



# An Analysis of Discourse of Death and Dying Based on van Dijk's Context Model Theory: A Case Study of New York Times Columnist Suleika Jaouad

Yang Lidong, He Li  
Beijing Jiaotong University

## ABSTRACT:

Despite extensive practices of critical discourse analysis, less attention is paid by CDA practitioners to the discourse of death and dying, and a specific individual representing the dominated group. Significantly, the psychological attribute of the discourse of death and dying itself is consistent with the cognitive nature of context model theory. Hence, this thesis is a critical discourse analysis of the discourse of death and dying of an individual, representing young women with cancer. It applies the context model theory proposed by T.A. van Dijk to the discourse of death and dying written by the columnist with cancer, Suleika Jaouad in New York Times.

Methodologically, the study adopts corpus-based CDA upon Suleika's narratives of her catastrophic experiences with life-threatening cancer. It took a top-down way to reversely reconstruct the underlying context model that controlled the production of Suleika's discourse. Furthermore, it, in a bottom-up way, scrutinized the mechanism by which the underlying context model leveraged its control upon the "surface" discourse, by qualitatively and quantitatively shedding light on the discourse structures, namely topic control, lexical control, syntactic control, semantic control, pragmatic control, etc. Finally, it examined Suleika's diachronic change of attitudes towards death and her identity construction on the basis of the underlying context model and the mechanism by which this context model functions.

It has been found that this underlying context model exercises its direct control on every linguistic level of the discourse, including phonological level, usually via frequent employment of K-device, a device actively supplementing the knowledge necessary for discourse comprehension. Suleika employs the mechanism of context model within her discourse to strategically make explicit how she interprets and understands her social environment and convey her message relating death or cancer to her audience in a generally humorous way, reflecting her own attitudes towards death and revealing her authentic identity. Furthermore, the hidden ideologies which discriminate against the oppressed group are unmasked, especially in carer-patient relationships in oncology wards.

**KEYWORDS:** death and dying; Context Model; CDA; K-device

## I. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Discourse analysis, with its first occurrence in Harris's paper entitled "Discourse Analysis" in the year 1952, began to develop into a branch of linguistic research and attracted more attention of different scholars since the 1970s, during which theories specialized in the study of discourse or texts appeared abroad. It revolves around the discourse's production, representation, and reception (Xu Jiujiu, 2019). As a strand of discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) has become more institutionalized and gained its entrance to mainstream (Fairclough, 2010: 51). It considers "language as social practice" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), deems discourse as the basic unit of communication (Tian, 2021; Wodak & Meyer, 2001), and gives prominence to ideologies and the intertwined relation between discourse and power.

Of all genres of discourse, political and news discourse are especially concerned. It is in congruence with its goal shared by all CDA approaches, more specifically six approaches formed under the interdisciplinary drawing (Wodak, 2006) and with one of them being social-cognitive approach proposed by Teun van Dijk (van Dijk as follows), that is, to reveal the interaction between ideology and discourse through the superficial form of language, and how the two arise from the social structure and power relations, and in turn, how they serve for them (Ding & Liao, 2001). Moreover, CDA has a concern with 'wrongs' in social life, which is committed to

'righting' perceived social 'wrongs' (including injustice, unfairness, discrimination, domination), and sides with people who suffer from such 'wrongs' (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018). The marginalized groups and their discourse articulated have been gradually taken into consideration by CDA practitioners.

Death and dying, however, still remain gloomy taboo in many high-context and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976), including in America, UK, and China. Yet, there is increasing consensus that talking explicitly about death and dying is necessary, in that death and dying have been exposed to transparent public talking with the rapid proliferation of elderly people and the growing involution of society. And the academic study of death has dramatically increased in recent decades, especially since the mid-1950s (Davis-Berman, 2011). Furthermore, the study of the discourse of death and dying has been emerging since the 1990<sup>th</sup>. At present, medical research is undergoing a humanistic turn, whereas CDA is of interdisciplinarity. Therefore, a critical analysis of the discourse of death and dying, in academic, not only keeps abreast of the mainstream of interdisciplinary research, but also is required to demystify the particular genre of "social practice" with abstract ideology and power relations underlying. More importantly, as the population gets older and the demand for care increases alongside cost, understanding the discourse of the terminally ill and the dying is of essential significance to better respond to the public health challenges of the 21st century.

### **1.2 Significance and Purpose of the study**

Death, though naturally inescapable and irrevocable, has been subject to being masked as a mystery by human being's reverence, which has made it long been evaded in texts or discourses in oral or written form. However, death is a commonly indispensable part of human life. Particularly, it has permeated all levels of society via the internet with the advent of the hyper-connected information age. Claim for death with dignity, initiatives of living will, life education, death education, palliative care, etc. have gained more and more concern. Accordingly, it is high time that social linguists, whose mission is to study language and social life, showered close attention upon the sphere of the discourse of death and dying (Gao Yihong, 2017).

Additionally, the social stereotype and the nerve-wracking tension between medical staff and patients tend to deprive the treated one of equality. Especially those people with cancer, who urgently demand their equal share of the social well-being, attracted my attention. Moreover, of all cancer patients, less attention has been paid to young women with cancer, who deserve attention and respect like any other social group, which motivated me to approach this group and investigate their attitudes toward death and their identities through utilizing CDA.

To further narrow down the field of research from DA to CDA to CDA of dying and death to focus on a cancer patient's narratives. By applying the context model theory in van Dijk's social-cognitive approach to CDA to the thorough examination of the construction of death in Suleika Jaouad's narratives of her experiences with cancer in *New York Times* column "Life, Interrupted", this research, first of all, attempts to reveal the way in which Suleika Jaouad, a female cancer patient at the height of her youth and vigour, more or less consciously implements contextual control to realize her discourse purpose in the discourse production, characterized by highly cohesion, coherence, and unification. Secondly, it seeks to unravel changes in Suleika Jaouad's chronological attitude towards death and her identity construction.

This study, thus, can contribute to bidirectionally enriching the empirical research of context model as van Dijk expected and case study of analysis of the discourse of death and dying. It will further refurbish the kaleidoscopic genres of discourse commonly studied, as in the cases of news, political speeches, under van Dijk's social-cognitive approach. It, in turn, is a kind of touchstone for the versatility of context model theory in practice. Furthermore, its concern with the specific minority group, to some extent, will provide practical edification to the care and treatment of cancer patients, young, female ones in particular. After all, it is evident from various health-care and social-care steering documents that the end-of-life is an important area of care but that nonetheless consistent national guidelines are lacking (Österlind et al., 2011).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The present research hypothesizes the existence of an interwoven relationship between the context model and the discursive practices of Suleika Jaouad. And the context model integrating the dynamic relations among the individual, the discourse, and the society is at the core of van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. This is the perspective from which the present thesis approaches the discourse of death and dying, with Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 providing a more comprehensive discussion of context model theory. Specifically, the following questions ready to be solved over the course of this thesis are proposed:

RQ1. How does the context model be employed by Suleika Jaouad to achieve her discourse purpose in the construction of death?

RQ2. How do Suleika Jaouad's attitude towards death and her identity chronically change?

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis examines how language works in actual use (Brown & Yule, 1983) beyond the level of a single sentence. Critical Discourse Analysis, with its emergence marked by *Language and Control* (Fowler et al., 1979), advocates a dialectical perspective to address the relationship between discourse and society, delving into opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. Though not long-existing, it has witnessed an internally increasing self-improvement, as well as an externally growing proliferation of applications to an extensive variety of research fields. For one thing, the three research approaches derived from the different media of discourse and society, namely, Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, van Dijk's social-cognitive approach and Wodak's discourse-history approach, are the overwhelming mainstream in research about CDA. For another, it not only extensively incorporates and integrates momentous theories and methods from sociology, anthropology, psychology, cognitive science and many other disciplines, yielding six research approaches with distinctive features (Wodak, 2006), but also makes it more applicable in various fields. Along with this expansion, its focal points are laid upon political discourse, critical pedagogy, and gender-related issues (Liu Wenyu & Li Ke, 2016).

Therefore, CDA, with gradually deepening sophistication and systematization, is interdisciplinary to language study. It, critical in its very nature, "studies not only what language is, but also why language is the way it is; and is dedicated to tapping into the meaning of discourse, and the way the construction of discursive meaning" (Ding & Liao, 2001).

#### 2.1.1 Applications of CDA

CDA bears "relational, dialectical and transdisciplinary" properties (Fairclough, 2010: 3) per se. When being leveraged to examine language use in its social context, it provides not only a descriptive examination of a discourse but also normative comments that seek to shed light on the social wrongs and to promote tentative solutions (Fairclough, 2010: 14). Taking power as a parameter, the application of CDA can be classified into two categories: one is the stronger, dominant group while the other is the weaker, dominated group. Centering especially on the analysis of social and political issues, this analytical tool has been employed prolifically to demystify identity construction and further deconstruct and expose racial discrimination, gender discrimination, prejudice against vulnerable groups, etc. hidden in the discourses of those in power, such as political leaders. But the other group is yet little examined through CDA, though the weaker has actively made herculean efforts to articulate their authenticity for equality. Despite the complexities and subtleties of power relations, CDA is especially interested in power abuse (van Dijk, 1993b), that is, in the breaches of equality, justice, etc., by those who wield power. However, how the dominated challenges and resists the dominant groups' power is one of the three major research issues decoding discursive power (van Dijk 1998: 6). Notably, with a similar focus, Mao Haoran (2014) found the anti-manipulation discourse strategies taken by dominated groups by a corpus-assisted analysis of the discourse of both groups in the case of Nature's apology to Ye Shiwen. Additionally, the scope of CDA practice has been limited to an explanation of the discourse of a collective, or inaugural address of a politician, causing a specific individual representing the dominated group relatively less taken into account by CDA practitioners.

Therefore, as a way of engaging in critical social science, CDA has an emancipatory knowledge interest, and a concern with wrongs in social life, which can and ought to be put right. CDA, in practice, is prone to take a form of critique, since it recognizes the support for the struggle against inequality as its specific agenda (van Dijk, 2001). With such a specific interest, concern or agenda, and by analyzing the texts of written or spoken in a transdisciplinary way and discovering the discourse sources of prejudice, inequality, power and dominance, CDA has arrived to make "the implicit explicit in language use" (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018: 2) and has gained innovative insights into the discourses and the implications concealed in the context (Wodak and Meyer, 2016).

#### 2.1.2 Evaluations of CDA

CDA as an approach has obtained wide acclaim, as well as criticism and skepticism. Its definition of discourse itself is even censured as opaque and ambiguous. Widdowson (1995: 158) believes discourse is "something everybody is talking about without knowing with any certainty just what it is: in vogue and vague". Moreover, the validity and effectiveness of CDA practices, from certain scholars' perspectives, are undermined by the lack of objectivity. Widdowson (1995: 169) argues that CDA is a biased interpretation: "it is prejudiced on the basis of some ideological commitment, and then it selects for analysis such tests as will support the preferred interpretation in a dual sense". Such subjective selection of interpretation (Blommaert, 2005) and obdurate exclusion of other possible interpretations derives CDA away from cogent practice. Against such critics, Fairclough draws attention to the open-endedness of results required in the principles of CDA. Meyer (2001: 17), in reply to the criticism, refers to "two irreconcilable positions" within social sciences. Baker argued

when conducting social research, *parti pris* is unavoidable and the aim for neutral objectivity is in itself a “stance”. Moreover, “a clearer explanation of data resources, a more detailed analysis of data, an enhanced self-reflection in research process and a multifaceted set of interpretations in conclusion” are advocated by Flowerdew and Richardson (2018) to improve the objectivity of CDA.

Meanwhile, the incorporation of corpus techniques into CDA practice, with prevailing popularity, accounts for the power relations embedded in discourse in a more credible, more convincing way. To separate CDA from polemic, Baker et al. (2008) developed application of corpus-driven CDA to the analysis of a 140-million-word corpus of news articles about ‘RASIMs’ and the examination of newspaper representation of Islam and Muslims.

Gaining certain insight into CDA in practice, this paper shifts the focus to ‘bottom-up’ relations of dominance from ‘top-down’ relations of dominance (van Dijk, 1993a), making an analysis of the disregarded discourse of a representative of the dominated, as well as introduces the cutting-edge genre of discourse in CDA (Liu Lihua, 2020), namely the discourse of death and dying, and the statistical approach of corpus. It would not only establish some sort of exoneration for its long-existing shortcomings, but also be a kind of “practice of teaching people to fish by giving prominence to the anti-manipulation discourse of vulnerable groups, which is consistent with the goal of CDA to reduce social inequality, discrimination and racial problems (Mao Haoran et al., 2015).

## **2.2 Studies of Context Model**

As mentioned before, the criteria shaping CDA to different strands is the media between language and society. Upon the relation between language and society, the traditional sociolinguistics believed that society directly influences discourse and earlier CDA also deemed there is a direct connection between the discourse structure at the micro-level and the social structure at the macro-level. With development, van Dijk, one of the remarkable representatives of CDA, rejects this deterministic view, and bridges the two with cognition. Underlaid as a theoretical foundation, such a cognitive approach to context bolsters the paper. Chilton (2005) also designated cognition as the missing link in CDA. The socio-cognitive approach to CDA, thus, emerges. It systematically discusses the relationship between discourse, cognition, and society, which is called a triangle.

To further crystallize the complexity of the relation, van Dijk proposed the Context model from the perspective of social cognition (van Dijk, 2008), which refining the socio-cognitive approach. The study of context can be traced back to Malinowski, an anthropologist. And J. R. Firth channeled it into linguistics. Contrary to previous approaches to context, van Dijk in his context model theory holds that context is a complex notion that possesses both subjective and dynamic attributes, inventively emancipating context from previous objectivity and static state. van Dijk’s context model accentuates the subjectivity of discourse participants or agents. Furthermore, the dynamic construction of the context model, as found, plays a key role in the generation and understanding of discourse, in that it illuminates the fundamental “socio-cognitive interface” (van Dijk, 2008) and makes explicit how participants or agents interpret and understand their social environment.

### **2.2.1 Applications of Context Model**

Bolstering such a theoretical foundation, scholars such as Higgins (2004) and Chilton (2004) respectively shows the importance of the “home nation” as a context feature influencing news coverage in Scottish and decodes the cognitive interference by a detailed examination of the static linguistic features of the discourse. Providing two classical cases for Context Model in practice, van Dijk, analyzed the debate between former Spanish Prime Minister Aznar and opposition leader Jose Zapatero over the Iraq war (1998) and the speeches of Blair and Cameron, giving prominence to the dynamic interactions between the society and the individual context model (2008). The linguistic features of the discourse, thus, serve as manifestations of the control that context models dynamically effectuate.

### **2.2.2 Evaluations of Context Model**

From the aforementioned discussion, we can arrive at the evaluation that Context Model theory in the light of the socio-cognitive approach to CDA snatches the failure to account for the famous problem of co-reference and coherence in discourse: people with the same social characteristics would not speak in exactly the same way (Wang Hui and Zhang Hui, 2014), or two different news reports on the “same” event in two different newspapers (van Dijk, 2008: 138). Wodak once applauded this combination of linguistics and neurosciences for its elucidating potential. Significantly, the psychological attribute of discourse of death and dying itself is consistent with the cognitive nature of context model theory. Susan Ervin-Tripp (1996: 21), one of the pioneers of sociolinguistics, coincided with Wodak and claimed the significance of spelling out context to develop realistic theories of language and of language acquisition, in that context permeates language and contextual assumptions affect the way we understand language.

Though van Dijk’s approach elucidating meticulously and systematically the media between discourse

and society, it seems not have been paid sufficient attention in previous researches, while Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, the first version of Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, has been employed extensively. Context has also been adopted in the analysis of discourse of death and dying as the studies in 2.3. However, the context examined in their studies remains a stasis regardless of the ongoing and dynamic interactions. Additionally, CDA, Discourse of death and dying, and Context Model all share the cognitive property in common. Therefore, this research about CDA is based on van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, more specifically the context model within it, to bring context model, dynamical and subjective, into full play in the critical analysis of the production and dissemination of discourse of death and dying.

### **2.3 Studies of Discourse of Death and Dying**

Though the contemplation of death is "inherently disconcerting" (Zimmermann, 2007) for the majority of people, death is one of the most pervasive phenomena of the society, and sometimes (with a slight sense of drama) is described as 'the only certainty in life' (Carpentier and Van Brussel, 2012). The research on discourse of death and dying, received widespread attention since 2000, has become increasingly interdisciplinary, involving fields of medicine, psychology, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and so on.

At present, its research at home and abroad is not merely a comparison of Chinese and Western death euphemisms from the perspective of taboos. The discourse of death and dying has been studied particularly with respect to identity, attitude towards death, palliative care, AIDS, suicide, cancer metaphors, digital mourning, with the focus on examining doctor-patient discourse, the dignity of death, the construction of death, etc. (Huang Fang, 2017; Wang Jingyun, 2016; Huang Fang 2019). For example, Elliott and Olver(2007) probed into the speech of 28 patients (average age 61) dying of cancer through a synthetic combination of conversation analysis (CA) and Foucauldian analysis to respectively uncover the influence of dying cancer patients' talk upon CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) and DNR (do not resuscitate) orders and elucidate how hope features within patients' speech from perspectives of hope-as-a noun (HN) Hope-as-a-verb (HV) and the implications of their employment of hope. And the project 'Metaphor in End-of-Life Care', funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, led by Elena Semino and based at Lancaster University, yielded plenty of research fruits upon metaphors identity construction in discourse of death and dying (Semino, Demjen & Koller, 2014; Demmen et al., 2015; Demjen, Semino & Koller, 2016)

The dominant theoretical approaches are narrative analysis, appraisal theory, metaphor analysis, CDA, and multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). Scholars such as Zimmermann (2007, 2012) examined the use of the binary opposition of acceptance and denial of dying from CDA proposed by Foucault to disclose death attitudes in palliative care. Another typical example is Gao Yihong (2019), a pioneer in the study of discourse of death and dying, elucidated genre types of discourse of death and dying in the Chinese context and the dynamic relation between discourse and social context. Combining CDA (Fairclough, 1995) and MDA (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt, 2009), Wildfeuer et al. (2015) crystallized short films of 30 German youngsters' conversation with dying people and their relatives, as well as online postings about their experiences shared by volunteers and shed light on how this content is produced and how the concepts of dying and death are constructed.

The research data is mainly collected from real sites with the methods of in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, etc. Österlind et al. (2011) employed Foucault's discourse analysis to explore the discourse of death and dying in nursing homes, collected from five focus-group discussions held with 28 staff (aged 20-64 years), by drawing on the understanding and reasoning of the staff. Similarly, Candrian (2014), took a two-year ethnographic study of a hospice and an emergency department (ED) and made a critical analysis of the on-site discourse of how health providers talk to and about individuals who are dying and the resulting accomplishments by following an approach used by Deetz and McClellan (2009), yielding the finding that 'Taming' is a key feature of discourse and sense-making at both sites.

Therefore, featuring extensive focus and diverse incorporation of approaches, the study upon discourse of death and dying is another priming example of interdisciplinarity. And its research issues can be classified into two dimensions, that is, the construction of meaning of death and the dissemination of meaning (Wang Jingyun, 2016) with attitude towards death and identity construction as the top two topics. Secondly, CDA proposed by Foucault, and MDA are mainly leveraged to establish the theoretical basis of the study of discourse of death and dying. Thirdly, there are few specific concerns upon an individual, with the elderly forming the research group in the majority of cases. And the situational data, with the narrative as the main data, mainly collected through the semi-structured interview. Finally, compared with foreign studies, there are still fewer domestic studies, especially in the study of first-hand, authentic data retrieved from the settings, which is without irrelevance to the overall medical atmosphere and the complexity of doctor-patient relationship.

Given the aforementioned findings from the review of studies of discourse of death and dying, this paper turns to center upon a cancer patients' narratives of her experiences from the perspective of CDA proposed by van Dijk. Gilbert (2002) asserted the vital role of narrative stories as research, especially as related to understanding the experiences of death and grief. It's true examining these end-of-life issues through a

narrative approach is a unique way, in which respondents are not restricted to talking or writing down their attitudes and fears surrounding this topic. Stories and narratives can yield important information, yet most of studies upon them center on the structures and strategies of storytelling itself, leaving the drawback that “who tells what kinds of stories, how, to whom and in what situations” (van Dijk, 2008: 196) are little examined. Moreover, van Dijk (van Dijk, 2008: 108) pointed that context models is the basis of everyday storytelling. Therefore, synthesizing the narrative description of a cancer patient and the context model under CDA is credible.

### **III. Theoretical Foundation and Analytical Framework**

#### **3.1 Context as Mental Model**

We have arrived at that “societal macrostructures cannot directly influence discourse or interaction” (van Dijk, 2008: 75). And context, the mediation, defined as “a special kind of mental model of everyday experience” (van Dijk, 2008: 71), is socially based and subjective. Context, discourse participants’ construct about the for-them-relevant properties of a situation,

bears the only distinct feature that it represents verbal communication or interaction. And context model, a cognitive interface between social situations and actual language use, organizes how discourses are strategically structured and adapted to the whole communicative situation or communicative environment.

Hence the main function of contexts, namely they not only represent the relevant properties of “the communicative environment in episodic (autobiographical) memory” (van Dijk, 2008: 16), but also enable and ongoingly constrain the processes of discourse production and comprehension.

##### **3.1.1 Self as the Central Category of Context Model**

Context is mental model of experience, which is “typically characterized by some kind of representation of Self” (van Dijk, 2008: 70), whereas experience is unique personal, even when shared with others. Hence the main feature of context model, namely it is crucially “egocentric” (van Dijk, 2008: 77), with Self the central, orienting category. This means that participants, consciously or otherwise, represent their own “Self” in discourse production. Such a kind of self-representation in its interaction, in turn, is ongoingly changing, without absolute stasis and sameness. Yet, identities, closely associated with instantiated Selves, can also be derived through certain form of relative “sameness, stability or continuity”.

##### **3.1.2 Context and Identity**

van Dijk (2008: 133-134) pointed that context model is, theoretically and methodologically, significant, in that it on the one hand uniquely “interprets, combines and constructs the relevant parameters of communicative situations” and on the other makes prominent the subjective construction of speakers’ identities in interaction. Participants’ relevant social identities are ongoingly activated or constructed in discourse processing. The activation and enacting of identities, conversely, are constrained by the discursive interaction.

#### **3.2 Context Model and Discourse**

##### **3.2.1 Context-Discourse Relations**

There is no doubt that the relations between discourse structures and context structures are needed to explicitly defined. The traditional direct, causal, relation between social structures and discourse is critically refuted by van Dijk (2008: 121). As mentioned in 2.2, the incorporation of “ad hoc, personal context models” (van Dijk, 2008: 126) fully elucidates the previous unfathomed conflict of discourse variants with similar social events. Contextual variability bridges the social similarity and the discourse diversity, which is a typically more “active” approach. It helps procure the conclusion that discourses are “variants (at some level) if they share the same event model (at some level), but if their context models are different” (van Dijk, 2008: 140). In this case, another important light of the correlation between discourse and context can be gained, that is, context is underlying and discourse makes the unobservable context visible.

And there are other relations. One of the dominant context-discourse relations is that it is context that controls discourse. The notion of control is explained, delicately and rigorously, as in the case of “A ‘controls’ B when A is a necessary condition of B” (van Dijk, 2008: 127). Context controls discourse “by virtue of the definition of context as the definition of the relevant aspects of the social situation” (van Dijk, 2008: 128). The reverse also holds. There’s a bilateral relation, that is, context factors (such as identity) that influence discourse, and conversely, such discourse in turn has functionality upon the current situation, such as addressing problems.

##### **3.2.2 The Complexity of Contextual Control**

“Control”, a selective term to characterize context-discourse relation, is social and cognitive. Furthermore, social properties, according to van Dijk, are almost merely necessary conditions, without forming sufficient conditions.

Each communicative event is a unique and complex combination of situational conditions and their unique discursive consequences. The influence of discourse always runs through a socio-cognitive interface. That is, if there is a relationship, it is mediated by the participants. It is in congruence with the notion that language is human-specific. Therefore, the probing into the relation between context and discourse should take human beings into account.

##### **3.2.3 Context and Variation**

To examine in more detail which discourse structures are typically controlled by context model

structures and how they are controlled are difficult, in that contexts defined as mental models cannot be observed directly. A salutary drawing on the study of unobservable phenomena in any science available makes the problem addressed, that is, to systematically study context's "consequences" (van Dijk, 2008: 107), namely, discourse variations.

Variation, a useful notion to account for context-dependent discourse structures, obviously by notion makes the presupposition that something remains more or less constant. Such underlying sameness means that most variation is based on local or global equivalence of meaning or reference: saying "the same thing" in different ways (van Dijk, 2008: 140). Meaning equivalence or referential equivalence, thus, mainly makes up the basis for elaborately scrutinizing variation. According to van Dijk, there is a relatively constant "underlying" level, realized as higher-level variants. And the discourse variation is contextually controlled.

### 3.3 Context Model and K-device

Cognitively, knowledge is a necessary component in the process of discourse production and comprehension (van Dijk, 2008: 128). Contextual knowledge management is called K-device, by which "the (non)expression of knowledge in discourse" (van Dijk, 2008: 83) is regulated and via which context model exercises its appropriate control on the discourse production. And social knowledge is recognized as "common ground".

It has been assumed that context models are not construed from scratch or out of the blue at the onset of speech, but constitute a special case of ongoing experience models (van Dijk, 2008: 100). This means that there's presupposed knowledge before the initiation of a communicative event. Besides, "no appropriate discourse is possible without shared knowledge of the participants" (van Dijk, 2008: 127). To perform this knowledge/information management, K-device is expected to be employed as constantly and as frequently as occur the exchange of and the updates of information. Furthermore, the complexity mentioned in 3.2.2, under the control of her communicative goal, demands vigorous employment of K-device which is expected to be manifest and prevalent in the discourse production.

## IV. Critical Discourse Analysis of Suleika Jaouad's Discourse of Death and Dying

### 4.1 Data Collection and Data Processing

The corpus for this study consists of 31 articles with 27028 words from "Life, Interrupted", *New York Times* published in 2012-3, which are selected from a total of 37 articles exhaustively retrieved from Suleika Jaouad's column. The selection was conducted according to the definition of discourse of death and dying (Wang Jingyun, 2016), that is, text or talk of events about death and dying, including narratives of cancer patients' experiences, attitudes and thoughts. Note that one of the articles exonerating from being discarded "My Mother's Cooking" is curtailed out its final part of the description of four meals' recipe.

Diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia at 22, Suleika Jaouad had a 35 percent chance of surviving her transplant and a dream to become a writer. And she made the best use of her condition to "report" from the frontlines, where she experienced, construed, defined or interpreted what is happening so as to voice for the normally voiceless minority: young female with cancer. The following chart showcases the narrative description of the cancer patient's experiences:

Table 4.1-1 Indices for Suleika Jaouad Data

	Title	Date
1	Facing Cancer in Your 20s	12/3/29
2	Countdown to Day Zero	12/4/5
3	The Patient in the Mirror	12/4/12
4	A Young Cancer Patient Faces Infertility	12/4/19
5	Dispatch From a Hospital Room	12/4/26
6	Cancer Is Awkward	12/5/3
7	Posting Your Cancer on Facebook	12/5/10
8	Hope Is My New Address	12/5/17
9	The Beat Goes On	12/5/24
10	Keeping Cancer at Bay	12/5/31
11	Finding My Cancer Style	12/6/7
12	Feeling Guilty About Cancer	12/6/14



13	Fighting Cancer, and Myself	12/6/21
14	My Incarceration	12/6/28
15	Am I a Cancer Survivor?	12/7/12
16	Medical Bills, Insurance and Uncertainty	12/8/9
17	Putting a Positive Spin on Cancer	12/8/16
18	Five Days of Chemo	12/8/30
19	A Cancer Patient's Best Friend	12/9/27
20	A Battle With Myself	12/10/11
21	Real Housewives of Chemotherapy	12/11/29
22	My Mother's Cooking	12/12/13
23	Brotherly Love	13/1/17
24	Crazy, Unsexy Cancer Tips	13/2/14
25	A Friendship, Interrupted	13/3/21
26	All in a Day's Work	13/5/2
27	Getting Away	13/5/16
28	The Cost of Cancer	13/6/13
29	Making Resolutions	13/6/27
30	A Test of Faith	13/08/22
31	By a Dog	13/12/23

One is needed to clarify is that the columnists' narrative employed in this research is treated in a perspective conforming to the trend. That is, this kind of autobiography, a form of social practice and social interaction, is not just elicited for the producer herself, but possesses the attribute of communication within its context.

To address the research questions, which maintains consistency with the research purposes, a corpus-based critical discourse analysis is conducted to analyze the data gathered. Furthermore, this paper, methodologically follows van Dijk's (2008) approach to context model.

First, this study will take a top-down way to reversely reconstruct the underlying context model that controlled the production of Suleika Jaouad's discourse of death and dying by virtue of context model schema proposed by van Dijk (2008: 76). Then it shall, in a bottom-up way, construe the mechanism by which the context model leveraged its control upon the surface representation, namely discourse, by qualitatively and quantitatively probing into the discourse structures, especially a complex set of discourse properties, e.g., topic choice, lexical choice, syntactic variation, semantic variation and pragmatic variation. Finally, bolstered by the first two steps, especially the second one, it can arrive to disclose Suleika Jaouad's diachronic change of attitude towards death and her identity construction.

#### 4.2 Suleika Jaouad's Context Model

Discourse is "a kind of social interaction, and, as such, reflexively, part of its "own" context" (van Dijk, 2008: 132). Likewise, Suleika Jaouad, a language user, is not just involved in processing discourse; at the same time, she is also engaged in dynamically constructing her subjective analysis and interpretation of the communicative situation. In order to reversely reconstruct the underlying contextual model of Suleika Jaouad's discourse of death and dying produced in *New York Times*, this section, on the basis of context model schema (van Dijk, 2008: 76), takes a top-down manner to spell out its dimensions in sequence by probing into the systematically context-controlled surface discourse in a general way and taking the background information into account.

**Table 4.2-1** The Underlying Context Model of Suleika Jaouad's Narratives

Dimensions	Subjective Interpretations
------------	----------------------------

Actual Setting	lying at a 45-degree angle in a hospital bed in an oncology ward in a bone marrow transplant unit in New York City
Intermediate Setting	<i>New York Times</i>
Social Setting	the society of the USA where still prevail diverse inequality, stereotyping and discrimination, avoidance of the taboo of death and cancer, and an unsettling lack of support for resolving the problems mentioned above
Medical Setting	young cancer patients are still facing an embarrassed misfit
Communicative Role	novice columnist, a speaker voicing for her community
Identity	American girl, daughter, cancer patient, fresh out of the college
Attributes	grateful for her family and caregivers, self-aware, dissatisfied with the social injustices
Recipients	readers who read Suleika's column worldwide
Action	to write her experiences with cancer
Communicative Goals	to address the dire discourse of death and dying, to voice for her community, to meaningfully pursue her dream as an author, and to provide certain knowledge and guidance for those who undergo similar suffering

Suleika Jaouad's context model, with delicacy and accuracy, makes identification of the multiplex communicative settings and her multifold social identities. The built socio-cognitive interface or mental interface or cognitive interface between social situation and discourse, with the integration of the important individual properties of the speaker and certain social parameters, lays the foundation for making explicit how Suleika Jaouad individually tends to represent, interpret and understand the communicative event.

#### 4.3 Context Model's Control over the Discourse Production via K Device

According to van Dijk, Suleika Jaouad subjectively construes the discourse in which she is involved and correspondingly constructs the context model that guides her discourse participation (van Dijk, 2008: 74). Context models are formed, activated, updated and applied in the actual discourse processes. Having postulated context model in 5.1, this paper, in this section, gives detailed insight into the ways Suleika Jaouad defines and represents her social situations, in which her personally unique constructions of relevant communicative constraints of the situation, namely her individual context model, functions. Specifically, a complex set of discourse properties of a given language user in a specific situation, e.g., topic choice, lexical choice are examined and construed systematically.

##### 4.3.1 Topic choice

van Dijk takes topics as semantic macro-propositions (van Dijk, 1980), and points that topic choice or topic variation is controlled by contextual constraints. Suleika is the main decider of her topics shared in the NYT column. Such selection from her experience leads to storytelling. The following table exhibits the selected topics by Suleika.

Table 4.3-1 Theme Occurrence Frequency

Theme	Frequency	Sub-theme	Frequency
waiting	9	for diagnosis result	4
		for a bone marrow transplant	1
		for biopsy results	4
life interrupted	23	previous life	4
		uncertain future(worry)	4
		peer pressure	2
		hope for the future	4

		misfit upon age	3
		decision-making	2
		stares from strangers	4
gender	4	infertility	3
		other sexual side effects	1
time	4	the relationship between the past, present and future	1
		a sense of urgency to seize the present	2
		time cost	1
symptoms and side effects (medical condition)	15	pain suffering	11
		appearance change (except hair loss)	3
		vulnerable immune system	8
		to improve	1
appearance	8	hair loss or even baldness	6
		personal style-changing	2
relationship	37	medical workers	4
		family and friends	18
		pet dog	2
		wardmates	7
freedom	8	escape	6
		travel	1
		marathon	1

Unlike a news report, private matters are prolifically and elaborately incorporated in Suleika's personal, private report from the "first line". Suleika talks about herself a lot, meaning that the topics are very personal to her. And such a selection of topics manifests the way Suleika represents her social situation and even the world. These chosen topics are a good attestation that topics are obviously related to people's experiences. All topics share referential equivalence in common, namely Suleika's life experiences interrupted by life-threatening cancer which are partly topically about death themselves.

The topics addressed by Suleika show some preferences and the most commonly discussed ones, are her interruption of life, medical condition and relationship with her multifold companions accompanied. Certain topics like the personal history of "good old times", hope for a better life, "unspoiled, untouched" future, and her affection towards people around, etc. are set up. What attempts to nail down here is not necessarily the specifics of what is discussed, but is more to what ends Suleika uses these topics.

Notably, the topic of "pain suffering" makes Suleika appear as a victim of catastrophic cancer, having a special effect of appealing to audiences' sympathy and making a connection with audiences. Furthermore, her choosing to spend more time and efforts on writing her "presupposed" end-of-life with family and friends further evokes the audiences' empathy and strengthens their ties in that audiences relate to their partly similar experiences.

Thus, Suleika's discourse of death and dying refers to miscellaneous elements of the death domain, and combines its topics with those from other domains, such as the medical domain, health care domain. Secondly, the topic variations manifested in Suleika's discourse exhibits certain preference, is under the control of the postulated underlying context model in 4.2. Finally, the characterization of topics in such specific discourse discloses selected topics is consistent with the communicative goals established in the context model: to address the dire discourse of death and dying, to voice for her community, to meaningfully pursue her dream as an author, and to provide certain knowledge and guidance for those who undergo similar suffering.

#### 4.3.2 Phonological Choice

Phonologically featuring standard American English, Suleika's intentional phonological variations are eminently noteworthy. The written text can be probed into characterizing the instantiated oral speech is beyond previous research design, hence serendipity.

*"Ja... Ja... Ja-odd?" a nurse calls out from behind the desk, struggling to pronounce my last name. "*

*The driver seems nice, an older man with a slight Jamaican accent. ... "Hel-lo, anyone there?" the taxi driver says. We've arrived, and I have been lost in my thoughts.*

*The long-awaited answer reverberated in my head, and I found myself slowly pronouncing the syllables: loo-KEEM-ee-ah.*

The first two are Suleika's imitation of the specific phonological features of certain people, while the last one is her own phonological choice with awkwardness incurred by the astounding abruptness of the catastrophic diagnosis. More specifically, all of them channel sounds into the written narratives, forming a good attestation of "actual language use in spontaneous talk and text" (van Dijk, 2008: 108) and making audience on the scene in person, and activate the shared basic knowledge (her name "Jaouad", "Hello" and the common stereotype of Jamaican accent, and "leukemia" respectively). Accordingly, the phonological variation, accompanying the lexicon variations and even syntactical variations, vividly portrays and represent the real situation, facilitates the efficiency of the communication and bridge the distance between the writer and the audience.

### 4.3.3 Lexical Choice

As is the case for the phonological characterization of Suleika's discourse of death and dying, this lexically level is also functional and effective. The lexical variation is eminently "context-sensitive" (van Dijk, 2008:171), her lexical variations prevail and can be grouped into five major categories: age numerals or terms, invented term, taboo words and death lexicons and medical jargon.

First, the figures in Suleika's narratives, controlled by the context model, can be further divided into two groups: One pertains to age, the other, medical record.

The repetition of the speaker's age "22", "at 23", "24" or "in the 20s" embodies Suleika's identity as a young female. Meanwhile, the diagnosis of cancer pressed a pause button upon her supposedly "an exciting time". Compared with her peers outside the ward, peer pressure, worry about the future and envy for the people at her age without cancer (since they are free from Suleika's concern and live a life without being interrupted ) all intertwine in Suleika's narratives.

Furthermore, she clarified an embarrassing dilemma of in-betweenness of age imposed by society:

*Even inside the hospital's oncology ward, being a young adult with cancer can make a person feel like a **misfit**. I'm usually the **youngest** patient on the floor. In fact, I'm the **youngest** person my doctor has ever treated with this disease. (A vast majority of patients with my form of leukemia are over 60).*

*Young adults might just be oncology's "**tweens**" — **too old for the pediatric cancer floor** but equally **out of place in an adult oncology unit**. I'm not suggesting that it's worse to be young and sick, but rather that young adults with cancer are a less visible demographic, swept up in the **mix** of adult cancer statistics.*

*But I have **an adult disease**. Most patients with my type of cancer, a form of acute myeloid leukemia, are long past their childbearing years.*

The underlined lexical choice, accurately and vividly, illuminates the dilemma of Suleika, initiating the audience's accepted views toward this group represented by her and the relevant social issues.

Suleika recorded her history with cancer, such as the diagnosis of leukemia, the bone marrow transplant's coming and going. "Nine months, eight hospitalizations and seven chemotherapy treatments"...such an engraved time record lies in extreme cherishing and attention upon life and time, in that the uncertainty and fleeting trait of life derived from the abrupt cancer diagnosis makes the speaker prudently contemplate life and time. And it also manifests that female's narrative is with elaborative delicacy. Furthermore, the presentation of the numerals by its very nature makes the whole narratives loaded with an objective feature, representing a mechanism of knowledge supplement to allow readers to trace the stage of Suleika's experience with cancer:

Table 4.3-2 Suleika's Life with Cancer

Time	Stage
2011/5	Diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia (at 22)
2011/5-2011/6	"Cancer bubble"
2012/4	Bone marrow transplant
2012/4-2012/5	Hardest period after transplant
2012/10	Permitted to keep a pet dog
2012/11	Want to give up and quit for the first time since the diagnosis

2012/12-2013/1	Marathon
2013/5	Permitted to travel
2013/6	Expect for normal life
2013/7	All non-stop chemotherapy treatments finished

Second, in describing the first hospitalization and isolation after her cancer diagnosis, she creatively invents a new and novel word “incanceration” from incarceration. The word vividly synthesizing “cancer” and “incarceration”, spelling out her ardent yearn for the freedom of a cancer patient circumscribed to a bed and isolated in a ward, self-mockery of her disease and resent for the uninvited guest. This choice of defining her isolated life, a lexical variation, on the one hand, demonstrates her gift as an author, and on the other, is intended to activate the general audience’s knowledge about the typical group’s struggling life and confused, scared, and isolated feelings.

Third, there are rare taboo words in the whole corpus, yet have dramatic functions under the context model. In describing the scenario in which she came across her fellow transplant patient with the same form of leukemia in a waiting room and was told by her friend her disease may have returned, she makes a certainly de-emphasized description to disguise her and her fellow transplant patient’s indignant emotion against her fellow’s second attack of cancer under the pseudonym “F-word” of “Fuck”. Similarly, during her first big trip since cancer with doctors’ permission, she retrospects the previous life as full of “C word”. As she clarified in the following, “*We both say the **F-word** at almost the same time. I don’t swear very often, but it just comes out. There’s a pause, and then we both break into a burst of laughter at the strange harmony of this.*”, and “*The anonymity that came with traveling was thrilling, and it was a welcome relief that no one would be bringing up the **C-word**.*”, these alternatives for slurs like “fuck” and words related to cancer both merely appear once (comply with NYT’s politeness rule), the lexicon selection shows that the author’s deep repugnance against cancer, which may abruptly terminate life.

Besides, there is no large number of “death” (only appeared four times) in the corpus. And a more moderate version of it, “mortality”, also only occurs two times. But cancer is articulated outspokenly with relatively high frequency, and medical terms (eg. “chemotherapy”, “Leukemia”, “mumps”, “antidepressants”, “a bone marrow transplant”) are also frequently employed to ensure sustainable communication. Such lexical variation is concerned with readers’ acceptance of gloomy taboos like death, the distribution platform’s requirement and appropriate k-device employment. Hence the consolidation of the relationship between the writer and the audience.

Therefore, despite a lack of a unified lexical variation strategy, Suleika actively employed diverse variation in this level in her construction of death to achieve an accurate representation and to reach the dramatic effects expected in her context model. And the contextual control via K-device can be identified as observable exhibitions.

#### 4.3.4 Syntactic Variation

Having now fully characterized and evaluated lexical variation and its impact, this section turns to analyze syntactic features. van Dijk pointed out syntax variation is less obvious and more subtle than lexical one.

To begin with, texts in *New York Times* are very unlikely to feature grammatical violations. In this sense, Suleika’s discourse, specifically a novice’s discourse, circulated in *New York Times*, is expected to manifest relatively high grammatical accuracy, and does so. It is a good attestation for NYT’s rigorous censorship and Suleika’s gift as a writer, which is also her dream.

Moreover, Suleika’s discourse can be characterized syntactically as with low sentence complexity and frequent employment of short sentences, among which a word as a sentence, like “*Frozen.*”, “*Celebrity?*”, is the shortest one. Other typical examples are as follows: “*For now.*”, “*Same train, same route.*”, “*Tick tock, tick tock.*”, “*I froze.*”, “*Not yet, anyway.*”, “*The biopsy next time.*”, “*The CT scan. The biopsy. The X-ray. The waiting.*”, “*I felt unsexy.*” and “*This time.*” Notably, “*Freedom, finally!*”, a sentence featuring both brevity and alliteration, gives full expression to Suleika’s jubilant ecstasy of being emancipated from previous isolation and travelling with the doctors’ permission after long-endured expectation and inhibition. The utilization of short sentences among other sentences can properly put more or less emphasis upon specific expressions, and thus indirectly contribute to corresponding semantic stress on specific meanings, as a function of the writer.

The lines that Suleika designed to conduct self-asking in a monologue way tend to be shorter than the normal sentences in her discourse. The typical examples are as follows:

Although I know I shouldn’t, I feel guilty about being a burden on others... **How could I not?** I trust that others with cancer know what I mean.

...I have blamed myself for lifestyle choices that might have led to my cancer...*Too much junk food? Were my jeans too tight?*

Finally... I attempted to go through with my plan. I hid my electronic bracelet under my pillow... I made it as far as the cafeteria on the ground floor. *Then I froze.* ... My anxiety mounted...*What if I fell? What if I fainted?* Within a few minutes I had returned to my room. *Beep, beep.* My little friend chirped. *Strangely, I felt safe again.*

Suleika's description of her sense of guilt are largely characterized as interrogative sentences, giving prominence of Suleika's sentence to the accidental attack of cancer, her self-accusation for the trouble brought to people around her, her attempt to escape from a predicament without freedom, as well as her preoccupation by various perplexing questions.

Though quite subtle are the forms that syntactic variations take, the underlying context model still leverages its integral control over the discourse production on this level. Yet, the k-device is not apparently employed during the control. However, the usage of short and interrogative sentences syntactically makes the goals of the speaker realized, which will be further elucidated in the following sections.

#### 4.3.5 Semantic Variation

The contextual control upon semantics that occurred in Suleika's discourse falls into two parts: One is that she creatively introduces terms with highly compressed meaning, the other is that she borrows similar things available in literature or culture.

Semantically equivalent terms prevail:

*In the world of social media, we are our own self-portraitists. Our digital identity is doctored to show the best version of our lives. (Maybe a more apt name for Facebook would have been "Best Face" book.) On Facebook, aren't we all?*

*Living with a life-threatening disease can make you feel like a **second-class citizen in the land of time.** Disease infects not only your body but your relationship to the past, present and future. Thinking about the past..., but now it mostly magnifies all that is no longer. When mortality hangs in the balance, daydreaming about the future, ..., can be a frightening exercise.*

*But I have **an adult disease.** Most patients with my type of cancer, a form of acute myeloid leukemia, are long past their childbearing years.*

*The word "survivor" felt like a **grown-up word** — more fitting for people who had lived with cancer longer than I had, or who had made it through a big operation or milestone in their treatment.*

*But I don't think it's all cultural. When it comes to disease, I think the "**positivity spin zone**" is a force of nature. ... And many cancer patients, consciously or otherwise, try to buffer bad news with a dose of positivity. Putting a positive twist on how things are going is a way to convey hope. We want to be strong, to put on a brave face for our loved ones.*

As demonstrated above, the bold expressions with condensed meaning are illustrated explicitly. The dramatic simplification of words and high concentration of meaning not only allure the audience's interest, but also give prominence to the speaker's intent. Moreover, the "compressed" meaning is extended fully in the abut elucidation, which achieves distinct effects in such a kind of contrast. Take the last as an example, it graphically emphasizes cancer patients' inner somber may sometimes be disguised by their superficial optimism, especially their mirthless, feint smiles. As is true for lexicon variation in 4.3.2, the aforementioned goals of newly-generated expressions will not be effectuated unless they are given further definition, hence the need of supplement for knowledge. Therefore, the k-device is employed again.

Additionally, Suleika strategically channels her semantic variation to index or map certain aspects of culture. In giving an account of her personal experiences and emotions, she employs "common ground" dexterously to make an articulation between her own subjective representation of the event model and the well-known things in popular culture or literature.

*Cancer may not be a choice, but style is. I was drawn to the idea of recreating myself — a cancer makeover. Once my hair was a few inches long again, I dyed it purple and wore it as a **mohawk.***

*It's my third day of "Chemo Week." When I say that to myself, it makes me think of "Shark Week" on the Discovery Channel, especially considering that a film crew is following me. But I'm honestly more afraid of sharks.*

*In the X-ray waiting room, the TVs are blasting "The View."*

This kind of semantically contextual control is diametrically opposed to the former. The former incorporates personal new knowledge, which needs the update of common-known basis, whereas the latter draws support from presupposed public, social knowledge, which can make themselves understood self-evidently (Eg. *mohawk* as a Native American people). But the potential effect of the latter is also huge because of such knowledge's long-existing popularity and influence. Furthermore, Suleika's affinity with the popular culture is a more pervasive and profound manifestation of her intent to successfully make a friendly, conducive, and profound communication with the audience, and her reference to literature typically also attests she has been well-educated and has a real knack for being a prominent writer.

Thus, as is true for lexical selection and phonological variation, both of these semantic variations manifest in Suleika's discourse are highly associated with the contextual control that is realized via K-device in her discourse. Also, this realization, as analyzed in the preceding paragraphs, echoes with the ultimate objectives pinpointed in Suleika's underlying context model and boosts their successful realization.

#### **4.3.6 Pragmatic Variation**

Discourse variation is contextually controlled since without different context models it by definition has no pragmatic functions (van Dijk, 2008: 140). Pragmatics sheds light on how the transmission of meaning depends on the context of the utterance, and, hence, the examination of pragmatic control of the context model focuses on how the utterances, otherwise improper or incomprehensible, are justified under the particular communicative circumstance.

When it comes to posting the diagnosis and other experiences with cancer on social media, Suleika takes a distinct way to write her narratives:

*After all, in the land of Facebook, I didn't have cancer yet. ... Online, I was still a healthy recent college graduate, who was "in a relationship" and liked jazz and Ryan Gosling. ... I now officially had cancer, on Facebook.*

Such characterization of pragmatic choice, original yet a bit eccentric, departs from convention but proves its credibility in that cancer and death are typically stigmatized as taboos or awkwardness with pessimism. However, it also manifests a hilarious and humorous tone, which is contrary to the somber tone of death discourse.

Similar bittersweet "jokes" are prevailing in the corpora:

*If only I could sue my body for breach of contract with the natural order of things.*

*... a man with a sleeveless shirt and a bandanna covering his hairless head leaned in toward my father, who's been bald since the '80s, and raised his fist in the air: "Live strong, brother," he said. Later, my dad and I had a good laugh about the mix-up...*

Suleika makes a witty claim against her body and rummages certain entertaining episodes to ease the tight nerves of her and the audience's for a moment. The magnificence of illuminating humour among shrouded melancholy and depression escalate Suleika's leverage of context model. Indeed, Suleika must have mustered all of her gallantries to share her experience in public, find the mission of reporting from the first line and establish humour and hope among suffering and isolation. In this respect, Suleika has been invisibly aligned with the audience to face together her abysmal life though covered by humor. Furthermore, the emphasis of boldness, a typical overt external evidence of covert cancer, is also a kind of employment of bottom-up power in texts. It is an attempt to voice against the hurtful discrimination or stereotype of cancer patients.

As mentioned in 4.3.1, the description of Suleika's relationship with family, friends and medical workers accounts for a large amount in topic choice, which also embodies certain pragmatic variation under the contextual control.

*I couldn't help but feel a bit like an inmate shackled to the schedule of the outside world. I remember guiltily feeling envious, and eventually somewhat resentful, of my visitors when they left my room. "I'm taking a break, and I'll be back soon," a friend would say...I, too, desperately needed a break.*

When it comes to Suleika's interaction with her visitors, a quiet normal visit-and-leave is reduced to contradictory behavior. Families or friends go for a visit and leave, which is understood by the author but is annoying as well. She says with certain sarcasm that she also needs certain relaxation like those who lay attention upon her.

*While my oncologists are intent on saving my life — and I am forever indebted to them for this — preserving my chance to be a mother some day just didn't seem to be on their radar.*

*...I'm surrounded 24/7 by the gaze of people who, first and foremost, are concerned with what I have not necessarily who I am. Doctors in face masks stand over my hospital bed, peering down at me. Eyes and ties. And white lab coats. Voices without mouths discuss me as if I weren't in the room. ... The Patient is talked at, looked at, probed, prodded and whispered about. ... But until then, it's hard not to feel like just a body. celebrity ?*

The narrative of medical workers' job concerning a cancer patient also stirs wrath, which is contradictory to the social norm or social knowledge. The attention addressed by doctors is described as something Suleika doesn't want to gain and such a celebrity status is reverse. Under them, Suleika feels less like Suleika, but just a body in isolation to prevent infections with cancer which medical workers focus on. And this body may be deprived of the right to be a mother some day. Hence in the relationship with cares, Suleika representing her dominated community to voice against those who with dominance say and act in a manner they deem right. In this respect, the hidden meanings are elicited during interpreting and analyzing pragmatic control, uncovering ideological assumptions that are embedded in texts.

Therefore, the underlying context model still exercised its control over the discourse production on the pragmatic level. Also, Suleika's utilizing humour and sarcasm as an approach to experience with deep-in-the-bone grief and her interpretation of her relationship with family and medical carers are also a kind of supplement of her real life, in turn, another evidence for her active employment of K-device.

The analysis is done within the level of pragmatic control which uncovers implicit ideology and exposes ideological bias and the exercise of power in the discourse of death and dying. Specifically, Suleika, strategically and intentionally, employs contextual control upon the pragmatic level to manifest the dominated groups' counter-dominance discourse. In this regard, it is proved that CDA also plays a key role in unraveling the hidden ideologies while scrutinizing the presence of power in studies of a discourse of death and dying.

#### **4.4 Suleika Jaouad's Attitude towards Death and Her Identities**

This paper relates these characteristics of multifaceted variations to Suleika Jaouad's approach to death and dying, and to her identities that she constructed. Variation can be more or less consciously controlled and thus becomes functional in specific communicative situations, then its corresponding identities will be part of the context model (van Dijk, 2008: 125) With the specific elaboration in 3.2, we can arrive at that Suleika's discourse structures are systematically controlled by context structures, and conversely, these discourse dimensions, in turn, influence the context models, that is, the interpretation and representation of the ongoing communicative event.

Suleika's attitude towards death has not been made explicit, as examined in 4.3.3 lexicons like "mortal" and "death" rarely appear in her narratives. Suleika is typical of an optimistic patient in facing traumatic cancer and life. Yet, her attitude towards death and cancer is fluctuating in a mix of hope and despair, which is chronically in congruence with the table in 4.3.3. Specifically, she feels shocked and depressed when told about the diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia at a young age, then tries to adapt to such a kind of unusual lifestyle and is in a tendency to positive emotions, which ends with a climax of the whole narratives, that is she wants to give up and quit for the first time since the diagnosis. And finally, she gradually returns to a normal track of life with certain freedom and is able or permitted to keep a pet dog and travel, during which she finishes her chemotherapy treatments and recalls her burning hope for life.

"Variable salience or hierarchy of and variable strengths of (subjective) contextual constraints" (van Dijk, 2008: 134) influence how social identities are indexed in discourse (van Dijk, 2008: 134). Upon identity construction, Suleika appears as a daughter, a novice columnist, and a young American female with cancer voicing for her community girl. Closely connected with her identities, her attitudes towards cancer and death are dynamically change from worry to hope. As mentioned in the pragmatic control, the seemingly contradictory points inspire Suleika and the readers to procure certain liberation from the sad and solemn topics with the doze of funny and humorous elements, which also indirectly reflects Suleika's optimistic attitude.

## **V. Conclusion**

### **5.1 Major findings and Implications**



This paper has examined discourse structures that are systematically controlled by the postulated, underlying context structures, and conversely, how such discourse dimensions may in turn influence the context models of participants, particularly, the speaker's identity construction and attitude towards death. It firstly can be arrived at the conclusion that the hypothesis is true, that is, there's an interwoven relationship between the context model and the discursive practices of Suleika Jaouad. Secondly, the raised questions can be addressed: For one thing, the underlying context model, strategically and hierarchically, leveraged its direct control upon the discourse production via frequent employment of k-device, and the direct contextual control upon phonological level is beyond the study's attempt, which is surprising serendipity. For another, Suleika's attitude towards life and death features ongoing change and a mix of pessimism and optimism; while her identities, as a cancer patient, a youngster, a daughter, a columnist, and a woman are typically prominently constructed compared with other ones. Thirdly, this study demonstrates that the mechanism of context model, featuring socio-cognitive interface and human-mediation, not only benefits the language user address the dire construction of death and dying (eg. make the narratives of experience with life-threatening cancer produced and publicized), but also does avail to make other communicative (eg. close the distance with the audience) goals a reality.

It is important that death is not made invisible, and that life at the same time has room for death (Österlind et al., 2011). Life is full of complexities and uncertainties, which need individuals' attempt to bring control every day. Though this study takes Suleika's discourse as a case, the procured findings are not exclusive to this study. The same is true for Suleika's attitudes and identities, manifested in the construction or sense-making of death and dying discourse, more specifically, her narratives of interrupted life by cancer. Hence the edification of life drawing from the discourse of death and dying.

As repeatedly mentioned in the discourse, Suleika appears as a typical representative of a community of young female cancer patients, which is also her priming identity. Though she pursues her dream as a writer, she voiced for the whole marginalized minority against discrimination, cancer-centered treatment and for patient-centered treatment, not merely herself. The discrimination and ideologies embedded in the discourse of death and dying are unmasked in 4.3.6 and the complex relationships between carers and patient are also uncovered. Hence, this study encourages the public to give more toleration towards the observable characteristic of cancer patients (such as hairless) and the carers, including medical workers, family and friends, to put more emphasis on the patient's emotion while revolving around cancer in the patient's body. Certain cardinal issues concerning humans, like fertility, should be addressed appropriately with cancer patients.

This study, to some extent, potentially can exert its significance in the domain of medical treatment. Especially in palliative care or oncology therapy, a particular understanding of death and dying, with their probability ranging from zero to one hundred is of crucial significance to care for the terminally ill and the dying. It can partly boost the systematic standardization of modern medical access to resources, care choices, and treatment choices, including the choices of text and talk around the end of life.

## 5.2 Limitations

As mentioned in 1.2 and 5.1, the research is of great efficacy. However, this study recognizes two major limitations in its effort to examine the discourse of death and dying under van Dijk's context model theory.

First, though this study adopted a corpus-assisted method and conducted data collection and data analyzing randomly and statistically to undermine the unfathomable, inextricable subjectivity of CDA, the underpinned authority and objectivity may need to be further honed. A cohesive methodology integrating better both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis is required.

Second, though elaborately developed certain decades, van Dijk's context mode, pertain to a socio-cognitive approach to CDA, is still an opaquely speculated hypothesis (van Dijk, 2008: 99). without detailed experimental (and other empirical) studies. A great deal of empirical exploration is needed to prove the feasibility of this model, so as to account for the discourse-society relation and discourse-context relation in a more convincing, profound manner.

Therefore, the future research to promote this study could be better embarked with the reinforced cohesive methodology, the intensified practice guidance of context model under socio-cognitive approach, as well as the consolidated interdisciplinary support.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., KhosraviNik, M., Krzyżanowski, M., McNery, T., & Wodak, R. (2008). A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press. *Discourse & Society*, 19(3), 273-306.
- [2]. Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [3]. Blommaert, J. (2005) *Discourse: A critical introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [4]. Candrian, Carey. (2014). Taming death and the consequences of discourse. *Human Relations (New York)*, 67(1), 53-69.
- [5]. Carpentier, Nico, & Van Brussel, Leen. (2012). On the contingency of death: A discourse-theoretical perspective on the construction of death. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 9(2), 99-115.

- [6]. Chilton, P. (2005). Missing Links in Mainstream CDA: Modules, Blends and the Critical Instinct. Wodak, R. & P. Chilton. *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, methodology and interdisciplinarity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 2005. 19-52.
- [7]. Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing Political Discourse*. London: Routledge.
- [8]. Davis-Berman, J. (2011). Conversations about death: Talking to residents in independent, assisted, and long-term care settings. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 30(3), 353-369.
- [9]. Deetz S and McClellan J (2009) Critical studies. In: Bargiela F (Ed.) *Handbook of business discourse*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 119-131.
- [10]. Demjén, Z., Semino, E., & Koller, V. (2016). Metaphors for 'good' and 'bad' deaths: a health professional view. *Metaphor & the Social World*, 6(1), 1-19.
- [11]. Demmen, J., Semino, E., Demjén, Z., Koller, V., Hardie, A., Rayson, P., et al. (2015). A computer-assisted study of the use of violence metaphors for cancer and end of life by patients, family carers and health professionals. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 20(2), 205-231.
- [12]. Elliott, Jaklin A, & Olver, Ian N. (2007). Hope and hoping in the talk of dying cancer patients. *Social Science & Medicine* (1982), 64(1), 138-149.
- [13]. Fairclough N (1995) *Media discourse*. London: Arnold.
- [14]. Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd Ed.).
- [15]. Fairclough, Norman, & Fairclough, Isabela. (2018). A procedural approach to ethical critique in CDA. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 15(2), 169-185.
- [16]. Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (Vol. 2, pp. 258-284). London: Sage.
- [17]. Flowerdew, J., & Richardson, J. E. (2017). *The routledge handbook of critical discourse studies*. Routledge.
- [18]. Fowler, R., Hodge, B., Kress, G., & Trew, T. (1979). *Language and control*. London: Routledge & K. Paul.
- [19]. Gleason, J. B., Ely, R., Perlmann, R. Y. and Narasimhan, B. (1996). Patterns of prohibition in parent-child discourse, in Julie Gerhardt and Dan Isaac Slobin (Eds.), *Social interaction, social context, and language: essays in honor of Susan Ervin-Tripp*, 205-217. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- [20]. Gilbert K. R. (2002). Taking a narrative approach to grief research: Finding meaning in stories. *Death studies*, 26(3), 223-239.
- [21]. Hall, E.T. (1976) *Beyond culture*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- [22]. Higgins, Michael. (2004). Putting the nation in the news: The role of location formulation in a selection of Scottish newspapers. *Discourse & Society*, 15(5), 633-648.
- [23]. Jewitt C (2009) *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London and New York: Routledge.
- [24]. Kress G and Van Leeuwen T (2001) *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold
- [25]. Meyer, M. (2001). Between Theory, Method, and Politics: Positioning of the Approaches of CDA. In R. Wodak, & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 14-32). London: Sage Publications.
- [26]. Österlind, Jane, Hansebo, Görel, Andersson, Janicke, Ternstedt, Britt-Marie, & Hellström, Ingrid. (2011). A discourse of silence: Professional carers reasoning about death and dying in nursing homes. *Ageing and Society*, 31(4), 529-544.
- [27]. van Dijk, T. A. (2001) Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, D. Schiffrin and H. Hamilton (Eds.), *Handbook of discourse analysis*, 352-371. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [28]. Van Dijk, Teun A. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage.
- [29]. Van Dijk, Teun A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249-283.
- [30]. Van Dijk, Teun A. (1980). *Macrostructures: An interdisciplinary study of global structures in discourse, interaction, and cognition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [31]. Van Dijk, Teun A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage
- [32]. Van Dijk, Teun A. (2008). *Discourse and context : A socio-cognitive approach*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [33]. Wodak, R. (2006). *Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis*. In J. Verschueren & J. Ostman (Eds.). *Handbook of pragmatics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- [34]. Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (2016) *Methods of critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory and methodology*. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 3rd Ed, 1-33. London: Sage.
- [35]. Widdowson, H. G. (1995). Discourse analysis: A critical view. *Language and Literature*, 4(3), 157-172.
- [36]. Wildfeuer, Janina, Schnell, Martin W, & Schulz, Christian. (2015). Talking about dying and death. *Discourse & Society*, 26(3), 366-390.
- [37]. Zimmermann, C. (2012). Acceptance of dying: a discourse analysis of palliative care literature. *Social Science & Medicine*, 75( 1), 217-224.
- [38]. Zimmermann, C. (2007). Death denial: Obstacle or instrument for palliative care: An analysis of clinical literature. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 29(2), 297-314.
- [39]. 丁建新, & 廖益清. (2001). 批评话语分析述评. 当代语言学, 3(4), 305-310.
- [40]. 高一虹. (2017). 专栏主持人语. 中国社会语言学(01), 1.
- [41]. 高一虹. (2019). 死亡话语类型与社会变迁探索. 外语研究(02), 1-6+112.
- [42]. 黄芳. (2017). 国际期刊死亡话语研究文献计量分析——以1992—2016年的SSCI为基础. 中国社会语言学(01), 26-39.
- [43]. 黄芳. (2019). 肿瘤科和安宁疗护医患沟通话语研究——国际期刊文献计量分析. 外国语言文学(01), 45-59.
- [44]. 刘立华, 韦荣波. (2020). 2019年国内批评话语研究综述. 天津外国语大学学报(06), 131-140.
- [45]. 刘文字, 李珂. (2016). 国外批评性话语分析研究趋势的可视化分析. 外语研究, 33(02): 39-45.
- [46]. 毛浩然. (2014). 弱势群体话语反操控策略研究——以《自然》致歉叶诗文事件为例. 福建师范大学学报(3), 103-112.
- [47]. 毛浩然 高丽珍 徐赳赳. (2015). van Dijk 话语理论体系的建构与完善. 中国外语, (5), 31-40.
- [48]. 汪徽 张辉. (2014). van Dijk 的多学科语境理论述评. 外国语, 37(2), 78-85.
- [49]. 田海龙. (2021) 批评话语研究之“话语互动”新路径. 外语学刊, (02): 16-22.
- [50]. 王景云. (2016). 死亡话语研究综述. 天津外国语大学学报(02), 1-7+80.
- [51]. 徐赳赳. (2019). 篇章语用研究70年. 载于刘丹青(主编), 新中国语言文字研究70年. 北京: 中国社会科学出版社.