Intertextual analysis in interpretation of higher education teacher professional vocation

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Abstract: This article attempts to present and illustrate the term intertextuality as a concept and as a method that can offer a framework for the analysis and interpretation of short stories or life stories. Intertextuality, as one of the central concepts in the study of culture, is particularly suited to qualitative research, which focuses on the subjectivity of the narrator, the story and the listener/researcher, as well as the relative and indefinite dimension of knowledge. However, the use of intertextuality as an interpretative method in various types of texts requires the knowledge and ability of the researcher in the areas considered in this article.

1 Introduction

Intertextuality can offer a conceptual and methodological framework for constructing interpretation in qualitative research. The purpose of this article is to offer a theoretical overview to those engaged in qualitative research that may be applicable to the reading and interpretation of narratives, biographies and other texts, and to illustrate such reading. Our hypothesis is that intertextuality as a cultural concept is particularly suited to studies that emphasize subjective, relative, and impermanent elements of knowledge. Thus, intertextual reading can contribute to the perception and depth of understanding of texts and help in the hermeneutic process of qualitative research.

Despite the importance of culture and context in the process of analyzing and constructing the interpretation of narratives, minimal attention has been paid to the central concept that constitutes the way of thinking and the method of analyzing literature and cultural phenomena in both modern and postmodern studies - the concept of intertextuality. An example of the use of intertextuality is a situation in which interviewers asked respondents to build their life story as if it were a biography [1]; the question itself
prompted respondents to adopt architextual familiar literary patterns, such as a confessional story, a novel, an educational novel, a travel story, or a fairy tale. Each storyteller consciously or unconsciously organizes the material within an existing tradition of structure and style, following the patterns of the story he or she has heard. The narrator uses pre-established literary prototypes from his cultural world (for example, "in ancient times in a distant kingdom, in a distant state ..." or "There is a saying ..."; he will use fixed patterns, literary genres, forms of intertextuality such as parody and stylistic allusions. The narrator molds the characters of the narrative according to cultural conventions (the protagonist and antagonist) and portrays them accordingly. Archetypes and mythical figures may also be integrated into the narrative; it becomes a kind of dialogue with stories heard in the past.

Qualitative research looks at intertextuality from limited perspectives (fig.1):

2 Intertextuality and hermeneutics

Fig.1. Perspectives of intertextuality

Intertextuality

understanding of reading and writing [3, 4, 5]

Intertextuality

reading books and documents [6]

Intertextuality

presenting data in qualitative research [7]

Intertextuality

way of writing a qualitative study [8]
Heidegger argued that the desire to interpret the world is an internal characteristic of man. The insights gained through the hermeneutical process express a personal understanding of human existence. Thus, hermeneutics is not esotericism with varied texts, but rather an important and continuous activity common to all people. It is our inability to formulate a “correct interpretation” with any certainty due to the “hermeneutic circle” which invites us to enter this circle in order to interpret while remaining connected to the universe. Gadamer [10] doubted that understanding could be achieved at all; according to him, all understanding is interpretation. He argued that perception is a process that exists through linguistic statements, a process of merging horizons in a two-way interaction between the reader and texts, between the cultures of the present and the past. The thoughts of Heidegger and Gadamer represent a turning point in the reader's approach to written texts [9]. The essence of this modification is the transition from the principle of mimesis to the principle of semiotics [11]. In other words, a literary work is no longer seen as an imitation of reality when the reader's eye is focused on the correspondence between the text and the reflections of the world or the author; now the reader will focus on how he himself forms the meaning of the composition. According to Peirce, we try to put meaning into every stimulus we receive from our environment; we “construct” the significance of situations according to their context, previous knowledge at our disposal, or elements from our personal and cultural world. All this allows us to represent different new meanings of known situations or texts in a constant ongoing process depending on changing motives. Defining the concept of “intertextuality” is not an easy task. Researchers working with different paradigms have built their own discourse based on this term, using different “languages” and different designations. In addition, this concept has changed over time [12]. Let us first consider the etymology of the word and then some of the main meanings of this concept, focusing on its extensive cultural connotations only in general terms. The word “text” comes from the Indo-Iranian word “tek”, meaning craft, especially weaving. In Latin, the word textus means fabric or its texture, its texture. The verb “texere” means to weave, to combine into a composition, hence the word “textile” came from, in Latin meaning a coverlet or fabric. “Intertext” is also Latin for intertwining threads and forming a piece of cloth. In modern semiotics, intertext is understood as the dialogic interaction of at least two systems of signs. Basically, this term is used in linguistic and cultural studies. Russian philosopher, literary and art critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), is considered the father of modern intertextuality. Beginning in the 1930s, Bakhtin called for replacing the Galilean perspective—a unified way of seeing things, in which people are the center of the universe, with a perspective that leaves room for the “indefinite”, and for heteroglossia—the simultaneous existence of divergent voices [13]. Bakhtin argued that every linguistic utterance is a unique expression, a social interaction in a certain social context, conditioned by past utterances and planned in advance by the speaker. The speaker takes into account what has been said in the past, considers how his words will be perceived by the listener, and expresses himself accordingly [13]. According to him, all speech is a dialogue. Dialogues exist between voices representing social classes, ideologies, eras and genres. The relationship between utterances gives a unique “presence” and “voice” to each speaker. Thus, each story expresses an individual voice and demonstrates a connection with a particular social, national, ideological or religious group. Julia Kristeva coined the term “intertextuality” in 1966 and argued that intertextuality is a complex semiotic cultural phenomenon. When encountering any “text”, whether spoken or written, drawn, performed, or any cultural phenomenon such as table settings or ceremonies, our experience is influenced by previous encounters with it, encounters that imprinted the relevant “text” into our minds. Every word or cultural representation has an infinite potential for association; the relationship between “texts” is thus inevitable and open. Reading creates a three-dimensional space between the addresser (the narrator of the story or the author of the
the meanings that the interpreter constructs. “The horizontal axis (destination topic) and the
Genette defines it as hypertext or "text of the second degree": it was created from the very beginning on the basis of the former source text, which he called the hypotext. The relationship between the top (new) layer, the hypertext, and the original text below it, the hypotext, can be explicit, implicit, or even intentionally hidden. One of the famous examples of such a work is "Ulysses" James Joyce. A careful reading of the upper text, the hypertext that Joyce wrote, requires the reader to be familiar with Homer’s Odyssey, the main text, or the hypotext. If the hypotext is not known to the reader or has been forgotten, the status new text, hypertext, changes: it will be read as an independent work and understood on its own terms.

Sarig [19] fully explored the relationship between these text layers using a systematic model based on four dimensions, each placed on a continuum. This allows you to view a range of relationships between the top and bottom texts. The combination of these dimensions reflects the potential richness of intertextuality. This model examines the relationship between top and bottom text, shown schematically using four continuums. The first continuum shows thematic and ideological relationships, ranging from the absence of a thematic, ideological or poetic connection (including, for example, "empty allusions" - quotes that do not make sense in context) to a deeply rooted connection, both thematic and ideological, between texts. The second continuum shows the nature of text revision by examining the changes made when transferring the original text to the new one: whether the changes were minor or major; did the massive "rewrite" distort the original text? The third continuum shows the improvements included in the new upper text (expansion, complication, development of the topic): to what extent and at what level is the lower source text present in the new text? Is it only minimally noticeable or dominant? The fourth continuum shows the extent to which the top text relates to the original text: is it the original text of the manifesto, is it explicitly mentioned, is it quoted directly, or is it only implicitly present, hinting that it cannot lead to recognition of the original text or establish a clear connection with the new text?
3 Tales of professional development

The narratives that will serve to illustrate our approach were collected as part of an extensive research project dedicated to the professional development of teachers in various departments of higher education institutions in Russia and abroad. We interviewed fourteen educators using a set of tested criteria. The interviews took place in two stages. The first stage was a semi-structured in-depth interview in which the interviewee told his story in response to a general question: "Tell us about your professional life and your attitude towards your chosen profession." We then asked respondents to tell us about the changes they experienced in their thinking, and finally we asked them to reflect on the question: "Can you recreate a situation or moment when you experienced an awakening or a new awareness of professional thinking? How did this happen?" Additional questions included, "Why at this particular moment? Can you illustrate how this realization came about?" We also asked respondents to tell us about the difficulties they encountered during the process. Each of them was asked to write a title or a metaphor to describe the development they went through. We expected these phrases to capture the essence of the change. At the end of this step, we showed interviewees a series of illustrations depicting the process of change graphically and were asked to respond to them by choosing one or another illustration to describe the changes they went through (fig.3).

Fig.3. Illustrations to the state of attitude to professional teacher’s activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intertextual elements in responses</th>
<th>Russian-speaking teachers (out of 10 responses)</th>
<th>English-speaking teachers (out of 4 responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your professional life and your attitude towards your chosen profession</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The changes you experienced in your thinking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The results of the interview analysis
### 4 Intertextuality as a method of interpretation in the qualitative study of life stories

Thus, the interpretation of biographies and narratives, written or oral, requires attention to a network of textual relations. Social and ideological associations on the part of the narrator, reader and listener play a central role in the construction of meaning. Stories "resonate" with the cultural, social, ideological and political context in which they were conceived and in which they are heard or read. Stories thus carry not a single static meaning, but the potential for multiple meanings. Meaning, in fact, is constructed in the "sound box" of perception by the listener-interpreter. Intertextual associations are necessary for a deeper understanding of the text.

On the following pages we will describe the interpretation method we have used for our work. Our approach is based on a holistic narrative study that considers the interview as a thematically and linguistically complete, comprehensive narrative unit [23; 24; one]. The told story is considered as an independent literary work. Based on these findings, we used the “close reading” technique to study interviews, a tool borrowed from the field of literary criticism [25]. Our analysis was carried out using reader response theory [26] with particular attention to language components and how respondents use them. Various intertextual elements [2] and a variety of levels [19] were also taken into account.

A literary reading of non-literary texts requires the reader to refrain from inference and look beyond the literal content. It takes time and attention to discover the consequences of stylistic devices, rhetorical turns, phrases and emotional reactions of both the speaker and the listener. However, literary reading is based on a different approach: it requires a strategy for studying the entire complex of linguistic, stylistic and aesthetic components that make up the text. This will include attention to repetition, rhyme and rhythm, use of metaphorical language, noting symbols, linguistic and stylistic usages, literary genre, and implicit intertextuality.

Our proposed approach to interpretation is based on repeated listening and reading of the stories told by the interlocutors. This includes initial reactions after the interview and when re-reading the transcribed text [27]. These multiple readings reveal a number of components, prompting the researcher to question the function of each element of the story on several levels: content, rhetorical impact on the reader, and overall meaning. We searched for different categories of focus for both descriptive and narrative passages, and identified key characteristics of the interview/story. Repetitions and word choice were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table: Intertextuality in Life Stories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Component</td>
<td>Example 1</td>
<td>Example 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>The story of a journey</td>
<td>The story of a journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Impact</td>
<td>The listener's emotional response</td>
<td>The listener's emotional response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Meaning</td>
<td>The theme of personal growth</td>
<td>The theme of personal growth</td>
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</tbody>
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studied with attention to changes such as increased use of verbs or adjectives, transitions from active to passive, etc., shifts in language register, and deviations from the central theme. Repeated readings allow for an examination of metaphorical language, including questions of frequency, originality, the structure of the metaphors used, and the descriptive purposes that the metaphorical language serves. We identified the secondary characters of the story and the attitude of the narrator towards them, tried to understand their function in the structure of the story [28].

We paid attention to common language parallelism, as well as parallelism between characters and between main and secondary stories. A common question we asked was: who is telling the story and to whom? If there are hidden recipients, then who are they? What is the relationship between the narrator and the addressee, and how does it affect the story? What does the context have to do with the story?

Each reading may alert the reader to "subtext" or other text intertextually related to the top text (such as an interview) [29]. The researcher analyzes the associations that other texts might have evoked in the narrator and tries to understand how they might guide the reading. Even when the genre of the top text is autobiography, other genres may well evoke associations as architect [2], whether overtly or covertly: a poem, a song, a travelogue, a folk tale, a rethinking that leads the researcher to association, and also to additional literary elements in order to establish their function in the deeper meaning of the text. Rereading the main pretexts that come to mind in comparison with the upper text (interview) can change the reader's understanding of the interview as a whole or some of its parts. This will happen over the course of many rereadings of the text, each one different, each one giving a different commentary. At the end of this phase of interpretation, a construction is formed that takes into account all the various findings; alternately, several options are presented side by side, allowing the reader to choose the most acceptable and reject others.

All the life stories we heard had a rich intertextual potential. In the case of the interviewee, whose native language was not Russian, but English, we may have missed some intertextual connections in their discourse due to cultural differences. The discourse of literature educators was generally richer in literary references and allusions, even beyond the examples they gave from the literature classes they taught. On the other hand, the discourse of educators in the fields of science referred to the world of science in their interviews. Often the reference was perfectly clear, as the interviewees made explicit statements or made certain intertextual connections. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned the source or even quoted it in full. In other cases, we knew that the interviewee's words were referring to something, and we could make the connection ourselves; from time to time we turned to interviewees for help or confirmation of our interpretation.

The history of life offers the researcher an abundance of detail. The possibilities of intertextual interpretation are manifold, and it is necessary to pay attention to every movement between texts [29]. Due to limited space, we will give an example from only one life story. In light of the methodological purpose of this article, we have chosen short stories representing different types of intertextuality and different relationships between texts. The stories provided will help to demonstrate the ways in which intertextual reading can point the way to interpretation. It should be noted, however, that this is our intertextual reading, which does not exclude another reading by readers who have other associations.

5 Journey between texts: short stories from one life story

Olga is an English teacher with a Ph.D. in her early 60s. She has taught in high school and university. English is central to her life; as she put it, it is both a profession and a hobby. She reads classical and modern literature. Her biography includes an abundance of literary
references to a variety of sources: Russian classical texts, song lyrics, English literary and popular texts.

At the beginning of the interview, Olga said the following: “I will turn over the calendar, and again on September 3rd ...”. In an interview, Olga connected her words with lyrics. She never explained the link; she never touched on the song, its author, or its place in its own history. This was all left to the listeners, who could make connections (or not) and details if they so desired. A connection can make sense, but it can also be inappropriate.

During the interview itself, we did not see much point in Olga's hint. There were a lot of linguistic and intertextual elements in the interview that grabbed our attention and offered a clear big picture. Even when we transcribed, read and re-read the interviews, we weren't particularly interested in the song. But as soon as we finished the first stages of analysis and interpretation and proceeded to the second stage with special attention to intertextuality, we were returned to the words and melody of the song “And again on September 3rd” by Mikhail Shufutinsky.

“Everything is not right, everything is wrong, You are my friend, I am your enemy,” the song begins. The academic year begins in September, as Olga said in an interview, in a decadent spirit, although this beginning is considered a holiday. Her own birthday is also in early September. Holidays are milestones in life. This is a time to reflect on past and future accomplishments and failures. However, despite all this, we eventually realized that the "beginning of September" is not just a detail of time, but an important key to understanding Olga's life.

Reading the lyrics of the song helped us to see Olga's storytelling from a different angle, one that was at odds with the traditional and natural world symbolizing this particular time of year as a time of focus and beginning. When Olga said, "That's what the song is telling us about," it was almost as if she called an additional voice, the voice of the song, into our speech. There was her melody, echoing in the minds of those who knew her, a pleasant melody, too pleasant even, overshadowing the words and content of the song.

In one short phrase, Olga's words made Shufutinsky's song part of the interview and the outside world was transferred to a quiet room where we were talking. “After all, everything was with you on September 2,” the song ends.

Understanding intertextual connections gives the reader some idea of the macrocontext fixed in social discourse and in the interview itself, in which the microcontext is clearly expressed: Olga's tricks about her rejection of the beginning of the school year as the beginning of endless labor. Understanding the macro context sharpens Olga's senses and is important for our perception of what is happening, the political, social and economic aspects that shape her daily life, although they may seem irrelevant to our understanding of the rest of the interview. However, the macro context is important when we come to interpret her story as a whole.

One might wonder if Olga, quoting phrases from the song, hinted at the associations and feelings of bitterness that the song expresses?

Given her vast cultural background and intertextual awareness, the answer may be yes; after all, Olga herself connected her words with what she quoted from the song. At the same time, her association could well be only with the line she was quoting, without conscious awareness (or memory) of the content of the entire song.

Following the intertextual concept, the listener or reader builds their own textual understanding and interpretation in accordance with her or his social and cultural world. Only when we reread it did we “hear” the words of Mikhail Shufutinsky. Then the context of the interview mixed with our understanding of the life story that Olga told.

On the other hand, the level of transposition of the original text (song) into the new text (her story) is low, since the cited source is not revealed beyond the citation of one line.
Throughout the interview, Olga made intertextual connections, subtly alluding to the world of literature and literary texts, the Bible, art, and music. All this is part of her way of thinking and expressing herself through the economical manner of allusions that convey the whole world. Rather, the context, as well as the type of dialogue we had, dictated the nature of the discourse. Revealing the dialogic contact that exists between the speaker and the addressee [14] is important for any intertextual interpretation, and thus is a sign of interpretation in qualitative research. It is quite possible that if she was speaking to an unprepared audience, Olga would have formulated her story differently. But this was said to the researcher of intertextuality; since Olga knew the purpose of our study, she could well have contacted fellow faculty members through us, assuming that they would be the only audience that would read the results of our study.

Narrative research often presents us with personal stories that are personal myths. The narrator seeks to understand himself through a well-known story, through which he or she adjusts, consciously or less consciously, to his own story [22]. The use of intertextuality helped us to identify such situations.

These examples demonstrate the place and importance of conscious interpretation of intertextual elements for narrative texts in qualitative research. Moreover, they clearly show how extensive the interpretive process is, how much it depends on culture, education, historical context, society, ideology, and, moreover, how much the subjectivity of the researcher influences this.

“I talk and talk […] but the listener only remembers the words he expects. […] It is not the voice that controls history: it is the ear” [26].

They told stories. We heard them. You heard them. What did you hear?

References


