

A PRAGMA-CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF BILKISU ABUBAKAR'S *THE WOMAN IN ME*

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Abstract

This study investigates pragma-contextual nuances in Bilkisu Abubakar's *The Woman in Me*. It aims at analysing the various contexts that shape the negotiation of meaning in the text. The research adopts a qualitative design, utilising descriptive and analytical methods to perform a systematic close-reading and pragma-contextual analysis of nine purposively sampled excerpts. The study is underpinned by Lawal's (2012) Aspects of Pragmatic Theory, specifically the background structures, which filters communicative acts through six hierarchical layers. The findings reveal that non-linguistic contexts; situational, psychological, social, sociological, and cosmological, significantly influence the interpretation of the text and character interactions. The analysis highlights how the situational context of displacement of Ibrahim and Rosamond from the UK to Kurmin Dusa impacts the narrative, while psychological contexts drive the internal emotional states of these characters. Furthermore, the study identifies that the narrative conflict is rooted in the failure of Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs), where Western individualistic orientations clash with traditional Northern Nigerian communal values regarding marriage and gender roles. The study concludes that the characters' inability to reconcile these disparate worldviews leads to the conflicts, thereby, establishing context as the ultimate arbiter of meaning in literary discourse.

Key Word: *Pragmatics, Context, Analysis, Novel*

Introduction

Context is the pine of pragmatics. Thus, the pursuit of meaning in literary texts, from the angle of pragmatics, hinges on context which acts as a critical factor in understanding meaning. In Bilkisu Abubakar's *The Woman in Me*, the actions, inactions and reactions of characters stem from differing Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs), particularly regarding marriage and gender roles. The study applies Lawal's hierarchical model of pragmatic theory to uncover how misunderstandings arise from differing contextual backgrounds. It examines the various contexts that shape the negotiation and interpretation of meaning in the text and well as the Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) that make characters struggle to share common assumptions amid the interplay of Western individualism and traditional Northern Nigerian communal values.

Overview of Abukakar's *The Woman in Me*

The story features Dr. Ibrahim Muhammad, who returns to his hometown, Kurmin Dusa, Nigeria, with his British wife, Rosamond, and their children. What starts as a vacation turns into a permanent stay when Ibrahim, urged by his mother, accepts a job as Assistant Medical Director. Rosamond and the children struggle with cultural adaptation, especially after domestic tensions arise when Rosamond hires a house help, Zara'u, whom Ibrahim later brings home as his second wife. Ibrahim continues to embrace polygamy, marrying two more wives for family and political reasons, leaving Rosamond increasingly isolated. A letter reveals Rosamond's adoption, prompting her to seek her biological family in Lagos, leading to further personal catastrophe. As Ibrahim ascends politically, Rosamond's mental health deteriorates, culminating in a public breakdown. The novel concludes tragically with Rosamond sedated and hospitalised, while Ibrahim's political power is reinforced,

leaving her devastated.

Pragmatics, Context and meaning

Pragmatics moves beyond rigid dictionary rules to explore how we actually use and understand language in real life. Traditional grammar and sentence-level semantics often miss the messy realities of human experiences and cultural friction portrayed in contemporary fiction. As scholars like Levinson (1983), Yule (2010), and Fetzer (2011) demonstrate, language never exists in a vacuum; decoding an utterance requires mapping the relationship between words, speaker intent, and the exact circumstances of the exchange. Meaning is not a static prize waiting to be uncovered; rather, it is dynamically built through the live interaction between a speaker and a listener. Because our communicative choices are shaped by our personal, social, and cultural identities, literary analysts have to look past literal word definitions. True comprehension requires digging into the unspoken cues and social dynamics shared between characters.

Linguistic perspectives on "context" have shifted dramatically over the years, moving from external, physical environments to internal, cognitive processes. Malinowski (1923) pioneered this discussion by separating the immediate physical setting (the context of situation) from the broader historical and cultural background (the context of culture). Halliday (1978) later integrated this into systemic functional linguistics, mapping how social situations dictate language style through the variables of Field, Tenor, and Mode. More recently, context has been recognised as something alive and evolving. Thinkers like Leech (1983) and Widdowson (2004) argue that context is not just a passive background canvas; it is an active cognitive process fueled by our shared mental assumptions and personal knowledge. This duality means context can be viewed in two ways: as a

static set of fixed variables, or as a dynamic reality constantly shaped and reshaped by ongoing conversation. Without incorporating these underlying layers — physical surroundings, prior discourse, and the personal belief systems of the speakers — the real emotional weight and hidden intentions behind any statement are completely lost.

Because context is so multifaceted, linguists categorise it in various ways to make it manageable. Cutting (2002) and Yule (2003) separate the surrounding text (co-text or linguistic context) from extralinguistic realities like our immediate physical co-presence and general background knowledge. Others, such as Fetzer (2002) and Huang (2007), group these elements into cognitive, linguistic, and social brackets, showing how deeply socio-cultural values influence how words are interpreted. When we look at human interactions, variables like setting, participant history, emotional states, and institutional boundaries dictate what can be said and what should remain unspoken.

Overview of Cited Submissions

Several scholars have investigated the role of context and pragmatics in literature across diverse theoretical frameworks and cultural settings. For instance, Andr (2017) explored how shared knowledge and an author's background influence the interpretation of figurative language, metaphors, and symbols in Buchi Emecheta's *The Rape of Shavi* using general linguistic pragmatics. Similarly, Mohammed (2019) applied Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory alongside Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework to children's literature, revealing that authors strategically use contextual elements to foster moral understanding and vocabulary acquisition in younger readers. The importance of context in decoding unfamiliar vocabulary was also echoed by Laily (2023), who utilized Bauman's framework to identify how synonym and inference clues aid

comprehension in fiction.

Expanding the scope to regional and comparative literature, researchers have shown how deeply cultural backgrounds shape meaning. Nasrullaeva et al. (2025) examined authorial intentions in Uzbek literature using Morris' theory of context and foundational speech act theories to show how writers challenge outdated views through symbolic dialogue. Taking a comparative approach, Sayitqulova (2025) analysed speech acts and implicature across English, Russian, and Uzbek traditions, concluding that while Western texts often rely on socio-philosophical frameworks, texts from regions like Uzbekistan prioritize cultural traditions to convey hidden meanings. Closer to the Nigerian context, Umar and Emike (2023) utilised Hymes' Theory of Communicative Competence to demonstrate how socio-cultural, linguistic, and psychological contexts are crucial for conveying themes and shaping dialogue based on social status in Andrew Kure's *Harvest of Woes*.

While these studies provide a rich foundation for understanding pragmatic context in literature, they largely focus on general linguistic pragmatics, children's cognitive development, vocabulary acquisition, or broad comparative traditions. The current study focuses on adult literature within a specific Nigerian demographic. Rather than relying on Hymes' communicative competence or general speech act theories, this research anchors its analysis in Lawal's (2012) *Aspects of Pragmatic Theory*. By applying Lawal's hierarchical six-layer model - specifically isolating psychological, social, and cosmological influences - this work offers a highly focused, multilayered exploration of the hidden authorial intentions and contextual dynamics at play in Bilkisu Abubakar's *The Woman in Me*.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study employs Lawal's (2012) Aspects of Pragmatic Theory to analyze the contextual factors influencing meaning construction and interpretation in Abubakar's *The Woman in Me*. This model emphasises the role of context in communication, identifying two layers of utterance—surface and background—which are further divided into six contextual dimensions: cosmological, sociological, social, psychological, situational, and linguistic contexts.

The Surface Structure

The surface context, which represents the linguistic context, is fundamental as it corresponds with the locutionary components, which represent the speaker's linguistic behaviour and the lexical, phonological, phonetic, morphosyntactic, and micro-semantic structures. At the core of Lawal's theory is the recognition that language itself is the most fundamental context. This foundational layer sets the stage for all subsequent interpretations and analyses of language use.

The Background Structure

The background structure, encompassing situational, psychological, social, and cosmological factors, shapes the illocutionary and perlocutionary elements of speech acts. The illocutionary act engages nonlinguistic functions, whereas the perlocutionary act reflects the ultimate impact, being influenced by audience responses and societal conventions. This model incorporates contextual aspects and speech act constituents, along with competencies and background information, suggesting that the participants' contextual understanding is directly related to their ability to encode and decode messages effectively.

- i. Situational context and competency involve the discourse's subject matter,

physical settings, and concrete aspects of the situation in which language is used, including the participants, location, and the immediate circumstances surrounding the communication event.

- ii. Psychological context refers to the internal states of the language user, including their mood, attitudes, and personal beliefs, which can significantly influence the way language is produced and interpreted.
- iii. Social context focuses on the interpersonal relationships among the communicators, highlighting how social dynamics and societal roles shape language use and interpretation.
- iv. Sociological context explores the broader socio-cultural and historical settings in which language is embedded, acknowledging the impact of societal norms, values, and cultural practices on language.
- v. Cosmological context represents the highest level of abstraction, encompassing the worldview of the language user and their implicit references to universal truths and established facts. This context reflects the philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of language use.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, employing descriptive and analytical methods to investigate the role of context in meaning construction within Abubakar's novel *The Woman in Me*. The primary data for this research consists of Nine (9) excerpts purposively sampled, comprising character dialogues, narrative descriptions, and internal monologues that highlight the socio-cultural and psychological tensions of Northern Nigerian life. Data collection was executed through a systematic close-reading of the text, focusing on linguistic markers that signal deeper pragmatic implications. The study applied pragma-contextual analysis based on Lawal's (2012) Aspects of

Pragmatic Theory. This framework allows the data to be filtered through six hierarchical contextual layers: linguistic, situational, psychological, social, sociological, and cosmological. By examining these layers, the study identifies how Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) are either shared or challenged by the characters, ultimately determining how meaning is negotiated and interpreted within the literary discourse.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In the analysis, various non-linguistic contexts such as situational, psychological, social, sociological, and cosmological are explored for their influence on the actions and reactions of characters, thus shaping the text's interpretation.

Datum 1: "Women play the roles of mothers and wives. They engage in agriculture; rearing animals and birds like guinea fowls, goats, sheep and chickens. Among other things; they are good hair plaiters and weavers of traditional cloths. The older women assist men in harvest and cultivation as well as picking cotton buds from the farm" (p. 1)

Situational Context constitutes the introductory description of Kurmin Dusa, setting the scene for the reader before the main characters' arrival. For the psychological context, the tone is descriptive and factual, not expressing any particular emotion but rather stating the established order of things.

Socially, the passage outlines the specific, gendered social roles that structure the community. Women's roles are defined by domesticity ("mothers and wives") and productive, supportive labour (agriculture, weaving). The sociological context reflects a traditional agrarian society where labour is divided along gender lines. The roles are complementary and essential for the survival of the community. It establishes the

sociological baseline against which Rosamond's modern, individualistic identity will be measured. In terms of cosmological context, the underlying worldview is that society functions best when there is a clear, established, and natural order. The description implies that these roles are not arbitrary but are the proper and time-honoured way for women to contribute to the community.

• Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs)

Within the context of the village, it is an MCB that these are the appropriate and expected roles for women. This shared belief ensures social cohesion and predictability. The narrator is conveying these MCBs to the reader.

Speech Acts:

- **Locution:** A list of the activities and roles of women in Kurmin Dusa.
- **Illocution:** The narrator is *defining* and *informing* the reader about the cultural framework of the village. The act is one of exposition.
- **Perlocution:** The effect on the reader is a clear understanding of the traditional expectations for women, which creates an immediate sense of impending conflict for the character of Rosamond, a Western woman who does not fit this mould.

Datum 2: "Seventeen years is a long time for a mother to be deprived of her son. What is the reason for my being alive? You were my fountain of hope, my source of joy and happiness. For you, I have lived, and for you I am dying. I am a grandmother without grandchildren, a mother-in-law without a daughter-in-law, it's been quite an age my son, so much that I doubt if I would still recognise you if ever set my eyes on you again." (p. 6)

With respect to the situational context, Ibrahim is in his comfortable home in the UK, reading a letter from his ailing mother, Inna, in Nigeria. The subject is his prolonged absence and her declining health. Inna's letter serves as a powerful expression of loneliness, desperation, emotional pain, and passive aggression. She is psychologically leveraging her suffering to evoke guilt and immediate action from her son. This reveals a deeply personal communication between a mother and son. The social dynamic is one where the mother holds significant emotional authority, appealing to the foundational bond of their relationship. The letter is embedded in a sociological context where adult children, particularly sons, have a profound and non-negotiable duty to care for their aging parents. The concepts of legacy, family continuity ("grandmother without grandchildren"), and presence are paramount cultural values. The worldview of the letter suggests that a parent's life purpose is intrinsically linked to their children's proximity and adherence to tradition. Her statement, "For you, I have lived, and for you I am dying," presents this as a universal, almost sacred, truth.

Speech Act:

- i. **Locution:** The words describe her loneliness, her lack of family connection, and her poor health.
- ii. **Illocution:** This is not a mere update; it is an emotionally charged command for Ibrahim to return home immediately. The implicature is that if he does not, he will be responsible for her death.
- **Perlocution:** The intended effect, which is achieved, is to overwhelm Ibrahim with guilt and a sense of urgent duty, forcing him to uproot his family and return to Nigeria.

In this excerpt, there is psychological and

sociological manipulation through language. Inna's words are potent precisely because they tap into a shared set of cultural beliefs (MCBs) between her and Ibrahim about a son's responsibility. The meaning is not just in the text but in the immense cultural weight it carries, making it the catalyst for the entire plot.

Datum 3: "Ibrahim was beginning to lose his patience. His wife was making things difficult with the manner she was going about things. He'd have thought that she'd welcome the idea but she wasn't forthcoming, "You can do without us," she told him. 'We're living together; I'll arrange for tickets for five,' he insists. 'Without you, yes but not without the children.' "Yes indeed. It is about time they visit home and get acquainted with their people and culture." (p. 9)

The conversation occurs in the couple's home in the UK shortly after Ibrahim receives Inna's letter. The topic is the immediate and unplanned trip to Nigeria. The participants are Ibrahim and his wife, Rosamond. Ibrahim is psychologically distressed by his mother's letter, feeling a sense of urgency and impatience. Rosamond is concerned about the disruption to their lives, particularly their children's schooling and her own commitments. Her tone is resistant, while Ibrahim's is insistent and increasingly authoritarian. The dialogue reveals a power struggle within the husband-wife relationship. Ibrahim attempts to assert his authority as the head of the family ("I'm their father. I decide where they go or not"), a role that Rosamond challenges with her practical objections, thereby enacting the social context. This argument is a clear manifestation of a clash between two different sociological frameworks. Rosamond operates from a Western, nuclear family perspective where major decisions are

planned and mutually agreed upon, and children's education is a high priority. Ibrahim, spurred by his mother's letter, reverts to a Nigerian cultural framework where filial duty to an ailing parent is a non-negotiable emergency, and the patriarch's decision is final. His desire for his children to "get acquainted with their people and culture" underscores this cultural priority. Ibrahim's worldview, reawakened by his mother's plea, is that family obligation, particularly to one's mother, is a fundamental, almost sacred duty that transcends all other commitments. Rosamond's worldview is based on order, planning, and the primacy of the nuclear family's established life in the UK. Their conflicting worldviews are irreconcilable in this moment.

The interpretation of this discourse is shaped by the collision of psychological, social, and sociological contexts. The locution is a disagreement over travel plans. The illocution, however, is a battle for control and a clash of cultural values. Ibrahim's perlocutionary goal is to force compliance, which he ultimately achieves, but at the cost of creating a deep rift in his marriage. The analysis shows that the "meaning" of his insistence is not just about visiting his mother, but about reasserting a cultural identity and authority he feels has been dormant.

Datum 4: "They walked hand in hand towards his mother, who was now being helped to her feet. With his left hand on Rosamond's shoulder, he said, 'Inna, this is Rosamond my wife'. (...) A frown appeared on the old woman's face as she watched her son's gesture. It ~~was~~ is a strange sight to her. No man in his right senses does that to his wife in the open." (p. 21)

The situational Context is Ibrahim introducing his wife, Rosamond, to his mother, Inna, for the first time upon their arrival in the village. This is a moment of high social and emotional significance. Psychologically, Ibrahim is happy and proud, acting affectionately towards his wife. Inna is psychologically disturbed and disapproving, viewing her son's public display of affection as inappropriate and strange. The social context is an introduction between a son's wife and his mother. However, Ibrahim's gesture (hand-holding, arm on shoulder) violates the unwritten social script for such an interaction in this community. Inna's reaction is shaped by the sociological norm of her community, where modesty and public decorum between spouses are paramount. Displays of physical affection are considered private matters. Ibrahim is acting according to the sociological norms of his life in the West. For the cosmological context Inna's worldview, reflected in the thought "No man in his right senses does that," frames this behaviour not just as a cultural misstep but as a sign of irrationality. It suggests a cosmology where proper social conduct is linked to sanity and moral order.

Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs)

This is a prime example of a breakdown in MCBs. Ibrahim acts on the MCB shared with Rosamond that open affection is a positive sign of a loving marriage. Inna operates on a completely different MCB, shared by her community, that such displays are shameful and improper. The lack of shared beliefs leads to misinterpretation.

Speech Acts

- **Locution:** Ibrahim says, "Inna, this is Rosamond my wife."
- **Illocution:** His intended act is one of proud and loving introduction. He is *presenting* his wife as an integral part of

his life.

- **Perlocution:** The effect on Inna is not warmth but disapproval and alienation. The act intended to bridge a gap instead creates one, causing her to frown and mentally question her son's judgment.

This scene encapsulates the collision between Western norms of expressing affection and the traditional, reserved customs of Kurmin Dusa. This shows how communication is more than words. Ibrahim's non-verbal actions, intended as an expression of love, are interpreted by his mother as a violation of deeply held cultural and moral codes. The analysis of the clashing MCBs reveals the root of the conflict: both parties believe they are acting correctly according to their own reality, but their realities are fundamentally incompatible. This small, failed speech act foreshadows the much larger marital and cultural chasms that will dominate the narrative.

Datum 5: "Astounded, Ramatallah sits up, "Foreign lifestyle my foot. Are you sure you gave him suck?" she asked, visibly agitated. Her friend seemingly has kept her eyes shut for too long. "How can you fold your arms and allow a girl from God-knows-where take absolute control of a child you laboured to bring forth?" (p. 23)

In the context of situation, dialogue takes place between Inna and her childhood friend, Ramatallah, at the local market in Kurmin Dusa. Inna has been complaining about Rosamond's influence over Ibrahim and his "foreign" ways, such as shows of affection. Ramatallah is "astounded" and "visibly agitated". Her psychological state is one of indignation and disbelief at Inna's passive acceptance of the situation. She is passionate and forceful in her advice. Inna is portrayed as "handicapped" and afraid of losing her son. Socially, the conversation is between two close, elderly friends and confidantes. Ramatallah takes on the role of a proactive

advisor, using their long-standing friendship to speak bluntly. The social dynamic is one of mutual support, where friends are expected to offer strong, practical (if unsolicited) advice. Sociologically, the conversation is deeply embedded in the cultural norms of their society. Ramatallah's question, "Are you sure you gave him suck?" is a culturally potent rhetorical question that questions Inna's maternal authority and bond. It presupposes that a mother's influence should be unbreakable. Her reference to Rosamond as a "girl from God-knows-where" reflects a suspicion of foreigners and the cultural belief that a wife, especially a foreign one, should not usurp a mother's influence. The entire exchange champions the cultural supremacy of the mother in a son's life. Cosmologically, Ramatallah's worldview is that there is a natural, almost sacred order in family relationships where a mother's position is paramount, and a son's duty is to her. Any deviation from this is unnatural and must be actively corrected. The solution to the problem, she later concludes, "lies with you and here in Kurmin Dusa," reinforcing a belief in the power of local customs and traditions to solve all problems.

Ramatallah's speech acts are not mere expressions of opinion. The locution is a series of questioning and stating disbelief. The illocutionary force is to shame and galvanise Inna into action. The perlocutionary effect is to empower Inna and allay her fears, convincing her to take a more active role in "reclaiming" her son from his wife's foreign influence. This shows how social and sociological contexts empower individuals to intervene in what Western culture would consider private family matters, all based on a shared cosmological understanding of how the world should work.

Datum 7: "How can you fold your arms and allow a girl from God-knows-where take absolute control of a child you laboured to bring forth?"... "Ahap. What haven't I seen with these eyes of mi.ne," Inna laments.

Ramatallah was shocked beyond words listening to her friend cry out, “And yet you remain this steadfast?” “Wallahi, as if that’s not enough, she seizes him in my very presence and places her lips over his.” (p. 23 & 24)

The situational context reveals that Inna is at the market with her close friend, Ramatallah, complaining about her son Ibrahim’s relationship with his wife, Rosamond. Inna is filled with lament, helplessness, and shame. Ramatallah expresses shock, indignation, and outrage on behalf of her friend. Her psychological state is one of vicarious offense at the violation of social norms. The speakers are intimate friends and confidantes. This close social relationship allows for unfiltered, highly emotional, and supportive communication. Ramatallah acts as an enforcer of social norms within this private sphere. This interaction is deeply rooted in the sociological norms of the community, where public displays of affection between a husband and wife are considered shameless and a sign of the woman having undue control. A wife from “God-knows-where” (a foreigner) is viewed with suspicion, and the mother’s authority is expected to be paramount. The underlying worldview, which constitute the cosmological context is that there is a natural, correct order to family dynamics where the mother who “laboured to bring forth” a child has a primal claim that should not be usurped by a wife. Ramatallah’s outrage stems from this perceived violation of a fundamental truth.

Speech Act:

- **Locution:** Inna describes Rosamond kissing Ibrahim in her presence; Ramatallah asks how she can stand by and let it happen.
- **Illocution:** Ramatallah is not just asking a question; she is admonishing Inna for her inaction and urging her

to assert her maternal authority. The illocutionary force is one of empowerment and a call to arms.

- **Perlocution:** The effect is to strengthen Inna’s resolve and validate her feelings, pushing her towards the belief that she must take action to “reclaim” her son.

This illustrates how sociological context reinforces social roles and psychological states. Ramatallah acts as a representative of the community’s values, interpreting Rosamond’s actions not as love but as a transgression. The meaning of a kiss is entirely redefined by the cultural lens, transforming it from an act of affection into an act of disrespect and control.

Datum 7: “What in the world does Jafaru need wives for he asked in reference to his driver. “It’s not for us to judge him” his ally responds. “He has a right to Practice polygamy.” “At whose detriment?” “The women aren’t forced into accepting his marriage proposal” his friend summed up (p. 49)

Ibrahim is conversing with his friend, Aliyu, about his driver, Jafaru, who has multiple wives despite his meagre income. This defines the situational context of the utterance. Psychologically, Ibrahim is in a state of bewilderment and judgment, viewing Jafaru’s actions as irresponsible. Aliyu, in contrast, is non-judgmental and accepting, reflecting a different psychological attitude toward the same set of facts. Socially, the dialogue is between two male friends from the same culture but with differing worldviews. Their friendship allows for this debate, but it also highlights

a fundamental schism between them. The discussion revolves around the sociological practice of polygamy. Aliyu's perspective is rooted in the cultural and religious acceptance of the practice as a man's "right." Ibrahim's view is influenced by his Western exposure, focusing on the economic and emotional consequences ("at whose detriment?"). This is to say that while polygamy has a spiritual and cultural backing; it has negative implications especially on the female gender. This is why the two men are operating from different cosmological standpoints. Aliyu's worldview accepts polygamy as a given, a part of the established order that is not to be questioned ("It's not for us to judge"). Ibrahim's worldview is based on a logic of individual responsibility and the nuclear family model, causing him to question the practice's morality and practicality.

Speech Act:

- **Locution:** Ibrahim questions the need for Jafaru's wives; Aliyu defends Jafaru's right to have them.
- **Illocution:** Ibrahim is implicitly condemning the practice as illogical and harmful. Aliyu is illocutionarily defending a cultural norm and subtly telling Ibrahim to mind his own business and respect their traditions.
- **Perlocution:** The conversation's effect is to underscore the deep ideological rift between Ibrahim and his community, even his close friends, positioning him as an outsider in his own culture.

This exchange perfectly encapsulates the conflict of worldviews. The meaning of polygamy is contested; for Aliyu, it is a right sanctioned by the sociological and cosmological context, while for Ibrahim, it is an irresponsible act when viewed through his more Westernised psychological and ethical

lens. The dialogue shows that even within the same culture, "competence" can be fragmented by external influences.

Datum 8: "What nonsense! You have given that wife of yours too much freedom. Imagine her taking decisions without your consent?" Tired of keeping their silence; Aliyu fumed, "She needs to be reminded that she no longer lives in Europe." 'Absolutely; things are different back home; men are in charge here,' Yahaya added." (p. 83)

Ibrahim dines with friends Aliyu and Yahaya, discussing his wife, Rosamond's decision to fire their cook without his consent. His friends express anger on his behalf, seeing his wife's action as a significant breach of male authority, indicative of patriarchal norms in their society. This gathering allows for unfiltered dialogue about marital dynamics, as they collectively reinforce their identity as men expected to control their households. Their advice to Ibrahim serves as cultural policing, pressuring him to align with societal expectations of male dominance. This interaction highlights peer pressure in maintaining gender roles and cultural standards within marriage, asserting a patriarchal worldview as a natural order.

Sociologically, his friends' reactions illustrate patriarchal norms, viewing a wife's unilateral decision to fire staff as a significant breach of conduct. The assertion "men are in charge here" underscores the cultural gender hierarchy, contrasting it with European perceptions of women's freedom. Their cosmological perspective maintains that a natural, patriarchal order governs marriage, which is accepted as fact in their own setting. Thus, a man's authority is central, and Rosamond's independence is deemed a violation of this fundamental order. The friends' advice serves as cultural policing

rather than just friendly support, marked by angry and declarative statements. It criticizes Ibrahim's treatment of his wife, urging him to assert cultural authority, ultimately pressuring him to conform to patriarchal standards. This highlights how social contexts reinforce gender roles and cultural expectations in marriage.

Datum 9: “‘The last thing I’d do is to get close to your wife. She hates me for no reason.’ (...) ‘You have to understand that she’s from a different background. Her people are not like ours. They are monogamous.’” (p. 111)

This dialogue is significant because it gives voice and perspective to Zara’u, the second wife, showing her awareness of the situation and her own feelings. The physical context is a conversation between Zara’u and Ibrahim sometime after their marriage. She explains her reluctance to interact with Rosamond. Zara’u speech and action are driven by psychological state where he feels hated and is wary of Rosamond. She is not a passive victim but has a clear-eyed view of the household dynamic. Ibrahim is in the role of mediator, trying to explain one wife to the other. Enacting the social context, this conversation reveals the tense social relationship between the co-wives. It also shows Ibrahim performing the difficult social role of the polygamous husband, who must manage the interactions and emotions of his wives. Within the sociological context, Ibrahim’s explanation

- “Her people are not like ours. They are monogamous” - is a moment of sociological instruction. He is explaining the cultural source of Rosamond’s hostility to Zara’u, acknowledging the difference in their backgrounds. The dialogue operates within a polygamous cosmology where the expectation is that co-wives must find a way to coexist. Ibrahim’s explanation is an attempt to create a basis for tolerance, if not

harmony, within this framework.

Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs)

Ibrahim and Zara’u share the MCB that their polygamous marriage is legitimate. Based on this, Ibrahim tries to build a new MCB: “We must be understanding of Rosamond’s different background.”

Speech Acts:

- **Zara’u’s Locution:** “‘The last thing I’d do is to get close to your wife. She hates me for no reason.’”
- **Zara’u’s Illocution:** She is *stating her position, defending her avoidance of Rosamond, and subtly expressing her own hurt.*
- **Ibrahim’s Locution:** “‘You have to understand that she’s from a different background...’”
- **Ibrahim’s Illocution:** He is *explaining, mediating, and requesting patience* from Zara’u. He is trying to manage the conflict.
- **Perlocution:** The effect is to give Zara’u a rational framework for understanding Rosamond’s behaviour, potentially reducing personal animosity by attributing it to cultural difference rather than pure malice.

The speech act analysis shows a rare moment where Ibrahim attempts to use communication to bridge a cultural gap rather than impose his will. He acts as a cultural interpreter for Zara’u, a role he consistently failed to perform for Rosamond.

Discussion on Findings

The study highlights that non-linguistic contexts play a significant role in interpreting texts in Abubakar’s *The Woman in Me*. The situational context encompasses the physical

setting and immediate circumstances that affect character interactions and dialogue meaning. The narrative's shift between locations, from a modern home in Sussex, UK, to the traditional village of Kurmin Dusa, emphasises themes of cultural clash and displacement. Ibrahim's home becomes a focal point for marital and cultural tensions, particularly when a new bride arrives, subjecting Rosamond to public scrutiny and altering her perception of Ibrahim's actions. Overall, the spatial setting profoundly shapes the narrative's mood and power dynamics.

The narrative's emotional arc is shaped by the characters' psychological contexts, highlighting feelings of despair, guilt, and longing that influence their actions. Rosamond transitions from discontent to betrayal and loneliness, while Ibrahim grapples with guilt and obligation to his mother, prompting significant life changes. Inna's letter manipulates Ibrahim's emotions, inducing guilt and compelling him to prioritise her wishes over his responsibilities to his wife. Concurrently, Rosamond's transformation from a confident spouse to one marked by alienation evolves her communication from requests to demands, illustrating her emotional despair. The characters' psychological states are fundamental in driving their actions and altering their story trajectories.

The social context is crucial for understanding power dynamics within families and communities, characterised by defined roles like husband-wife and mother-son that create a hierarchy influencing patriarchy and female agency. Ibrahim's return to Nigeria marks a shift from an egalitarian partner in the UK to a patriarchal figure in Kurmin Dusa, demonstrated by his declaration, "I'm the man of the house," which highlights societal expectations of authority. The dynamic between Inna, the mother, and Ibrahim, her son, is significantly

shaped by these social influences, with Inna's patriarchal authority emphasised during Ramatallah's questioning, empowering her role. Inna's complex relationship with her daughter-in-law Rosamond reveals challenges to her authority due to non-traditional behaviors. Ramatallah's inquiries prompt Inna to assert herself, while Zara'u's role as a "friend to live with" emphasises the communal nature of marriage in a polygamous context. Variations in greeting customs further illustrate how social contexts influence communication, potentially leading to conflicts.

The novel explores the sociological conflict between Rosamond's Western background and Ibrahim's Nigerian heritage. This clash highlights how cultural norms shape individual behaviors, with Ibrahim's support for polygamy stemming from a societal emphasis on large families as status symbols, contrasting with Rosamond's monogamous beliefs. The rigid gender roles add to the tension, as Rosamond faces societal judgment for her nonconformity. The differing views on marriage, seen as a tradition in Ibrahim's culture versus a personal commitment for Rosamond, further illustrate the deep sociological divide contributing to the novel's tragic outcome. The novel's central themes are profoundly influenced by its socio-cultural context in Northern Nigeria, where polygamy, patriarchy, and communal responsibility clash with Rosamond's Western individualistic values. The normalisation of polygamy among Ibrahim's peers contrasts with Rosamond's perception of it as betrayal, underscoring the conflict arising from differing cultural interpretations of Ibrahim's actions.

The cosmological context shapes characters' worldviews, particularly Ibrahim and his community, influencing their interpretations of fate and God's will. Ibrahim justifies his betrayal of Rosamond as divine will,

absolving himself of responsibility, while his marriage to Zara'u is seen as preordained, creating tension with Rosamond's focus on personal commitments. Jafaru similarly uses divine justification for neglecting his children's education. This belief system reinterprets personal choices as fixed destinies, hindering dialogue and making Rosamond's search for rational explanation ineffective, as her suffering is seen as part of a predetermined cosmic narrative.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the crucial role of context in interpreting Abubakar's *The Woman in Me*, highlighting that meaning is intertwined with situational, psychological, social, sociological, and cosmological factors. It reveals deep cultural conflicts due to characters' failure to reconcile differing worldviews, leading to a breakdown in Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs), especially regarding gender roles and marriage. The study concludes that communication effectiveness is reliant on shared assumptions shaped by socio-cultural contexts, asserting that the tragedy in *The Woman in Me* stems from this failure of MCBs. Understanding the narrative necessitates recognising the clash of distinct worldviews, with context being essential for meaning.

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