linguistic unit in a text to attract attention, it is not necessary for it to be unusual; on the contrary, an ordinary word, expression, etc., can sometimes produce a more powerful emotional semantic effect [Leech, Geoffrey; Short, Mick, 1981, p.46]. In other words, a word does not gain poetic power when it is ornate, rare or poetic, but when it is used in the right situation. Kazuo Ishiguro also used this very technique to create emotion in his works through the unconventional sound of otherwise ordinary expressions, leading the reader not to the question “what was said?”, but to “why was it so simple?”.

Cultural context, another type of context, refers to features such as national and ethnic identity characteristics, a value system, the historical memory of society, religious beliefs, social stereotypes, norms of behaviour, and so on, which underpin the meaning of words, expressions, or other syntactic units. Thus, a word or phrase, in addition to its dictionary meanings, is also subject to the worldview, thought patterns, and value systems of the environment in which it is formed, thereby acquiring its own distinctive characteristics. An image, symbol or expression that evokes a positive association in one culture may carry a different, even contradictory, meaning in another cultural context. Based on their research in this area, Anna Vejbitskaya and N.D. Arutyunova concluded that the meaning of a linguistic unit is not simply the lexical correspondence of words, but is shaped by the world-classifying system and cultural schemas of the people who use it. [Арутюнова Н. Д., 1976.; Вежбицкая А., 1996.]. Therefore, language can be called the guardian and bearer of cultural experience. In their conceptual theory, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson also noted that a person's everyday language and thought are not accidental, but are built upon fixed metaphorical expressions shaped by the cultural environment [Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark, 1980.]. Thus, we can call cultural context one of the conditions that determines the way meaning is created, expressed, and understood.

One of the most successful examples of cultural context can be found in Zadie Smith's novel, *White Teeth*. The novel's setting in North London serves more than just a geographical backdrop. Here, various histories, a colonial past, religious affiliation, ethnic memory, and patterns of class behaviour are transformed into a semantic field, creating the cultural context. As concepts such as “Englishness”, “the future” and “origin” are of crucial importance in this work, the novel is presented as a work that deals with the struggle to understand the cultural identity of North London's migrants and native residents [Smith, Zadie, 2000].

When analysing this novel, we can use Fairclough's approach, which explains discourse as social practice. Fairclough sees language as part of society, a social process and a socially conditioned practice, and he put forward the concept of an “order of discourse”, which states that each social space is constructed with its own specific types of discourse and their relationships [Fairclough, Norman, 1989.]. In *White Teeth*, the various discourses appear as fields in which different discourses compete with one another. For example, we can point to Samad Iqbal's invocation of family and religious memory, and Chalfen's of science and liberal rationality. The younger generation, torn

between these two spheres, seeks new formulas of identity. The tension in the novel arises precisely from the competing discourses, and the depiction of the multicultural environment not merely as a source of colourfulness but as a space for power struggles is one of the novel's most valuable aspects.

In her novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison explores the effects of the history of slavery on the collective consciousness, family memory and in the language itself, and as a cultural reality that governs the processes of remembering and forgetting, thereby damaging family relationships, has constructed the cultural context on a heavier, deeper, and more traumatic level [Morrison, Toni, 1987.]. In her classic article, Caroline Rody, discussing the concept of “rememory”, noted that it transforms memory into an active field of consciousness and imagination [Rody, Caroline, 1995.]. Morrison further reinforced this idea in a later essay, noting that *Beloved* is structured around a conflict between “remembering and forgetting” [Morrison, Toni, 1987.].

One of the key features of cultural context is that it is often explained not explicitly, but through certain images, signs, or historical and religious codes. Here, the full meaning can vary depending on the interpretive tradition of the reader. In his theory of interpretive communities, Stanley Fish supported this idea, concluding that meaning is formed not simply by the text or the reader, but by interpretive communities that share similar reading strategies [Fish, Stanley, 1980.]. Therefore, different readers can understand the same novel differently, depending on their reading tradition. From this, we can conclude that cultural context is the ideological temperature of the text, and without sensing this temperature, the reader cannot fully comprehend the text's aesthetic tension and internal discursive energy.

Pragmatic context, another type of context, concerns how a linguistic unit is understood in a specific communicative situation, in relation to the speaker's intention, the hearer's expectations, implicature, silence strategy, presupposition, indirectness, and speech acts. Here, how and why the speaker says something is more important than what they say. While studying pragmatics, George Yule defined it as the sphere of meaning that is conveyed by the writer or speaker and interpreted by the reader or listener in a particular situation, and noted that it deals with issues such as “speaker meaning”, “contextual meaning” and “what is unsaid” [Yule, G., 1996, p. 3-4]. Thus, in this type of context, meaning is formed within the speaker's intention and the listener's expectation through an inferential process, making factors such as presupposition, politeness, silence, implicature, and speech acts the main components.

John Searle's theory of speech acts is therefore of significant importance. According to this theory, John Searle believed that the basic unit of language was not the sentence, but the illocutionary act, that is, when the speaker utters any sentence, they do not merely provide information; they can also ask something, request, confess, reject, soften, conceal or create distance [Searle, J.R., 1979, p. 177–178.]. In his theory, he noted that in indirect speech acts, the speaker conveys something indirectly, rather than directly, relying on the listener's inference, shared background knowledge, and ability to reason rationally. For example, the sentence ‘Can you reach the salt?’ may at first appear to be a question, but it actually pragmatically expresses a request.[Searle, J.R., 1979, p. 30-34]. Thus, in a pragmatic context, the meaning cannot be fully derived from the surface of the utterance; to complete it, one must resort to the knowledge and inference mechanisms shared between the speaker and the listener.

Pragmatic context plays a crucial role in fiction, because instead of stating an idea directly, writers often use devices such as rhythmic pauses, half-confessions or changes of subject to prompt the reader to complete the unspoken meaning, which in turn makes the work more readable. This characteristic can be seen in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. In the novel, the character Stevens constantly avoids speaking frankly, using measured, polite and formal language. While analysing Foniokova's work, the main tension in Stevens's speech arises between the scenes that are taking place and how Stevens presents them [Foniokova, Z., 2006, p. 88–89]. In the novel, Stevens conceals even his most crucial confessions for a long time, delivering them in a delayed and pragmatically crafted form, veiled behind an indirect, incomplete and professional tone. He even only partially expresses his feelings for Miss Kenton at the end of the novel, saying, ‘my heart was breaking’ [Ishiguro, K., 1989, p. 239].

We can therefore conclude that in artistic discourse, pragmatic context is of great importance, as the emotional and ideological charge of the text is concentrated in what the speaker says and how they say it.

The final type of context, the intertextual context, consists essentially of the relationships a text establishes with other texts. By “relationship” here, we do not simply mean a quotation, a mention, or an allusion. Relationship refers to a text's engagement with the pre-existing memory of genres, models of plot, cultural codes, ideological languages, and so on. Meri Orr Kristeva argues that a text is not a “self-enclosed” unit, calling it a “mosaic of citations” [Orr, Meri., 2003, p. 21-22]. Jerar Jenett, in a more systematic study of the matter, noted that a text is not a commentary on a previous text, but a new, derivative text built upon it [Jenett, Jerar, 1997, p. 5-7].

Intertextuality manifests itself in artistic discourse on two main levels:

1. The level of specific reference
2. The structural and genre level

At the first level, devices such as quotation, epigraph, allusion, mythological reference, biblical reference, and the invocation of a well-known image are used. At the second level, the text's genre plays the main role, such as gothic novel, historical novel, slave narrative, detective plot, etc.

Hutcheon notes of this type of context that in such texts the reader moves between “proximity” and “distance”, feeling both a sense of familiarity and perceiving how the new text alters the previous one [Hutcheon, Linda, 2000, p.32].

This theoretical framework can be clearly seen in Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*. The novel not only contains a few biblical allusions, but it is also a text that incorporates an entire historical and literary memory. When analysing the novel, Raunak Rathee has noted that it is a corrective rewrite, presenting it as a neo-slave narrative [Rathee, Raunak, 2018, p. 875-879.]. From this, we can conclude that the novel's power lies in Morrison's attempt not to restore the historical fact, but to give voice to the experience that fact silenced.

Conclusion

From the theoretical and practical analyses conducted, we can conclude that context is one of the main factors determining the text's semantic and discursive structure. The types of context, such as situational, Although the types of context—situative, cultural, pragmatic and intertextual—are described separately in the classification, they are constantly in interaction and influence within artistic discourse,

and therefore, it is more appropriate to consider them as an intertwined and dynamic model.

We would be mistaken to say that context always plays an explanatory and clarifying role, because in contemporary literary texts context is deliberately left incomplete to draw the reader into the process of inference and serves as a means of creating productive ambiguity. Thus, context in the literary sphere manifests itself as the text's mode of operation.

Overall, research indicates that context is not a background serving meaning, but rather its mode of action. Discourse not only takes place within a certain context but also plays an active role in its selection, reconstruction, and negotiation, as well as in the reader's interpretative process. Therefore, it is incorrect to explain the text solely on lexical, syntactic, and stylistic levels. Context helps to give literary discourse semantic depth, ideological ambiguity, and aesthetic impact by engaging factors such as the scene, the conditions of speech, collective memory, silence, allusion, and genre relations.

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