

Situated Meaning in Patricia McCormick's Novel *Cut*

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Abstract

The present article investigates the idea of situated meaning in Patricia McCormick's Novel Cut. This study explores the complex interactions between language, context, and interpretation through a thorough reading of the text, providing insight into the process of creating and navigating meaning within certain situational framework. The research examines the contextual relevance of conversation, narrative components, and character interactions, shedding light on the complex ways in which language and context interact to influence reader comprehension. It does this by drawing on theories of discourse analysis and literary criticism. This study sheds light on the intricate ways that psychological dynamics, social elements, and narrative techniques play a part in meaning-making inside McCormick's gripping story universe.

Keywords: Situated meaning, discourse analysis, narrative components, sociocultural factors, narrative techniques.

Introduction

Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study investigates the situated meaning of text in Patricia McCaormic's novel *Cut*. Approaches to studying how authors and speakers give language clear meanings in certain contexts are known as situated meanings. As James Gee states, "The meanings of words are not stable and general rather words have multiple and ever-changing meanings created for and adapted to specific contexts of use. At the same time, the significance of words is integrally connected to social and cultural groups in ways that transcend individual minds" (40). The protagonist of Patricia McCormick's novel *Cut* is a young girl named Callie who has an obsession with self-cutting. After being admitted to a rehabilitation facility for young women with different diseases, Callie initially refuses to discuss her issues with anybody. Callie realizes what Amanda has done to herself after meeting her and noticing the marks left behind by her tendency to cut herself, and she starts to open up more about herself. Callie, a teenage girl, excels academically and was an athlete. She was really quick at tracking as well. She appears to be an ordinary teenager. With one exception: she works very hard and remains fearless even in the face of adversity, but she faces many challenges at home. Her father used to frequently go out, her brother was extremely sick, and her mother decided to stop her work and remain at home to take care of him. Meaning is multifaceted, flexible, and culturally embedded in this way. Furthermore, language is adjusted to fit the settings in which it is employed. Gee further pronounces:

Discourse analysis is to explicate the workings of identity and social practices in society.

Situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds and Discourse moves us from the

ground of specific uses of language in specific contexts (situated meanings) up to the world of identities and institutions in time and space (Discourses) through varieties of language (social languages) and people's taken-for-granted theories of the world (figured worlds). (42)

According to his visual precept, discourse analysis starts with this progression. Therefore, discourses about identities and institutions have the power to alter how various individuals use language in context, or situated meanings, by pushing back via figured worlds and social languages. Since the novel *Cut* is a dialogic novel, several characters confront one another in dialogic patterns in settings that are contrastive.

The research takes into account the discourse of diverse language contexts and examines from a variety of angles, drawing on the ideas of V. N. Volosinov, J. P. Gee, M. A. K. Halliday and Hassan, and Foucault. Nonetheless, several academics and intellectuals discuss how context determines where meaning is positioned. Certain goals and the terminology employed in critical discourse analysis can be linked to meaning through the application of critical principles to language usage. In line with the linguistic aspects and the interconnected processes of analysis linked to the discourse dimensions once more.

Critical Response in the Novel *Cut*

Whenever we use language, we set up circumstances and settings to give statements specific meaning and to modify our language appropriately. For these continuing processes, circumstances, or events to continue, they frequently have a similar structure. Regarding language's function and contextual meaning, language serves mainly as a means of communication and a repository of knowledge. Gee explains in his book *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* as:

Many people, including many linguists, think that the primary purpose of human language is to "communicate information." In fact, I believe this is simply a prejudice on the part of academics who believe, often falsely, that what they themselves primarily do and with each other is "exchange information." Language, in fact, serves a great many functions and "giving and getting information," yes, even in our new "Information Age," is but one, and, by no means, the only one. (1)

Every person attempts to use language appropriately for the situation, regardless of whether it is professional or casual. It is also possible to teach young children how to adapt their language to the situations that are predominantly produced by members of their own social and cultural groups. They discover that certain language usage may actively shape and build these kinds of environments. This is a suitable illustration of a youngster learning a word's meaning. In the novel, Callie's roommate Sydney asks her questions, but she does not comprehend and answers at random:

You sit down and ask about visiting day. "How was it for you?" you say. I study your shoes. They're tiny black witch's shoes with silver buckles. "What was it like seeing your family?" "Your shoes look like they're made of fabric, like they're too delicate to be worn in the real world." "Is there anything you want to tell me?" I consider saying something totally stupid. (*Cut* 21-22)

With a dull feeling, Callie believes that she will eventually give up and leave her alone, without question. She is unable to see her companion as well because of inquiries over her visit from yesterday. She obviously has little understanding of other people. Since communicating involves dual processes, it is necessary to be able to openly exchange thoughts with others. Clear, simple, and situational language is essential. Understanding the circumstance is crucial to the communication process. We examine the situation of a young girl learning the word "shoe." She solely refers to the shoe in her mother's closet while using the term in the first section. She could eventually become unusual in her ability to recognize when "the shoe" is suitable. She now uses it not just in shoe-related scenarios but also while managing the shoelaces on her teddy bear, passing an adult to fit a doll's arm, putting a sock on a doll, and looking at an image of a brown beetle.

Theoretical framework

The little girl now identifies the word "shoe" with a wide range of circumstances, all of which include one or more distinguishing characteristics that might prompt the usage of the term. The term "shoe" is linked to the image of the beetle, most likely because of its qualities of "shiny," "hard," and "oval shaped"; similarly, the doll's arm is related with the word "shoe" because of its qualities of "fit to the body" and "associated with a limb of the body," and so on. The little girl's only motto is with what a "shoe" means. To name anything a "shoe," she still has to learn the entire range of traits she should consider in that context but more importantly, she needs to understand that the features linked to various contexts that initiate the application of a word are not only a list. As a result, the term "shoe" has several contextual meanings depending on a child's comprehension level and its true meaning as seen by adults. Gee agrees, "In fact, it is because children learn how to fit their language to the contexts primarily created by others in their social and cultural groups that they learn that certain forms of language can create and transform such contexts in quite active ways" (41). Two consecutive dialogues that are shown in succession throughout the novel serve to highlight the nuanced nature of language in context. Claire strikes up a conversation, extending an offer to join in. Her gestures and words suggest that she will be facilitating the gathering. In the meanwhile, it appears from the narrator's placement that they are not directly involved. The example above highlights the importance of context in forming linguistic meaning and interactional dynamics within narrative discourse by illuminating the complex interactions between language, gesture, and spatial dynamics in communication.

Tara tugs on her hair, Debbie charmers her sweatshirt over her stomach, and Becca slides off her chair and sits on the carpet at Debbie's feet. Her legs tucked underneath her, Girl Scout style. But nobody is willingly focusing on the answers. Debbie cracks her weight-control gum. Tiffany, who for some reason wears a purse strapped across her chest at all times, fiddles with the latch. (*Cut* 14)

The characters in this paragraph, including Tara pulling on her hair, Debbie putting her sweater over her tummy, and Becca sitting on the floor, all exhibit restlessness and distraction by their actions and behaviors. These bodily motions and gestures operate as nonverbal indicators of their disinterest in the topic of discussion. Tiffany's persistent tinkering with her purse and Debbie's breaking of her weight-control gum, on the other hand, are personal quirks that

may be unconscious coping mechanisms. These findings highlight how nonverbal signals may convey attitudes, feelings, and mental processes in addition to—and occasionally even in contradiction to—verbal cues. In a similar spirit, nobody can reply to the addressor since they do not understand the situation or the context, like Claire, the team leader. Immediately after Claire poses a detailed question to them:

"Ah, come on," Claire says. "Yesterday was visiting day. Surely somebody has something to say about that." I add new cars to my list. Brown, white, white, blue, beige, green, red. Brown, white, white, blue, beige, green, red. "OK, OK." Debbie says this like everyone was begging her to talk. "I might as well go first." Again she asked and then only they responded. (*Cut 15*)

In this excerpt, Debbie is reluctant to talk until Claire urges her for an update on the visiting day from the day before. Debbie says, "I might as well go first," which conveys a sense of duty or resignation rather than enthusiasm. Her tone suggests that, rather than actively contributing to the conversation, she views herself as carrying out a chore. This exchange demonstrates the social dynamics in which people could feel under pressure to participate in discussion even when they are not really interested or engaged. The recipients respond more clearly in the subsequent exchange because they pay more attention to Claire's remarks. Better participation is facilitated by their increased understanding of the current circumstances. The discourse itself contains this enhanced exchange.

According to Foucault, discourse is made up of recurrent claims and linguistic constructions that appear in a variety of texts, illustrating the recurrent themes and linguistic frameworks that define communication in a range of contexts. He, therefore, highlights situated meanings are based on discourse. "Discourse consists of recurrent statements and wordings across texts" (Foucault, 1972). Furthermore, these "together mark out identifiable systems of meanings and fields of knowledge and belief" (Kress, 1993) that, in turn, "are tied to ways of knowing, believing, and categorizing the world and modes of action." (1990). Discourses propagate at various levels of particularity and function with various degrees of unity. For instance, the broad category of political speech contains several unique but related forms: Democratic discourse, Republican discourse, and so forth.

When Gee expands on an idea, he penetrates into the depths of the subject, leveraging his rich expertise in linguistics, education, and literacy studies. Renowned for his exploration of the social and cultural dimensions of literacy, Gee examines how language operates within and shapes various communities. Gee further elaborates about the "situated meaning is", a "thinking device" that guides us to ask certain sorts of questions. Faced with a piece of oral or written language, we consider a certain key word or a family of key words, that is, words we hypothesize are important to understanding the language we wish to analyze. We consider, as well, all that we can learn about the context that this language is both used in and helps to create or construe in a certain way. (53)

Each discourse, then, is identifiable through wordings, "naming," or "glossification" (Mey, 1985) that are specialized to construct meanings for the particular field of relevant knowledge and belief. Even in the official contexts of formal social institutions such as political parties,

governments, and religious organizations, these lexical resources are dynamic and ever-changing. "The meanings are tied closely to particular orientations to the world. They are dynamic, changing in accordance with the demands and needs of the institution or community in question" (Kress, 1989). Meanings are dynamic in various contexts because they are closely related to certain points of view and change based on the needs and expectations of the relevant institution or community. Any political discourse will also adopt and modify helpful terminology from related discourses, such as those of other political parties, popular religious organizations, the sciences, popular culture, advertising, and so on. It is true that all writings are multi-discourse, drawing on a range of discourses, knowledge domains, and perspectives. In the novel, Claire, the leader, settles the dispute while everyone else is blaming themselves.

"Anyone else care to comment?" Claire says, I hold very still. Claire's a hawk for body language. Biting your nails means you want to talk. Leaning forward means you want to talk. Leaning back means you want to talk. I don't move. Sydney clears her throat. "I don't care if we talk about my visit," she says. People exhale. (*Cut 16*)

In this excerpt, Sydney responds to Claire's request for further remarks, showing that she is open to talking about her visit. However, the narrator does not say anything; this might be seen as a refusal to converse. Claire's astute assessment of nonverbal signs in communication is another evidence of this. The inclusion of leaning back, leaning forward, and chewing one's nails as signs that one wants to talk draws attention to the variety of subtle ways people express themselves. Sydney may be making a preparation gesture when she clears her throat before speaking. People's collective sigh in response to Sydney's remark may indicate relaxation from one another or an expectation of further conversation. The illustration depicts the complexities of interpersonal communication, in which both verbal and nonverbal messages are crucial for expressing goals and promoting interaction in group settings. Claire's command makes the dispute settled as the audiences realize the situation. Every character is talking smoothly with proper way. Language is appropriately used and meaning is coined with the situated content.

Language has the ability to both mold and adapt to the communication environment. It also gives language a magical quality that allows our expression to mold and shape the circumstances. J. P. Gee highlights, "Language has a magical property: when we speak or write we craft what we have to say to fit the situation or context in which we are communicating. But, at the same time, how we speak or write creates that very situation or context. It seems, then, that we fit our language to a situation or context" (Gee, 11). These lines emphasize the dual role of language: it both adapts to and shapes the situation or context of communication. When we speak or write, we tailor our language to suit the circumstances. However, the way we express ourselves also influences and constructs the environment in which communication occurs. Thus, language not only conforms to but also constructs the context within which it operates. In the novel the dinnertime dialogue among girls focuses on how food biases individuals in various manners the meanings that are conveyed.

Textual Analysis in Patricia McCormick's Novel *Cut*

People with food-related issues lean in attentively. In the novel *Cut* the major characters involve in food-related issues and converse:

"I twirl my pasta around and around my fork until it slips off. There are four basic food groups here: pasta, purees, puddings, and potatoes," she says. "They only serve things that begin with a 'p'." Debbie sighs "Seriously," Sydney says, "have you ever noticed?" "I'm sick of pasta," Tara says. "All those carbohydrates are an issue for me." "Yeah," says Tiffany. "This stuff is crap." "We had chicken last week," says Debbie. "Yes, Debbie, we remember," says Tiffany. "It was the high point of your life". (28-29)

In this interaction, Sydney initiates up a discussion that prompts a range of reactions from the group about their dissatisfaction with pasta as a meal alternative. Tara worries about carbohydrates, and Tiffany and Debbie join in with remarks. Tiffany's comment also included a tongue-in-cheek reference to an earlier chicken meal that Debbie had brought up, suggesting a playful attitude despite her dissatisfaction with the menu. Every waking moment is spent interacting with text of some way, whether it be a text, a political speech, a children's story, an interaction on television, or a casual discussion. Here the text is defined as "language in use" (Halliday & Hasan, 1985), any instance of coherent, coded language in verbal or written communication. For effective communication, there needs be a situational language, though. The communicator interprets the language and modifies the message to fit the context. "We might more generally speak of visual, audiovisual, gestural texts. Certainly, many contemporary texts are multimodal, mixing visual, audio, electronic texts with the long-standing media of spoken and written language" (Kress, 1993). These lines imply that in addition to conventional spoken and written language, modern writings frequently include various forms of communication, such as visual, auditory, and gestural features. This acknowledgment emphasizes how varied and dynamic communication channels are, as well as how current literary forms include a range of sensory and technical elements. But if "natural languages and their affiliated sign systems are the raw materials of communication, then texts are those artifacts of human subjects' work at the production of meaning i.e., representation and social relations" (Voloshinov, 1986). According to this excerpt, texts are the results of human labor in the process of creating meaning, but natural languages and the sign systems that go along with them are the basic instruments for communication. In this sense, texts include any kind of human communication aiming to express concepts, feelings, or establish relationships. They function as material representations of human expression and aid in the development of social interactions and representation in society.

Within the framework of situated meaning, Foucault discusses social conditions in which intersubjectivity and context are related to logical communications. Concentrating on the main points he expresses, "Because texts are moments of intersubjectivity: the social and discursive relations between human subjects; they involve writers and readers, speakers and listeners, individuals whose intentions are neither self-evident nor recoverable without recourse to another text. (Foucault, 1972)

The argument highlights the fact that texts are examples of human interaction including both authors and readers. It draws attention to the intricate interactions between social and discursive connections, in which people's intentions are sometimes ambiguous and may need to be clarified by more research or referencing other texts. Gee highlights, "Discourses always involve more than language. They always involve coordinating language with ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing, feeling, and with bodies, clothes, non-linguistic symbols, objects, tools, technologies, times, and places" (25). The text emphasizes how discourses are more than just words; they include things like behaviors, relationships, morals, ideologies, feelings, and tangible items, clothing, tools, and technology in addition to the temporal and spatial settings. It highlights the multidimensional character of communication, encompassing not only verbal expression but also a vast variety of interconnected elements that contribute to interpretation and meaning. Dhungana, in a similar vein, is also focusing on body discourse, and he articulates "Their bodies become site of exercising power. The larger political and social framework is an alarmingly falling birth rate" (353). The body is interpreted in the frame of exercising power and create an identity through the use of its narrative and languages. In no time at all, the characters' dinnertime conversation changes. However, it still has significance, since the context requires it. Communicators create the right atmosphere at dinner so that other receivers may receive in an appropriate manner. Consequently, context and situationality should be considered in communication.

Sydney changes the subject. "Look," she says, pointing across the room. "It's the Ghost." A lady is waltzing around the salad bar, her gray braid reaching her waist. Her arms are extended as though she was holding hands with an imaginary companion, and she is dressed in a long, white frock.

"She's from Humdinger," says Sydney. "What's that?" asks Tara. "The wing where they keep the real psychos." "You mean Hammacher," Debbie says. "Humdinger," says Sydney. "You have to be a real humdinger to get in." People laugh. "Once you get in, you never get out." No one laughs this time. (29)

Issues of relevance and situational meaning are comparatively the main topics of discussion. One poses a fundamental question, while another provides an answer in a framework that makes sense. In the similar vein, Gee explores,

[T]he meanings of words are not stable and general. Rather, words have multiple and ever changing meanings created for and adapted to specific contexts of use. At the same time, the meanings of words are integrally linked to social and cultural groups in ways that transcend individual minds. (40)

Situational meanings are dynamic rather than static. There are several contexts and layered meanings possible. Any object's meaning is determined by the discourse itself. Human beings employ writings about them to establish relationships and acts that are necessary for daily existence, as well as to make sense of the world around them. Texts are more than simply tools used by human beings to demonstrate their identities as "child," "student," "teacher," and "parent" in an established position. These texts constitute the real mediums and contexts for their identity, which is disputed and socially formed.

These discourses are ideologically charged and open to a multitude of interpretations at the acquiring level because of the "situatedness" and the ideology a producer represents. To understand these discourses, one requires "mental models". "Mental models not only define our understanding of talk and text itself, but also the understanding of the whole communicative events" (Dijk, 367). This excerpt makes the argument that mental models affect how we understand specific communication events, such as written texts or conversations, as well as how we view larger communication events as coherent and significant exchanges of ideas. It emphasizes how crucial cognitive frameworks are to helping us comprehend the intricacies involved in communication processes and how important they are in influencing how we perceive and interpret language and social occurrences

Conclusion

Subjectivity, a fluid and ever-evolving existence, which reflects meaning, is in perpetual motion, constantly unravel in response to the shifting the identity. This dynamic dance is perhaps most vividly seen fluctuation of conversations, where the meaning of words and expressions is not fixed but instead pulses with the life of the particular moment, breathing in the nuances of the scenario is reflected. Context is the place on which these meanings are created, each thread colored by past experiences and the rich patterns of culture that have intermingled themselves into the matrices of our understanding. In this context, the present is never just the present; it is a palimpsest, layered with the echoes of past meanings and the spectrum of cultural frameworks that continue to exert their influence, shaping the now in ways both subtle and profound. The interactions between Callie and her therapist, as well as with other residents, reveal layers of her internal world, showing how her behavior is a product of her environment and experiences. The novel suggests that healing is not merely about addressing the symptoms, but about understanding the complex interplay of factors that give rise to them. By situating Callie's struggles within her specific context, McCormick invites readers to see beyond the surface, to recognize that every action and emotion is tied to a broader narrative, making the story not just one of individual pain, but of a young girl navigating a world that often feels too heavy to bear.

In nutshell, in Patricia McCormick's novel *Cut*, the concept of "situated meaning" is intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative, serving as a lens through which the protagonist's struggles with self-harm and mental health are deeply contextualized and understood. The story is not just about the act of cutting itself, but rather about the environment, relationships, and psychological landscape that surround and shape the protagonist, Callie. Situated meaning here refers to how the significance of her actions and the emotions. The paper explores that the situation with the protagonist cannot be fully comprehended in isolation; they are embedded within the specific circumstances of her life, including her family dynamics, the pressures she faces, and the silence she maintains. McCormick masterfully portrays how Callie's self-harm is a response to her feelings of powerlessness and her need for control, which are magnified by the lack of open communication in her family and the overwhelming burden of her brother's illness. The therapeutic setting of Sea Pines, where much of the novel unfolds, further amplifies this notion of situated meaning is explored in this paper.

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