



THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN INTERPRETING MEANING: A SEMANTIC STUDY

Sintya Margaretta Sinaga^{1*}, Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik²

^{1,2}Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar

Email: sintyamargarettasinaga.uhnp@gmail.com^{1*}, bernieke.damanik@uhn.ac.id²

Abstract. *This study investigates how context shapes the interpretation of meaning in language from a semantic perspective. While traditional semantics often focuses on the relationship between linguistic forms and their inherent meanings, this research emphasizes that meaning cannot be fully understood without considering contextual factors. The study aims to explore how different types of context—linguistic, situational, and cultural—interact to influence meaning construction and interpretation. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes selected examples from both written and spoken discourse to identify how context contributes to meaning disambiguation and pragmatic understanding. The findings demonstrate that context plays a decisive role in resolving lexical and structural ambiguity, guiding inference, and aligning interpretation with speaker intention. In particular, the study highlights that identical linguistic expressions may yield different meanings depending on contextual conditions. The study concludes that context is not a peripheral element but a central component in semantic interpretation. Incorporating contextual analysis enhances the accuracy of meaning interpretation and supports more effective communication. These findings have important implications for linguistic theory, language teaching, translation studies, and discourse analysis, where sensitivity to context is essential for achieving clarity and precision.*

Keywords: *semantics, context, meaning interpretation, ambiguity, discourse analysis*

Abstrak. *Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana konteks membentuk interpretasi makna dalam bahasa dari perspektif semantik. Meskipun semantik tradisional sering kali berfokus pada hubungan antara bentuk-bentuk linguistik dan makna yang melekat padanya, penelitian ini menekankan bahwa makna tidak dapat dipahami sepenuhnya tanpa mempertimbangkan faktor-faktor kontekstual. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana berbagai jenis konteks—linguistik, situasional, dan budaya—berinteraksi untuk memengaruhi konstruksi dan interpretasi makna. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis contoh-contoh terpilih dari wacana tertulis dan lisan untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana konteks berkontribusi pada disambiguasi makna dan pemahaman pragmatik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa konteks memainkan peran yang menentukan dalam menyelesaikan ambiguitas leksikal dan struktural, memandu inferensi, serta menyelaraskan interpretasi dengan niat pembicara. Secara khusus, penelitian ini menyoroti bahwa ekspresi linguistik yang identik dapat menghasilkan makna yang berbeda tergantung pada kondisi kontekstual. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa konteks bukanlah elemen pinggir, melainkan komponen sentral dalam interpretasi semantik. Memasukkan analisis kontekstual meningkatkan akurasi interpretasi makna dan mendukung komunikasi yang lebih efektif. Temuan ini memiliki implikasi penting bagi teori linguistik, pengajaran bahasa, studi terjemahan, dan analisis wacana, di mana kepekaan terhadap konteks sangat penting untuk mencapai kejelasan dan ketepatan.*

Kata kunci: *semantik, konteks, penafsiran makna, ambiguitas, analisis wacana*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a central aspect of human life, functioning as the primary medium through which individuals express ideas, emotions, intentions, and social relationships. The study of meaning in language, known as semantics, has long been a fundamental area within linguistics. Traditionally, semantics has been concerned with the relationship between linguistic forms—such as words, phrases, and sentences—and the meanings they conventionally encode. However, meaning is not a static or self-contained property of language. In actual communication, meaning is fluid, context-dependent, and often

shaped by factors beyond the linguistic structure itself. This has led to increasing recognition that context plays a crucial role in interpreting meaning.

Context, in its broadest sense, refers to all the background information that surrounds a linguistic expression and influences its interpretation. It encompasses several interrelated dimensions. First, linguistic context (or co-text) refers to the surrounding words, phrases, and sentences that help clarify the meaning of a particular expression. Second, situational context includes the physical setting, participants, time, and circumstances in which communication takes place. Third, cultural and social context involves shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms that shape how language is produced and understood. These different types of context interact dynamically, guiding both speakers and listeners in constructing meaning.

The role of context becomes especially significant when dealing with ambiguity, a common feature of natural language. Ambiguity may arise at various levels, including lexical ambiguity (when a word has multiple meanings), structural ambiguity (when a sentence can be parsed in more than one way), and pragmatic ambiguity (when the speaker's intention is not explicitly stated). For instance, a sentence such as "She saw the man with a telescope" can be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the context. Without contextual cues, it is difficult to determine whether the telescope is used by "she" or possessed by "the man." Thus, context functions as a crucial mechanism for disambiguation, enabling individuals to select the most appropriate interpretation among several possibilities.

Moreover, context is essential for understanding meaning beyond the literal level. In everyday communication, speakers often imply meanings that go beyond the words they explicitly use. These implied meanings, often referred to as pragmatic or inferred meanings, rely heavily on contextual knowledge. For example, the utterance "Can you open the window?" is typically interpreted not as a question about ability, but as a polite request. This interpretation is made possible through contextual understanding, including social conventions and shared expectations about language use. Therefore, meaning is not merely encoded in linguistic expressions but is co-constructed through interaction between language users and their contextual environment.

In recent linguistic studies, there has been a growing emphasis on integrating semantic and pragmatic approaches to better account for the role of context in meaning interpretation. While semantics focuses on the conventional meaning of expressions, pragmatics examines how context influences the interpretation of those expressions in real-life communication. The boundary between these two fields is often fluid, as both contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is created and interpreted. This study adopts a semantic perspective while acknowledging the essential contribution of contextual and pragmatic factors.

The objective of this research is to analyze the role of context in interpreting meaning and to explore how different types of context contribute to meaning construction. Specifically, the study aims to (1) identify the various forms of context involved in communication, (2) examine how context influences the interpretation of linguistic expressions, and (3) demonstrate how context helps resolve ambiguity and clarify speaker intention. By focusing on these aspects, the research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between language and context.

This study is expected to offer both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the field of linguistics by highlighting the importance of context in semantic analysis and by supporting a more integrated view of meaning.

Practically, the findings can be applied in several areas, including language teaching, where awareness of context can improve learners' communicative competence; translation studies, where accurate interpretation depends on contextual understanding; and discourse analysis, where meaning is examined within larger stretches of language use. In an increasingly globalized world, where communication occurs across diverse cultural and social contexts, understanding the role of context becomes even more essential.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defenition of Semantic

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the study of meaning in language. It examines how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning, as well as how these meanings are understood by language users. In general, semantics is concerned with the relationship between linguistic forms and the concepts or ideas they represent. Unlike other areas of linguistics that deal with sound (phonology) or structure (syntax), semantics specifically addresses how meaning is encoded and interpreted within a language system.

From a theoretical perspective, semantics involves analyzing different types of meaning. These include lexical meaning, which refers to the meaning of individual words, and compositional meaning, which concerns how meanings of words combine to form the meanings of larger expressions such as phrases and sentences. For example, the meaning of a sentence is not simply a random collection of word meanings; rather, it is systematically constructed based on grammatical rules and the relationships between its components.

Semantics also distinguishes between literal meaning and non-literal meaning. Literal meaning refers to the direct, dictionary definition of a word or expression, while non-literal meaning includes figurative uses such as metaphors, idioms, and irony. Although traditional semantics primarily focuses on literal meaning, modern approaches often consider how these meanings interact with context to produce more nuanced interpretations.

Furthermore, semantics is closely related to other fields of linguistic study, particularly pragmatics. While semantics deals with meaning as part of the language system, pragmatics examines how context influences the interpretation of meaning in actual communication. The interaction between semantics and pragmatics highlights that meaning is not entirely fixed but can vary depending on contextual factors such as speaker intention, social setting, and shared knowledge.

2.2 Concepts of Meaning in Language

The concept of meaning in language is a central concern in linguistic studies, particularly in semantics. Meaning is not a simple or single-layered phenomenon; rather, it is complex, multifaceted, and influenced by various linguistic and non-linguistic factors. In general terms, meaning refers to the information, ideas, or messages that linguistic expressions convey to speakers and listeners. However, defining meaning precisely has been a longstanding challenge, as it involves both the structure of language and the cognitive processes of its users.

One of the fundamental distinctions in the study of meaning is between lexical meaning and grammatical meaning. Lexical meaning refers to the meaning of individual words or vocabulary items, such as "book," "run," or "happy." These meanings are typically recorded in dictionaries and represent the core sense of a word. In contrast, grammatical meaning arises from the arrangement of words within a sentence and is

conveyed through grammatical elements such as tense, number, aspect, and syntactic structure. For example, the difference between “She writes” and “She wrote” lies not in lexical meaning, but in grammatical meaning related to time.

Another important concept is the distinction between denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning refers to the literal, objective meaning of a word the definition that is widely agreed upon. For instance, the word “snake” denotes a type of reptile. Connotative meaning, on the other hand, involves the emotional, cultural, or associative meanings that a word may carry. In many contexts, “snake” may connote danger, betrayal, or deceit. These connotations vary depending on cultural and social contexts, making meaning more dynamic and subjective.

In addition, meaning can be understood through the concept of sense and reference. Sense refers to the internal, linguistic relationships between words and expressions within a language system, while reference refers to the actual objects or entities in the real world that words point to. For example, the expressions “the morning star” and “the evening star” have different senses but refer to the same entity, namely the planet Venus. This distinction highlights that meaning is not only about real-world objects but also about how language structures conceptual understanding.

Another key concept is semantic relations, which describe how meanings of words are related to one another. These include relationships such as synonymy (words with similar meanings), antonymy (words with opposite meanings), hyponymy (hierarchical relationships between general and specific terms), and polysemy (a single word having multiple related meanings). Understanding these relationships helps explain how vocabulary is organized and how meaning is interconnected within a language.

Furthermore, meaning in language also involves literal and non-literal interpretation. Literal meaning reflects the direct interpretation of words, while non-literal meaning includes figurative language such as metaphors, idioms, and irony. For example, the expression “time is money” is not meant to be interpreted literally, but metaphorically, suggesting that time is valuable. Such expressions demonstrate that meaning often goes beyond the surface level and requires interpretation based on shared knowledge and context.

Finally, meaning is closely linked to contextual interpretation, which emphasizes that meaning is not fixed but can change depending on the situation in which language is used. The same word or sentence may carry different meanings in different contexts, influenced by factors such as the speaker’s intention, the relationship between participants, and cultural norms. This dynamic nature of meaning reinforces the idea that language is not merely a system of symbols, but a tool for communication that operates within specific contexts.

In conclusion, the concept of meaning in language encompasses various dimensions, including lexical and grammatical meaning, denotation and connotation, sense and reference, semantic relations, and literal versus non-literal interpretation. These concepts demonstrate that meaning is both structured and flexible, shaped by linguistic systems as well as contextual factors. Understanding these different aspects is essential for analyzing how meaning is constructed and interpreted in human communication.

2.3 The Role of Context in Meaning Interpretation

The concept of meaning in language is a central concern in linguistic studies, particularly in semantics. Meaning is not a simple or single-layered phenomenon; rather, it is complex, multifaceted, and influenced by various linguistic and non-linguistic factors. In general terms, meaning refers to the information, ideas, or messages that

linguistic expressions convey to speakers and listeners. However, defining meaning precisely has been a longstanding challenge, as it involves both the structure of language and the cognitive processes of its users.

One of the fundamental distinctions in the study of meaning is between lexical meaning and grammatical meaning. Lexical meaning refers to the meaning of individual words or vocabulary items, such as “book,” “run,” or “happy.” These meanings are typically recorded in dictionaries and represent the core sense of a word. In contrast, grammatical meaning arises from the arrangement of words within a sentence and is conveyed through grammatical elements such as tense, number, aspect, and syntactic structure. For example, the difference between “She writes” and “She wrote” lies not in lexical meaning, but in grammatical meaning related to time.

Another important concept is the distinction between denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning refers to the literal, objective meaning of a word—the definition that is widely agreed upon. For instance, the word “snake” denotes a type of reptile. Connotative meaning, on the other hand, involves the emotional, cultural, or associative meanings that a word may carry. In many contexts, “snake” may connote danger, betrayal, or deceit. These connotations vary depending on cultural and social contexts, making meaning more dynamic and subjective.

In addition, meaning can be understood through the concept of sense and reference. Sense refers to the internal, linguistic relationships between words and expressions within a language system, while reference refers to the actual objects or entities in the real world that words point to. For example, the expressions “the morning star” and “the evening star” have different senses but refer to the same entity, namely the planet Venus. This distinction highlights that meaning is not only about real-world objects but also about how language structures conceptual understanding.

Another key concept is semantic relations, which describe how meanings of words are related to one another. These include relationships such as synonymy (words with similar meanings), antonymy (words with opposite meanings), hyponymy (hierarchical relationships between general and specific terms), and polysemy (a single word having multiple related meanings). Understanding these relationships helps explain how vocabulary is organized and how meaning is interconnected within a language.

Furthermore, meaning in language also involves literal and non-literal interpretation. Literal meaning reflects the direct interpretation of words, while non-literal meaning includes figurative language such as metaphors, idioms, and irony. For example, the expression “time is money” is not meant to be interpreted literally, but metaphorically, suggesting that time is valuable. Such expressions demonstrate that meaning often goes beyond the surface level and requires interpretation based on shared knowledge and context.

Finally, meaning is closely linked to contextual interpretation, which emphasizes that meaning is not fixed but can change depending on the situation in which language is used. The same word or sentence may carry different meanings in different contexts, influenced by factors such as the speaker’s intention, the relationship between participants, and cultural norms. This dynamic nature of meaning reinforces the idea that language is not merely a system of symbols, but a tool for communication that operates within specific contexts.

2.4 Relevant Semantic Theories

The role of context in interpreting meaning has been widely discussed in various semantic and linguistic theories. These theories provide different perspectives on how

meaning is constructed, represented, and understood, particularly in relation to contextual influence. Understanding these theoretical frameworks is essential for analyzing how context contributes to meaning interpretation in language.

One of the foundational approaches is truth-conditional semantics, which focuses on the conditions under which a sentence can be considered true or false. According to this theory, the meaning of a sentence is determined by its relationship to the world. While this approach emphasizes literal meaning, it has limitations in explaining how context affects interpretation. For example, sentences like “I am here now” cannot be fully understood without knowing the context of the speaker, time, and place. This limitation highlights the importance of incorporating contextual elements into semantic analysis.

Another important framework is lexical semantics, which studies the meaning of words and the relationships between them. Lexical semantics examines how words can have multiple meanings (polysemy) and how context determines which meaning is activated in a particular situation. For instance, the word “light” can mean illumination or something not heavy. Context plays a crucial role in selecting the intended meaning, demonstrating that lexical meaning is flexible and context-dependent.

Formal semantics is also relevant, as it analyzes meaning using logical and mathematical models. This approach aims to describe how meaning is systematically constructed from smaller units within a sentence. Although formal semantics provides a structured understanding of meaning, it often assumes that meaning is context-independent. However, later developments in this field have acknowledged the necessity of context, particularly in interpreting indexicals (e.g., “I,” “here,” “now”) and context-sensitive expressions.

A key development in understanding the role of context is found in pragmatics, particularly through theories such as speech act theory and Grice’s cooperative principle. Speech act theory explains how utterances function not only to convey information but also to perform actions, such as requesting, promising, or apologizing. Meanwhile, Grice’s cooperative principle and conversational maxims (quality, quantity, relevance, and manner) explain how speakers and listeners rely on shared assumptions and context to infer meaning beyond what is explicitly stated. These theories demonstrate that meaning is often implicit and heavily dependent on context.

Another influential perspective is Relevance Theory, which emphasizes that communication is guided by the principle of relevance. According to this theory, listeners interpret utterances by seeking the most relevant meaning based on the available context and cognitive effort. Context is seen as a dynamic set of assumptions that individuals use to derive intended meaning. This theory strongly supports the idea that meaning interpretation is context-driven and inferential in nature.

Additionally, cognitive semantics offers an important perspective by linking meaning to human cognition and conceptualization. This approach suggests that meaning is not only a property of language but also a reflection of how people perceive and understand the world. Context, in this sense, includes mental frameworks, experiences, and cultural knowledge that shape interpretation. Concepts such as frames, schemas, and prototypes illustrate how context influences the way meaning is structured in the mind.

Finally, discourse semantics (or discourse analysis) examines how meaning is constructed across larger units of language, such as conversations and texts. This approach emphasizes that meaning cannot be fully understood at the sentence level alone but must be analyzed within the broader discourse context. Factors such as coherence, cohesion, and thematic structure play a significant role in guiding interpretation.

2.5 Previous Studies

Previous studies on the role of context in meaning interpretation have widely emphasized that meaning in language cannot be fully understood without considering contextual factors. Many researchers in semantics and pragmatics agree that context is an essential component in constructing and interpreting meaning, especially in real communication settings.

Several studies highlight that context plays a decisive role in determining word meaning and sentence interpretation. For example, research in lexical semantics shows that many words are polysemous, meaning they have multiple related meanings, and context is required to select the appropriate interpretation in actual usage ([Paradigm][1]). This indicates that meaning is not fixed within words themselves but is activated dynamically depending on surrounding linguistic and situational cues.

Other studies emphasize that context is not only important for word meaning but also for sentence-level interpretation. Research in semantic and pragmatic fields suggests that both linguistic context (co-text) and non-linguistic context (situational and social factors) influence how utterances are understood in communication ([Ruang Publikasi Ilmiah][2]). For instance, identical sentences may produce different meanings depending on speaker intention, setting, and shared knowledge between interlocutors.

In addition, many studies in pragmatics stress that context is crucial in interpreting implied meanings, such as implicature, speech acts, and deixis. Findings show that pragmatic meaning is highly dependent on extralinguistic context, meaning that interpretation often goes beyond the literal meaning of expressions ([Aspirasi Journal][3]). This supports the idea that communication is not only about decoding linguistic forms but also about inferring intended meaning through contextual understanding.

Furthermore, some studies integrate cognitive and discourse perspectives, arguing that context functions as a mental and social framework that guides meaning construction. From this view, meaning is not simply retrieved from linguistic input but is actively constructed by combining linguistic information with background knowledge, experience, and situational awareness. This reinforces the idea that context is a dynamic and interactive element in interpretation.

In conclusion, previous studies consistently show that context is a fundamental factor in semantic interpretation. It influences lexical selection, sentence understanding, and pragmatic inference. Across different linguistic approaches, researchers agree that meaning is context-dependent and cannot be fully explained without considering linguistic and non-linguistic environments. These findings provide a strong theoretical foundation for further analysis of the role of context in interpreting meaning.

[1]:https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/v10319-012-0007-x?utm_source=chatgpt.com
"The Role of Context in Polysemy"

[2]:https://publikasi.dinus.ac.id/lite/article/view/2323?utm_source=chatgpt.com
"Konteks dalam Studi Linguistik Pragmatik | LITE: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya"

[3]:https://journal.aspirasi.or.id/index.php/Pragmatik/article/view/1269?utm_source=chatgpt.com
"The Role of Context in Pragmatic Interpretation | Pragmatik : Jurnal Rumpun Ilmu Bahasa dan Pendidikan"

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the role of context in interpreting meaning from a semantic perspective. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the focus of this research is to understand how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and influenced by contextual factors rather than to measure numerical data or test statistical hypotheses. The descriptive nature of the study allows for a detailed explanation of linguistic phenomena as they occur in natural language use.

The research design is grounded in the principles of semantic and pragmatic analysis, where meaning is examined in relation to linguistic expressions and their surrounding context. This approach enables the researcher to explore how different types of context—such as linguistic, situational, and cultural context—contribute to the interpretation of meaning in communication.

In this study, data are analyzed in the form of words, phrases, and sentences taken from selected written and spoken sources. These data are examined to identify how context influences meaning interpretation, particularly in cases of ambiguity, implied meaning, and variation in interpretation. The analysis is conducted through an interpretive process, where each linguistic item is carefully examined based on its contextual usage.

Furthermore, this research adopts a contextual semantic analysis framework, which emphasizes the interaction between linguistic elements and their context of use. This framework allows the study to move beyond literal meaning and focus on how meaning is dynamically constructed in real communication situations.

Overall, the qualitative descriptive research design provides a suitable foundation for exploring the complexity of meaning interpretation. It enables a comprehensive understanding of how context functions as an essential component in shaping semantic interpretation in language use.

3.2 Data Resources

The data in this study are derived from secondary qualitative sources that represent natural language use in both written and spoken forms. These sources are selected to provide clear examples of how context influences meaning interpretation in real communication. The use of secondary data is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to analyze authentic linguistic expressions without interfering with the natural production of language.

The primary data sources include written texts, such as textbooks, articles, online publications, and literary excerpts. These written materials are chosen because they contain a wide range of linguistic structures and meanings that can be analyzed in different contextual settings. In addition, written discourse often provides clear co-text, making it suitable for examining linguistic context and semantic interpretation.

In addition to written sources, the study also considers spoken language data, such as dialogues, conversations, interviews, and transcripts from media or everyday communication. Spoken data are important because they reflect real-time language use, where context plays a crucial role in shaping meaning. In spoken interaction, meaning is often influenced by tone, situation, speaker intention, and shared understanding between participants.

The selection of data is based on relevance and representativeness. The data are chosen purposively to ensure that they contain instances of contextual variation in meaning, such as ambiguity, implied meaning, and context-dependent expressions. This purposive

sampling technique allows the researcher to focus on linguistic examples that are most relevant to the objectives of the study.

Furthermore, the data are collected from reliable and accessible sources, including academic publications, credible online platforms, and documented speech transcripts. This ensures that the linguistic examples analyzed in the study are valid and appropriate for semantic interpretation.

Overall, the data resources in this study provide a diverse and meaningful set of linguistic materials that support the analysis of how context influences meaning interpretation. These sources enable a comprehensive examination of both written and spoken language in relation to semantic and contextual factors.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

The data collection in this study is conducted using a documentation technique, which is appropriate for qualitative research focusing on language analysis. This technique involves gathering relevant linguistic data from written and spoken sources that contain instances of context-dependent meaning. The main purpose of this method is to collect authentic examples of language use that can be analyzed to understand how context influences meaning interpretation.

The first step in the data collection process is identifying relevant sources. The researcher selects texts and spoken materials that are rich in contextual variation, such as articles, textbooks, dialogues, interviews, and conversation transcripts. These sources are chosen because they provide clear examples of how meaning can change depending on linguistic, situational, and cultural context.

The second step involves reading and observing the data carefully. The researcher closely examines the selected materials to identify sentences, phrases, or expressions that show ambiguity, implied meaning, or context-dependent interpretation. During this stage, attention is given to how meaning shifts according to different contextual conditions.

After identifying relevant data, the next step is data recording and documentation. The selected linguistic items are noted down systematically, along with their surrounding context. This includes co-text (the surrounding words or sentences) and, when available, situational information such as speaker, setting, and communicative purpose. This step ensures that each data item is recorded accurately for further analysis.

The final step is classifying the data based on contextual categories. The collected data are organized according to types of context, such as linguistic context, situational context, and cultural context. This classification helps in analyzing how each type of context contributes to meaning interpretation in different communicative situations.

Overall, the data collection techniques used in this study ensure that the data are relevant, well-organized, and suitable for semantic analysis. By systematically collecting and classifying linguistic data, the researcher is able to examine the role of context in interpreting meaning in a structured and comprehensive manner.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study employs a qualitative descriptive analysis technique aimed at identifying, interpreting, and explaining the role of context in meaning construction. This approach is used because the study focuses on understanding linguistic phenomena rather than measuring them numerically. The analysis is carried out systematically to ensure that each data item is examined in relation to its contextual environment.

The first stage of analysis is data reduction, which involves selecting and focusing on relevant linguistic data from the collected materials. Irrelevant or repetitive data are

excluded, while expressions that show contextual influence on meaning such as ambiguity, implied meaning, and context-dependent interpretation are retained. This step helps to simplify the data and focus the analysis on key findings related to the research objectives.

The second stage is data classification, where the selected data are organized into categories based on types of context. These categories include linguistic context (co-text), situational context, and cultural context. Each category is used to group data that demonstrate similar patterns of meaning interpretation. This classification makes it easier to identify how different types of context contribute to semantic understanding.

The third stage involves data interpretation, which is the core of the analysis process. At this stage, each linguistic item is examined in detail to determine how context influences its meaning. The analysis focuses on identifying whether meaning is determined by lexical choice, sentence structure, speaker intention, or situational factors. The researcher interprets how ambiguity is resolved and how implied meanings are derived through contextual clues.

The fourth stage is drawing conclusions from the data, where patterns and findings from the analysis are summarized. This step involves identifying recurring roles of context in meaning interpretation, such as clarifying ambiguity, supporting inference, and shaping pragmatic meaning. The conclusions are based on consistent evidence found throughout the data.

To strengthen the validity of the analysis, the study applies contextual semantic interpretation, which combines semantic and pragmatic perspectives. This ensures that meaning is not only analyzed at the linguistic level but also in relation to real-world usage and communicative intent.

Overall, the data analysis techniques used in this study provide a structured and systematic way to examine how context influences meaning. Through reduction, classification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing, the study is able to present a comprehensive understanding of the role of context in semantic interpretation.

Table 1. The Role of Context in Interpreting Meaning: A Semantic Study

No	Stage of Analysis	Description	Focus of Analysis
1	Data Identification	Selecting relevant linguistic expressions from written and spoken sources that show context-dependent meaning, including ambiguous, implied, or polysemous expressions.	To determine data that reflect the influence of context in meaning interpretation.
2	Data Classification	Grouping data based on types of context, namely linguistic context (co-text), situational context, and cultural context.	To organize data according to contextual categories for structured analysis.
3	Contextual Analysis	Examining each data item by analyzing how linguistic and non-linguistic contexts influence meaning interpretation, including literal and non-literal meanings.	To identify how context determines or changes meaning in communication.
4	Semantic Interpretation	Interpreting the meaning of each expression based on semantic theory and contextual support, including ambiguity resolution and implied meaning.	To explain how meaning is constructed through context.
5	Data Description	Presenting the results of analysis in descriptive form, explaining how context affects each example of meaning.	To provide clear explanation of findings in a systematic way.
6	Drawing Conclusion	Summarizing patterns and general findings about the role of context in interpreting meaning across all data.	To conclude the overall influence of context in semantic interpretation.

4. Discussion

4.1 Analysis of Context in Lexical Meaning

Lexical meaning refers to the meaning of individual words as stored in the mental lexicon or commonly presented in dictionaries. However, in actual language use, lexical meaning is not fixed or absolute. Instead, it is highly flexible and often influenced by context. The analysis of the data in this study shows that context plays a crucial role in determining which meaning of a word is activated in communication.

One of the main findings is that many English words are polysemous, meaning they have more than one related meaning. For example, the word “head” can refer to a part of the human body, a leader of an organization, or the top part of something. The correct interpretation of this word depends entirely on the context in which it is used. In a sentence like “He is the head of the department,” the lexical meaning of head shifts from a physical body part to a figurative meaning referring to a leader. This demonstrates that context is essential in selecting the intended lexical meaning.

Another important observation is that linguistic context (co-text) plays a major role in narrowing down word meaning. The surrounding words in a sentence help disambiguate lexical items that might otherwise be confusing. For instance, in the sentence “She went to the bank to withdraw money,” the word bank is clearly interpreted as a financial institution due to the presence of the phrase “withdraw money.” Without this linguistic context, the word could also refer to the side of a river.

In addition to linguistic context, situational context also significantly affects lexical interpretation. The same word may carry different meanings depending on the physical

or communicative setting. For example, the word “cold” in “It is cold in here” may simply describe temperature, but in a different situation, such as during a conversation between friends, it may function as a subtle request to close a window. This shows that meaning is not only derived from words themselves but also from the situation in which they are used.

Furthermore, cultural context influences how lexical meaning is understood. Certain words or expressions may carry different connotations in different cultures. For example, the word “home” may not only refer to a physical building but also symbolize comfort, family, and emotional attachment. These additional meanings are shaped by cultural experiences and shared values, showing that lexical meaning extends beyond dictionary definitions.

The analysis also reveals that lexical meaning becomes clearer when speakers and listeners share common background knowledge. When communication participants have similar experiences or cultural understanding, they are able to interpret words more accurately even when meanings are implied rather than explicitly stated.

4.2 Situational Context in Meaning Interpretation

Situational context refers to the physical environment, social setting, participants, time, and communicative circumstances in which a linguistic expression is produced. In semantic interpretation, situational context plays a crucial role because it helps determine the intended meaning of utterances that may otherwise be ambiguous or incomplete when viewed only at the lexical or grammatical level. Meaning in natural communication is often not fully encoded in language forms alone; instead, it is completed by situational factors surrounding the interaction.

The analysis in this study shows that situational context significantly influences how speakers and listeners interpret meaning in everyday communication. The same sentence can produce different interpretations depending on where, when, and by whom it is uttered. For example, the expression “It’s cold here” may function as a simple statement of temperature in a scientific or neutral setting. However, in a conversational context between friends in a room, the same utterance may be interpreted as an indirect request to close a window or turn off the air conditioner. This demonstrates that meaning is not fixed in the sentence itself but is shaped by the situation in which it occurs.

Another important finding is that situational context helps in interpreting speaker intention, especially in indirect speech acts. In many cases, speakers do not express their intentions explicitly. For instance, the utterance “Can you help me?” is structurally a question about ability, but in a real communicative situation, it is typically understood as a request. The listener’s interpretation depends heavily on the situational context, including the relationship between speakers, the urgency of the situation, and social norms governing politeness.

Furthermore, situational context plays an important role in reducing ambiguity in meaning interpretation. A single linguistic expression may have multiple possible meanings, but the situation helps narrow down the intended interpretation. For example, the word “meeting” in “The meeting is at 10 o’clock” becomes clear when the situational context indicates a workplace setting rather than a social gathering. Without situational information, the interpretation remains vague and uncertain.

The findings also indicate that situational context is closely connected to non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and physical surroundings. These elements often complement verbal language and provide additional meaning that cannot

be captured by words alone. For example, a statement delivered with a sarcastic tone may convey a meaning opposite to its literal interpretation. This highlights that situational context includes both verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication.

4.3 Ambiguity and the Role of Context

Ambiguity is a common phenomenon in language where a linguistic expression can have more than one possible interpretation. In semantics, ambiguity is considered an important issue because it shows that meaning is not always transparent or fixed within linguistic structures. The analysis of the data in this study reveals that context plays a central role in resolving ambiguity and ensuring accurate meaning interpretation in communication.

There are generally three types of ambiguity found in language: lexical ambiguity, structural (syntactic) ambiguity, and pragmatic ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity occurs when a single word has multiple meanings. For example, the word “light” can refer to illumination or something that is not heavy. Without context, it is difficult to determine which meaning is intended. However, when placed in a sentence such as “The room is full of light,” the linguistic context clearly indicates that it refers to illumination, not weight.

Structural ambiguity arises when a sentence can be interpreted in more than one way due to its grammatical structure. For instance, the sentence “She saw the man with a telescope” can mean either that she used a telescope to see the man or that the man she saw had a telescope. In this case, context is essential to determine the correct interpretation. Additional information from the situation or surrounding discourse helps clarify the intended meaning.

Pragmatic ambiguity occurs when the intended meaning depends on speaker intention and situational context rather than linguistic structure alone. For example, the utterance “It’s getting late” may simply describe time, but in a social context, it can also function as an indirect suggestion to end a conversation or leave a place. The interpretation depends heavily on shared understanding between speaker and listener.

The findings of this study show that context acts as a disambiguating tool in all types of ambiguity. Linguistic context helps clarify meaning through surrounding words and sentences, while situational context provides information about the communicative setting. Cultural context also contributes by supplying shared knowledge that guides interpretation. Without these contextual cues, ambiguous expressions would remain unclear or open to multiple interpretations.

Moreover, the role of context is not only to choose between possible meanings but also to guide inference-making processes. Listeners or readers actively use contextual information to infer the most relevant and appropriate meaning based on the situation. This process demonstrates that meaning interpretation is dynamic and involves cognitive effort rather than passive decoding of linguistic forms.

4.4 Case Studies or Examples

This section presents several examples to illustrate how context influences meaning interpretation in real communication. The data are analyzed to show how linguistic, situational, and cultural contexts work together in determining the intended meaning of utterances. These case studies demonstrate that meaning in language is dynamic and highly dependent on contextual information.

Example 1: Lexical Ambiguity

Sentence: "He went to the bank."

The word "bank" is lexically ambiguous because it can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river. In isolation, the sentence does not provide enough information to determine the correct meaning. However, when additional linguistic context is provided, such as "He went to the bank to deposit his salary," the meaning clearly refers to a financial institution. This shows that linguistic context is essential in resolving lexical ambiguity.

Example 2: Situational Context

Utterance: "It's cold in here."

In a neutral or informational setting, this statement simply describes temperature. However, in a real-life conversational situation, such as when two people are sitting in a room together, the utterance may function as an indirect request to close a window or turn off the air conditioner. The interpretation depends on situational factors such as the physical environment, the relationship between speakers, and shared understanding. This example highlights the importance of situational context in determining speaker intention.

Example 3: Structural Ambiguity

Sentence: "She saw the man with a telescope."

This sentence has two possible interpretations: (1) she used a telescope to see the man, or (2) she saw a man who was carrying a telescope. Without context, both meanings are possible. However, contextual information such as the surrounding discourse or situational background helps clarify the intended meaning. This demonstrates how structural ambiguity can only be resolved through contextual support.

Example 4: Pragmatic Meaning

Utterance: "Can you open the window?"

Literally, this is a question about ability. However, in everyday communication, it is usually interpreted as a polite request. The meaning depends on pragmatic context, including social norms, speaker intention, and the relationship between interlocutors. This example shows that meaning is not always literal but is inferred through context.

Example 5: Cultural Context

Word: "Home"

The word "home" does not only refer to a physical building but also carries emotional and cultural meanings such as comfort, family, and belonging. In different cultural contexts, the emotional value associated with home may vary. This shows that cultural background influences how lexical meaning is understood and interpreted.

Summary: The analysis of these case studies confirms that context plays a crucial role in meaning interpretation. Linguistic context helps clarify word meaning, situational context reveals speaker intention, and cultural context adds deeper layers of interpretation. Without context, many expressions would remain ambiguous or misunderstood. Therefore, meaning in language is always constructed through interaction between linguistic forms and contextual factors.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1 Conclusion

This study has examined the role of context in interpreting meaning from a semantic perspective. Based on the analysis of linguistic data, it is clear that context is an essential factor in understanding how meaning is constructed and interpreted in communication. Meaning in language is not fixed or fully determined by lexical items alone, but is highly dependent on various contextual elements, including linguistic, situational, and cultural contexts.

The findings of the study show that context plays a crucial role in clarifying meaning, resolving ambiguity, and revealing speaker intention. In cases of lexical, structural, and pragmatic ambiguity, context functions as a guiding framework that helps listeners or readers select the most appropriate interpretation. Without contextual support, many linguistic expressions would remain unclear or open to multiple interpretations.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that situational and cultural contexts significantly influence how meaning is understood in real communication. Situational context helps determine the function of an utterance in a specific environment, while cultural context provides shared knowledge and values that shape interpretation. These contextual dimensions work together to ensure that communication is meaningful and effective.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be proposed for further research and practical application in the field of semantics and language learning.

First, it is suggested that future researchers explore the role of context in meaning interpretation using a wider range of data sources, including multimedia communication such as videos, social media interactions, and online conversations. These modern communication forms provide rich contextual variations that may offer deeper insights into how meaning is constructed in digital environments.

Second, further studies may focus on integrating pragmatic and cognitive approaches more deeply with semantic analysis. Since meaning is influenced not only by linguistic structure but also by mental processes and social interaction, combining these perspectives can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how context operates in language use.

Third, in the field of language teaching and learning, educators are encouraged to emphasize the importance of context when teaching vocabulary, reading comprehension, and communication skills. Students should be trained not only to understand literal meanings but also to interpret implied meanings based on situational and cultural context. This can improve their communicative competence and reduce misunderstandings in real communication.

Fourth, for translation studies, translators should pay close attention to contextual factors when interpreting meaning from one language to another. A lack of contextual understanding may lead to inaccurate or misleading translations, especially in cases involving idioms, metaphors, and culturally bound expressions.

Finally, it is recommended that learners of linguistics and language users in general develop greater awareness of contextual interpretation in everyday communication. Understanding that meaning is context-dependent can help individuals become more effective communicators and more accurate interpreters of language in diverse situations.

7. REFERENCES

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.*
- Crystal, D. (2003). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* (5th ed.). Blackwell Publishing.*
- Fasold, R., & Connor-Linton, J. (2006). *An introduction to language and linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.*
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Speech acts* (Vol. 3, pp. 41–58). Academic Press.*
- Leech, G. (1981). *Semantics: The study of meaning* (2nd ed.). Penguin Books.*
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic semantics: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.*
- Palmer, F. R. (1981). *Semantics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.*
- Saeed, J. I. (2016). *Semantics* (4th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.*
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.*