

# INTERTEXTUALITY AWARENESS AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF TEXTS

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## **Abstract**

*The main purpose of undertaking reading exercise is to draw information from the text involved through effective comprehension. One of the ways to ensure better understanding of texts is through awareness of intertextuality in such texts. This paper, therefore, examined the concept of intertextuality, awareness of intertextuality, elements of intertextuality, how to create intertextuality awareness and the role of intertextuality in better understanding of texts. In line with the above philosophy, the paper was concluded with a strong proof that intertextuality awareness is a useful tool to produce reliable meanings and acceptable interpretations of texts.*

**Keywords:** Texts, Awareness, Produce, Intertextuality

## **Introduction**

Reading is sine-qua-non to nothing in the modern world because it is an outstanding tool of navigating the ocean of global phenomena. Thus it becomes means of acquiring mind training, mental development and knowledge acquisition all which are essential ingredients of meaningful and qualitative living in any society one may find oneself (Olatayo and Alabi (2004). Similarly, Ogundepo (2011) observed that reading is an indispensable tool of learning at various hierarchies of modern education system. Likewise, Alabi and Babatunde (2002) were of the opinion that reading is a means by which every age is linked.

All the above assertions are pointers to the fact that reading is essential in human life and as such its importance in running modern society meaningfully can hardly be overemphasized. However, the essence of reading texts is understanding. Needless to say that a text read without understanding is a wasted effort. No matter the purpose of reading a text, understanding is the underlying principle. Reading is an information gathering process (Adebanjo 2004) for this reason reading is only said to occur if understanding has taken place. That is, understanding is a prerequisite to meaningful reading.

In the light of the above fact, finding means of ensuring better understanding of texts on the part of students when reading comprehension passages and literacy texts is a worthwhile academic endeavour of immeasurable educational values. Hence, this paper is based on the

means of ensuring effective reading through proper understanding of the reading materials using awareness of intertextuality as a guide.

### **What is a text?**

For a complete effective and functional communicative occurrence ‘the words and sentences on the page are reliable clues but they cannot be (form) the total picture’ (De Beaugrande and Dressler 2002). The total picture (communicative occurrence) can only come into being when those words and sentences are harnessed to form a text. Therefore, existence of a text is a prerequisite for communicative occurrence. What then, is a text?

De Beaugrande and Dressler (2002) have this to say on the meaning of a text.

*A text will be defined as a communicative occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality. If any of these standards is not considered to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative. Hence non communicative texts are treated as non-text.*

As explained in this definition, a text is determined on the basis of communicative occurrence. It is a naturally occurring manifestation of language as a communicative linguistic event in a context: (Ibid).

Halliday and Hassan (1976) also gave a detailed explanation on the meaning of the concept. To them, ‘text’ is a term used in linguistics to refer to any passage-spoken or written, of whatever length that does form a unified whole [...] A text is a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence; and it is not defined by its size [...] A text is best regarded as a semantic unit; a unit not of form but of meaning.

From the above given explanations and definitions; a text can be regarded as a series of mutually relevant linguistic units or structures organized in such a way as to achieve a complete and meaningful informative purpose. It could be: spoken, written, prose, verse, dialogue, monologue, single proverb, a cry for help or all day discussion on a committee (Halliday and Haban 1976).

It is important to note that most linguists agreed that text can be classified into five, namely: narrative, descriptive, argumentative, instructive and comparison/contrast. Similarly, they have also identified certain qualities that must be inherent in a text before it can be considered a good text. These qualities are known as standards of textuality. Seven of such standards are identified – cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality.

### **Intertextuality as a Concept**

Text which is basically regarded as linguistic unit that has a distinct communicative function anchors its textuality on seven principles-cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. Scholars believe that the way and manner in which these elements are manipulated will clearly demonstrate how richly every text is connected to the reader’s societal and global knowledge (De Beaurgrande 1997). Out of these principles, intertextuality has received a considerable attention.

This may not be unconnected with the assertion of Allen (200) that in the post-modern epoch, theorists often claim, it is not possible any longer to speak of originality or the

uniqueness of the artistic object, be it a painting or novel, since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art. Little wonder, scholars have made series of attempts to define intertextuality as a concept. Some of these definitions are examined below.

Kristeva (1980) who coined the term explained it thus any text is actually a permutation of texts, intertextuality in a space of given text in which several utterances, taken from other texts intersect and neutralize one another. This explanation is too compact. It could only make effective meaning in the midst of linguistic scholars. According to De Beaugrande and Dressler (2002) intertextuality is the interdependent ways in which texts stand in relation to one another (as well as to the culture at large) to produce meaning. This definition explains the concept in its simplest form but it fails to give the necessary detail on how texts can stand in relation to one another. Similarly, Plottel and Charney (1978) asserted that interpretation is shaped by a complex of relationships between the text, the reader, reading, writing, printing, publishing and history that is inscribed in the language of the text and in the history that is carried in the reader's reading. Such a history has been given the name 'intertextuality'. The problem with this definition is that though it is intellectually sound but it is too complex for general quick understanding.

Barthes (1977) Opined that texts originate not from their authors but from a plurality of voices, of other utterances and of other texts. The modern author merely collects and arranges what has already been read or written in a variety of texts-none of them being original itself. This is an explanation carried too far on the concept of intertextuality. There is no way an author would not contribute original ideas or innovations in a text since the theme (s), the plot, the setting and even the style would be product of his/her imagination. Similarly, Genette (1992, 1997<sup>a</sup>, 1997<sup>b</sup>) explained that intertextuality is no longer a post structuralisms concept but becomes the relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts and the actual presence of one text within another. This explanation, though, seems simple but it is too technical for non linguists.

The definition of the concept given by Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013) seems simple and adequate. They have this to say on the meaning of the concept; intertextuality can be generally defined as the influence and presence of previous texts in the construction of the present one, it shows the inter relations of a text with all other relating texts. However, the view point of Bloor and Bloor (2007) cited in Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013) is quite satisfactory and it will be upheld in this paper. The definition goes thus: 'intertextuality is rather intrusion or adaptation in text, that is, the intrusion of elements of previous texts in the new text in the form of questions, direct or indirect, hybridization or mixing one genre into another'.

### **Types of Intertextuality**

Porter (1986) identified two types of intertextuality. These are iterability and presupposition. According to him, iterability intertextuality refers to the repeatability of certain textual fragments, to citation in its broadest sense to include not only explicit allusions, references, and quotation within a discourse, but also unannounced sources and influences, clichés, phrases in the air and traditions. That is iterability intertextuality is made of all the traces of other text(s) that are physically present in a text which help to constitute the meaning of such a text.

On the other hand, presupposition intertextuality refers to assumptions a text makes about its referent, its readers and its context to portions of the text which are read, but which are not explicitly there (in the text). For example. *Once upon a time* is a presupposition signaling to even the youngest reader the opening of a fictional narrative. Presupposition can also be regarded as hidden intertextuality. Similarly, Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013) identified two types of intertextuality. Intertextuality of text/author and intertextuality of reader. To them, the former focuses on the text itself and analysis of it with a view to discover the textual elements of other texts that are influencing the text at hand. This is quite similar to interability intertextuality already discussed. The latter, intertextuality of reader, is concerned with the reader's reading experiences and prior knowledge and how the same or other chains of texts are affecting his/her reading, understanding interpretation, meaning making and meaning discovery. This also is in line with the presupposition intertextuality earlier discussed.

### **Intertextual Elements**

These refer to those intertextual cycles that inherently connect the relating texts to the intended text (Ahmadian and Yazdani 2013) simply put, they are the linguistic devices through which the influences of the previous texts may be traced in the latest work of an author. Notable among these devices include translation, adaptation, quotations implications and conventions, literary genres, figures of speech, structural and semantic parallelisms e.t.c.

In fact, all those linguistic skills and ideas that an author inherited from his exposure to other texts that are displayed in his work will count in this regard.

### **Creating Intertextuality Awareness In Readers**

It is important that the young readers should be aware of the presence of intertextuality in any text they may be reading. This awareness will allow them to benefit from the contributions of intertextuality to the overall meaning of such texts. Therefore, creating means of identifying instances of intertextuality in a text for young readers is a task that must be done by mature readers especially the teachers. This feat can be performed by taken the following steps

Young readers should be formally exposed to intertextuality as a concept using the various definitions of it that have been cited. The meaning of the concept must be well comprehended and digested. In addition, such readers must be exposed to the elements of intertextuality within texts. Notable among these elements are: semiotic elements, literary traditions and conventions, literary genres, allusions, figure of speech, quotations, hybridizations, implications e.t.c. They should be able to identify when and where any of these elements are used in resemblance of the previous usage.

Lastly, they should be encouraged to undertake reading of varieties of texts. Through this, they will imbib cross fertilization of ideas, varieties of styles, multiple concepts of setting and different patterns of structural display or layout. This knowledge will no doubt serve as carry over learning in the process of interpreting concepts in any new textual analysis and thematic interpretation. Any reader that is able to internalize all these mechanisms and display them accordingly is already aware of intertextuality.

### **The role of intertextuality awareness on reading comprehension passages and literary texts.**

The importance of intertextuality in effective understanding of texts in general can hardly be over flogged. As noted by Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013) in reading literature, being aware of intertextuality seems to be important in better understanding of the text. This is because such awareness facilitates cross fertilization of cultural values, linguistic usage, structural patterns, stylistic variations, general blending and thematic adaptation. A sound knowledge of these is sine-qua-non to correct and adequate interpretation of any text read.

Allen (200) also underscored the role of intertextuality awareness in understanding the meaning of texts when he asserted that 'intertextuality seems such a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life'. As stated in the above statement, awareness of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence of global phenomena, language manipulation, figurative conglomerating of words, phrases and expressions is an indispensable tool for proper analysis and interpretation of artistic work.

Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013) equally emphasised the role that the awareness of intertextuality can play as regards effective understanding of literary text when they stated that in reading literature, understanding the nature of literary text depends, to a large extent, on understanding the nature of the elements constructing it such as intertextuality (which is of prime and crucial importance) and all its elements, components, features as well as the subject and the style of the text. The statement is reinforcing the fact that a sound knowledge of intertextuality is crucial for through comprehension of any texts.

They (ibid) stressed the fact further when they claimed that it can be assumed that the readers awareness of intertextuality and its underlying elements and components in a literary text may help him/her to produce a more reliable and acceptable meaning and interpretation of that text. This is so because each text is a combination of the intertextual cycles of the chain of texts which make history of that text. Thus, the knowledge gained in the previously read texts can positively influence the meaning that a reader makes of a text at hand.

Hameed (2008) also identified one vital reason why the knowledge of intertextuality is essential for a reader. The reason is inherent in the following statement:

*Texts are produced for a greater many receivers. But here lies an important element how and for what reason these must be produced and received; and what standards they must have in order to fulfill the communicative aims. These crucial standards for a satisfying text are the seven standards of textuality without which a text will not mean anything to the receiver.*

Interestingly, one of these seven standards is intertextuality. If this is a standard that must be present in a text, its awareness on the part of the reader is crucial for meaningful reading and interpretation.

Based on the above pieces of information, it is obvious that the awareness (as well as ability to identify and wield its elements) of intertextuality in texts is imperative if a more reliable and acceptable meaning and interpretation of texts is to be granted.

## Conclusion

This paper has taken a look into the role of intertextuality awareness as a means of better understanding of texts. In the course of doing this, the concept of intertextuality was extensively defined, the elements of intertextuality such as traditions, conventions, literacy genres, allusions quotations, figures of speech e.t.c.-were identified while intertextuality types (iterability and presupposition) were equally discussed. The means of creating intertextuality awareness were examined and the role of intertextuality awareness in producing reliable meaning and acceptable interpretation of a text was also analyzed. Lastly, it was asserted that the awareness of intertextuality in texts on the part of a reader is vital to proper interpretation of any text.

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