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Closing the gap between text and context in academic writing research—An “impossible” task?



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ABSTRACT

This paper revisits ongoing tensions in the relationship between text and context in research into academic writing, paying particular attention to the ways in which context is understood, the effects this has on the textual analysis that is performed, and the consequent readings of a text that might be produced. The data for this paper are texts which reference each other in various ways. The theoretical framework for the paper employs insights from Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and the performativity work of Judith Butler to illustrate the unresolved and perhaps unresolvable difficulties of closing the gap between text and context in academic writing research.

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1. Introduction

Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion ... this iterability of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly, but is that (normal-abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called normal functioning. What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose functioning could not be lost on the way? (Derrida, 1972, p. 97, p. 97)

Jacques Derrida's explanation of contextual and semiotic complexity produced through the iterability of the sign and its ability to break from its context and generate new ones provides the beginning point for this paper. Here, however, I detour from Derrida's foundational work, while holding to his focus on contextual and semiotic complexity, to focus on ongoing tensions in the relationship between text and context in research into writing in academic contexts. Lillis (2008) and Coffin and Donohue (2012), for example, approach this question respectively from an academic literacies and a Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) perspective. In this paper, I revisit this relationship, informed by an unlikely combination of theories or epistemological frameworks. One is the SFL model of language in use associated with Michael Halliday (1994), within which context occupies a critical position. The other is Judith Butler's performativity work (1997, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2008) understood as the ongoing, contingent, language infused process of becoming a social subject. Significantly for this paper, both theorists have an interest in the materializing effects of language and in the two-way relationship between language and context. This interest takes into account the ways in which language both constructs and construes social contexts and the

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ways in which language and discourse, used here in the Foucauldian (1982) sense of power and its relationship to social institutions and actions, has the capacity to both enable or “make possible”, and constrain or “make impossible” certain texts and social subjects.

In this paper, I open up to scrutiny the sort of textual analysis with which many of us engage as part of teaching academic writing. My intention here is to examine the ways in which different texts and different readings of those texts construct and construe social contexts and social subjects. The overarching question driving this paper is: is it possible to close the gap between text and context in academic writing theory and pedagogy?

Following in the tradition of critical discourse analysis (see for example, Fairclough, 2013), the data for this paper are the written texts that were produced by different writers over several years. These texts reference each other in various ways. They include: excerpts from a successful new humanities/history doctoral thesis written by “Kate”; an excerpt from a paper by Greg Denning (nd), one of Kate's thesis examiners, which makes reference to the thesis and its writer; Bob Hodge's (1995) paper on writing theses in the new humanities; Sue Hood's chapter in *Advances in Language and Education* (2007) which analyzes excerpts from Kate's thesis; and Karl Maton's (2000) article which Sue Hood draws upon in her analysis of the thesis. Kate's thesis is particularly provocative in that it has generated such a range of textual responses. Directly or indirectly, these texts provide a place to explore the constituting and materializing effects of language and the ways in which understandings of context are implicated in these effects.

In the following sections I introduce some of the problematic issues that have been identified in the relationship between text and context within SFL, along with key theoretical considerations in Butler's work that have relevancy for this paper. I then move to the data in order to ground and develop a response to the central question motivating this paper.

2. Text and context within Systemic Functional Linguistics

Within SFL, context is ‘recognized as a stratum in its own right’ (Hasan, 2009, p. 168). As Hasan explains, context may be understood from the perspective of an instance—‘context of situation’—that is, what is going on within any particular text on some specific occasion. Or, it may be understood from the system perspective—‘context of culture’—that is, the broader socio-cultural context of a particular language use. Both perspectives need to work together since system and instance are not distinct entities but the same phenomenon ‘viewed from different time depths’ (Hasan, 2009, p. 169).

Two aspects of Hasan's description of the relationship that exists between system and instance are particularly salient. Firstly, system is not a mere inventory of instances and secondly, both system and instance have the potential to impact on each other. Hasan describes the relationship between language and society as ‘cogenetic’ (2009, p. 174)—a relationship which is also made possible by the processes of ‘realization’ which she explains:

to put it simply, to explain why anyone says anything one must appeal to the context which exerts pressure on the speaker's choice of meaning; and to explain why these patterns of wording appear rather than any other; one must appeal to the meanings which, being relevant to the context, activated those words. (2009, p. 170)

Context, therefore, is a critical aspect of the SFL model and as a theory of language in use, SFL appears to have the potential to address the gap between text and context that Lillis' (2008) article has highlighted. Paradoxically, however, this dynamic understanding of context is also problematic for SFL. As Hasan points out, attempts to identify the elements that determine context beyond those of field, tenor and mode, have been unrewarding. What, she asks, constitutes relevant context, relevant for whom and for what? Who are the relevant participants in the context and, what if there is more than one context in operation as in the case of storytelling? (pp 175–177). Beneath the tripartite description of context (field, tenor and mode), she explains, there is no reasoned framework with which to determine contextualization.

The implications are clear. If it is the case that an SFL analyst, in the absence of any fully theorized contextual framework, may construe ‘from the language of the text what the text is all about—who was doing what to/with whom and why, when and where’ (Hasan, 2009, p. 180), then an analyst may well employ an instance of language use in a particular text as a proxy for the wider context. Equally, since context is construed by the analyst, what is seen as relevant context is to some degree open to the interpretation of the analyst. If the analyst is an outsider, a non-acclimated member of the wider context of culture, the analyst's interpretation of the instance of language use in a particular situation must, at the very least, be partial. Thus the ambivalence attached to context in SFL allows for potentially different commonsense understandings of relevant context and potentially different cultural norms of text reception.

While this may appear to be a problem only for those of us who use SFL to analyse texts, the problem is applicable to any type of textual analysis. Academic literacies research, for example, emphasises the importance of ethnography and pays attention to the sometimes overlooked and seemingly inconsequential details of the context of text production (Lillis & Scott, 2007). An analyst in the academic literacies tradition, nevertheless, makes choices about which aspects of context to attend to and which to discount.

3. Butler's contextual performativity

From a Butlerian perspective, textual analysis is also a site for a retrospective performance of the text and its writer. She argues that language can go on meaning even after the time of utterance and can go on meaning beyond the original intention

of the speaker or writer. Although her work is not oriented to the academic environment, Butler provides an illustrative example of her performativity theory at work within academia. She explains:

It seems to me that there's a fabulous contradiction at the heart of academic work—on the one hand the best thing that could possibly be said about anybody's work is that it's innovative, that it sets a new standard, it's unprecedented, it's original and hasn't been done before. On the other hand ... it seems to require that you write in ways that conform to already established norms and meet certain standards of peer review ... the problem of course is that the very same work that's lauded in some circles as innovative, unprecedented and groundbreaking, can be dismissed as impossible, unacceptable, in appropriate, excessive, and non compliant in others ...the *work* is in many ways a function of its reception. Depending on how it's worked, how it's delivered, for whom and in what context, it can turn out to be compliant or non compliant, or both at once; it can change, it can maintain both of those valences, it can take one valence over time and another in another time. (Butler, 2008, p.88, p.88)

Most salient here, Butler's performativity underscores the idea that language can be put to use in another context with quite different effects.

My analyses of the texts that make up this paper provide a detailed account of aspects of Butler's performativity applied within an academic environment. These analyses demonstrate the ways in which particular texts come to be called into being differently, and become received and evaluated differently. At the same time, my analyses underscore Hasan's concerns about the lack of a fully theorized understanding of what constitutes 'context' and so provide a demonstration of how it is that a text can be both compliant and non compliant, valued and not valued. Central to the exploration in the remainder of this paper is the question of what happens when a text is taken out of its original context of culture and read and analyzed within a different context.

4. Contextual performativity at work

In the following sections, I employ excerpts from Kate's thesis, her thesis examiner's description of her writing, Sue Hood's SFL influenced analyses of Kate's thesis, and Karl Matron's theorization of the epistemological standing of the new humanities. These texts provide an assemblage through which to further explore in a concrete way, the complex relationship between text and context. These texts reference each other from, at times, very different epistemological standpoints (contexts of culture) and so provide an opportunity to explore in some depth the ways in which recontextualization can work to both affirm and disavow the same text.

Kate's thesis is a history of a massacre of Aboriginal people in a small regional Australian town in the mid 19th century. The thesis contains a number of conflicting accounts of the massacre placed within the social and political contexts surrounding the event. The thesis fits within the field of the 'new humanities' (Hodge, 1995) or cultural studies and was acclaimed within its community as having the sorts of qualities that Bob Hodge describes as congregating around new humanities work. These qualities include: being a piece of writing (as opposed to a piece of research), research as writing, transdisciplinary, theory driven (as opposed to research-oriented), performative, self-reflexive, opaque, difficult, critical, and creative (see Hodge, 1995, p. 35 and 39). Kate's writing instantiates these epistemological and ontological concerns, self-reflexively constructing for herself a subjectivity or multiple subjectivity from those subject positions that are available within the culture (Butler, 2004a).

Acknowledgement of Kate's text and the multiple subjectivities that are constituted within and through the text requires an audience that recognizes the cultural norms of the new humanities — a particular context of culture. In Kate's case, this recognition was bestowed by her thesis examiners, one of whom wrote:

I gulped a little when I received this creative thesis. I loved the abstract. Thought it was brilliant, was even jealous of a young scholar who could integrate a whole paradigm of thinking into her writing. When I saw how seriously she had set herself the task to unravel not just the story, but the telling of her story, and how personal was her present which she set up in relation to the past, I became a little frightened. I still loved her endeavour, but what were my responsibilities to the institution? There are no measuring sticks for this kind of work. This was as 'up your face' as you can get.

Pretty talented 'up your face' though. Had to admire her complete and integrated control of the reflective literature. *She lived it* didn't just display. Just how I think 'theoretical' elements should go. Not isolated into some separate section, but weaving through the narrative as reflection (Denning, nd, np).

In his acknowledgement of Kate's text, Denning also recognizes the risks attached to its potential recontextualization within the broader culture of the academy.

What worried me was that she wasn't protecting her flanks. I tell students: take your freedoms, but somewhere for the sake of your future, write little reflections—in a preface, in an appendix, somewhere—where you face up to the disadvantages as well as the advantages of what you are doing. Show that you know what your difference is. Play your distinctiveness against the approaches of others—not negatively, not even critically—just to show the examiners that you weren't acting out of ignorance or laziness to do it your way. Not for her. It was straight up your face. (Denning, nd, np)

Dening's advice, taken more generally, is recognition that any text may be taken out of context, that is, retrospectively received and reconstituted for a different purpose, within a differently nuanced epistemological frame and for a different audience. Hood's (2007) analysis of Kate's text does just this.

Hood's analysis involves a comparison of textual strategies used to represent and argue for new knowledge in what she calls a cultural studies thesis, Kate's, and her own applied linguistics thesis. Positioning her work within broader academic literacy and English for academic purposes (EAP) projects, Hood's specific goal in her article is:

... to contribute to an appreciation of common ground and difference, and thus to explore the potential for cross-disciplinary dialogue between two disciplines, those of applied linguistics (AL) and cultural studies (CS). (Hood, 2007, pp.185–186)

Hood explains her linguistic toolkit and interpretative framework as follows:

The linguistic analyses of the texts draw on systemic functional linguistics theory, in particular theories of genre, and the discourse semantic system of Appraisal ... The analyses focus on how each writer argues for their research endeavour. Interpretations of how each represents a different orientation to knowledge are then made with reference to the sociology of knowledge (Bernstein), and in particular to the structuring of knowledge within higher education (Maton 2000a, 200b; Moore and Maton, 2001). (2007, p. 186)

Working on selected excerpts from the introductory chapter of Kate's thesis and her own, Hood argues that Kate's text represents a particular orientation to knowledge: that of a *knower oriented* as opposed to a *knowledge oriented* text. This classification is based on Karl Maton's work (2000) on what he calls the *legitimation codes* of the parent discipline. Hood's analyses and interpretations of Kate's thesis are framed within a context of culture which is predominantly based on Maton's critique of contemporary social theorizing, her own applied linguistic field that encompasses SFL understandings of genre theory, SFL more generally, and the Appraisal framework as an offshoot of SFL. If one also includes the project of the new humanities as relevant context, as one must, then, context of culture consists of at least five materially present, heterogenous contexts, these being: SFL, Appraisal, genre theory, Maton's critique, and cultural studies as an epistemologically and ontologically radical project within the academy. At play in Hood's analyses and interpretations, therefore, is a complex array of interjecting theories, epistemological, methodological, and ontological stances. These are instantiated within the texts that I have called 'data'. Collectively they form the context of culture or rather a context of cultures operating in parallel and simultaneously in much the same way (but amplified because of the number involved) as Hasan's description of the dual contexts that operate in 'story telling' (2009, p. 176).

In the following sections, I first consider the ways in which Maton's argument, contained within his text *Languages of Legitimation* (2000) constructs the knowledge field of cultural studies, the field's proponents, and student body, providing Hood with the context of culture for her textual analyses. I then turn to Hood's analyses and interpretation of the ways in which this context of culture – its knowledge field and its knowers – are realized in the structure and language of Kate's thesis. I focus here only on Hood's macrostructural and genre analyses and on the clause level features that she identifies in her analysis of Kate's text, since my intention is to demonstrate some of the ways in which a text is called into being *differently* via a process of recontextualization, rather than to do an exhaustive reading of Hood's paper. In doing this work, I want to stress that I am no objective analyst and interpreter. I am multiply positioned—an *interested* reader and interpreter.

5. Constructing a context—the knowledge field of cultural studies

Maton's 'languages of legitimation' (Maton, 2000, p. 149) framework identifies the ruler for both participation and achievement within an intellectual field. Applying this framing to cultural studies, Maton uses a collection of documents, course notes, and academic texts produced from within the field of cultural studies, to identify the languages of legitimation of that field. These languages, he says, collectively position cultural studies in a place of 'sustained marginality and relative invisibility ... as a named and distinct area of study within British higher education' (p.150). Cultural studies' marginal institutional status is, he argues, reflected in attacks from both within and without higher education (Maton, 2000, p. 151).

The proponents of cultural studies legitimate the field to other 'producers' within the field by way of scholarly texts and presentations. Maton argues that his analysis of these texts reveals an ongoing preoccupation with two dominant themes which he terms: *disciplinarity* and *giving voice to*. Disciplinarity, refers to cultural studies' claims to undisciplinarity; its project of deliberately transgressing disciplinary boundaries, of keeping its 'objects of study and procedures of enquiry ... hypothetically uncircumscribed' (2000, p. 153). Giving voice to refers to cultural studies' anti-canonical stance, that is, where progression is measured by giving voice to new marginalized groups and development categorized as a series of critical breaks within a 'post' theoretical landscape of ongoing rupture and regeneration (p. 153).

In his description of the field, its epistemological standing, its proponents and its scholars, Maton argues that the privileging of voices of a succession of marginalized groups (organized around class, race, gender, and sexuality) has given rise to:

... contextualist and perspectival epistemologies to celebrate 'difference' and emphasize the multiplicity of truths and narratives against notions of objective truth and 'grand narratives' ... Cultural studies has thus tended to valorize the subjective over the objective, and primary experience over the detached viewpoint. (2000, p. 154)

Cultural studies' languages of legitimation, Maton argues, have structuring effects on the intellectual field itself. Drawing on Bernstein's work on classification and framing, cultural studies demonstrates weak classification of the epistemic relation (the relationship between knowledge and its object of study) because of its disavowal of disciplinary boundaries and proscribed objects of study or explicit procedures of enquiry (2000, p.155). It is therefore, Maton concludes, a *knower mode* of legitimation as opposed to a *knowledge mode*, with the latter mode having specialized procedures for generating knowledge of a distinct object and consequently a strong epistemic relationship. Knower modes of legitimation, on the other hand, 'base claims for fields on a privileged subject of study, the "knower"' (Maton, 2000, p. 156).

Cultural studies demonstrates a strong social relationship but a weak epistemic relationship to knowledge. Boundaries are only strong around *who* counts as a legitimate knower in this mode, not *what* counts as legitimate knowledge or objects of study or procedures for study of the object. This leads, Maton says, to 'a procession of the excluded' (2000, p. 160). As each marginalized group is replaced with another, 'the privileged and specialized knowledge' (p.161) claims of the displaced group, being strongly bounded from knowledge claims of other groups, become 'inaccessible to other knowers' (p. 161).

6. Constructing a text context relationship

Hood's text works backwards from Maton's description of cultural studies as a knower oriented field (functioning as proxy for context of culture) to identify the ways in which this field is construed in the grammar and structure of Kate's thesis. This is not an unexpected move within SFL, since the lexicogrammar is understood as construing the semantics and, through this, the context (Halliday & Webster, 2009, p. 236). Hood's methodology involves a comparison of the overall structuring of Kate's thesis introduction with that of her own thesis (hereafter the two theses are referred to using Hood's acronyms: CS—Cultural Studies, and AL—Applied Linguistics). The introductory sections are then analyzed in more detail for the rhetorical strategies that each writer uses and the ways in which these strategies 'reflect different orientations to knowledge' (Hood, 2007, p. 187).

Using *Representation of the object of study* (field) and *Reflection or theorizing on the research process* (participants in the field) as the two hyper organizational categories, Hood compares the introductions of the CS text (Kate's text) and the AL text (her own thesis) in terms of the proportions of the text that fit within these hyper organizational categories. The category *Reflection or theorizing on the research process* is further divided into sub categories to accommodate the possible participants in the field or the source of knowledge about the field (Table 1). In determining amounts of texts that fit into these sub categories:

The proportions are estimated by identifying the focus of each phase of the text (as represented in paragraphing) and then identifying the amount of text (% of page space) oriented to each field focus. (Hood, 2007, p. 187, p. 187)

Hood provides a tabular summary of her results (reproduced in Table 1).

In relation to field, Hood summarizes what she calls the macro structure of the introductions to both the CS and the AL texts. These introductions 'function in each case to introduce the research focus and provide arguments for the research endeavour' (2007, p. 186). Hood's analysis identifies two commonalities. The first of these is that each writer 'constructs some representation of the object of study, the field that is the focus of the study or the phenomenon to be investigated' (2007, p. 187). Secondly, each writer 'writes about the process of research itself, that is, about reflecting or theorizing in relation to the object of study itself' (2007, p. 187).

Hood then discusses the ways in which each of the texts represents *the object of study as projected by other sources*. Although roughly equivalent in terms of the percentages ascribed to this subcategory in the table (AL 27 per cent, CS 26 per cent), Hood argues that there is a difference in terms of the 'nature of these sources and the kind of knowledge that they project' (2007, p.188). The CS text, Hood argues, privileges the writer as knower. In support of this claim, Hood cites from her comparison table (Table 1) the relative percentages of text given over to the writer as the source of knowledge about the object of study (AL 7 per cent, CS 42 per cent) and, the percentage of text oriented to a discussion of theoretical foundations (AL 44 per cent, CS 0 per cent). The AL text, she argues, draws on other academic researchers and theorists as sources: 'knowledge is generalized and authorized by multiple sources' (2007, p.188). Hood provides an example of this from the AL text, reproduced below as Text excerpt 1:

Text excerpt 1

... the shift in literacy practices and expectations from secondary to tertiary learning presents major difficulties for many undergraduate students, difficulties that may remain unattended to in their formal learning experiences (Belcher

Table 1
A comparison of proportions of each text according to field focus and to sources.

Field focus	AL	CS
Representation of the object of study projected by the writer	7%	42%
Representation of the object of study projected by other sources	27%	26%
Discussion of theoretical contributions from others	44%	–
Descriptions of the writer and/or of the writer's own text	22%	32%

Source: Hood (2007, p. 187)

1996, Johns 1997, Gollin 1998), and which are compounded where academic writing is in English as a second language (Belcher and Braine, 1995, Ventola and Mauranen 1996 ...). (2007, p. 188)

In contrast, Hood argues, the CS text draws on individual knowers as the source of knowledge. These knowers are:

the projecting voices of participants in the domain, that is, within the field being observed, and in that sense they are also data for the study. They are other *individual knowers* alongside the writer herself. The perspective of each individual source is local, that of a participant in the domain of the object of study, an insider. (Hood, 2007, p. 188, p. 188)

Hood also excerpts the following section of the CS text (Text excerpt 2) as further demonstration of its knower orientation. Although Hood does not identify the original source page of this extract, nor its role, this extract is taken from page 9 of Kate's thesis. This is the first page of the section titled 'Introduction' and it is a reference to a diary entry made in 1908 by Irby, one of the sources of information about what happened at Bluff Rock, the scene of the massacre of Aboriginal people.

Text excerpt 2

Hearing movement, Irby and Windeyer lay over the rocks and began firing into the group below knowing that their fire would bring up Connor and Weaver who also joined the slaughter (Irby 1908: 77& 90). (Thesis extract cited in Hood, 2007, p. 188, p. 188)

In several other places in the CS text, Kate makes reference to a number of her other sources of information about the massacre. A sample of those listed in the reference list and works cited section of Kate's thesis (pp. 166–175) include: Windeyer, A. (1838–91) *Diary of Archibald Windeyer*, UNE Archives, A479 & A165; Windeyer, T. (1845–) Station Diary of Thomas Windeyer, incorrectly listed under Archibald Windeyer. UNE Archives V2202; Ogilvie, E.O. Letter to SMH re 'The Natives', 25th Oct (1841); Letter to SMH re 'Situation in NE', 8th July (1842); Letter to Hunter River Gazette re 'New England', 12 Feb (1842); Thomas Keating's account cited in Thomas, J.F. (1882–1941); and, Papers Miscellaneous Historical Subjects, Vol2 Tenterfield. Hood makes no mention of these other sources, since they do not appear in the introduction. She concludes that there is only one exception to the projection of voices of participants in the domain as individual knowers in the CS text, and that is 'some brief extracts from scientific texts on the nature of granite, the stone that forms the rock at which the massacre took place, in which case the knower is an outsider/expert voice' (2007, p. 188).

Hood further concludes that although 'no single phase of the CS introduction is identified as primarily a discussion of theory, in the way that this is so for the AL introduction, the theoretical orientation of the thesis is nonetheless very apparent and referred to in many ways throughout the document' (p. 188). However, Hood argues that the way in which theory is employed is different. She provides seven separate sentence long excerpts from pages 9–10 of the CS thesis as examples and explains the difference in the following way:

What is different about the theoretical referencing in the CS paper, from that in the AL paper, is that such references are all made in the service of describing and evaluating the writer's own contribution. Most often the theoretical influences are coded in a word or phrase, which functions to call up the source of that wording, or they are obliquely signalled through imitation of style, something the CS writer explicitly refers to in her abstract as "my textual impersonation". In this sense again the CS text is more knower-oriented. Theoretical influences are exemplified in the writer's way of writing, rather than being explained or discussed and hence evaluated. Given this means for connecting to theoretical influences, it is not surprising to find that there are no dissenting researcher/theoretical voices, that is there is no positioning of one in relation to another as is typical in the applied linguistics text. In the CS text all referenced theoretical voices are represented as in alignment with the writer. (2007, pp. 189–190)

Through these analyses, Kate is represented as an individual knower working within a knower oriented text where 'theoretical influences are exemplified in the writer's way of writing rather than by being explained or discussed and hence evaluated' (Hood, 2007, p. 189). When theoretical influences are acknowledged they 'all relate to the research process and to its "textualization" and not to the object of study' (p. 198).

7. Recontextualization and exclusions

Excerpting, as Hood has done in her analysis of Kate's text and indeed as I have done in relation to Kate's thesis, Hood's chapter and the other texts I have used here, is a type of exclusion and further complicates the relationship between context and text. Given the absence of a fully theorised account of 'context', excerpting has the potential to further reduce the possibility of a more elaborated understanding of a text and its relationship to the wider context of culture. Using Hood's excerpts as an example, it is an obvious thing to say that complete introduction sections of the two theses are not available for scrutiny. Less obviously, the genres of the two theses are not comparable. Genre analysis relies on regularities but Kate's thesis deliberately works against this expected staging. So, even if the full introduction had been made available, there is no easy assurance that the 'theoretical contributions from others' to the new humanities thesis (Table 1) would be locatable in the

introduction section as one might expect in the more traditional thesis introduction (Swales, 2004). Denning, you might recall, viewed this intermixing positively:

Had to admire her complete and integrated control of the reflective literature. *She lived it* didn't just display. Just how I think 'theoretical' elements should go. Not isolated into some separate section, but weaving through the narrative as reflection (Denning, nd, np).

Kate employed this interweaving as a deliberate textual strategy to disrupt traditional genre conventions, the integrity of her authorship and authority, and any sense that there could be a singular meaning attached to the Bluff Rock Massacre. Her thesis is, as she describes:

Text excerpt 3

cultural [emphasis added] history ... a textual model of what writing a history might look like that was constantly concerned with how the self that was writing was able to write, was coming into a particular form at a particular time and able to make ontological and epistemological questions obvious within what was written ... employing a number of textual techniques [and] ... attempting a textual exposition of the questions—How does one write the past when it is also the present?; what is a postcolonial autobiography?; what is a postcolonial sexuality/textuality?—rather than answer them. (Thesis excerpt, pp. 6–7)

Kate's thesis is self consciously textual or, as she writes, 'heterotextual' (Thesis excerpt, p. 6).

Hood's reliance on selected excerpts from the abstract and introduction defaults to the expected genre staging of a thesis introduction. She applies an instance (in this case an instance of generic staging) of a particular context of culture (the traditional academic thesis structure) to an instance that sits within an avowedly different context of culture—the project of the new humanities. Because Hood applies this traditional thesis staging to an examination of the introduction to Kate's thesis, those parts of the written text in which the new humanities thesis writer describes, in various parts of the abstract, the introduction, and throughout the thesis chapters, the broader project of the thesis and the place/s that the Irby account occupies in that project are erased.

Hood used the Irby quote, for example, to illustrate her argument concerning the individual knower orientation of the CS text: 'The perspective of each individual source is local, that of a participant in the domain of study, an insider' (2007, p. 188). Hood contrasted this to the AL text where the other voices are those of 'other academic researchers/theorists. The knowledge is generalized and authorized by multiple sources' (2007, p. 188).

As an example of one of the many meanings that Kate attaches to the Irby material quoted by Hood, the following information gained from other parts of the thesis is relevant. The quoted text (Text excerpt 2) is a summary from a diary kept by Edward Irby, the station owner of Bolivia, of an event, 'the massacre', that occurred in 1842 on part of the land which the Irby brothers leased and later owned. The Irby diary entries used in the thesis, in addition to the quoted excerpt, range from pages 70 to 107. As in any history, and this is, as Kate writes in her abstract, 'a cultural *history* [emphasis added] ... a textual model of what writing a history might look like ...' (Thesis extract, p.6), the diary entries represent one of a number of *primary sources* in the thesis.

The excerpt of Irby's account of the massacre is 'one of two different versions of the same source' (Thesis extract, p.71). Within the context of the whole thesis, this diary sits alongside a number of other accounts of the massacre and of the social and political contexts surrounding the event. These include the archival sources that I have already cited along with other sources such as family histories, tourist leaflets, gossip, and field notes that Kate works with throughout her thesis.

When reinstated within the broader context of the thesis as *history*, the status of this knower, Irby, is still an insider, and still one of a number of individual knowers whose accounts make partial and conflicting histories of the Bluff Rock massacre. Irby's account, however, understood as a *primary source* account, along with the other primary source accounts, is also recognizably the stuff of history (Myton, 2003). Hood recognizes this when she says that the individual knowers are also part of the data of the thesis. They provide the dissenting voices for the object of study: 'what happened'? Nevertheless, when contrasted with and placed next to the AL thesis, which is positioned as knowledge oriented through its references to 'other academic researchers/theorists [and where the] knowledge is *generalized* and *authorized* [emphasis added] by multiple sources' (Hood, 2007, p. 188), these individual knowers and their local perspectives (invoking Maton) become somewhat suspect, less authorized, and unable to provide generalizable knowledge.

Hood's intention is to 'contribute to an appreciation of common ground and of difference, and thus to explore the potential for cross-disciplinary dialogue between [the] two disciplines' (2007, p. 185). Her deployment of Maton's framing as context, however, raises several questions. Firstly, are we witnessing an unintentional performance of the *history wars* in Hood's analyses and interpretation? In other words, is this a performance or recitation of the ongoing political struggle in which history is surrounded by arguments about how it can be told and whose voices can be included (Myton, 2003, p. 13)? Related to this question, is Maton's knower/knowledge bifurcation and Hood's adoption of this binary as context an implicit, perhaps inadvertent nod to the grand narrative argument within which history is a relatively homogenous space where only certain knowers (academic, authorized) can build knowledge? Carolyn Coffin provides a short gloss of this issue as a framing to her

examination of the ways in which voice or voices operate as a key rhetorical strategy in history texts, noting that the grand narratives of history, claiming the status of 'objective' truth, have been exposed and challenged (2002, p. 504).

More importantly though, the new humanities as a project insists on construing *research as writing* as opposed to the construction of 'research versus writing' (Hodge, 1995, p. 39). Kate's abstract and introduction make numerous references to her project being as much, if not more, about the writing as it is about the massacre. A further question, therefore, is why is it that this has not been taken up as the focus for the analysis of the text? Or rather, the question might be better posed as: could this be taken up as a focus for analysis within the binary knower/knowledge oriented framework that has been adopted? Hood certainly acknowledges the focus on textualizing:

It is the writer's way of 'textualizing' that is the focus. The way of knowing is represented as unique (original, novel) and individuated. (2007, p. 197)

A focus on the textuality of Kate's text, however, can not be addressed within a framework which has been developed largely on the model of research writing where the *object of study* is separated from the *field of study*, as it is in the AL thesis. In this new humanities thesis, the object of study and field of study are inseparable. Theory and methodology are inseparable.

The linguistic framework that Hood has set up as the basis for much of her argument defaults, necessarily, to the AL thesis. The AL thesis is the 'norm'. The CS thesis demonstrates absence of the norm: in its absence of a recognizable generic structure; its absence of a separation of field of study and object of study; and in its absence of 'an argument for the thesis making a contribution to knowledge in the sense of resolving an unresolved-ness; or in Swales' term, "occupying a niche", a research gap (Swales 1990)' (Hood, 2007, p. 196).

In undertaking this work, *authorized* as it is within a volume devoted to *Advances in Language and Education*, Hood's analysis performs a cultural rewriting both of the thesis and its writer, and the broader epistemic project of the new humanities. Kate, however, anticipates a rewriting, though not Hood's in particular, as she reflexively acknowledges her own rewriting of a poem:

Text excerpt 4

To position myself to do a critique of this work [Col Newsome's poem] is to take up a position that isolates me from my own 'localness' (assuming a fruit salad such as myself can reclaim, continue to claim, 'localness'). If I examine this poem using my word tools and critical practices from cultural studies, am I making unreliable theory the only home I will have? Of course ...

But what does or might the critique of the poem actually do to the poem and so in part to the poet? By critiquing it, I am translating it from one audience to another. I am letting this poem go into a niche market of readers who have other agendas. In taking it out of the 'local' and into the critical I may be destroying the very thing that makes it 'work'—that is, its location. If I am to say anything about the poem then it must be ethnographically, critically 'aware'. But how can I do that when my own position is so chronically disputed? I'm afraid the author is being chewed up by being.

But if I leave the poem, sitting in its own invention and don't engage in any way with what it says, I am continuing its existing peripheral (in critical terms) state, I am denying that it can affect me, suggesting it doesn't invent new ways for me to work. I invent in the process a narrow version of theory which I usually despise. So let's begin again. (Thesis excerpt, pp.41–42)

Kate's thesis is not only a writing about a disputed event; it is also a performance of a form of writing that makes critique possible. Within the analysis that has been performed, however, Kate as the writing subject is fixed as an individual and unique knower, writing a text that is populated by the voices of other individual knowers, where 'the way of knowing is represented as unique (original, novel) and individuated' (Hood, 2007, p. 197). The same text, lauded in new humanities circles is, within the context of Maton's epistemological framing of cultural studies and Hood's textual analyses, a more dubious text, occupying an uncertain place in the wider, *academically rigorous* culture of the university.

What is at issue here is not the credibility of linguistic analysis per se. Analyses such as those provided by Hood are crucial for gaining understandings of how texts work and, in turn, being able to explain to students how they work in the ways that they do. What is at issue is the ways in which different understandings of context impact on what is analyzed, on the types of analyses that are performed, and the interpretations made.

8. Conclusion

The preceding discussion has highlighted Hasan's concerns about the uncertainty attached to a determination of context. From a Butlerian perspective, the discussion has also highlighted the ineffability of context and the consequent possibilities for textual analysis to perform a cultural rewriting of a text, that is, to name the same text in quite different ways. But while Butler argues for the illimitability of context and for its non unitary form, she also says that this does not mean that 'one

should cease any effort to delineate a context; it means only that any such delineation is subject to a potential infinite revision' (Butler, 1997, p. 148).

To return to the original question with which I began this paper, the SFL influenced analyses that Hood has performed and my own analyses of the texts have produced a number of effects that amplify rather than rectify the problematic relationship between text and context. Context, for example, has multiplied into contexts without any absolute anchorage. Additionally, while the analysis of a text may logically be supposed to come after the production of a text, in many ways, the discussion in this paper has illustrated the ways in which analysis has the ongoing potential to produce the text, or at least, particular readings of the text and its writer. Closure remains, at best, provisionally "possible", with consequences for academic writing research and pedagogy.

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