

**The Definition of Context  
and  
its Implications for Language Teaching**

**by**

**Eva Illes**

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## **Abstract**

The notion of context has come to the fore in recent years both in the study and teaching of language. Despite the overriding importance attached to the concept and the number and variety of definitions provided, the lack of a comprehensive and workable definition based on systematic analysis has become increasingly apparent.

The present thesis intends to clear up the confusion that surrounds the concept. Its main contribution is a theoretical framework of two distinct perspectives on context, which emerges as a result of the scrutiny of numerous definitions available in language study. The framework is then applied to the investigation and categorisation of interpretations of context offered by various theories in linguistics.

The pedagogic implementation of the framework aims to identify which conception of context has informed a particular language teaching development. Once that has been established, it is examined how the application of one or the other perspective determines the constitution and characteristics of various trends in language pedagogy.

It is demonstrated that a clear understanding of the type of context model adopted by different language teaching practices can reveal the incongruent nature of approaches and methods commonly described as communicative. As a corollary, more recent developments attempting to broaden the scope of the communicative movement are also explored.

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## Preamble

### Why the Notion of Context?

#### Context in Language Study

Since a shift from the paradigm of language as a formal system to the paradigm of the language user has taken place in linguistics (Mey 1993), context has become a key notion in language study.

The growth of interest in how language is used in real-life situations and what people mean when they exploit its meaning potential has been, in part, a reaction to Chomsky's treatment of language and the language user as abstract entities (Chomsky 1965:3). Questions concerning actual language use have been raised and it has become obvious that they can only be answered if the scope of linguistics is expanded and reference is made to the context in which language occurs.

As a consequence, the study of meaning has become the business of two distinct areas of inquiry in linguistics. Whereas *semantics* is concerned with the ways meaning is encoded in language, *pragmatics* focuses on meaning in context (Levinson 1983, Widdowson 1996b).<sup>\*</sup> Meaning which inheres in the linguistic sign as a stable semantic property is called *symbolic*. *Indexical* meaning, on the other hand, is achieved pragmatically in relation to some context (Widdowson 1990:82). The sentence "Lovely day, isn't it?" may take on a variety of meanings in different contexts of use, depending on the specific features of situation the linguistic sign is linked to by the language user. The question above can, for instance, serve as a formulaic expression in the context of greeting, but can often mean the opposite when uttered in an ironic tone on a dull, rainy day. Alternatively, it may function as an expression of mockery when two learners of English replicate a cliché-ridden dialogue from their textbook outside the classroom. In any case, it is this meaning the sentence obtains when it becomes an utterance in relation to a context that forms the concern of pragmatics.

Since context is a feature that generally distinguishes pragmatics from

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<sup>\*</sup> It must be borne in mind that not all linguists agree with such demarcation or terminology. What has been considered pragmatics in the present study, for instance, represents semantics for Firth and Halliday. Similar inconsistency of definition characterises some other notions, language use and usage in particular.

semantics, definitions of pragmatics are frequently formulated in reference to it. Pragmatics has thus been seen as the inquiry into the contribution context makes to meaning (Yule 1996:92), or the examination of contextual and speaker meaning i.e. the interpretation of what people mean by their utterances in a particular context and how the context influences what is being said (Yule 1996:3).

The relationship between language and context has been of special interest. As a result of it, pragmatics is often defined as the study of the correspondence or systematic relation of a language to situation and/or context (Oller 1970:506; Richards et al. 1992:284; Brown and Levinson in Yule 1996:109), or “the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding” (Levinson 1983:20).

Some definitions are formulated in terms of the constraints context may present. On the one hand, pragmatics is therefore viewed as “the study of the conditions of human language uses as these are determined by the context of society” (Mey 1993:42). On the other hand, there are linguists (Mey (1993) and Yule (1996)) who stress the role of the language user, refer to user’s context, and treat pragmatics as the investigation of the role of context in speaker meaning.

The context of society Mey cites and the systematic relations between language and context appear to delimit the inquiry to the first type of context provided for the sentence “Lovely day, isn’t it?”. It is the kind of situation whereby, due to common occurrence and predictability, it is relatively easy to establish a systematic correspondence between language and the social context. The ironic remark and the mockery of textbook dialogues, on the other hand, suggest less conventional contexts where the individual user’s role is emphasised (Mey 1993, Yule 1996). It is this area of specific local conditions of language use that Leech (1983:10) excludes from pragmatics, but which other linguists like Yule consider integral to the inquiry.

As the examples demonstrate, there exists an array of descriptions of pragmatics which has been partly brought about by the wide variety of contextual interpretations available in language study. The ambiguity surrounding the notion of context thus affects other areas of linguistic theory and results in the lack of a commonly accepted, standard definition for such a fundamental notion as pragmatics.

Although context has been central to new developments in linguistic theory and is frequently evoked not only in linguistics but in other disciplines concerned with language



use such as cognitive psychology (Clark & Carlson 1981), what constitutes the concept has generally remained unclear. Attempts to elucidate the notion have only given rise to an increasing number of descriptions, which often complement or even contradict each other. Given these circumstances, it seems that an unequivocal definition of context in linguistic theory is not only essential but long overdue as well.

### **Context in Language Pedagogy**

Alongside language study, significant changes have taken place in language teaching too. Dissatisfaction with the then dominant practices led teaching experts to turn to linguistic theory to develop new, more efficient approaches. Following linguistic trends, the attention has shifted from displaying knowledge of abstract linguistic rules to the ability to exploit this knowledge for effective communication in actual situations within language pedagogy as well. The name of the movement reflects the new emphasis: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The aim of CLT is to promote *use*, that is meaning achieved in context, and the realisation of the language system through utterances rather than *usage*, i.e. the production of sentences which manifest the language system without any informing context (Widdowson 1978). In fact, the focus on use and context has become not only the basic premise but the force that binds together various approaches and methods under the umbrella term of CLT.

In spite of the apparent unity, however, basic principles, such as *authenticity* and *learner-centredness* have obtained contrasting interpretations within CLT (Widdowson 1996a). Other contradictions have arisen from a difference of emphasis, and it has largely remained unclear as to what exactly teaching communicatively in context entails: is it practising real-life situations, teaching notions and functions or creating conditions for effective learning which may considerably differ from real-life situations outside the classroom?

In the light of these fundamental discrepancies it appears reasonable to assume that the problem is rooted at the heart of the matter, i.e. that the various readings of key concepts may, in fact, be brought about by different interpretations of context across the approaches and methods bundled together in CLT. An analysis of context, however, cannot be carried out unless there exists an authoritative definition which can serve as a template for pedagogic investigation.

So even though context looms large in language teaching too, it has retained the kind of indefiniteness and multifacety that characterises the notion in linguistic theory. One reason for this may be the fact that language education has taken over context from linguistics without having really made systematic inquiries as to what implications the various linguistic theories and definitions have for the concept. The result has been an even wider array of often narrow or loose interpretations and a lack of concerted effort to delineate the term.

The burning need for the clarification and standardisation of context has thus been carried over from language study and is prevalent in language pedagogy as well.

### **The Contribution of Present Thesis**

It has become evident in the above sections that although context plays an important role both in language study and pedagogy, neither has yet offered a definition which could equally be applied to the theory of language use and the practice of teaching.

The premise of this thesis is that context being such a pivotal concept needs to be properly described. Since in-depth and comprehensive analyses of the notion are scarce in language pedagogy, it is suggested that we turn to linguistics to examine how the definitions and models developed by language theory can bring about a comprehensive framework which then can be employed for pedagogic investigations.

The goal of this research is to effectively apply linguistics, i.e. to utilise the findings of language study for pedagogic purposes. In so doing, the thesis aims to fill the hiatus caused by the absence of an authoritative definition and intends to propose a workable contextual construct which can successfully be exploited for the analysis of various linguistic and language teaching movements.

End note: It must be pointed out that there is substantial overlap between the domains of pragmatics and discourse analysis as defined by Schiffrin (1994) and Coulthard (1977) for example. Although Schiffrin treats pragmatics as one of the six approaches within discourse analysis (DA), in DA she includes areas other linguists defining pragmatics in a wider sense also explore e.g. speech act theory, the ethnography of speaking etc.

In the present work, it is suggested that, by and large, two schools of thought should be distinguished, which define discourse analysis either in *quantitative* or *qualitative* terms. The former determines discourse analysis as the study of language organisation above the sentence (Stubbs 1983:1) and

focuses on the structure and combinations of text chunks (Schiffrin 1994). The latter regards the discipline as the analysis of contextualised stretches of language perceived to be meaningful and construed out of motivated choices by the language users for some communicative purpose (Cook 1989:156, Cook 1994a:1, Batstone 1994:136). (In fact, the division presented here corresponds to Schiffrin's (1994:42) distinction identifying two perspectives within discourse analysis according to their varying emphasis on structure and function.) As the qualitative definition - which entails factors other than language and is concerned with the way sentences are put to communicative use in the performing of social actions (Widdowson 1979:93) - goes beyond the scope of text analysis, it is considered to be the kind of discourse analysis which coincides with pragmatics in this thesis.

# Chapter 1

## Definitions and Models of Context

### 1.1 Definitions of Context in Language Study

#### 1.1.1 A Selection of Definitions

As a first attempt to grasp context, a selection of concise but often cursory definitions will be examined. A closer inspection will reveal that, despite their apparent diversity, these descriptions share commonalities and generalisable features which can serve as building blocks in the construction of a framework for the systematic analysis of context.

(1.) “The features of the non-linguistic world in relation to which linguistic units are systematically used. The term 'situation' is also used in this sense, as in the compound term 'situational context'.

(1a.) In its broadest sense, situational context includes the *total* non-linguistic background to a text or utterance, including the immediate situation in which it is used, and the awareness by speaker and hearer of what has been said earlier and of any relevant external beliefs or PRESUPPOSITIONS.

(1b.) Others restrict the term to what is immediately observable in the co-occurring situation.” (Crystal 1985:71)

(2.) “The CONTEXT of an utterance is a small subpart of the universe of discourse shared by speaker and hearer, and includes facts about the topic of the conversation in which the utterance occurs, and also facts about the situation in which the conversation itself takes place. ... The exact context of any utterance can never be specified with complete certainty. The notion of context is very flexible (even somewhat vague).” (Hurford & Heasley 1983:68-9)

(3.) “The role of context is not easy to assess and define. One difficulty is that relevant context is not always directly available to the researcher. The researcher may have access to the **immediate physical environment** in which communication takes place (including speaker, hearer, co-present others, location in time and space, activity, etc.), and may have access to the **verbal environment** in which a given verbal act is couched (e.g., prior and subsequent discourse). However, although these dimensions of context are significant, they do not exhaust

the range of utterance-external variables that affect the use and interpretation of verbal behavior. To assess the import of a language user's behavior, one must consider the **social and psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time.** " (Ochs 1979:1-2).

"The concept of context includes, minimally, language users' beliefs, and assumptions about temporal, spatial, and social settings; prior, ongoing, and future actions (verbal, non-verbal), and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those participating in the social interaction at hand. " (Ochs 1979:5)

(4a.) "CONTEXT has been understood in various ways, for example to include 'relevant' aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance.

(4b.) I shall consider context to be any background knowledge assumed to be shared by *s* and *h* and which contributes to *h*'s interpretation of what *s* means by a given utterance." (Leech 1983:13)

(5.) "A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions of the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediately physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation." (Sperber & Wilson 1986:15-6)

(6.) "However, the context of an utterance cannot simply be identified with the spatiotemporal situation in which it occurs: it must be held to include, not only the relevant objects and actions taking place at the time, but also the knowledge shared by the speaker and hearer of what has been said earlier, in so far as this is pertinent to the understanding of the utterance. It must also be taken to include the tacit acceptance by the speaker and hearer of all relevant conventions, beliefs and presuppositions 'taken for granted' by the members of the speech community to which the speaker and hearer belong. The fact that it is in practice, and perhaps also in principle, impossible to give a full account of all these 'contextual' features should not be taken as a reason for denying their existence or their relevance." (Lyons 1968:413)

(7.) "What then might one mean by *context*? First, one needs to distinguish between actual situations of utterance in their multiplicity of features, and the selection of just those features that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the production and interpretation of utterances (...). The term *context*, of course, labels the latter (...).

Although, ..., we may be able to reduce the vagueness by providing lists of relevant

contextual features, we do not seem to have available any theory that will predict the relevance of all such features, and this is perhaps an embarrassment to a definition that seems to rely on the notion of context.” (Levinson 1983:22-3)

(8.) “It is, obviously, not possible for us in a textbook to permit you to have the experience of everyday discourse in what Stenning (1978) calls a 'normal context', where the hearer is part of the context and then experiences the text. We have to have recourse to what Stenning calls 'abnormal' contexts, where the analyst reads the text and then has to try to provide the characteristics of the context in which the text might have occurred.” (Brown & Yule 1983:41-2)

(9.) “The situations which prompt people to utter speech, include every object and happening in the universe. In order to give a scientifically accurate definition of meaning for every form of a language, we should have to have a scientifically accurate knowledge of everything in the speaker's world. The actual extent of human knowledge is very small, compared to this.” (Bloomfield 1935:139)

(10.) “Whereas a COMMUNICATIVE SITUATION is an empirically real part of the real world in which a great number of facts exist which have no SYSTEMATIC connection with the utterance (either as an object or as an act), such as the temperature, the height of the speaker, or whether grass is growing, a context is a highly idealized abstraction from such a situation and contains only those facts which systematically determine the appropriateness of conventional utterances. Part of such contexts will for example be speech participants and their internal structures (knowledge, beliefs, purposes, intentions), the acts themselves and their structures, a spatio-temporal characterization of the context in order to localize it in some actual possible world, etc.”

“The first property of context to be emphasized is its 'dynamic' character. A context is not just one possible world-state, but at least a sequence of world-states. Moreover, these situations do not remain identical in time, but *change*. Hence, a context is a COURSE OF EVENTS.” (van Dijk 1977a:191-2)

(11.) Context ... “which occurs before and/or after a word, a phrase or even a longer utterance or a text. The context often helps in understanding the particular meaning of the words, phrase etc. For example, the word *loud* in *loud music* is usually understood as meaning "noisy" whereas in *tie with a loud pattern* is understood as "unpleasantly colourful.” (Richards et al. 1992:82)

(12.) “Context refers to the situation giving rise to the discourse, and within which the discourse is embedded. There are two different types of context. The first of these is the linguistic

context - the language that surrounds or accompanies the piece of discourse under analysis. The second is the non-linguistic or experiential context within which the discourse takes place. Non-linguistic contexts include: the type of communicative event (for example, joke, story, lecture, greeting, conversation); the topic; the purpose of the event; the setting, including location, time of day, season of year and physical aspects of the situation (for example, size of room, arrangement of furniture); the participants and the relationships between them; and the **background knowledge** and assumptions underlying the communicative event.” (Nunan 1993a:7-8)

(13a.) “In other words, context is a schematic construct. It is not ‘out there’, so to speak, but in the mind.” (Widdowson 1996b:63)

(13b.) “Those aspects of the circumstances of actual language use which are taken as relevant to meaning.” (Widdowson 1996b:126)

(14.) “ The physical environment in which a word is used.” (Yule 1996:128)

(15a.) “‘Give me all the information, and I’ll predict what is going to happen, what this or that utterance is supposed to mean.’ However, this kind of method will never work, because the concept of context that is invoked here is purely static; it bears a certain likeness to the thinking of classical physics, where conditions preceding a particular state of affairs in the physical world are thought of as completely determining the next development: a bit like a controlled experiment in the physics classroom or in the laboratory.” (Mey 1993:8)

(15b.) “A context is *dynamic*, that is to say, it is an environment that is in steady development, prompted by the continuous interaction of the people engaged in language use, the users of the language. Context is the quintessential pragmatic concept; it is by definition *proactive*, just as people are.” (Mey 1993:10)

### 1.1.2 Analysis

The two questions the definitions seem to address concern

- a) what subpart of the universe context comprises, and
- b) to what extent context is accessible to and describable by the researcher.

Only Richard’s definition (11) restricts the notion to the linguistic environment in which language items occur, i.e. to *co-text*. Other descriptions either regard co-text as part of the context (3,5,12), or separate the linguistic and non-linguistic worlds and determine context in terms of the latter only (1).

Yule (14) and 'others' in Crystal's definition (1b) perceive context as the *physical* environment in which language is used. Most authors, however, tend to view the immediate physical setting as one of the various constituents that make up the notion (1,3,5,6,12).

In three cases (4,5,13a), context is seen as a purely psychological entity, which does not exist in the outside world but prevails in the mind of the speaker/hearer and should be seen as a set of assumptions about the world.

The majority of definitions, however, reveal a multifaceted concept which amalgamates not only the linguistic and physical environment but other aspects, such as the psychological or social (1,2,3,5,6,9,10,12). While in some cases no attempt is made to itemise the components (9,13a,13b), in definitions 1,2,3,5,6,10 and 12, the notion is broken down into some or all of the following constituent parts: the spatio-temporal and verbal environment and the social and psychological world of language users.

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Some authors (2,3,6,7,) highlight the acute problem of pinning down the concept. For Bloomfield (9) the reason is quantitative: as, in his view, a scientifically accurate description of context should include 'everything' both from the outside and inside world, the task of specifying exactly the phenomenon which triggers off speech is practically impossible.

Ochs (3) attributes the difficulties to the fact that a significant part of the notion, the social and psychological attributes, is inaccessible to the researcher and cannot therefore be analysed in terms of variables like the immediate physical or verbal environment.

Furthermore, in a number of definitions context does not appear to be constant or predictable. Expressions such as 'any' (1a,3,4b) and 'may' (3,5) used in connection with the notion underline the indefiniteness and fortuitousness that characterises the concept - features which are explicitly stated by definitions that refer to context as 'flexible', 'dynamic' and 'proactive' (2,10,15b).



### 1.1.3 Issues Arising

#### 1.1.3.1 Terminology

With regard to the setting in which an utterance takes place two expressions are used: *context* and *situation*. In definition 1., it is noted that the terms 'situation', 'situational context' and 'context' are often interchangeable and mainly signify 'the non-linguistic world in relation to which linguistic units are systematically used.' In a similar vein, the boundary between context and situation is blurred in extract 12., where context is defined as situation which functions both as a prompt (also definition 9.) and the 'container' of discourse.

Elsewhere, however, a clear distinction is made between the two terms. While situation is viewed as the 'actual', 'empirically real' part of the real world (6,7,10), context is conceived as an abstract notion derived from situation (10).

Alongside the actuality/abstraction axis, situation and context are also distinguished with regard to the domains they encompass. Whereas situation is described en masse, as the total setting with a multiplicity of elements (7,9,10), context comprises only a selection of those features of the situation which become important in instances of language use (4,6,7,10). Unlike situation, context here forms a systematic connection with the utterance in that it either determines the language used (1) or, more broadly, affects the interpretation or meaning of an utterance (4b,5,6,13b). In extract 10., the relevant features of situation that constitute context are restricted to the specific function of ensuring the appropriateness of conventional utterances. In these definitions the notion of *relevance* becomes crucial since it serves as the device that separates context as a set of relevant features from situation which is perceived as a set of all - both relevant and irrelevant - components.

The question of who decides which constituents of situation should be considered relevant is addressed indirectly in definition 8. In natural contexts (or 'normal' as Stenning calls them, see def. 8) it is the *participant* who interprets the text and therefore defines the relevant features of the situation. In what is described as 'abnormal' context, however, it is the *analyst*, an outsider acting post factum, who works out relevance from the text and, in fact, re-creates context.

### 1.1.3.2 Opposing Perspectives

The actuality/abstraction distinction, which separates context from situation, is not the only polarity that emerges from the definitions. In fact, when exploring the nature of context, most linguists seem to perceive the notion in terms of opposite ends. The aim of what follows is to identify these poles and look at them in some detail.

#### a) Context: physical or mental?

The notion of context as a merely physical and observable phenomenon (1,4a,14) and context as a solely psychological/schematic construct (4b,5,13a) seem to represent the two ends of a continuum with definitions in between incorporating both qualities (1,2,3,6,10,12).

Sperber and Wilson (5) who, like Widdowson (13a), argue that context is an exclusively mental entity, point out that the two worlds (the physical and the inner) may, in fact, be not only qualitatively different but contradictory too: the interpretation created by an individual on a particular occasion may considerably differ from what the other interactants see as the actual, 'objective' state of affairs.

Placing context in the mental domain, however, renders the notion less observable and analysable (3). Hence the claim that it is impossible to specify all relevant contextual features with complete certainty (2,3,7,9).

#### b) Context: individual or social?

Within the notion of context as a mental phenomenon, the social and the individual/psychological world of the language user are distinguished (3,4).

Although no definition elaborates on the nature of context as a social entity, references to conventions (6), culturally relevant features (7) and external beliefs and presuppositions (1b) point to the fact that there must be underlying commonalities that characterise interaction within a speech community. These regularities may also serve as reference points for the analysts who, being expert users of the language, can observe and identify what is 'taken for granted' by members of their speech community.

By linking context to *appropriateness*, van Dijk (10) indicates what nature these rules of use may be. Relevance, the device that separates the empirically real communicative situation from the 'highly idealized' context, in his case is related to a set of rules which determine socially acceptable language behaviour.

Context seen as a psychological construct (5,13a), on the other hand, appears to include not only general cultural assumptions but individual elements such as 'anecdotal memories' as well. The unpredictability and unconventionality of the many idiosyncrasies of a person's mind then make it impossible to establish the same straightforward relationship with an utterance that van Dijk's conventional situations entail.

c) Context: concrete or abstract?

Reference to context as immediately observable (1b) renders the notion a *concrete* phenomenon. As has been observed earlier in 1.1.3.1, some definitions (7, 10) assign this attribute to situation which is often seen as 'actual', or 'empirically real' as opposed to context which is a 'highly *idealized* abstraction' (10). The latter is a research convenience which narrows the domain of context and renders the notion suitable for scientific investigation.

The reason for this is that whereas the description of context as an actual happening necessarily includes temporary, fortuitous and individual features, context as an abstract notion is the product of some kind of idealisation process that strips the concrete situation of these atypical elements. The outcome is a generalisation, the subject of standard inquiries.

d) Context: dynamic or static?

Mey (15b) and van Dijk (10) view context as a phenomenon which undergoes continuous change and never remains identical - both within and between situations. Each stage of this constant development represents a different world-state prompted by the continuous interaction between people.

Mey (15a) points out that there is another way of looking at context which, in his opinion, resembles traditional scientific research. It is similar to what Stenning (8) calls the 'abnormal context' whereby the analysts reconstruct the context. This procedure,

however, can only be carried out if all relevant information about the nature of context is presented in an accessible form to the linguist. Mey is also aware of the fact that the perception of context as a dynamic psychological construct inevitably requires an approach which is fundamentally different from the classical *modus operandi*. He, however, fails to suggest what kind of alternative means of delineation are available or would be suitable to describe context as a flexible entity.

#### 1.1.4 Conclusion

The definitions of context above have shed light on the wide variety of interpretations linguistic theory offers. They have also confirmed that there is no general agreement as to what constitutes the concept and how it should be described.

Despite the uncertainties, the investigation has proved worthwhile in that the features, which pertain to context and tend to represent different types of polarities, strongly indicate the prevalence of *opposing views* of the notion. On the one hand, context is presented as an abstract structure which comes about as the result of the analyst's insight, observation and generalisation of predictable states of the world or the mind. On the other hand, context is perceived as a dynamic phenomenon containing fortuitous as well as individual constituents which cannot be prefixed and defined in the conventional way.

Apart from these emerging distinctive perspectives, the analysis of definitions has been beneficial in that it has drawn attention to three key notions which will be crucial for the description of context both in linguistics and language pedagogy.

First of all, the conception of context as a *schema* has emerged, which allows humans into the analysis and renders the inquiry predominantly psychological. This, however, will entail drawbacks. As Yule observes: "The big disadvantage is that all these very human concepts are extremely difficult to analyze in a consistent way." (Yule 1996:4). The second important notion is *relevance*, the significance of which lies in the fact that it determines what features of the situation come into play for the production/interpretation of utterances and create context. The main question that has arisen in this regard is the identity of the person who decides what aspects of the total situation should pertain: the participants who experience or the analysts who reconstruct context. The third concept that has come to the fore is *appropriateness* which implies the

rules of socially accepted language behaviour.

The issues identified in this section are crucial for the thesis in that they form the backbone of the inquiry: the three notions will comprise the core issues of a comprehensive definition, while the polarities are going serve as the skeleton for the proposed framework. In the chapters that follow, the expansion and refinement of the concept of context will therefore be carried out in relation to them throughout.

## 1.2 Firth's Definition of Context

The linguistic study which integrates schema, relevance and appropriateness as well as the polarities of attributes is Firth's delineation of context. Although it presents one of the most comprehensive and authoritative definitions of the notion, its concise nature allows for disparate readings. In addition, Firth's own narrow interpretation raises further questions about the nature of context. The following investigation attempts to exploit these merits and limitations of Firth's view of context to its own advantage and will further elaborate on the concept.

### 1.2.1 Firth's Theory of Meaning

Firth's theory of meaning hinges on the notion of context. Although he consistently refers to semantics, Firth's sole concern is, in fact, *pragmatics* (see Preamble). He refuses to accept that words and sentences can have meanings in and by themselves and firmly believes that "the complete meaning of a word is always contextual, and no study of meaning apart from a complete context can be taken seriously" (Firth 1957:7). All over, Firth argues that no text should be considered meaningful unless it can be referred to some generalised context of situation (Firth 1968:12-3). According to him, sentences such as 'I have not seen your father's pen, but I have read the book of your uncle's gardener.' (Firth 1957:24) may provide apt illustrations of grammar but represent nonsense at the semantic level since they cannot be related to any "observable and justifiable set of events in the run of experience" (Firth 1968:175)\*.

In fact, this exclusive view has been challenged by linguists such as Lyons (1966) who denies that a theory of meaning without semantics is sustainable and maintains that any linguistic description of meaning must account for intra-lingual phenomena (e.g. relations like synonymy and analytical implication etc.) too.

Apart from being thought provoking, Firth's insistence on recognising contextual meaning only has been of further benefit to linguistic study in that for a linguistic theory of this kind a workable definition of context must be a prerequisite.

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\* It must be noted that in reality all sentences, including the one mentioned above, become utterances once they are realised and make sense in reference to the purposes (e.g. irony, mockery, play on words etc.) for which they have been produced. So contrary to Firth's suggestion, seemingly non-sensical sentences, such as the above example or literary texts, can carry meaning at the pragmatic level.

### 1.2.2 Firth's Definition

Firth's attempt has resulted in the following succinct definition:

"My view was, and still is, that 'context of situation' is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events, and that it is a group of related categories at a different level from grammatical categories but rather of the same abstract nature. A context of situation for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:

A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.

(i) The verbal action of the participants.

(ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.

B. The relevant objects.

C. The effect of the verbal action."

(Firth 1957:182)

### 1.2.3 Analysis

#### 1.2.3.1 Key Terms and Characteristics

Firth has borrowed the term 'context of situation' from Malinowski who has coined it to describe the environment in which an utterance becomes meaningful and achieves an "immediate and practical effect" (Malinowski 1935:52).

It is, in fact, Malinowski who has first broadened the conception and interpreted context not as co-text but as the setting in which words acquire meaning. By bursting "the bonds of mere linguistics" and carrying over "into the analysis of the general conditions under which a language is spoken" (Malinowski 1923:306), he has extended the scope of linguistic inquiry and entered the domain of pragmatics.

Firth, who has also been driven by the intention to venture into a realm beyond language, has not simply adopted the term but has made considerable amendments by expanding and elaborating on the notion. Throughout, his main objective has been to transform Malinowski's context of situation into an acceptable and applicable tool of

investigation.

Since such a goal requires a formula which is highly general by nature, Malinowski's perception of context as raw reality with all its immediacy and actuality has been replaced by a fully abstract notion devoid of concreteness (cf. 1.1.3.2c).

Firth has emphasised that the usefulness of this abstraction lies in the "renewal of connection", that is, relating it back to the observable setting from which it has been extracted (Firth 1968:168, 175). He has maintained that "without this constant flux of reapplication to the flux of experience, abstract linguistics has no justification" (Firth 1968:19). The notion of context for Firth can thus serve as intended, i.e. a device of linguistic description which has been generalised from particular instances and is applied back to specific occurrences in order to be able analyse them. In this respect, Firth's context indeed bears a close resemblance to formal grammar as it also represents idealisations at a very general level, perhaps like the pattern of subject-verb-object in the English language (Batstone 1994).

By defining context as a 'schematic construct' Firth presents the concept solely as a *mental* entity (cf. 1.1.3.2a), a schema which is a "general type, essential form, conception of what is common to all members of a class" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 1982:937).

According to Firth, schemata are "frames of reference, a sort of scaffolding for the handling of events" (Firth 1957:181) which have no ontological status in the sense that they do not have existence. They represent generalisations which are "neither immanent nor transcendent" in that they do not exist 'out there' but are not beyond the reach of experience either. They are, in fact, located somewhere between the two and entail mental representations of the stereotypical extracted from experience.

The linguist's task is then to scrutinise "what is objective and observable in the group life of our fellows" (Firth 1968:170), separate out the structures that make up the fabric of human existence and draw up schemata, which are not the depiction of the setting or the background but rather, correspond to a "*set of categories in ordered relations* abstracted from the life of man in the flux of events, from personality in society." (Firth 1968:200, my italics)

Firth has always considered the identification of contexts a feasible undertaking and based it on the premise that although the social world in which we live may appear to be 'chaos of flux' at first, it is, in fact, highly organised by nature. He has argued that the orderliness which prevails in human society finds its way to everyday speech events. As a consequence, conversation "is much more of a roughly prescribed ritual than most people



think” (Firth 1957:28) and “most give-and-take of conversation in our everyday life is stereotyped and very narrowly conditioned by our particular type of culture. It is a sort of roughly prescribed social ritual, in which you generally say what the other fellow expects you, one way or another, to say.” (Firth 1957:37)

The world according to Firth is thus like a stage where society is the author and the participants play the roles assigned to them by the culture into which they have been initiated. This provides law and order which he considers beneficial for both society and its members (Firth 1957:184). While growing up and being progressively incorporated into the social organisation, members of a society gradually learn how to act in accordance with the expectations created by their community. In this respect, Firth does not allow for much freedom or room for manoeuvre as far as the individual is concerned:

“You deceive yourself if you think words are opinions on which your individual soul may soar in perfect freedom into limitless empyrean. Even in literature, where madness is sometimes called genius, such extreme forms of non-conformity are rare. The main stream of literature is governed by a healthy, though of course not absolute, conformity with hallowed tradition. Ordinary everyday conversation is much more narrowly determined than literary composition.” (Firth 1964:94)

Not surprisingly, Firth regards highly idiosyncratic behaviour as “unusual”, “misdirected” and “tactless” which entails “grave social risks” (Beaugrande 1991:195). This orderly language behaviour is, in fact, what has been described as appropriateness in the previous section. In Firth’s framework, context thus necessarily comprises the knowledge of those social rules which make language behaviour acceptable within a speech community.

It is for this reason that, according to Firth, sentences like the one quoted in 1.2.1 are nonsensical: if an utterance cannot be related to any customary or generalisable routine, it is perforce meaningless.

With all deviant elements filtered out, the object of inquiry, i.e. language use, becomes a highly predictable mode of action whereby there is an almost one-to-one correspondence between language and the type of situation in which it occurs. In fact, it seems that any one component in one realm can trigger off the appropriate response in the other system: the context of railway travel, for instance, implies a specific kind of vocabulary and vice versa, a typical line will make the identification of context possible. It is, in fact, the kind of systematic connection between context and utterance to which van Dijk has referred in 1.1.1. Firth illustrates this as follows:

“A very rough parallel to this sort of context can be found in language manuals providing the learner with a picture of a railway station and the operative words for travelling by train. It is very rough. But it is parallel with the grammatical rules, and is based on the repetitive routines of initiated persons in the society under description” (Firth 1957:182).

The fact that the Firthian context of situation is restricted to highly conventional routines requiring formulaic language necessarily implies that the concept attains a strictly social character with individual features purposefully left out (cf. 1.1.3.2b).

By adopting the ‘*context of situation*’, rather than the context *and* situation distinction as seen earlier in 1.1.3.1, Firth emphasises the relationship that exists between the two notions. While the context of situation is seen as part of the situation (which includes all the features of the setting), it only comprises those general categories of the situation that are relevant to ‘linguistic work’. The division along which the context (of situation) is separated out of the situation does not therefore run along the actuality/abstraction axis (see 1.1.3.1) but is controlled by relevance instead.

Since the main aim of human discourse is the maintenance of social order, to pertain means to serve this purpose. The pertinent features of Firth’s context of situation are therefore those which are relevant to the generation of meaning in the Firthian sense, i.e., those constituents of the situation which contribute to the conservation of routines. As all language use is supposed to be geared towards the creation and perpetuation of continuity in the existing order, both relevance and the resulting combination of the characteristics of the situation must be permanent and steadily fixed. For Firth context as a dynamic entity is thus a non-viable option which would shake the very foundation of his framework.\*

In fact, in Firth’s inquiry schemata (i.e. contexts) become such stable and obvious fixtures of the collective mind that they can be easily recognised. Since deviance is disapproved of and is therefore discounted, observing normality allows the analyst to establish what is appropriate and what is consequently relevant. In other words, relevance and appropriateness are inextricably interwoven whereby the latter determines the former.

As has become obvious from the above and Firth’s uncharacteristically lucid statement - “The *linguist* decides what is relevant ...” (Firth 1968:173 - my emphasis) – that

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\* Despite Firth’s references to ‘creativity’ and the ‘flux of experience’, these notions do not, in fact, entail a different view of context. In his framework, creation and the creative process equate with the creation and maintenance of social routines and values rather than creative and out of ordinary language use (Firth 1957:186, 1968:108). Similarly, ‘the flux of events’ or ‘the flux of experience’ (Firth 1968:14,16) do not mean concern for the actual processing of data in context but rather, represent the first stage of generalisation.

the linguistic work for the purposes of which the definition has been provided in the first place is to be carried out by the outside analyst rather than the inside participant (cf. 1.1.4).

#### 1.2.3.2 Features of the Context of Situation

##### Participants

The most significant components of context are the participants who are defined in terms of persons and personalities. A social *person* is a bundle of parts, each with their appropriate lines. The relevant features of a participant as a person will be those which ensure that the participant is cast for the part and says his or her lines. *Personality* is a wider concept including not only nurture but nature as well. Firth claims that in personality the two (the conformist and the individual) are amalgamated mainly through language which contributes hugely to one's initiation into a community and social organisation.

Firth argues that since "science deals with large average effects" (Firth 1968:13), features and intentions of particular participants in particular instances cannot be accommodated by linguistics and should be assigned to *stylistics*. *Linguistics*, on the other hand, needs to focus on linking language studies with *social* human nature and as such should "think of persons rather than individuals" (Firth 1957:186). As for context, Firth claims that personality can be included in the analysis in so far as it displays typical features (Firth 1957:188).

Taking the railway travel example again, it means that the relevant feature of the participant as a person will be the fact that he or she is a passenger who wants to buy a ticket. Generalisable characteristics of the personality, such as the specific form of self-expression by a participant representing the working class, may also pertain while more particular features, like being chatty or not having enough change, will be discounted as atypical and fall outside the scope of inquiry. (Firth 1957:185-6, 1968:13)

Firth's participants thus represent stereotypes and their mediating role between situation and code is minimal. Both their verbal and non-verbal actions are heavily prescribed with a limited range of possible responses and heavily constrained language behaviour.

### Objects and effect

Firth has not provided many clues as to what exactly should be meant by these two components. When reconstructing the context for 'Ahng gunna gi' wun fer Ber', for instance, he assumes that it is so obvious what the relevant objects and the effect of the sentence are that there is no need to state them explicitly (Firth 1957:182). As the context for the Cockney version of the utterance "I'm going to get one for Bert." represents a typical speech event of customers in a pub, a possible interpretation of the relevant object and effect may be the pint and getting it for Bert.

In the other example of the railway travel situation, possible relevant objects may include the typical features of the environment which mark out the setting as a railway station, ticket office, ticket etc. If, however, objects are used in the sense of 'objectives', (Firth's famously vague wording allows for it), the purpose of the interaction might be buying a ticket and the effect of the verbal action could be the successful purchase of it.

Alternatively, relevant objects may be interpreted as the various purposes to which language can be put, i.e. speech functions such as greeting, blessing, praise etc. Firth points out that some speech functions, especially those employed in churches or law courts are binding by law and can produce serious effects. Others such as promises, although not legally binding, might be used with a similar effect in everyday life because of the conventional social force attached to them (Firth 1957:30, 1968:178).

#### 1.2.4 Application

The fact that the context of situation has been defined by Firth as an abstract schematic construct comprising typical linguistic and non-linguistic features of common and repetitive social routines in a speech community makes Firth's interpretation of the concept particularly suitable for application to stereotypical speech events. Tightly controlled and highly ritualistic situations whereby participants have little choice of what to say and how to behave provide the best supporting evidence for Firth's theory of context. His examples concerning the application of the notion are therefore usually confined to restricted languages such as the language of air traffic control whereby any individual interpretation or deviant form of expression may have grave consequences.

Firth seems to be aware of his theory's limitations and claims that "descriptive linguistics is at its best when it concentrates on what I call restricted languages. A restricted language serves a circumscribed field of experience or action and can be said to have its own grammar and dictionary." (Firth 1968:87)

#### 1.2.5 Firth's Context of Situation - an Alternative Interpretation

Despite Firth's effort to produce a watertight analysis meeting the requirements of scientific inquiry of the time, his proposed definition of the context of situation can, in fact, accommodate an alternative, *participant* oriented reading.

As the definition itself does not specify who carries out the linguistic work and decides what pertains in a situation (cf. 1.2.2), *relevance* can be assigned to the interactants engaged in making meaning in particular instances of language use. This is, in fact, what Stenning describes as 'normal' context, whereby the interlocutors determine what features of the situation will become pertinent and contribute to the creation or interpretation of a text (cf. 1.1.1).

Participant defined relevance necessitates further alterations to Firth's model of context. If the pertinent components of context are selected by a particular language user who is allowed to act both as a *person and full personality*, features of context will inevitably contain idiosyncrasies. One reason for this is that what participants consider as salient on a specific occasion largely depends on their state of mind at the time of the interaction. There is normally an infinite number of factors which might affect their judgement of what is significant, including probably one of the most influential, the verbal action of the discourse partner. Any slightly unpredictable or out-of-the-ordinary response, for instance, may turn the conversation in an unexpected direction and force the participants to navigate their way through by making decisions regarding their actions on the spur of the moment.

An alternative model thus bears a close resemblance to Sperber and Wilson's context: a bundle of permanent and fortuitous, accidental and intended features (see 1.1.1 (5)). As a consequence, defining which elements of the situation come into play to create context here is a much more unpredictable business than in Firth's original scheme.

However random the constitution of the context may be, the speech event as a process can still be defined in relation to the direction in which it is heading. *Purpose-orientedness* is one of the main characteristics of human activities and acts of speech are no

exception. There is always some kind of motivation or reason why people want to talk which necessarily creates a purpose, whether transactional or interactional (Nádudvari 1980, Medgyes 1986a). The goal of language use is then another vital element of context and may correspond to Firth's second component of the definition, i.e. relevant *objects*, if the term 'object' is understood as the 'objective of the interaction'.

The definition rounds up the full cycle of the interactional procedure once the *effect of the verbal action* as the last category of the context of situation is included. It can entail the attainment of the objective of the interaction, i.e. the intended interpretation of the speech event and the realisation of the changes/satisfaction of the needs that have instigated the act of communication in the first place. Since relevance is also geared towards this end, language use here is to serve the individual demands of the language user rather than the maintenance of social order.

Compared to Firth's original, the alternative contextual model encompasses a wider domain in that it contains *social* as well as *individual* elements (cf. 1.1.3.2b) and also represents a more *fluid* concept (cf. 1.1.3.2d). As a consequence, its analysis needs to go beyond what Firth terms as linguistics and has to move into the realm of what he calls stylistics in 1.2.4.1. This, on the one hand, implies that new methods, which enable the analyst to capture the dynamics and richness of context created in actual language use, need to be introduced (Mey 1993:10). On the other, it means that the range of speech events to which the resulting definition can be reapplied will necessarily be wider than Firth's set of highly ritualistic interactions.

#### 1.2.6 Conclusion

Despite the unresolved issues and the new questions raised, Firth's definition presents a major step towards the understanding of context.

Most importantly, Firth has 'tidied up' the concept and introduced it as an *abstraction* as systematic and orderly as conventional formulae of investigation. He has achieved this neatness by presenting context as a *schematic construct*, a generalised pattern of a typical speech event which reflects the prevailing social order. Since the process of 'cleansing' has necessarily implied filtering out the unnecessary physical and concrete elements, Firth has solved the 'physical or mental' (cf. 1.1.3.2a), 'concrete or abstract' (cf. 1.1.3.2c) dilemmas presented in the previous section. He has also tackled the two remaining

polarities (cf. 1.1.3b,d). As the context of situation represents the structure of interactional norms in society and Firth views this social orderliness as something that needs to be preserved unchanged, context acquires similar qualities and is described as *social* and *static*.

As has been demonstrated, Firth's definition also allows for an alternative description of context which, in fact, comprises features that represent the opposites of some of the attributes that have been sanctioned by Firth. As a result, within Firth's framework context can also be presented as a dynamic, continuously changing entity which can contain individual and fortuitous components as well.

The relationship between the three key notions has been worked out too. Firth has confirmed that *relevance* and *appropriateness* are interrelated and that it is, indeed, the rules of socially acceptable language behaviour that govern relevance which defines what features of the situation come into play to make up a *schema*, i.e. the context of situation.

Even though Firth has confirmed the legitimacy of the issues and clarified the notions which have been introduced in the previous section, his study has failed to provide the solid theoretical grounding that is necessary for a more accurate and in-depth study of context. With context defined as a psychological entity, it seems reasonable to turn to a discipline where such mental constructs are examined. Consequently, just as discourse analysis (Cook 1989, 1994a) or reading theory (Carrell and Eisterhold 1988, Lopes 1986) have employed cognitive psychology in their search for answers regarding questions of comprehension and discourse processing, the present research will investigate a field outside linguistics in order to assure that the concept in terms of which Firth has defined context is adequate for the description of context. It is also in cognitive psychology, where disparate views of schema have already been well documented, that we will seek to verify the existence of two types of contextual model. Furthermore, a closer inspection of the psychological background is expected to provide a better insight into the nature of schema.

End note: Although Firth has not answered all the questions, his work has had a huge impact on several of the inquiries that will play an important role in the formulation of a definition of context in the present thesis. The notion of *mental representations* has become central to schema theory (see 1.3.2) and an essential part of Widdowson's model of context (see 3.4). The concept of *relevance* is one of the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle (see 3.2) and the pivot of Relevance Theory (see 3.3). *Situation structures and types* feature prominently in Mitchell's, Hymes's and Halliday's (see 2.1; 2.2; 2.3), research. *Functions*, i.e. what people do with language, have been taken up by Speech Act Theory (see 2.5).

### 1.3 Cognitive Background

#### 1.3.1 Definition of Schema

The definition of schema in cognitive psychology bears a close resemblance to Firth's context of situation. Most of the differences that exist lie in the amount of detail and the attention the notion is given in the two disciplines.

In cognitive psychology schemata are described as knowledge representations of the outside world which enable humans to reduce the endless diversity of life to manageable proportions. They are seen as the building blocks of cognition: structures for generic concepts stored in the memory upon which all information processing and the performance of cognitive acts depend. Schemata thus act as a link between humans and the outside world: they are representations of brain states which are, in turn, representations of our environment (Rumelhart and Norman 1985:17).

As in Firth's study, schemata are abstracted from past experience. They arise as a result of extracting common elements from a range of situations or events, and form structures of stereotypic knowledge. Faced with new input, they are activated and serve as cognitive templates against which new experiences are matched and in terms of which they are comprehended (Rumelhart and Ortony 1977:131, Cook 1997a).

Like Firth's context, schemata in cognitive psychology also constitute patterns which present what is normally true, typical and accepted in a society. They project a social order on individual experience and thus may "help to account for the role of social constraints in conceptual information processing" (van Dijk 1977b:21). Mental structures conceptualising social conventions are necessarily *culture specific* and carry the implication that most members of a society or speech community will have a similar repertoire of these representational systems. Schemata thus provide individuals with order and guidelines for their thinking and behaviour as social beings and consequently represent their security in a world of infinite diversity.

With regard to *language use* schemata translate into mental representations of typical speech events which, depending on the degree of conventionality, require a certain mode of verbal and non-verbal language behaviour. When participants find themselves in a new situation e.g. meet somebody they know, they activate the 'greeting schema' and, unless there is evidence to the contrary, act in accordance with the relevant social conventions which



apply to the given situation. Problems may arise when somebody from a different culture has a slightly different 'greeting schema' and may, as a result, interpret "How are you?" as a genuine question and respond with a grammatically correct but socially inappropriate litany of ailments and grievances.

Since schema in psychology seems congruent with Firth's context of situation in that both represent cognitive frameworks of regularities of social life and implicate the key concepts of *relevance* and *appropriateness*, the exploitation of schema for the description of context appears justified.

The following section will make up for some of the shortcomings of the research so far. On the one hand, Schema Theory will provide what Firth has failed to supply, i.e. a componential analysis. On the other, connectionist models will suggest ways in which the alternative perception of context/schema can be examined. Rather than being interested in constituents, connectionist models will be concerned with the means by which schemata acquire their contents and the manners these structures come into being and are employed in real-life situations.

It must be noted that for the purposes of the present study the examination of an earlier period in the history of schema theory will be undertaken with later developments deliberately left out.

### 1.3.2 Schema Theory

#### 1.3.2.1 Outline

One of Schema Theory's main concerns is the constitution and types of the notion. Schemata can underlie not only objects but situations, events, sequences of events, action and sequences of actions as well (Rumelhart and Norman 1985:35). These generalised concepts can then be analysed into units which may vary considerably in size. A widely applied illustration of the object schema is the schema of face (Rumelhart 1980, Howard 1987) which contains parts like eyes, ears, nose, mouth etc. All these sub-schemata of FACE consist of further sub-schemata: the MOUTH has constituents like lips, teeth and tongue. The FACE schema also prescribes that these components be organised in a certain way: the eyes must be above the nose, the lips below the nose etc. Other object schemata, like that of the human body, for instance, are obviously more complex and can therefore be broken into many more

partonomies.

Objects arranged in a certain way in space present bigger units and make up what Howard (1987:45) calls 'scene schemata' or what O'Malley and Chamot (1990:20) refer to as 'forms of images' such as landscapes or the arrangement of a room. Expanding further and relating schemata to time results in 'event schemata' (Howard 1987:47) which encapsulate our abstract knowledge about situations and sequences of events. Concepts like BUY evoke the image of a whole situation with persons like the PURCHASER, the SELLER and objects like MONEY and MERCHANDISE. A BUYING situation also consists of subevents e.g. greeting, paying etc. (Rumelhart 1980).

Frequently occurring schemata, which prescribe a certain sequence of actions, have been termed as *scripts*. Schank and Abelson, who have developed the notion, suggest that there are scripts for every common type of social events. The purpose of scripts, in their view, is "to set up expectations about events that are likely to follow in a given situation. These scripts can be predicted because they have occurred in *precisely* this fashion before" (Schank 1976 quoted in Eysenk 1984:127, my italics)

One of the best known scripts proposed by Schank and Abelson is the RESTAURANT one. First, co-ordinates in relation to which the situation is going to be examined are identified. The componential analysis of the RESTAURANT script will consequently be conducted in terms of such variables as the participants in their particular roles, the necessary objects - props, entry conditions (the customer is hungry and has money) and results (the customer is not hungry and has less money; the owner has more money). The sequence of events is depicted in stages according to the chronological order throughout which they occur during typical situations (See **Appendix 1**, Anderson 1980:140-2, Rumelhart and Norman 1985:40).

Schemata are sometimes explicitly compared to plays: both have various parts played by actors who say their lines prescribed by the script of the play. In the RESTAURANT schema, for instance, there are two main characters, the customer and the waiter with their distinguishable lines, the props - tables and chairs etc. A play's instantiation is a specific performance, just as the actualisation of the FACE schema is a particular face. (Rumelhart 1980, Howard 1987)

It should be noted that such a characterisation is very similar to Firth's description of context. As has been observed, Firth also perceives social life as a kind of stage where 'social actors' are bound by the roles and scripts society prescribes (cf. 1.2.3.3). Furthermore, both

Firth and Schema Theory focus on highly conventionalised schemata/contextes which are rigid, prescriptive and predictable by nature and can therefore occur - as they claim - in 'precisely' the same fashion all over again. In fact, the categories Firth uses to define context closely correspond to the variables identified in the RESTAURANT script: the relevant features of participants are the particular roles they play, the relevant objects are the props, entry conditions and the relevant effect is the change that occurs in the physical, financial state of the interlocutors.

These common features indicate that schema theory's conception of schemata and Firth's own interpretation of the definition of context represent the same type of modelling. They emphasise the social content and relevance in terms of the appropriateness constraints society imposes in order to maintain the orderliness of everyday life. The two theories are concerned with *highly conventionalised contexts* which display the kind of straightforward relationship between language and context to which van Dijk has referred in his definition (see 1.1.1). Furthermore, in both cases the componential analysis of such conventional contexts by an outside analyst is based on the assumption that these mental constructs are *static and observable*.

#### 1.3.2.2 Criticism of Schema Theory

As in Firth's inquiry, such a view of schema/context represents a somewhat restricted portrayal of the notion. Firstly, this kind of delineation can, by its nature, account for neither the individual differences that prevail in real life nor for schema as a kind of informal, private and inarticulated theory about the nature of events, objects or situations individuals come across (Rumelhart 1980). As a result, the features of description specified by an outside expert may not necessarily correspond to the features participants would select as relevant on a particular occasion.

Secondly, much of everyday discourse is not as ritualised and predictable as Firth or Schema Theory believe it to be. To a varying degree, there always seems to be room for manoeuvre: even highly constrained actors in a Chinese opera can add something which makes them and their performance unique. This being the case, cognitive psychology should be able to account for how "knowledge is also used to understand discourse about events that are not stereotyped" (Johnson-Laird 1983:371).

Thirdly, the model lacks the dynamism van Dijk and Mey (cf. 1.1.1) consider crucial

for context. In fact, the loss of fluidity is a research convenience which inheres in this type of analysis where the specification of the content of structures is only possible if the flow of a situation is broken up into fixed stages which then, in turn, result in the inflexibility noted by many researchers (Eysenk 1984, Beaugrande 1985, Eysenk and Keane 1990).

#### 1.3.4 Connectionism

Connectionism is a challenge to the traditional model of schema, which attempts to compensate for the limitations of the theory outlined above. Instead of investigating *what* constitutes mental structures, the emphasis here is on *how* these structures come into being and what processes are involved.

*Connectionist networks or parallel distributed processing (PDP) models* are computational models which aim to explore how the system progresses from one state to another and how the generative capacity of human understanding works in novel situations.

##### 1.3.4.1 Connectionist Models

Connectionist models, which are claimed to be more closely tied to the physiology of the brain than other kinds of information processing systems, reflect the participant's perspective and describe 'from inside' what is actually happening when people make sense of their world of immense diversity:

"The brain consists of a large number of highly interconnected elements which apparently send very simple excitatory and inhibitory messages to each other and update their excitations on the basis of these simple messages" (McClelland, Rumelhart & Hinton 1986).

In a similar vein, connectionist models assume that critical processes underlying representation and acquisition are at the level of networks of simple processing elements called 'units' which are massively interconnected through excitatory and/or inhibitory links. These units, which may correspond to relatively simple features (conceptual primitives) or may have no particular meaning as individuals, represent building blocks at a *microlevel*.

As with the human brain where there is activity in many places simultaneously, PDP proposes *parallel* processing which is more flexible and powerful than those in which processing takes place in a serial manner. Within a connectionist network, more than one process takes place at a time and processing occurs in a number of different locations, hence

*distributed* processing.

It has been suggested (McClelland, Rumelhart & Hinton 1986:8) that a parallel distributing processing network should be seen as a constraint network in which each unit represents a hypothesis and each connection represents constraints among the hypotheses. If, for example, feature B is expected to be present whenever feature A is, there should be a positive connection from A to B. Conversely, if there is a constraint that whenever A is present B is expected *not* to be present, then there should be a negative connection from A to B. Inputs can also be seen as constraints. A positive input to a unit will mean that there is evidence from the outside that the relevant feature is present.

“The stronger the input, the greater the evidence. If such a network is allowed to run it will eventually *settle* into a locally optimal state in which as many as possible of the constraints are satisfied, with priority given to the strongest constraints. The procedure whereby such a system *settles* into such a state is called *relaxation*.” (Rumelhart, Smolensky, McClelland & Hinton 1986:9) As a result, PDP models do not need to programme explicitly all aspects of the model but ‘learn’ to produce specific outputs when certain inputs are given to them.

Entities, in terms of which connectionist models characterise the world, are fluid patterns of a network which operates without discrete symbols and a hierarchy of discrete units. Since connection strength modulation mechanisms that adjust the strength of connections between units are based on information locally available at the connection, control is distributed and the system has no central executive to determine what rules should apply and how to implement them. In fact, there are no explicit rules associating inputs with outputs either. Connectionism assumes that rules arise out of the complex interactions of primitive elements and processes and a network acts *as though* it knew the rules (McClelland, Rumelhart & Hinton 1986:32).

Given the view that “linguistic rules are so complicated that it is not plausible that they could be stored as a list of explicit propositions; they must be therefore implicit in the connection strength” (Martindale 1991:206), a connectionist model seems highly suitable for the description of how language is learnt and used in real-life situations.

#### 1.3.4.2 Characteristics of Connectionist Schemata

First of all, connectionist schemata are not fixed data structures which can be

analysed into constituent parts by the analyst. They are, instead, *processes*: “There is no representational object which is a schema. Rather, schemata emerge at the moment they are needed from the interaction of the large numbers of much simpler elements all working in concert with one another” (Rumelhart, Smolensky, McClelland & Hinton 1986:20) Schemata therefore are not ‘things’ or explicit entities which can be broken up into discrete, constant and identifiable units but networks in which *the units are all interconnected and all aspects are variable*.

The other reason why connectionist models of schema cannot be subjected to componential analysis is its inherent *fluidity*. Connectionist schemata are not fixed structures, but, rather, constantly changing networks which from time to time settle into local and temporary states of optimal goodness-of-fit. This relative and temporary stability and non-defined content characterise knowledge in connectionist models.

Categories defining the boundaries and contents of schemata are emergent and transient in nature and should be understood as *approximations* rather than hard and fast divisions (Gasser 1990). They are distinctions of degree and not of kind: instead of invariant patterns for concepts such as FACE or BUY, the connectionist system has ‘more or less’ FACE or BUY. The reason is that even though there might be a set of units which would tend to be activated by the perception of FACE, it would be impossible to draw the borderlines around this set as the units of it would also participate in the representation of other concepts. As a result, the activation of FACE would make other concepts partially active too.

The following example demonstrates how connectionist schemata function and reflect real-life language use. The interpretation process of the passage highlights how the SCHOOL schema gets constantly adjusted until, having satisfied all the constraints of the input, it settles into a good fit.

“John was on his way to school last Friday -  
He was really worried about the maths lesson -  
Last week he had been unable to control the class -  
It was unfair of the maths teacher to leave him in charge -  
After all, it is not a normal part of the janitor’s duties.”

(Sanford and Garrod [1981] quoted in Widdowson 1983:61)

The picture of somebody walking to school evokes the strongest connection and John is most probably thought of as a schoolboy. The second line confirms this hypothesis which is, then, immediately refuted by the information in the third line and a new hypothesis is formulated: the person who is supposed to be in control must be the teacher. The fourth line, yet again, disproves this idea, while the last input eventually identifies the hero of the story.

While trying to understand the passage, the reader moves from the strongest connection to weaker ones, towards one of the goodness maxima, until all the constraints set in the text are satisfied. The system thus settles into a locally optimal state which, in this case, is the most plausible interpretation. This relaxation will necessarily alter the connection strengths of the network and will inevitably create a new state of departure for the next input.

In fact, this model of schema bears a close resemblance to the alternative interpretation of Firth's context definition (cf. 1.2.5). The features which become relevant for the understanding of the passage are not predetermined by the linguist but are selected by the participant in flight. Due to the individual's specific position as a janitor, the speaker's schema displays individual features and is, therefore, considerably different from what would be the typical SCHOOL schema. As the objective of the interaction is understanding and establishing common ground between the participants, the hearer has to make a continuous effort to adjust relevance in order to accommodate a less stereotypical input. The effect of interaction is then seen not in the light of practical outcomes (like in the RESTAURANT schema) but in terms of the schematic changes the interaction brings about. Interactions thus continuously alter the participants themselves whose schemata develop and are constantly modified with experience. Our reading of the same poem, for instance, now or ten years ago reflects how changes in time alter what we consider relevant.

#### 1.3.4.3 Criticism and Amendment of Connectionist Model

Connectionist models have been criticised for being primarily data-driven systems whereby processes are described mainly in behaviourist terms. Although learning and schema formation have elements of a stimulus-response procedure, the relationship of the outside world and schema is not as mechanical as the *stimulus* (available information) -----> modifies -----> *response* (schema) connection suggests.

First of all, the perceiver is not passive and the stimulus is not an external object waiting to be picked up (Johnson-Laird 1983:173, Neisser 1976:57). We can only see

something if we know what to look for: humans can find an object or a person if they can discern the features which distinguish them from other things or people. In other words, we construct anticipation which gives us direction in our exploration of where to look. As a result, schemata play an active role in determining what will and will not be perceived. The outcome, picking up the information i.e. spotting the object/person, is the result of an *interaction* between schema and environment in which neither determines the course of perception alone (Neisser 1976:20, 44). An important consequence of this interplay is that schema can never be identical with what is perceived: "The old joke that the optimist sees the doughnut while the pessimist sees the hole does not imply that either is mistaken. ... If the environment is rich enough to support more than one alternative view (and it usually is), expectations can have cumulative effects on what is perceived that are virtually irreversible until the environment itself changes." (Neisser 1976:44). This view is line with Sperber and Wilson's thinking (see 1.1.1) in that the assumptions which make up context and affect the interpretation of an utterance do not necessarily reflect the actual state of the world.

There are other implications for language use. The most important one is that relevance and relevant features do not reside in the situation waiting passively to be employed in the interpretation of an utterance (Johnson-Laird 1983). Rather, they are the result of the participant's active engagement with the situation which involves processing information both from the environment and the participant's own schema. Due to the constant changes this interplay brings about in the participant's schema and, in fact, the environment (see Neisser above), no two contexts can ever be identical.

### 1.3.5 Conclusion

Venturing into cognitive psychology has proved beneficial in that it has answered some of the questions raised in the previous sections.

Firstly, the investigation has verified the view of context as a schematic construct. Research into schema as a psychological phenomenon has furnished evidence for Firth's supposition that mental patterns derived from human experience function as templates for understanding the world, including speech events. The inquiry has also confirmed that, despite doubts and reservations (e.g. Ochs in 1.1.1), context presented as schema can, in effect, be properly described and defined.

Secondly, the two trends identified within cognitive psychology have also indicated



that schemata can, indeed, be looked at from two different perspectives. One type of investigation is analyst-oriented and focuses on the constituents of the notion. In the other, the overriding concern of research lies with the participants and the fashion in which they exploit and modify mental structures in the actuality of language use. The emerging binary perception of schema then confirms the hypothesis that has been proposed as a result of the analysis of definitions (cf. 1.1.3.2) and Firth's study of context.

Thirdly, cognitive psychology has supplied clues regarding the ways componential analyses of context can be conducted. For Firth's interpretation of the notion, for instance, Schank and Abelson's script appears to be a plausible means of investigation. The criticism of the Schema Theory model has, on the other hand, reinforced that such a conception of context has limitations.

Fourthly, the exploration into Connectionism has offered further information about the nature of an alternative model of the context of situation. It has, first of all, revealed that the concept is a continuous *process* whereby the participants, drawing on the 'old' information provided by their existing schemata and extracting new information offered by acts of a particular speech event, strive to achieve some kind of goodness-of-fit, i.e. try to create or construe the meaning that suits the cognitive circumstances best. This state is temporary and will be altered, to varying degrees, each time new input needs to be accommodated.

In the light of this, it is now possible to define more clearly what comprises the object and the effect of verbal action for a dynamic perception of context. The overall *objective* of communication is to bring about the desired schematic change in the participants as well as satisfy the interlocutors' communicative needs which have instigated and maintained the interaction in a mutually agreeable way. The new, modified mental representation that comes about while achieving this end will constitute the *effect*, which presents a novel constellation of relevance for the next speech event when it will be altered again.

On the whole, venturing into the realm of cognitive psychology has proved highly worthwhile: it has provided us with a clearer and more detailed picture of context as schema and also lent the much needed support for the notion of two distinct models. With the theoretical foundation thus strengthened, a working definition of context can follow.

## 1.4 Summary

The selection of definitions in linguistics, Firth's delineation and the explorations into cognitive psychology have provided a considerable amount of information about the nature of context. The objective of this last section of the chapter is to appraise what has emerged from the discussions and prepare the ground for the analysis of linguistic theories.

### 1.4.1 A Working Definition of Context

In this study, *context* will correspond to Firth's *context of situation* in that both are defined as cognitive constructs comprising those components of the situation that are recognised as relevant to the understanding and creation of meaning by the human agent. Occasionally, *setting* will be employed as an alternative term for situation.

While the situation, which represents a combination of various types of features, is 'out there' waiting to be engaged with, context is begotten by the language users as a result of their interaction with the setting. The outcome is a psychological construct which reflects but does not necessarily coincide with the actual state of the world it represents. Further incongruence may occur between the analyst's and the participant's mental portrayal of the same situation since their 'linguistic work' is often driven by different purposes, and represents concerns at various levels of generalisation (e.g. while researchers deal with the average, language users reckon with specific goals and local information).

The question that also needs to be posed at this stage is whether the linguistic element of the situation should also be regarded as part of the context. Firth and Cook (Cook 1994a) suggest that co-text or 'the verbal action of the participants' should be integrated into the notion. Hence Cook's definition of context as the "knowledge of the relevant features of the world and *co-text*" (Cook 1994a:24, my italics).

On the surface, this distinction resembles Widdowson's dichotomy of the two reference points on which language use hinges: the *knowledge of the language system* (i.e. systemic) and *schematic knowledge*. A closer inspection, however, reveals that Cook's co-text does not coincide with Widdowson's systemic knowledge which is a solely semantic property ("the internalization of the symbolic function of signs" Widdowson 1990:104). Although it is not stated explicitly, it seems that what Cook means by co-text is similar to Gardner's (1985) interpretation who, when referring to 'the context of language', discusses

constraints that operate when interactants interpret utterances in discourse, e.g. that questions are normally followed by answers. As this knowledge goes beyond the language system and is concerned with the regularities of normal language use, it should be assigned to Widdowson's schematic knowledge. In fact, while discussing schemata, Widdowson also makes references to related pairs like Gardner's, which function at a more general level. The problem-solution and/or situation-evaluation sets, for example, create a sequence of situation-problem-solution-evaluation, which is described as a basic rhetorical routine underlying discourse structure (Widdowson 1983:58).

In the present thesis a synthesis of the above terms and views will be applied. In so far as co-text as a mental representation entails the background knowledge of norms concerning the formal, rhetorical and organisational structure of various types of interaction (Carrell and Eisterhold's term is 'formal schemata' 1988:79 while Widdowson calls it 'interpersonal' 1990:104), i.e. part of what Widdowson considers schematic knowledge, it will fall within the purview of this inquiry. Since the focus of the thesis is pragmatics, co-text as systemic knowledge, i.e. the *linguistic environment* (Yule 1996:128) including matters such as cohesion (Widdowson 1978), will not be taken into account.

It must be borne in mind, however, that this distinction is an idealisation which does not reflect actual language use whereby utterances are always made sense of in reference to the interlocutor's knowledge of both the world and the language system simultaneously, and context emerges as the result of the interplay of the two. As with semantics and pragmatics, the above differentiation serves as a research device, which enables us to demarcate the field of the inquiry.

In the previous sections it has also been established that context as a schematic construct can be analysed in terms of *two disparate models*. It must be stressed that although the patterns outlined below seem to stand for two different concepts, they, in fact, represent alternative perspectives or conceptions of the same notion. In essence, the difference between them lies in the emphasis: whether the focus is on the make-up of context or the process through which it is (re)created.

## 1.4.2 Conceptions of Context

### 1.4.2.1 Analytical Model

This contextual model is the work of the analysts who develop it by way of observation and insight. Contexts here therefore comprise those mental representations of reality which display recognisable regularities of communication. They are generalisations that are achieved as a result of an idealisation process which filters out the idiosyncratic elements and retains ritualistic patterns of socially sanctioned language use only. Since no component is singled out on an ad hoc basis, contexts will be concerned with the average and the typical. Most of these mental constructs will inevitably have a characteristic set of verbal and non-verbal actions whereby there exists an almost one-to-one correspondence between the schema and language (cf. 1.2.3.1). This type of meaning, which is created by directly linking the features of context with the features of language, is called *contextual* (Widdowson 1979a:106).

The changing contextual configurations that may occur during a longer interaction are often depicted as a series of static stages, which renders a fragmented representation of language use.

As Mey has observed (cf. 1.1.1), such treatment and analysis of a phenomenon is very much in line with the classical experiment in physics whereby the object of the inquiry, e.g. gravity, becomes an idealisation devoid of such 'disturbing noises' of real-life conditions as friction or air resistance. This kind of modelling of context represents what is called the *reductionist paradigm* in hard sciences whereby the accepted practice is to take a fixed and spatially limited segment of reality, break it into smaller and smaller elements and examine how these components interact (Gleick 1987). The purpose of such an inquiry is a componential analysis with an *analytical model* as the outcome.

### 1.4.2.2 Procedural Model

The alternative model of context reflects the ways meaning is made in particular instances of actual language use regardless of how conventional or idiosyncratic they may be. Context here is a fluid, constantly changing phenomenon without fixed boundaries or units,

and includes both general social and individual elements. It is created by the participants in flight, who are allowed to decide what features of the situation pertain.

This is therefore a *participant-oriented* model where relevance lies with the person who takes part in an act of communication on a particular occasion. Given that context is presented the way it functions in real-life situations, with all its individual elements and inherent dynamism, relevance cannot be prefixed or treated as given. Instead, it is worked out by the participants who, by activating their schemata, recognise rather than mechanically apply the patterns that prevail in a specific situation.

For instance, on hearing the question "How are you?" when lying in a hospital bed, the patient can choose from a wide range of possible answers. What will actually be said is unpredictable since the reply will be the result of an indexical decision made on the spur of the moment which can take many features, e.g. the patient's mood, as relevant. This type of meaning whereby there is no straightforward or predictable connection between the elements of context and the elements of language, is termed *pragmatic* (Widdowson 1979:106).

The kind of research which aims to depict actual language use in its entirety and dynamism represents the *procedural paradigm* (Gleick 1987).

#### 1.4.3 End and Forenote

After the questions posed in the first chapter, the second part of the inquiry has intended to develop the understanding of context by shedding light on its nature and the emphases that bring about the two disparate models of the notion. Exploring disciplines other than linguistics has confirmed the hypothesis that phenomena in the world can, indeed, be approached from different angles resulting in disparate but complementary interpretations of reality.

The next two chapters will present an expansion on the topic with the objective of refining and adding to the description of context in strictly linguistic terms. The main criteria for the selection of linguistic theories presented on the following pages have been the influence these studies have exerted on language pedagogy and/or the contribution they have made to the definition of context.

Given the fact that the conceptual framework identifying the two perspectives on context and the resulting analytical and procedural models of the notion have come about as the result of the investigation conducted in this thesis, the following grouping and



categorisation will not necessarily reflect how the theorists themselves would judge their work. The exception, perhaps, is Widdowson who pursues a similar line of thinking.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Analytical Models of Context**

Since the main concern of the studies that apply this model is a componential analysis, the sections in this chapter aim to reveal the different ways relevant features of context are identified in linguistics. It will be demonstrated that most theories, to some extent, follow up Firth's leads and examine the notion either in terms of situational elements or according to speech functions (i.e. the various purposes language can be put to), or with regard to the social structures language use reflects.

#### **2.1 Mitchell's Adaptation of Firth's Model**

##### **2.1.1 The Application of Firth's Definition**

Although Mitchell disagrees with Firth on issues such as the scope of linguistic inquiry (he considers Firth's view 'somewhat extreme', and maintains that the analysis of formal properties should not be ruled out of language study), he has implemented Firth's theoretical framework in the manner it has originally been intended. As a result, his article on "The language of buying and selling in Cyrenaica" has been generally acclaimed as "the best" (Halliday & Hasan 1985) or "the most penetrating and revealing" (Robins 1971) application of Firth's definition of the context of situation.

Following the ethnographic tradition of the time and heeding Firth's advice, ("as far as Firth was concerned, it was an indispensable part for the formation of a scholar in linguistics to work some years with informants, native speakers of this or that language, at home and in the field." Mitchell 1975:155) Mitchell seeks to gather research data in Cyrenaica, Libya. By selecting a recurrent and repeatedly observable social ritual, which allows the analyst to identify patterns of group behaviour, Mitchell has complied with Firth's requirement of limiting the inquiry to what is objective and observable in social life. Shop transactions have been popular objects of inquiry ever since (e.g. Ventola 1983, Aston 1988), mainly because they are well-known routines with conventionally fixed words and acts which bind people to a prescribed line of action.

Knowing neither the language nor the culture puts Mitchell in an 'ideal position': he is a linguistic and social outsider who can observe the goings-on with little or no chance of getting involved directly in any of the interactions under study. On the one hand, the distance between the observer and the observed is undoubtedly beneficial in that it provides an overview which facilitates generalisation and the establishment of categories. On the other, it creates a situation whereby two sets of contexts prevail - that of the observer's and the participants'. Given Mitchell's unfamiliarity with the culture and language in Libya, his schema could hardly be more remote from the schemata of those whom he has observed. What is presented as the *context* of buying and selling in Cyrenaica is therefore the *analyst's mental representation of the observable and otherwise accessible* (through his assistant) *elements of the situation*. The consequences of this are manifold.

First of all, *relevance* inevitably lies with the observer who decides what specific features pertain to particular types of speech events. Given the importance of observation, relevance is determined in terms of practical outcomes and on the basis of what the analyst can see, is told by the assistant or has experienced as a member of another speech community: "One man has goods for sale, another wishes to buy; both seek the most advantageous price. These are the essential conditions, and no text or part of a text is here considered as belonging to buying and selling unless it can be uttered by seller (...) to buyer (...) or vice versa in the course of the transaction." (Mitchell 1975:171-2)

Since the criterion of relevance is the successful completion of the act of selling and buying, only the seller and the buyer are seen as *relevant personalities*. Others participating, mainly bystanders, play a lesser role in the transaction and are therefore distinguished as persons and not personalities. It must be pointed out here that Mitchell has altered Firth's original interpretation of the two terms. While Firth's personality is a wider and more abstract concept which includes the social as well as certain individual features of the participant (see 1.2.3.2), Mitchell, having limited access to the participants' schemata, distinguishes the two in more practical terms, i.e. who contributes more substantially to the effective accomplishment of the transaction.

Secondly, as Coulthard (1977:5) notes, it is a content based analysis which captures the *observable structure* of the transaction. Since the researcher is a linguistic outsider, context is recognised primarily by the activity rather than the linguistic features that occur in it. As a consequence, language is assigned to context, rather than the other way round. Although Mitchell also notes that it is possible to identify the situation from the language



(Mitchell 1975:174), just as in Firth's pub example (see 1.2.3.2), it must be noted that this is possible only in situations where the observer speaks the language of the observed. In either case, the relationship between context and language is direct and predictable, and results in *contextual meaning* (cf. 1.4.2.1).

With the two settings, the research situation and the commercial transaction, the verbal actions are conducted in two languages, which can be distinguished according to the schemata present (Mitchell 1975:170). On the one hand, there is the *object* language, the vernacular of the observed. The analysis, on the other hand, is conducted, explained and discussed in the mother tongue of the analyst, the *metalanguage*.

### 2.1.2 Components of the Context of Situation

Since Libyan market transactions require a high level of conformity and display a well observable and predictable structure, singling out the features of the situation which contribute to the pattern of this 'roughly prescribed social ritual' is a fairly straightforward matter. Given the limited access the observer has to the situation, the features context will comprise are often determined by the frequency of their actual occurrence. If the Arabic form of the greeting 'Good morning', for instance, is used on a regular basis, it is considered as part of the pattern specific to buying and selling and is included in the context. (Mitchell 1975:169-170)

Since the analyst is expected to deal with 'large average effects' (cf. 1.2.3.2), the *relevant participants* represent abstract social categories stripped of their individual characteristics and idiosyncratic attributes. They retain only the features which are typical for those who play the role of buyer and seller in accordance with social expectations. Mitchell's participants thus correspond more to Firth's persons than personalities. A participant in the abstract can then be realised by many people in actuality e.g. an old Bedouin, a well-off townsman, a wholesaler etc., the distinguishing characteristics of whom are left out of Mitchell's design.

According to the framework, both the verbal and non-verbal actions of the participants are determined by the pattern the given type of situation is identified with, and the buyer and seller do not have much room for manoeuvre in deciding how to act and what to say. In fact, their freedom in the model is constrained to such an extent that they are described as 'actors' with their 'allotted lines' 'within a play' (Mitchell 1975:171) – terms which

reverberate the words and reflect the views of Schema Theory (cf. 1.3.2.1).

The *relevant object* of the context of market transactions is the object of sale which, like the participants, is an abstraction that can assume various concrete forms such as cereals and other (edible) commodities. The relevant object of context, in fact, coincides with the goal of the interaction in that the purpose of the speech event, against which relevance is established and judged, is the completion of the buying and selling of the object of sale.

While the *effect* of the participants' action, which is probably the actualisation of the objective, receives little attention, a detailed account of the observed transactions in terms of 'three categories' is provided. These categories are, in fact, types that have been identified according to the venue of the interaction. The different varieties are then subjected to an extensive comparative analysis according to the stages that comprise them. These descriptions capture the ongoing activities in a film-like manner and include both verbal and non-verbal elements.

As has been pointed out in 1.3.2.1, breaking an interaction into consecutive sections in such a way makes it possible to deal with longer transactions. As with other elements of context, the phases also represent abstractions "made for the purpose of linguistic classification and statement" (Mitchell 1975:180). The stages and, in fact, the whole concept of context in Mitchell's analysis thus bear a close resemblance to Schank and Abelson's RESTAURANT script (cf. 1.3.2.1). This is no coincidence, however, as both provide analytical models of context/schema.

Other linguists, e.g. Ventola, have developed these stages into flow charts which, based on binary (Yes/No) relations, capture sequences of structural elements within a certain type of speech event. Although they are more detailed and include a choice of paths, flow charts are still fixed generalisations of routes defined by an outside observer and do not necessarily reflect the way participants negotiate their way through the interaction on a particular occasion (Ventola 1983).

### 2.1.3 Mitchell's Contribution

First of all, Mitchell's truthful application of Firth's definition and *modus operandi* has revealed the consequences an ethnographic approach has for the analysis of context. As has been demonstrated, if the inquiry is limited to 'what is objective and observable in group life', *the context of situation will correspond to the analyst/observer's mental representation of*

*what is audio-visually perceivable of a routine transaction.* As a result, the relevant features of situation are also identified in practical, empirical terms. Overall, context is used as a set of categories to record the proceedings of different sorts of interaction in a way that makes their cross-referencing and comparison possible.

Throughout, the assumption is that language use is made up of a finite number of different kinds of context. When all of them have been analysed, language use as such will have been dealt with. As Robins puts it: “the whole of language use, including the selection of the appropriate vocabulary items, is a vastly complex amalgam of specific language uses, and that a general explication of meaning can come about only as the end-product of indeterminately numerous detailed studies such as Mitchell’s” (Robins 1971:38). The outcome for linguistic theory is then a taxonomy of common situational structures with the most frequent linguistic elements associated with them, which then can be compared with similar studies in other languages (see Ventola 1983).

Mitchell’s research has also highlighted the limitations of an ethnographic inquiry. Firstly, it has provided further evidence that contextual study serves the linguist’s objectives best when it is restricted to frequently recurring ritualistic speech events where the regularities of language behaviour can be easily detected (see 1.2.4). Secondly, with observation being the main source of information, the investigation is necessarily restricted to the recording of audible and visible phenomena, without any reference to the participants’ – possibly diverse – schemata. Throughout, the analysis is carried out from the analyst’s point of view whose mental representation of reality therefore takes precedence. Thirdly, the focus on the verbal and non-verbal actions of the participants leads to the establishment of systematic correlation between texts and their environments, thus demonstrating how contextual meaning (cf. 1.4.2.1) is created.

On the whole, Mitchell’s contribution lies in the completion of Firth’s design by rendering the implementation stage Firth has failed to provide. Mitchell’s scheme represents the most straightforward application of Firth’s definition in that it supplies a basic framework for observation which allows a detailed but fragmented description and comparison of repetitive speech events, without offering a formal and comprehensive descriptive theory for the analysis of language use. This challenge is taken up by Hymes, whose definition of context will comprise the scheme for the components of the system of speaking.

## 2.2 Hymes's Definition

### 2.2.1 Introduction

Hymes's delineation of context is rooted in Mitchell's ethnographic traditions and Firth's notion of the orderliness of language use which is both an element and reflection of social order.

Consequently, Hymes's inquiry is based on the assumption that just as there are rules that govern the language system, there exist rules which control language behaviour (Hymes 1972a). However, rather than proposing context as a collection of observable structures of ritualised situations like Mitchell, Hymes attempts to postulate a theory of language use in society (Hymes 1971) with a twofold objective. On the one hand, the aim is to "describe the communicative competence that enables a member of the community to know when to speak and when to remain silent, which code to use, when, where and to whom etc." (Hymes 1967:13). On the other, Hymes attempts to supply a model "of descriptive analysis of language in interaction with social setting, one which, being explicit and of standard form, could ensure development of knowledge and theory through studies that are full and comparable." (Hymes 1967:9) With such a descriptive model properly formulated, the goal of a taxonomy of sociolinguistic systems can also be realised.

According to Hymes, the relevant form of inquiry, on which "the answers" depend, is "survey or ethnography" (Hymes 1972b:52). Although he sets out to obtain data for the classification and comparison of practices in various speech communities through observation, Hymes intends to reduce the distance between the observer and the observed, and regards the ethnographer as a kind of 'participant observer'. Part of this attempt is narrowing the gap between the object language, the vernacular of the observed, and the metalanguage (cf. 2.1.1) by requiring that the ethnographer have some command of the local language together with some insight into the conventions of local language use (Hymes 1971:74-5). Hymes is also aware of the fact that formal rules can account for unmarked regularities only, and sees ethnographic study as a necessary initial stage rather than the end (Hymes 1974). He reasons that only after these conventional means have been identified, will the understanding of the personal and transcendent become possible, but 'in the immediate situation it is important to stress the steps that lie at the edge of normal practice and theory (Hymes 1971:70).

For context, this set-up implies the presence of two contexts (the participant's schema of competence and the analyst's design of analysis) which will need to be defined, and which will have to converge to form a coherent theory of sociolinguistic systems.

### 2.2.2 Communicative Competence (CC)

While Mitchell's context as the analyst's schematic construct comprises the *observable* structure of ritualised situations, context defined in reference to communicative competence is necessarily a *cognitive* framework.

Hymes's model of *communicative competence* presents a novel notion in that it has both expanded and qualitatively altered Chomsky's original formulation: a) there are four parameters as opposed to Chomsky's one; b) Hymes's competence is both knowledge and ability whereas Chomsky's entails grammatical knowledge only; c) rather than positing an ideal speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech community who is unaffected by the adverse conditions of language use (Chomsky 1965:3), Hymes's primary concern is the performance of actual speakers/hearers with differential competence within a heterogeneous speech community (Hymes 1972a)

According to Hymes, CC entails a set of rules which encompasses the judgements and abilities of a person with regard to what is *acceptable* within a speech community. Utterances of an interaction are assessed or appraised in relation to what is seen as normal practice, that is, in reference to the four parameters of the formally possible, feasible, appropriate and actually performed (Hymes 1972a:281-3).

In other words, acceptability, which is the most general and important criterion for a person's judgement of normality, has its sources in all four parameters and all four parameters are measured against it. The ungrammatical utterance 'Long time no see', for instance, is appropriate and fairly common in informal conversation. By the same token, the request 'Would you be so kind as to pass me the salt, please?' is grammatically impeccable but too formal, awkward and rarely used at the dinner table. In spite of its grammatically erroneous form, the former sample utterance is probably considered more acceptable in normal social practice than the latter. This then indicates that *appropriateness* can override grammaticality and increase feasibility and attestedness.

In fact, appropriateness is the component that constitutes what Hymes describes as 'context grammar'. The first parameter of the formally *possible* concerns usage (see

Preamble) and, as such, is not related to the notion of context. The question of whether and to what extent something is regarded *feasible* is linked to psycholinguistic factors such as memory limitation, perceptual device etc. and defines a portion “of what is lumped together in linguistic theory under the heading of performance” (Hymes 1972a:285). Given the largely ad hoc features and numerous variables of performance, it is a parameter which eludes the normative regularities rules of speaking aim to handle. The category of *actually occurring* cultural behaviour is a concrete phenomenon, the realisation of a schema and not the schema itself. Since context has been defined as a psychological construct in this thesis (cf. 2.4.1), its actualisation does not form part of the inquiry.

Of the four components of CC, it is then the third, *appropriateness*, which covers the knowledge of what is commonly seen as adequate, happy or successful in a given situation. This conclusion keys in with Hymes’s definition, where appropriateness is the only component in reference to which context is mentioned and which is related to contextual features (Hymes 1972a:281, 285). Regarding context as one of the constituents of CC is further supported by Hymes’s claim according to which “the communicative competence of persons comprises *in part* a knowledge of determinate ways of speaking” (Hymes 1972b:58 *my italics*).

To conclude, context as an element of CC constitutes the knowledge of appropriateness as well as the ability to behave appropriately in social situations. In CC, it represents the most powerful criterion against which the properness of language use is measured.

### 2.2.3 Components of Context

Since context contains the ‘determinate ways of speaking’ which regulate communicative behaviour within a community, with its rules made explicit, it can serve as a device for the establishment and analysis of communicative patterns. As in the case of Firth and Mitchell, once the general categories have been identified, the schematic structure can provide, as it were, a template for the empirical collection, interpretation and classification of data.

Hymes argues that creating context is not simply a matter of the linguist correlating linguistic form to the social setting as Mitchell has suggested. Participants have a choice and they choose in accordance with their knowledge of the rules of use which contains

conventionalised configurations of context rather than a set of constant features. Linguistic analysis then proceeds on the assumption that the knowledge of appropriateness can be formally explicated by drawing up a schema of components which may potentially comprise various speech acts and events (Hymes 1964, 1967).

The most significant, general and universal dimension of Hymes's framework (1972b) is the *participant*. This component is defined in terms of further entities e.g. hearer, receiver, audience, addressee or the number required by rules of speaking. Another important element is *purpose*, with regard to both goals and outcomes. Purposiveness is particularly significant since it is the category of purpose and that of outcome which are considered crucial to the distinguishing of varieties of events (Hymes 1972a:22). So far Hymes's selection of relevant features bears a close resemblance to Firth's design. Hymes, however, adds further components, including the *setting* (physical circumstances), *scene* (psychological setting), *message form, content, and key* (tone, manner of speaking), *channels, forms of speech, genres as well as norms of interaction and interpretation* (Hymes 1972b).

Hymes (1967) himself has realised that this inventory is very atomistic and therefore would be mnemonically inconvenient. He has therefore grouped the components and called the scheme SPEAKING, thus offering a code word which is easy to remember and represents an abridged version of the original list (setting/scene, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms, and genres).

According to Hymes, in an act of communication any of these features can come into play. The observer's task is to identify which configuration of factors presents a particular form of speech. The presence or lack of certain features as well as their relationship will characterise a particular type of speech event and result in a combination of relevant features which will render it comparable with other acts and events within the same community and with similar acts in other speech communities. Measuring the SPEAKING grid against acts of using proverbs among the Yoruba, for instance, reveals rules of appropriate behaviour such as that proverbs have to be spoken, children can only use them if they make a formulaic apology beforehand etc.

The framework Hymes proposes for the formulation and analysis of rules of speech in a community is thus concerned with what is judged as *the appropriate contextual configuration* of a speech event or act, the units of which are directly governed by rules or norms for use. It must be noted that Hymes's speech act is somewhat loosely defined and entails both an act of intent which can be determined through its illocutionary force (e.g.

commands) as well as more sizeable and complex structures (e.g. jokes). Speech events, on the other hand, are larger units which can be made up of one or several speech acts e.g. conversation during a party (Hymes 1972b:56-7; Schiffrin 1994:142).

#### 2.2.4 Definition of Context

The two contexts, the component of CC and the system of categories for the analysis of situations, can be united through the notion of appropriateness. As a unified concept, context will thus comprise the knowledge and ability of appropriateness in relation to socially accepted combination types of situational features.

However, there remains a discrepancy. While context as a research tool necessarily represents the outsider analyst's understanding of the rules of speaking within the observed community, Hymes seems to suggest that communicative competence exists in the language user's mind (See reference to a theory of *language users* and language use in Hymes 1972a:281).

Linguists like Canale and Swain see Hymes's CC in a similar light, and maintain that communicative competence "includes the *language user's* knowledge (and ability for use of) rules of language use in context" (Canale & Swain 1980:16, my emphasis). Widdowson (1983:24), on the other hand, argues that Hymes's formulation reflects the analyst's rather than the participant's perspective. Given the opposing views and the emerging disparity within Hymes's scheme, the question arises as to which of the two claims holds true.

In Hymes's terms, communicative competence is the capability to assess to what degree a linguistic expression conforms to pre-existing norms for language activity. In other words, it measures the fit between the requirements of the situation and the utterance in terms of acceptability. It does not, however, reveal *why* and *how* the speaker has chosen a specific linguistic expression on a particular occasion and what he or she has intended to mean by using it.

Hymes's model of communicative competence therefore does not present what the language user thinks and does when engaged in communication. Instead, it retains an analytical perspective: rather than revealing the participant's knowledge of language use, it serves as a device to analyse participant behaviour from the outside (Widdowson 1983:23-4).

As a result of it, the whole investigation necessarily reflects the analyst's point of view. Since the researcher's schematic representation of reality takes precedence over the



participant's, relevance will lie with the ethnographer who determines what features of the situation should pertain to the purposes of the inquiry. Hymes seems to be aware of the limitations of ethnography: "The formal analysis of speaking is a means to the understanding of human purposes and needs, and their satisfaction; it is an indispensable means, but only a means, and *not that understanding itself*." (Hymes 1972b:70, my emphasis). In practical terms, it means that the analyst's understanding of the rules of speaking of the observed speech community as well as the description including the labelling of acts (e.g. reproach, taunting) may, despite Hymes's effort (see 2.2.1), differ considerably from what the participants would make of it in real-life situations (Hymes 1972b:68-9). In sum, despite the differences that appear on the surface, both components of context represent the analyst's state of mind and are not in conflict with each other in this respect.

The definition of context provided at the beginning of this section thus needs to be amended. Since the combinations of relevant features identified by the outsider analyst do not reveal what the participants actually think and do when they apply their knowledge of the rules of speaking in specific instances of communication, Hymes's context comprises only the knowledge of the rules of "when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner" (Hymes 1972a:277). The amended definition of the notion consequently must refer to context as the part of communicative competence which constitutes *the knowledge of appropriateness in terms of typical combinations of contextual features*.

#### 2.2.5 Conclusion

Compared to Mitchell's analysis, which is concerned with the relatively straightforward relationship between situation structure and linguistic forms and defines relevance in strictly practical terms, Hymes's definition represents a more complex concept. Firstly, context is seen as a *cognitive* construct. Secondly, the correlation between situational and linguistic features is more intricate since the goal is to discover rules of language behaviour rather than to establish direct correspondence between situation and language. Thirdly, the composite notion of context is examined by means of a more elaborate device which not only comprises an increased number of components but forms a system as well.

In spite of these differences, Hymes's notion of context overall represents the same type of model as Mitchell's application of Firth's definition. The reason for this is that even

though context is primarily defined as a part of CC, the actual analysis and the rules of language behaviour are, to a certain extent, presented in reference to observable situation types. Both Hymes's (1972b) and Schiffin's (1994:142) application of Hymes's notion of context indicate that rules of speaking which govern language behaviour, e.g. girls' puberty rites or interviews, are dependent on the type of situation in which the speaker/hearer takes part.

Thus, in Hymes's context the situational and cognitive factors coexist. This view is reflected in the double interpretation of speech act in language study. On the one hand, Hymes's componential analysis has been part of a trend in linguistics the representatives of which have attempted to define aspects of situation which they have regarded as relevant for socially acceptable language behaviour (e.g. Brown & Fraser 1979). On the other, there has been a growing interest in the cognitive background of speech acts defined in terms of speaker intent, which will be the subject of the last section of this chapter. Before moving on to it, however, the description of context by an advocate of Firth, whose main interest lies in the social aspect of language use and situation types, will be outlined.

## 2.3 Halliday's Theory

### 2.3.1 Context and Situation

When looking at the realities that lie beyond language, Halliday opts for the *social* dimension which, according to him, can not only provide explanations for linguistic phenomena but can serve his purpose of exploring language in education best (Halliday 1985:4). The reason for Halliday's decision is his belief that meanings are the social system in that they are created by the social system, since language has evolved the way it has because of the functions it serves in society. As a consequence, language is seen as (one form of) the expression of social semiotic (Halliday 1979b:141).

Although he follows Firth's social orientation, Halliday's perception of the notion of context seems to differ considerably from that of Firth's. In fact, defined as a psychological construct it falls outside the scope of Halliday's inquiry. The explanation for this lies in the fact that, according to Halliday, language study normally places the emphasis on one of two perspectives. The intra-organism standpoint attempts to find out what goes on in the individual's mind and presents language (use) as knowledge (Halliday 1979b:10). The inter-organism perspective, on the other hand, focuses on what goes on between people when they engage in communication, looks at the individual from the outside, and views language use as behaviour. As for Halliday, he dismisses the notion of competence and knowledge as 'artificial', and focuses on the *social aspects* of what takes place between the participants of an interaction (Halliday 1979b:56-7). He thus adopts the inter-organism stance and intends to provide a functional and sociological account as opposed to a structural and psychological one (Halliday 1979b:18). As Widdowson observes, Halliday's distinction, in fact, creates context and situation whereby context accounts for the linguistic and schematic features while the situation deals with the social aspects (Widdowson 1998:8).

### 2.3.2 Context of Situation

In line with Firth, Halliday also maintains that the notion does not refer to all the bits and pieces but to those features only which are "relevant to the speech that is taking place" (Halliday 1979b:29). Moreover, Halliday also connects *relevance* to the

conservation of social order. Relevant features of the context of situation therefore comprise those components which establish and maintain social roles and project behavioural patterns that find expression in language. However, not all situations are considered equally important: general types which prove particularly salient for the transmission of culture, the so called 'critical socializing contexts', form the core of the enquiry (Halliday 1979a:34; 1979b:30,122).

The context of situation derives from the social structure and 'is an instance of the meanings that make up the social system' (Halliday 1979b:142). Its function is to act as a sociolinguistic interface between the social system and the semantic structure of language. The context of situation of any text is then "an instance of a generalised social context or *situation type*" (Halliday 1979b:122). It is not an audio-visual inventory of speech events but a semiotic structure which corresponds to context as an abstraction.

In Halliday's framework, the *context of situation* brings about the understanding and creation of meaning in an act of communication. It is assumed that the situation type gives the participant the 'right' information about the meaning that is being exchanged and the meanings that are likely to emerge (Halliday 1979b:109; Halliday & Hasan 1985:10). The situation in which the participants find themselves will thus specify what behaviour and meanings are allowed and considered acceptable by their culture.

Halliday suggests that contexts of situation, i.e. situation types, differ in three aspects which constitute the relevant features of social context as well as determine the range within which meanings are selected (Halliday 1979b:31). The three categories are: field, tenor, and mode. *Field* refers to *what* is happening, what kind of social action is taking place in which language is an essential component and what purposes language use is serving. In this respect, field coincides with Hymes's setting/ends and Firth's object. The second feature, *tenor*, is concerned with *who* is taking part, with the nature of participants, their statuses, roles and relationships. Tenor thus roughly covers Hymes's and Firth's participant categories. *Mode* refers to the part *language* is playing, the organisation of the text, including the channel, rhetorical mode and genre. It roughly corresponds to Hymes's channel, key and genre (Halliday 1979b:62, 110; Halliday & Hasan 1985:12).

These situational elements, which determine what participants *can do* in terms of verbal behaviour, activate the semantic system that defines what participants *can mean* within the constraints of a given situation type. The semantic network forms a bridge between the extralinguistic social system and the lexicogrammatical system of language in that it is a

projection or realisation of the social system which is projected onto and realised by the linguistic system. The semantic network thus presents a set of options for meanings available in a given social setting (Halliday 1979a:34; 1979b:79). Defined as a function-oriented meaning potential, the three features of situation type are expressed through three corresponding functions of the semantic system:

- (i) *field* determines the *ideational function* - language rendering the participant's experience of the external world and own internal world
- (ii) *tenor* activates the *interpersonal function* of language expressing relations among participants
- (iii) *mode* tends to define the *textual function* - the range of meaning as texture and language in its relevance to the environment.

It must be stressed that the three categories of the situation type are *determinants* and not (Hymes's) components of speaking. Together they predict the *register*, which is a semantic configuration typically associated with particular social contexts. Registers vary according to the degree situational features control language use. Firth's restricted languages (cf. 1.2.4) represent what Halliday calls closed registers whereby the options in the meaning potential are rather limited and there is little scope for individuality. More open registers offering more room for manoeuvre are, for instance, recipes or headlines. (Halliday & Hasan 1985:39-42)

Semantic options are realised in the language by lexis and grammar. In the case of ritualised social contexts requiring highly formulaic language e.g. wedding ceremony, the linguistic items used are directly relatable to the options in the semantic network. In other, less circumscribable situation types, the relationship is less direct and may result in an open-ended list of possible language realisations.

To summarise, in Halliday's theory the social order and the linguistic system are linked up in the following way:

Social order → situation type → semantic network → lexicogrammatical system  
(can do) (can mean) realisation: text

In real life it means that in an interaction between mother and toddler, for example, the 'recall of similar events' situational feature of tenor activates the 'past time' interpersonal element of the semantic network which is then realised by the use of past tense in the

lexicogrammatical system (Halliday 1979b:117-8).

### 2.3.3 Halliday's Model of Context

Despite its apparent transparency and clarity, Halliday's definition of context is laden with contradictions and ambiguities.

First of all, the situation-context distinction in 2.3.1 gives the false impression that the analysis of language use as an expression of social semiotic is possible without any human intervention. Since such objectivity is unattainable, it seems more reasonable to interpret Halliday's intra-organism and inter-organism aspects as references to participant and analyst perspectives. In this regard, Halliday's context then has to be defined as the *linguist's mental representation of situation types*.

In fact, even though Halliday rules out context as knowledge (cf. 2.3.1), the notions of cognitive structures and background information appear with regard to the context of situation in his writings nonetheless. The following texts exemplify this:

"We do not experience language in isolation – (...) - but always in relation to a *scenario, some background of persons and actions and events* from which the things which are said derive their meaning. (Halliday 1979b:28, my italics)

"If the observer can predict the text from the situation, then it is not surprising if the participant, or 'interactant', who has the same *information* available to him, can derive the situation from the text; in other words, he can supply the relevant *information* that is lacking." (Halliday 1979b:62, my italics)

Apart from acknowledging the existence of 'observer' and 'interactant' schemata, the second quotation also carries the implication that two sets, in fact, coincide.

As has been demonstrated in the earlier sections of this chapter, while there are indeed two contexts to reckon with, the different purposes that instigate the activities of the analyst and the participant require disparate mindsets. Whereas the speaker's objective is to use language to actual communicative ends, the linguist sets out with a different goal in mind: "And the kind of description or interpretation of the context of situation that is going to be the most adequate for the linguist is one that characterises it in those terms: that is, in terms that enable him or her to make predictions about meanings, of a kind that will help *to explain how people interact*." (Halliday & Hasan 1985:10, my italics)

The schema of the participant and that of the analyst cannot therefore be identical as

Halliday maintains. With the participant schemata having been excluded at the very start, the linguist's knowledge of social structure prevails and, throughout the inquiry it is Halliday's mental set-ups and decisions concerning relevance that are reflected in the situation types.

This exclusively linguistic perspective, in fact, gives rise to one of the shortcomings of the study. Despite the focus on the social aspect and the frequent references to the social environment and structuring, the inquiry – with the exception of Bernstein perhaps (Halliday 1979a:34, 1979b:29 etc) – fails to draw on any social theory and relies on Halliday's insight as an expert language user only.

Given the fact that the analyst's perspective and judgement of relevance is decisive, it is the linguist who determines what features of the three categories of the situation type pertain. The situation type is of paramount importance: it governs the semantic system and through it determines what language should be considered as relevant in a given type of situation. The whole theory is thus concerned with *contextual meaning* (cf. 1.4.2.1): the systematic correspondence between particular contextual features and the specific selection of linguistic form they require (Halliday 1979b:32).

In the light of this, the *textual* function of the semantic system which relates language to the context, the relevance function as Halliday calls it, becomes obsolete since this function is already embedded in the other two categories. (Interestingly, Halliday himself at one point – for no obvious reason – refers to two basic components of meaning, the ideational and the interpersonal (Halliday 1979b:79).) As a result, the definition of context needs to be modified and the notion of context should be described as *the analyst's mental representation of situation types in reference to the parameters of tenor and field*.

On the whole, in spite of the terminological inaccuracies and suggestions to the contrary [e.g. Halliday on his theoretical framework: "This is simply our way of explaining what members of the culture, the participants in any given context of situation, *actually do themselves*." (Halliday & Hasan 1985:36 – my italics)], Halliday's model of context undoubtedly follows the reductionist paradigm with an analytical model of context.

Context thus represents an abstract theoretical construct, which serves the goals of the inquiry rather than the purposes of interaction. What the linguist finds important to outline is not *how* participants make these choices, how they realise the potential, but *what* makes up the various categories that define meaning. The result is the development of detailed charts and lists of the situational, semantic and language elements of certain situation types (Halliday & Hasan 1985:32-3).

Halliday's aim with the theoretical framework is to recover the context of situation from the text. In Widdowson's words, his work is based on the assumption that meaning can be, as it were, read out of the text. As we have seen, the outcome of such an approach is what Stenning calls 'abnormal' context (see 1.1.1) as opposed to the 'normal' state of affairs whereby participants read meaning into the text (Widdowson 1998:20).

#### 2.3.4 Halliday's Contribution

Halliday has introduced a somewhat novel conception of context within the socially oriented school. He, first of all, has produced a framework less fragmented than Hymes's by reducing the contextual components to two categories, which are directly related to the functions language fulfils in society. The result is a more generalised and flexible framework, which can accommodate less ritualistic situations containing less formulaic language. The intricacies of filling the compartments of this structure are, of course, left to the linguist's discretion who performs it through the control of relevance.

More importantly, the notions Halliday has introduced have been widely adopted and employed in linguistic theory. The functional approach to the analysis of language use has, for instance, been adopted by Speech Act Theory (see 2.5), where it forms the cornerstone of the inquiry. The attention to text and the patterns of the way text embodies the social environment has been furthered by Genre Theory, which explores what has been referred to as formal schemata in this thesis (see 1.4.1). Genre Theory takes up and develops the concept of genre, which Halliday tentatively defines as the specific semiotic function of text with a generic structure that has social value in the culture (Halliday 1979b: 133, 145).



## 2.4. Genre Theory

### 2.4.1 Genre as a Schematic Construct

The social values to which Halliday refers above manifest themselves in conventions that give rise to socially sanctioned types of communicative events, i.e. genres (Widdowson 1996b:127, Kramsch 1998:128; see **Appendix 2**). Whereas register has been defined as the cluster of semantic features according to situation types controlled by field, tenor and mode, Genre Theory (GT) places the emphasis on social purpose as the sole variable which determines language use (Martin, Christie & Rothery 1988:59). Genre is therefore considered a descriptive category determined by a set of social purposes, which provide the rationale and constrain the choice of content and style of text (see definitions 1,2 and 3 in **Appendix 2**). The conceptual framework that emerges from these definitions resembles Halliday's in terms of structure but differs from it with regard to the constituents:

Communicative purpose → genre → text

The complex of situation type suggested by Halliday has thus been replaced by a single determinant, the purpose, which controls the schematic structure genre entails (Swales 1990:58). Text, at the other end of the scale, stands for the linguistic realisation of genre.

The objective of research papers, for instance, is to inform the research community of new findings in a clear and convincing manner. In consequence, all features of the text, e.g. structure, style or vocabulary, need to be selected and combined in a way that allows for the best possible accomplishment of the specific goal of interaction. Similarly, letters of complaint come about as a result of some grievance suffered by the writer which can be remedied most efficiently by composing a factual and cool-headed piece describing the nature of complaint and stating the required action.

The starting point of GT, like that of the theories outlined earlier in this chapter, is that the order that prevails in human society creates patterns of social interaction which are reified in the products of language use i.e. texts. The features of a particular social occasion in which the text has been produced create specific configurations of linguistic and rhetorical elements in the text which, in turn, embody and reflect these social structures and relations. In this respect, genre can be seen as the *conjunction where social patterning and textual*

*patterning meet* (Cope & Kalantzis 1993:7).

Genre as a social process (See def.1. in **Appendix 2**) implies that the notion has evolved as a result of members' interaction in order 'to do things with words' in a culture. Genres are therefore conventions which represent the most efficient ways of speech with which communities are endowed at a given time of going about their business (Martin, Christie & Rothery 1988). Since it is the functions language fulfils in the life of society that inform and shape genre, the emphasis throughout is on the *social* dimensions which enter into the formation of conventionalised patterns of discourse. Genre therefore entails conventional rather than individual meaning: participants act in their capacity as persons (cf. 1.2.3.2) who share significant experiences, values and meanings and produce text which is predominantly social by origin, orientation and nature.

Like Hymes' communicative competence, genre represents an analytical notion established for the identification of text types rather than comprising a participant category which is concerned with the actuality of interpretation. Genre analysis hinges on the assumption that "the reasons for textual differences can be located in the social purpose of each text" (Cope & Kalantzis 1993:7), and is carried out with the emphasis on either the social or the textual content.

In the first case, the focus is put on the manner in which language both reflects and constructs relations of *power* and *authority*. The starting point is the 'socially and contextually complete unit of language', i.e. the text, and the aim is to reveal the particular ways in which certain social relationships are expressed and encoded in it (Kress 1993). Due to its focus, this type of analysis inevitably has a strong political inclination. When moving towards the textual end, the primary concern is obviously the text: the generic structure of its various types, the succession of stages which reflect the phases of the social task the participants are performing, aspects of its grammar and the circumstances in which the various types have evolved and functioned.

#### 2.4.2 Context - Knowledge of Text Appropriateness

It follows from the above that genre entails *schemata* comprising types of standardised communicative events with a set of goals mutually understood by the participants (Swales in Widdowson 1983:101; Swales 1990:58). As with other mental representations, genres are acquired in the process of the individual's initiation into a

particular society and constitute the knowledge accumulated by members of a culture in their efforts to render social life commonly acceptable and efficient by using language. Genres thus constitute *shared social knowledge* which comes about as a result of previously established patterns of experience and encounters with texts. In other words, the two important components of prior knowledge necessary for the production of a socially appropriate and successful text are verbal experiences and all previous 'life experiences' bundled together (Swales 1990:84).

In terms of schemata, this composition entails the following distinction. Whereas experiences with prior texts give rise to *formal schemata* representing patterns of the rhetorical structures of different types of text, direct experiences of life develop *content schemata*, the background knowledge of the content area of a text (Carrel and Eisterhold 1988; Swales 1990; see also 1.4.1). (It is noteworthy that this categorisation of schemata has been borrowed from reading theory which, by its nature, is also preoccupied with text.) Although both types of schema contribute to the recognition of genres and guide the production of instantiations, Genre Theory is primarily concerned with *formal schemata* and the investigation of the *rhetorical organisation of texts* in particular (Swales 1990:83).

As the inquiry is based on the assumption that there also exist conventions which control the way texts are composed to achieve the goals of an activity involving language, formal schemata will comprise the particular linguistic and structural configurations, including the sequence of stages, the use of particular grammar and style, layout etc., of various genres. Research articles, for example, normally consist of four standard sections such as Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion, each of which display a different distribution of linguistic and rhetorical features. While the simple present tense prevails in the first and last sections, the dominant tense in the middle parts is the simple past - a move which reflects the shift from the general (Introduction) to the particular (Method and Results) and back to the general in the Discussion again. Most instances of the author's comments occur in the Discussion which mirror images the Introduction by moving from specific findings to wider implications (Swales 1990).

The total of the characteristic features of a discourse type entails the *generic form*, which is a notion similar to situation type. But whereas situation types correspond to stereotypic patterns of situational appropriateness, generic forms entail mental models of *textual conventionality*. The basic rhetorical routine, the situation-problem-solution-evaluation structure, for instance, represents the normal sequence that provides the basis for

anticipation and the perception of the text as accepted and customary for many discourse types (Widdowson 1983).

The particular configuration of textual features that need to pertain to the successful fulfilment of a particular purpose comprises what is considered *text appropriateness* in a discourse community. The knowledge of what combination of properties will render a text appropriate and felicitous constitutes genre. In the light of this, genre can be overall defined as the *schematic knowledge of generic text forms, which ensures the socially appropriate production and interpretation of texts*.

While formal schemata normally consist of a number of components, the only salient element of content schema in GT is the *purpose* in relation to which different types of genre are identified (Allison 1999). On the one hand, meeting real-life, practical requirements results in genres which are classified in terms of commonsensical categories describing regularly occurring activities such as letter writing, sports commentaries, news items, advertisements etc. On the other, genres, such as the situation-problem-solution-evaluation sequence above, represent more abstract discourse categories which are dissociated from the practical outcome of the particular language activity and reflect the wider internal patterning of the rhetorical organisation of the text. This group is sometimes separated from genre and is presented as a distinct class termed text type (Paltridge 1996).

The third category, to which such communicative events as service encounters and lessons belong, is what has earlier been termed 'situation type', which consists of a range of contextual features comprising both content and formal schemata. Since the emphasis in GT is shifted to the latter domain, situation types are subjected to a narrower analysis: rather than attempting to account for all the possible schematic contributions participants make for the production of a text, the investigation is, by and large, limited to developing and exploiting algorithms and flowcharts of texts derived from the regularity and predictability of the unfolding successive stages of interactions.

#### 2.4.3 Genre Model of Context

The outcome of the analysis is a taxonomy highlighting the connection between schematic (i.e. genre) types and their typical textualisations. The attempt to establish such correlation stems from the assumption that there exists a systematic, fixed and linear relationship between text form and the function the text fulfils in society. As a result, the kind

of meaning that prevails in GT is what has been defined as *contextual* (cf. 1.4.2.1).

Since the pertinent features of both content and formal schemata are singled out by the analyst after the communicative event, *relevance* in GT inevitably lies with the outside linguist acting as an expert member who can recognise and describe the textual configurations that serve social purposes most efficiently and are therefore considered appropriate within a speech community.

The characteristics of genre outlined above indicate that GT favours an *analytical conception* of context whereby the emphasis is on the components of generic forms and the language commonly associated with them. What makes GT stand apart from previous theories in this chapter, however, is its *primary concern with formal schemata*. GT inquiry thus entails a narrower scope in that it does not aim to delineate the whole of language behaviour and is limited to the text and the analysis of mental representations members of a culture should possess in order to be able to produce and interpret *texts* in a socially acceptable way.

## 2. 5 Speech Act Theory

### 2.5.1 Speech Acts

Speech Act Theory (SAT) adopts a functional approach to language use in that it attempts to describe what speakers/hearers do with language. More specifically, the aim is to unearth what intentions lie beneath their verbal actions and how they render these intentions mutually comprehensible. So rather than being concerned with situation types comprising stereotypic schemata of everyday activities, e.g. buying and selling, SAT focuses on intents such as promising, complaining, inviting etc., which form part of situations, e.g. a shop transaction may include greeting, requesting etc.

The unit and subject of SAT inquiry is Hymes's 'speech act' (see 2.2.3) whereby language use is depicted in terms of the communicative purposes to which language can be put. As a consequence, instead of presenting objectives as practical outcomes, the alternative interpretation of Firth's second contextual component, the object of interaction is applied. Speech acts thus represent more abstract communicative functions participants aim to fulfil through their verbal actions.

According to SAT, the action of producing an utterance consists of three related acts. The act of saying something, that is, creating a well-formed, meaningful linguistic expression e.g. 'It's cold in here.' is the *locutionary act*. It corresponds to communicative competence's first parameter of the formally possible (cf. 2.2.2). The performance of an act in saying something for some communicative purpose is the *illocutionary act*, which is realised through the illocutionary force of the utterance. By saying 'It's cold in here,' speakers may express their intent to request the hearer to shut the window, turn on the heating etc. Language users perform illocutionary acts in order to produce certain effects on the feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience. What is achieved or brought about by saying something e.g. have the heating turned on, is called the *perlocutionary act* (Austin 1962:94-109, Mey 1993:112-3). So while the illocutionary act covers the alternative reading of the objective as has been established above, the perlocutionary act coincides with the effect of the participant's action.

The main question for SAT is how an act of communication is recognised as the expression of a certain intention, i.e. whether the utterance 'It's cold in here.' functions as a statement about the room temperature or is a request. As the example demonstrates, the

difficulty with the interpretation of an utterance is often that there is no one-to-one or even obvious correspondence between the intent and the linguistic form employed. Searle (1969:70-1), among other linguists, has also observed that one utterance carries the potential of performing several different illocutionary acts and, by the same token, the same illocutionary act can be realised by various linguistic means. The same way as the above sentence can imply a statement or a request, speakers have a wide choice of phrases at their disposal when requesting somebody to close the window.

As a consequence, the interpretation of an illocutionary act can often only be recovered in reference to the non-linguistic environment in which the utterance takes place. Since SAT also views speech as ordered behaviour and maintains that speech acts are "in general made possible by and performed in accordance with certain rules for use of linguistic elements" (Searle 1969:16), the regularities that make speech acts recognisable are regarded as recoverable. In Hymes's words, just as there are rules of language, it is assumed that there are also regulations that govern what contextual conditions need to obtain for an utterance to count as a specific speech act. These rules represent social *conventions* ["In the case of speech acts performed within a language, ..., it is a matter of convention - as opposed to strategy, technique, procedure, or natural fact - that the utterance of such and such expressions under certain conditions counts as the making of a promise." (Searle 1969:37)], which constitute the shared knowledge that allows successful communication between members of a speech community.

It should be noted, however, that according to speech act theorists it is only the illocutionary acts that conform to conventions. Perlocutionary acts are seen as dependent on particular circumstances and are, consequently, seen as less conventional and predictable (Austin 1962:105,119,121; Mey 1993:112). With regard to the general theoretical framework, this argument appears to be flawed. If there exist conventional ways of rendering intent - as SAT claims - and these conventions are shared by both the speaker and the hearer, then the hearer ought to be able to interpret the particular intention in reference to those conventions which are common to all participants.

Despite the contradiction, SAT's main concern remains to be the *illocutionary act*, which comprises a limited but more common definition of '*speech act*' (Thomas 1995:51). Apart from the narrow interpretation, the interest in illocution and the exclusion of perlocution implies that the emphasis is laid on the speaker's language production rather than the hearer's interpretation process.

### 2.5.2 Context - Appropriateness Conditions of Illocutionary Acts

Context in SAT constitutes those components of the situation which make up the conditions that must obtain for various speech acts to be effectively performed. Similarly, *relevance* is not geared towards the practical outcome of an everyday activity (see. 2.1, 2.2), but is a matter of identifying features of situation which render a speech act successful in the sense that it is identified as the realisation of a speech act type.

Relevance keys in with appropriateness in SAT as well since a speech act can only be recognised if the conditions that evoke it are consistent with the conventions of what is considered proper language behaviour within a speech community. In Austin's words, "it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*," (Austin 1962:8).

Context as the knowledge of conditional conventions allows for the identification of an utterance as a particular speech act. When hearing "Hello!" in certain circumstances, e.g. meeting a friend at the bus stop, the conditions of what normally counts as 'greeting' prevail and lead to the consequent interpretation of the expression. It is this schematic knowledge of rules shared by members of a speech community which makes creating and understanding meaning in context possible. The objective of SAT is to formulate these rules, that is, to specify the configuration of conditions that must prevail for the participant to recognise an act of speech as 'greeting', for example.

However, the rules of speech acts are not as explicit or directly accessible as the visible goings-on of a speech event. Speech act theorists therefore cannot employ observation the way ethnographers do. Instead, in order to establish the rules that govern the realisation and recognition of speech acts, they need to resort to the knowledge they possess as language users. SAT methodology can therefore be described as follows: "I am a native speaker of a language. I wish to offer certain characterisations and explanations of my use of elements of that language. The hypothesis on which I am proceeding is that my use of linguistic elements is underlain by certain rules. I shall therefore offer linguistic characterizations and then explain the data in those characterizations by formulating the underlying rules." (Searle 1969:15)

The main problem the analyst faces is that language users often draw upon their knowledge of the rules of use without being conscious of the fact that they are acting in compliance with particular social norms. As Searle points out, in a normal conversational



situation, the hearer does not have to go through any conscious process of inference to arrive at the conclusion that the utterance “Can you pass the salt?” is a request rather than a question about the hearer’s ability (Searle 1975:73).

Since the language user’s knowledge of rules is largely intuitive, what linguists have to do when formulating rules is, in fact, to formalise their intuitions regarding language use (Labov & Fanshel 1977:72). In so doing, the expert user has to convert “*knowing how into knowing what*” (Searle 1969:14). For context it carries the implication that instead of describing the actual process of creating context - *how* rules are applied -, the focus will lie on *what* rules constitute context. In other words, the analyst turns the potential of creating a procedural model of language use into an *analytical model of language description*.

Context as the knowledge of a set of rules that define the conditions which prevail for speech acts has been the object of several enquiries. In the present study, three well-known models, which offer propositions as to what components this body of knowledge may comprise, will be examined.

#### 2.5.2.1 Austin’s Felicity Conditions

Austin’s scheme, for which he has not claimed any finality, identifies three conditions, each of which are made up of two components. According to Austin, if any of the six rules are flouted, the speech act will be unhappy.

The felicity conditions are as follows:

- A (i) There must be an accepted conventional procedure having a conventional effect.  
(ii) The circumstances and participants must be appropriate.
- B (i) The procedure must be carried out correctly and (ii) completely.
- C (i) The participants must have the requisite thoughts, feelings or intentions and  
(ii) must so conduct themselves subsequently.

(Austin 1962:14-5, abridged)

According to Austin’s definition, context comprises a set of stringent terms where adherence to *conventions* is particularly stressed. The rendering of intent thus proceeds

according to strictly prescribed rules, which are deeply ingrained in the collective mind of a speech community.

The reference to procedures seems to indicate that Austin is more concerned with what Hymes calls speech events (see 2.2.3). Furthermore, a novel feature of the construct is that, since the notion of speech act hinges on intention, the interlocutors' sincerity becomes a crucial element. This reaches such an extent that context constitutes not only the knowledge of conventional procedures but also the *feelings* participants must possess in order to yield an intention successfully. Wedding ceremonies, for instance, require that the participants have the intention of getting married and adhere to a traditional order of events. The occasion also demands seriousness and solemnity on the part of the participants who are constrained in their verbal actions as well. For instance, they are only allowed to say 'I do.' when consenting. Even though expressions such as 'Yes, of course!' may carry the same meaning, they do not make the act legally binding. In fact, the correspondence between the speech act and the language employed is so close that on hearing the expression 'I do.' most speakers of English recall the marriage vow.

Given the connection which exists between the verbal and non-verbal elements of the situation, some speech acts can be identified through fixed or partly fixed forms of words or syntactic structures (Stubbs 1983:154). The utterance of 'I name this ship ...', for instance, clearly indicates the type of act in question.

To summarise, Austin's context presents *a rigid and highly conventionalised schematic construct* whose features are fixed by relevance which is determined by accepted social practice. In common with Hymes's and Halliday's definitions, context here constitutes the *knowledge of appropriateness* participants belonging to the same culture share about what is considered as acceptable rendering of intentions on highly conventional social occasions. As a result, the description of context is restricted to special ritualistic events whereby participants have very little room for manoeuvre. Context in the Austinian framework therefore represents a strict code of conduct to which participants must adhere in order to render the speech event (legally) valid.

#### 2.5.2.2 Searle

Like Austin, Searle also views context as a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful performance of a particular speech act. But instead of proposing a general

framework for speech events containing more or less fixed speech acts, Searle offers an analysis of speech acts which function independently of an event.

According to Searle, in order for an utterance to count as a promise, for instance, the following conditions (apart from the one which ensures that the speaker and hearer know how to speak the language) must obtain:

*Propositional content condition:*

Speaker predicates a future act of speaker

*Preparatory condition:*

Speaker pledges to do something which speaker believes is something  
hearer wants to be done; speaker can do it

*Sincerity condition:*

Speaker intends to do the act promised

*Essential condition:*

Speaker undertakes the obligation to perform a certain act

(Searle 1969:57-61; Thomas 1995:94-5)

In Searle's framework, the emphasis shifts from, 'outside' conventionalised procedures to the *speaker*, with the focus on Austin's third condition. As with Austin, Searle's terms define not only what the speaker can and must do in order to render an intention, but what they are supposed to think and believe as well. Interestingly, even though Austin's third component is explicitly termed as 'sincerity condition', it entails only intention without any reference to how the participants must feel. Searle's essential condition then corresponds to the second part of Austin's third constituent.

Speech acts other than promise can also be described in reference to the four general conditions but will result in different sets of rules. The preparatory conditions for 'giving an order' will, for example, include that the speaker should be in a position of authority over the hearer, the sincerity condition that the speaker wants the ordered act to be done while the essential condition needs to account for the fact that the speaker intends the hearer to do a certain act. However, not all speech acts measure up against all four conditions. Greetings, for example, are a much simpler kind. In the utterance of 'Hello', for instance, there is no propositional content and sincerity condition (Searle 1969:64). Consequently, the context for

a particular speech act always comprises a *specific* set of conditions with individual rule realisations.

Since the analysis is conducted in reference to speech act types, it is a prerequisite that there exists a set of criteria which distinguishes one speech act from another. While Austin has based his classification on finding out what verb used in the first person singular present indicative active form (e.g. 'I name..., I declare etc..) can be inserted in the utterance so that it indicates the illocutionary act of the given speech act, Searle (1976) has proposed twelve non-linguistic criteria (e.g. differences in the point or purpose of the act, in the expressed psychological states, in the strength with which the illocutionary point is presented etc.), to allow for the classification of speech acts. The result, in both cases, is a taxonomy with a large number of identified speech act types.

On the whole, Searle's model of context represents the *knowledge of appropriateness* speakers must possess. This background knowledge encompasses a wider scope than Austin's in that it encompasses speech acts whereby the intention is not made clear by a verb or there is no one-to-one correspondence between the messages and language forms. One of the consequences of this broader range and more detailed analysis of individual speech acts is, however, a more fragmented picture of language use.

### 2.5.2.3 Labov and Fanshel

Following Searle, Labov and Fanshel also aim to formalise configurations of context which allow participants to interpret an utterance by relating it to extralinguistic cues in a systematic way. In so doing, they move further away from conventionalised procedures and concentrate on the participants' mindset instead. Speech acts are interpreted in the broader sense as they include the perlocutionary act by involving the hearer.

According to Labov and Fanshel, for the hearer to recognise the intention of the speaker as a request, the conditions of *needs*, *abilities*, *obligations (or desires)* and *rights* need to obtain. In the case of 'Can you pass me the salt, please?', for example, there is a need for the action to take place. It is also a kind of deed which the hearer is able to carry out in an act of politeness. Furthermore, in normal circumstances, at the dinner table, the speaker has the right to ask the hearer to perform the requested action. An order comprises a similar set of conditions [“1. It is desirable for a certain action to be done. 2. The speaker has the right to ask the hearer to carry out the action. 3. The hearer has the obligation to carry out the action.

4. The hearer has the capacity to carry out the action.” (Criper & Widdowson 1975:203)] - with the difference in the strength of the illocutionary force. In the case of an order, the rights and obligations carry more weight than in a request.

The conditions of needs and abilities outlined above, in fact, correspond to Searle’s preparatory conditions. Obligation and rights, on the other hand, shed light on the social relationship that exists between the speaker and the hearer in a particular situation. In addition, Criper and Widdowson (1975:203) point out that identifying an utterance as an order is not a matter of whether these conditions actually obtain - what matters is that the speaker believes that these conditions prevail and the hearer assumes that the speaker believes that they do. This interpretation then implies that the emphasis is put on the schematic set-up that prevails in the participants’ mind when they carry out a speech act in accord with social conventions. However, the set of rules and the detail supplied suggest that this type of modelling cannot provide an account of how hearers recognise speech acts with the speed that characterises everyday language use either.

### 2.5.3 Summary and Critique of SAT Context

The notion of context in SAT comprises the knowledge of those rules of use the speaker/hearer exploits to perform or recognise speech acts. The aim of the analysis of the SAT context is to identify the mental representations participants share for the realisation of intentions. Even though there is a tendency among the three definitions of conditions to approximate the participants’ mindset, context remains a generalisation created and presented by the analyst as an expert member of the speech community.

SAT is based on the assumption that the rules which govern the performance of speech acts are universal and apply to all participants of discourse. In Searle’s words: “Different languages, to the extent they are inter-translatable, can be regarded as different conventional realizations of the same underlying rules.” (Searle 1969:39)

The idea of abstraction at the level of universal rules of use, however, is questionable. Often people with a huge area of shared knowledge - e.g. husband and wife - interpret the same situation as providing conditions for two disparate speech acts. The wife’s comment of ‘Oh, I’ve got this horrible lunch with my boss tomorrow.’ may be understood by the husband as a request for help. His response, ‘Why don’t you tell his secretary that you cannot make it’, may then upset his wife who expects sympathy and understanding rather than advice (further

examples in Tannen 1992:49-50). Similarly, there are cultural differences, and conditions which are interpreted by a Hungarian as pertinent to an inquiry about someone's health, for example, may function as a greeting in another culture.

The idea of describing the entirety of language use in terms of speech acts bears a close resemblance to the method suggested for situation types in the previous sections: once the sets of conditions for all speech acts have been identified, the whole of language use is described (Searle 1971:40). Should it ever be achieved [Austin (1962:150) estimates the number of speech acts between 1,000 and 9,999], the undertaking would render a highly atomistic view of language use which would by no means reflect the actuality of language use where it is highly unlikely that participants have hundreds or thousands of sets of rules in mind when they speak a language. In a similar vein, it is doubtful whether indirect speech acts, ones in which "the speaker utters a sentence, means what he says, but he also means something more" (Searle 1975:59), are interpreted by way of deriving the primary illocution (e.g. 'Can you pass the salt?' as a request) from the literal illocution ('Can you pass the salt?' as a question) through ten steps in actual instances of speech since this kind of processing would be extremely time consuming and slow. The assumed existence of this long and complicated procedure contradicts to what Searle himself observes in cf. 2.5.2, i.e. that participants understand the question 'Can you pass the salt, please?' as a request straight away, thus providing a clear indication that the available contextual information must be processed in a more direct and efficient way.

The view of context as an inventory of rules inevitably restricts application, which in part stems from the conformity-orientedness of the conception. As we have seen, the characteristics - atomistic view of language use, limited implementation, analyst relevance etc. - are necessary prerequisites of an analytical type of research, the purpose of which is *language description*. Searle, in fact, has been aware of the implications:

"Of course, this analysis so far is designed only to give us the bare bones of the modes of meaning and not to convey all of the subtle distinctions involved in actual discourse. ... this analysis cannot account for all the richness and variety of actual speech acts in actual natural language. Of course not. It was not designed to address that issue." (Searle 1991 in Thomas 1995:99)

In her critique Thomas (1995), who argues that characterising speech acts in terms of *rules* can never be satisfactory, fails to realise that she and Searle (the latter apparently knowingly) pursue different paradigms. Whereas Searle is concerned with *language*

*description* and aims to formulate *rules* which are exclusive (in the sense that one rule precludes involving another), definite and conventional by nature, Thomas sets out to reveal how *language* is *used* in real-life situations. When she suggests that the analysis should be carried out in terms of *principles or maxims* which are less rigid, probabilistic and can co-occur, she, in fact, refers to models of context that depict the actuality of language use and which are going to be the subject of the following chapter.

## 2.6. Analytical Models of Context - Summary

The analysis of various linguistic theories in this chapter has proved that the general framework suggested by the present thesis is suitable for the examination and classification of language studies in terms of context.

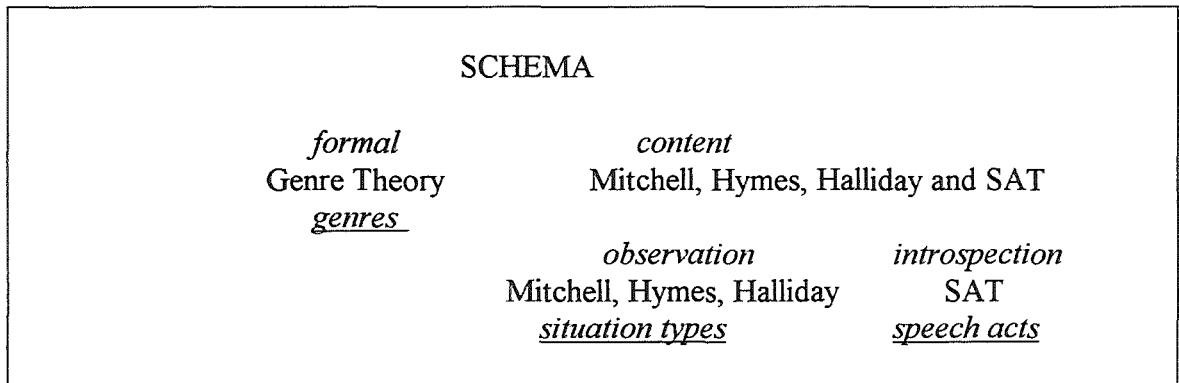
The features that are common to all models outlined in Chapter 2 coincide with those described as characteristic of an analytical model (cf. 1.4.2.1). In all cases contexts represent the *knowledge* of generalisations of appropriate language behaviour, with only those schematic constructs included that are typical and widely shared by the members of a speech community. Since the focus is on highly conventional instances of language use whereby there is either an almost one-to-one or predictable correspondence between the linguistic and non-linguistic elements, the meaning that concerns these theories is necessarily *contextual*.

Context is developed by the analysts who determine relevance in relation to what they see as socially accepted, appropriate and felicitous language behaviour. The researcher's perspective, however, necessarily implies that (i) in reality there exist two contexts, that of the participants' and the linguist's, of which the latter takes precedence; (ii) since the objective of the analyst is the description of language use, the concern is not *how* meaning is actually created but *what* constitutes context.

The models in this chapter fall into two groups with regard to the kind of schema they examine. Whereas Genre Theory explores *formal* schemata, the focus of all other studies lies on *content* schemata. The latter batch then can be put into subcategories according to the method the linguist employs in the inquiry. In the case of Mitchell, Hymes and Halliday, the analyst acts as an *observer* with an interest in *situation types*. In Speech Act Theory, on the other hand, the researchers rely on *introspection* in order to formulate the rules that provide for appropriate *speech act conditions*. This categorisation, in fact, corresponds to the three possible realisations of the analytical models of context, i.e. genres, situation types and speech acts. As will be demonstrated later in the thesis, such a division, of which there is an overview below, has 'trickled down' and prevails in language pedagogy as well.



## Analytical Models



*A Model for Describing Analytical Models of Context*

Figure 1

## Chapter 3

### Procedural Models of Context

#### 3.1 Ethnomethodology

##### 3.1.1 The Perspective of Ethnomethodology

As the various definitions of the term reveal (See **Appendix 3**), ethnomethodology's main concern is not what formal rules govern language use but how these rules are evoked and fitted to particular occasions in order to make sense of a speech event. For ethnomethodology the fact that the focus of an inquiry is a matter of *emphasis* (cf. 1.4.1) carries the implication that although ethnomethodologists acknowledge the norms that exist and play an important part in communication (Cicourel 1973:73), they are interested in the 'interpretative work' (Cicourel 1973:100) which is necessary for the abstract rules to be applied in actual situations.

Instead of proposing rules, ethnomethodologists suggest that participants make sense of each other's verbal actions in relation to some *practical, common-sensical reasoning* which forms part of the competence of all interactants (Turner 1974). For example, ethnomethodology "emphasizes that scientific reports and accounts are tied to the everyday practices of the working scientist in ways that are not captured by the idealizations of textbook or philosophy of science accounts" (Turner 1974:9).

As the above quote also demonstrates, according to ethnomethodologists, the same regulatory forces are employed regardless of the type of interaction, whether it is an everyday conversation or research (Cicourel 1973:36,39). Since the interpretative work carried out by the participants and researchers coincides, the analysts cease to occupy a privileged position and do not cast judgement concerning the adequacy, value etc. of the participants' action (see definition 1 in **Appendix 3**). The assumption that everyday social practices and scientific activities are governed by the same regulations (Cicourel 1973:51) also entails that the rules or regularities of language use ethnomethodologists intend to identify are highly general, if not universal, by nature.

The references to members' resources and accounts (see definitions 1,3 in **Appendix 3**) indicate that ethnomethodology is concerned with the participants' perspective, which includes that of the researchers. As Garfinkel and Sacks point out, in ethnomethodology "the notion of *member* is the heart of the matter." (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970:342).

The description of the participants' world as constant 'accomplishment', 'doing' and 'achieving' shows that the interlocutors, unlike their counterparts in the previous chapter, are neither abstractions nor passive recipients or actors of socially designated roles. Instead, speakers/hearers are seen as human agents who are *actively engaged* in the process of making sense of their surroundings and accomplish 'socially organized common practices'. Interaction, including meaning and context, is therefore not given but evolves as the result of the participants' rational, concerted and purposeful action (Garfinkel 1972:323).

Participant-orientedness and the concern with the ways interactions are accomplished as a result of the interactants' active involvement in particular instances of language use point to the fact that the type of inquiry ethnomethodology represents follows a procedural paradigm (cf. 1.4.2.3). In consequence, the focus is on the *process*, the interpretative work carried out at every stage of the interaction rather than on abstract rules that constitute socially acceptable language behaviour.

### 3.1.2 The Definition of Context

Context in ethnomethodology comprises the following: "(a) a commonly entertained scheme of interpretation consisting of a standardized system of symbols, and (b) "What Everyone Knows", i.e. a preestablished corpus of socially warranted knowledge." (Garfinkel 1967:56).

The first type of knowledge the definition names is *linguistic*, which supplies important but insufficient information. Ethnomethodologists view all communication as 'irremediably' indexical (see Preamble), i.e. that part of meaning always lies outside language: "speech indexes some particulars, but we must feel, perceive, recover, invent, or imagine many more particulars in order to assign sense to a setting." (Cicourel 1973:112).

This means that in everyday situations a lot of what is meant remains unsaid and participants fill in the gaps and supply the particulars that language does not and cannot carry by drawing on their non-linguistic resources, such as the stock of knowledge of the world which includes typifications, expectations and assumptions of what is considered normal,

accepted or strange in society in addition to the participants' individual biographies and any other information specific to them.

A husband saying to his wife, 'Dana succeeded in putting a penny in the parking meter today without being picked up.', for instance, implicates a vast area of shared knowledge, some of which is universal (e.g. that children grow), culture specific (e.g. what are parking meters and how to use them) or individual (e.g. to whom 'Dana' refers to). Statements about the mutual knowledge implied by the husband's utterance could be further refined and carried on, probably, *ad infinitum*. However, an experiment conducted by Garfinkel's students has proved that any attempt to recover the full contextual background to real-life utterances is doomed to failure as it is impossible to measure the exact amount of this shared agreement among participants (Garfinkel 1967).

Furthermore, in real-life situations all this information about the world assumed to be commonly available to the particular speaker and hearer remains largely unspoken (Garfinkel 1967, 1972) since communication is meant to be, to varying extents, sketchy, elliptical, incomplete and partial. The question 'How are you?' used as a greeting, for example, requires a conventionally vague and bland reply. Any precision demanded e.g. 'How am I in regard to what? My health, my finances, my school work, my peace of mind, my ...?' is seen as highly inappropriate and may result in a similarly unorthodox answer as in Garfinkel's example: "Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don't give a damn how you are." (Garfinkel 1967:44). The task of filling the non-linguistic gaps of understanding is therefore not only unaccomplishable but undesirable as well.

Given the fact that the common understandings of participants do not consist of a measurable amount of shared knowledge, have many individual and occasional elements, (see references to different accounts of the 'same' scene (Cicourel 1973:129) and change as a result of interaction (Cicourel 1973:32), they cannot and should not be recovered if communication is dealt with the way participants perceive it in actuality.

As a consequence, the knowledge of social norms and expectations and its componential analysis (the main objective of theories in Chapter 2) is *not* what ethnomethodologists mean by the second element of context, i.e. 'What Everyone Knows'. Context, rather, refers to a more general, probably universal assumption which enables participants to decide what norms are operative or relevant on a particular occasion e.g. what particulars in the situation will indicate that a formulaic answer and not a request for further clarification is needed as a reply to the 'How are you?' question.

Ethnomethodologists argue that the cognitive background shared and used as a scheme of interpretation by 'everyone' is not a collection of numerous stable rules dictating language behaviour but a *cognitive information processing* system which enables participants to impose orderliness on their environment and "mark off and identify settings into relevant categories for generating and deciding upon the appropriateness and meaning of communication" (Cicourel 1973:61). 'Shared agreement', i.e. the second component of the definition of context then entails "various social *methods* for accomplishing the member's recognition that something was said-according-to-a-rule and not the demonstrable matching of substantive matters. The appropriate image of common understanding is therefore an *operation* rather than a common intersection of overlapping sets" (Garfinkel 1967:30, 1972:320 - my emphases).

Since the first component of Garfinkel's definition, i.e. the analysis of the linguistic system falls beyond the scope of this thesis (cf. 1.4.1), it is these interpretative procedures (Cicourel, who used the term first, calls them 'interpretive'), which enable the participants to make sense of an infinite variety and number of variables within a speech situation that comprise context here.

### 3.1.3 Context as Interpretative Procedures (IPs)

Context in ethnomethodology thus corresponds to interpretative procedures, which provide a common scheme of interpretation that allows the participants to assign contextual relevance: invoke norms and values in order to identify the relevant features of a situation and thus (re)create context. The ethnomethodologist perception of context as a process rather than a set of components bears a close resemblance to connectionist models (see 1.3.4.2) and follows the procedural paradigm as well.

Like connectionist schemata, interpretative procedures do not represent rules which tell participants what is wrong or right, or correct or incorrect. Rather, as Cicourel remarks, IPs advise participants on an infinite collection of behavioural displays and provide them with a sense of social structure (Cicourel 1973:51). This view, in fact, keys in with Thomas's stance which asserts that actual instances of language use should be described in terms of less rigid principles or maxims rather than definite and exclusive rules (see 2.5.3).

As opposed to analytical models where relevance is fixed and the pertinent features of the situation are predetermined, in ethnomethodology only the *interpretative procedures*

represent invariant properties or principles (Cicourel 1973:33,85) while all the other elements, e.g. norms, are considered variable (Cicourel 1973:29). Given the fact that schematic representations of normality are unmeasurable and changeable, the research focuses on what is invariant and analysable, i.e. the guiding force of the process of context creation rather than the idealised product of it. The participants' assumption that 'normal forms' are recognised and employed is, in fact, one of the main properties of IPs (Cicourel 1973).

Negotiation with the environment entails that participants are not given relevance but, through the interpretative procedures, actively look for connections with the situation. In order to be able to do that, they have to engage their schematic resources. The assumption that the internalisation of norms does not lead to automatic application of rules on particular occasions (Cicourel 1973:45) and participants need to get involved actively (see Johnson-Laird and Neisser in 1.3.4.3) allows the speakers/hearers to assign relevance and make meaning by themselves instead of meekly acting out roles written by society.

In the ethnomethodologist framework, the negotiation of meaning includes only the speaker/hearer with their common and individual assumptions and expectations. Their interaction as an ongoing and constructed accomplishment is based on the presumption that both of them will employ similar methods when making their intentions manifest and when interpreting the other person's verbal and non-verbal actions. In order to fulfil the objective of the speech event, i.e. to recover each other's intent and achieve communicative effect, participants have to adapt and approximate their schemata to those of the other participants. Drawn together by some commonly agreed purpose, the interaction can thus be described as an ongoing reflexive and constructed 'convergence of schemata of interpretation' (Mackay 1974:185). The cooperative effort whereby participants orient themselves to their partners by adopting the standpoint that what is said will represent intelligible and recognisable features of a world known in common and taken for granted by both hearer and speaker is another property of IPs (Cicourel 1973:34-5, 52-3).

### 3.1.4 Application of IPs

A well-known illustration of how IPs are employed has been supplied by Sacks who examines why on hearing "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up." (Sacks 1972:330), the hearer automatically assumes that the 'mommy' who picks up the 'baby' is the mother of the child. He aims to design an apparatus, which explains how this gap of information (i.e. that it

is the baby's mummy) is filled in by the hearer.

He starts off by claiming that the term 'baby' forms part of two membership categorisation devices. One of them is the 'stage of life' which puts the word 'baby' together with such terms like 'child' and 'adult'. In addition, 'baby' also occurs in the 'family' device in the company of such words as 'mummy' and 'daddy'. These links of 'baby' with other words are claimed to come about as a result of the application of the economy rule (a single category from any membership categorisation device can be referentially adequate) and the consistency or relevance rule (if the first person has been categorised as baby, further persons may be referred to by other categories of a collection of which they are a member, so other categories as 'mommy' or 'daddy' are relevant given the use of 'baby'). To put it simply, while the first sentence has the potential of two interpretations (baby - stage of life; baby - family), the category 'mommy' in the second sentence invokes the 'family' device and eliminates the 'stage of life' when the two sentences are connected.

If the scene described by these two sentences is seen and there is no language involved, the viewer will still most probably assume that the person who picks up the child is his or her mother. The reason for this, according to Sacks, is a norm common in most cultures which says that a mother ought to soothe her crying baby. This expectation of motherly behaviour (i.e. viewer's schema) fills in the gaps left by the lack of language and specific information about the identity of the two persons of the scene.

It must be noted that this is a highly simplified version of Sacks' complex explanation which, in addition, demonstrates how the device 'family' is duplicatively organised (family being one of the 'teams' in human society) and looks at the interpretation of the second sentence from the activity-category 'cry'. The crux of Sacks' extensive investigation, however, is briefly summarised by Sacks himself with regard to the above outlined issues of members' knowledge and relevance (Sacks 1972:330).

### 3.1.5 Summary and Evaluation

Apart from the realisation that the background knowledge which is activated in particular instances of language use presents a huge and unmeasurable stock of information with many fortuitous and individual elements, the novelty of ethnomethodology lies in the recognition that the connection between the participants' schemata and the situation including the utterance does not come about automatically. It, rather, requires the active engagement of

the speakers/hearers who have to look for clues in their schemata, the setting and language, and assign relevance to the situation themselves in co-operation with other participants.

Ethnomethodology, a theory representing the procedural paradigm, therefore focuses on this process, on how the interactants connect up their existing schemata to the situation, and investigates the procedures that make it possible. Context therefore is not thought of as the knowledge of appropriateness but rather the *ability to use language appropriately* (it is worth noting that the introduction to Sack's article (1972:325) also refers to this mental apparatus as 'ability'). This then necessarily implies that communicative competence is also defined here in terms of *ability* for use (cf. 2.2.2).

The main contribution of ethnomethodologists to the development of a procedural model of context is the realisation that human communication (verbal and non-verbal) is governed by very general, probably universal and commonsensical maxims, which are shared by all participants. These interpretative procedures, which help the rapid selection of the meaning best suited to the situation, form the basis of the concerted action of interactants.

However, the role played by ethnomethodology in linguistic theory resembles that of Firth's in that both present novel and influential ideas but fail to analyse and expand them in a consistent manner. The application of innovative notions is also often contradictory.

The outline of the interpretative process by Sacks, for instance, is carried out in terms of numerous and stable rules rather than flexible maxims. Sacks' inquiry, aiming to be as exhaustive and accurate as possible, reflects the reasoning of the researcher rather than that of the participant. His interpretative apparatus employs various devices and categories, and appears to be far too complex and extensive to represent what real-life interlocutors do on particular occasions. As a result, the interpretation of the two sentences in his example comes about as the result of elimination through overlapping categories rather than quick, simple and commonsensical reasoning which seems to prevail in the actuality of interactions.

As Searle has observed earlier (cf. 2.5.2), understanding utterances is normally a straightforward exercise which does not require time consuming and complex processing. Interpreting Sacks' 'mommy' as the mother of the child is most probably a fairly straightforward matter of invoking a universally shared and primary schema that connects up to the situation quickly. This process is also facilitated by use of the definite article ('the mommy') which, given its grammatically coded meaning, (i.e. something definite, known, linked to previous utterances) delimits the choice to the 'mommy of the baby' by itself.

Cicourel's characterisation of IPs also represents a throwback to the analytical



paradigm. Not only does he refer to his work as the "*analytic* description of interpretive procedures ... " (Cicourel 1973:88 - my emphasis) but conducts an inquiry into the features that characterise IPs instead of aiming to identify *what* these procedures actually are.

While ethnomethodologists have prepared the ground for the development of a procedural model of context by raising fundamental issues concerning language use e.g. IPs, co-operation of participants, the ownership of relevance etc., the researcher who has resolved the problem of formulating maxims which reflect everyday logic and practical reasoning is Grice. His Cooperative Principle is the subject of the next section.

## 3.2. Grice's Cooperative Principle

### 3.2.1 Introduction

The basic tenet of Grice's theory of meaning is the communication of *intention* (Grice 1957, 1968, 1969). Although Speech Act Theory adopts the same starting point, the route it has taken diverges from Grice's significantly. Whereas SAT is concerned with the conventional conditions that must obtain for the successful performance of an illocutionary act (cf. 2.5.1), Grice claims that the intention of inducing a certain effect is a necessary but insufficient condition since communication becomes only possible if the audience recognises the intent behind the utterance. Grice thus reintroduces the hearer category and, with it, includes the perlocutionary act, which constitutes the schematic change that occurs in the participant's state of mind as a result of the interaction e.g. the belief that the speaker is in pain and wants the hearer to do something.

In consequence, communication in the Gricean framework is viewed as the *joint effort* of participants. The speaker produces a certain kind of behaviour in such a way that it can be recognised by the audience. The identification of the speaker's intention brings about some effect (response) in the hearer who then acts upon a state of mind already modified by the recognised intent of the speaker. This then implies that, in order for the interaction to be successful, participants need to engage their schemata and exhibit cooperative behaviour with what the ethnomethodologists call reciprocal perspective. The cooperative efforts of the participants move in a mutually accepted direction towards the achievement of a purpose which may be fixed from the start or evolve during the interaction (Grice 1975:45). As the alternative interpretation of Firth's definition of context has indicated, this *purpose-orientedness* is vital to communication and represents Firth's second element of context (cf. 1.2.5).

The probing question that remains is what devices participants employ to get their intentions recognised and make sense. One such tool is language. In his early work, Grice (1957) is of the view that, even though rare, explicitly formulated linguistic (or quasi linguistic) intentions exist. Later on, however, he tends to agree with ethnomethodologists and observes that in real-life situations normally more is implied than said and therefore there can be no one-to-one correspondence between language and meaning. When the sentence 'John is a bachelor' with its relatively fixed and stable conventional i.e. semantic meaning

(John is an unmarried male) becomes an utterance in a real-life setting, it gives rise to a variety of possible interpretations, e.g. John leads a happy and carefree life, or, conversely, has a lonely existence, or his flat is always a mess etc. (Grice 1982:238).

As Ziff, among many other linguists, points out, the actual use of an expression is determined by several factors, many of which have nothing to do with the conventional semantic meaning of the utterance (Ziff 1971:64-5). Language only points in the direction where meaning should be found in the situation and interpretation only takes place if the participants “refer to the context (linguistic or otherwise) of the utterance and ask which of the alternatives would be relevant to other things he is saying or doing, or which intention in a particular situation would fit in with some purpose he obviously has (e.g., a man who calls for a ‘pump’ at a fire would not want a bicycle pump)” (Grice 1957:59).

### 3.2.2 Grice’s Definition of Context

In spite of the crucial role assigned to context, there are only brief references to the notion in Grice’s works. According to Grice’s cursory definition, context, ‘linguistic or otherwise’, is one of the five pieces of information that are necessary for the understanding of what has been implicated by the speaker. The data the hearer will rely on include ‘the conventional meaning’, the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, context, other items of background knowledge and the assumption that all these items are available to both participants. Although it is not explicitly stated, what is seen as context by Grice may imply the co-text, the physical environment of the utterance, and even (given the fact that ‘other items of background knowledge’ follows context) some undefined background information (Grice 1975:50).

Grice’s vacillation as to what context should entail has led to interpretations which, in fact, contradict Grice’s view of communication and meaning. Schiffer, for instance, has adopted what Grice calls the ‘formalist position’ (Grice 1975: 41-3) and aimed to work out how certain facts about the conditions of an act of communication are mutually known by the participants. He acts upon the assumption that it is possible to fully render and recognise a particular intention and provide a set of logically sufficient conditions for specifying what the speaker meant by uttering *x*. Schiffer’s attempt, based on an idealisation, has necessarily resulted in an infinite regress (“For example, all ‘normal’ people know that snow is white, know that all normal people know that snow is white, know that all normal people know that

all normal people know that snow is white, and so on '*ad infinitum*'.” Schiffer 1972:32). With its accuracy and completeness, this systematic treatment represents the analytical paradigm which reflects the analyst’s rather than the participant’s logic.

In his criticism, Grice points out that such an investigation serves the purposes of a scientific inquiry and does not reflect how language is used in the actuality of real-life situations (“we can know perfectly well what an expression means without knowing its analysis ...” Grice 1975:42). Following a line of thought which is fundamentally different from Schiffer’s, Grice’s objective, in fact, coincides with that of the ethnomethodologists in that both theories aim to inquire into the very general guidelines that apply to all language use and which are known to all communicators.

In consequence, Grice’s concept of context should be viewed as the speaker/hearer’s schematic construct. Since the general framework follows the ethnomethodologist thinking, instead of Grice’s own definition, Garfinkel’s delineation of context, with particular emphasis on the schematic element (cf. 3.1.2), seems more adequate here.

### 3.2.3 Context as the Cooperative Principle

#### 3.2.3.1 The Cooperative Principle (CP)

By formulating a ‘rough general principle’ which all participants are expected to observe, Grice accomplishes what the ethnomethodologists have failed to render, i.e. identifying the interpretative procedure that governs human interaction. ‘What everyone knows’ when engaging in an act of communication is the *Cooperative Principle* which requires that the participants make their conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange in which they are engaged (Grice 1975:45). The fact that the response of most readers who come across the CP for the first time is usually that ‘it is stating the obvious’ shows that the CP indeed represents the kind of simple, commonsensical and practical reasoning the ethnomethodologists refer to when describing interpretative procedures.

In Grice’s framework, the CP is seen as the fixed and universally shared part of context which determines how actual contexts in particular instances of language use are created. At the same time, it leaves other constituents of context, such as the one-off constellation of elements in the participant’s schematic construct *deliberately* undefined.

### 3.2.3.2 The Maxims of the CP

The maxims of the CP lay down the ground rules of interpretation and the creation of meaning. When engaging in interaction, participants automatically assume that the other party will proceed in the manner that the maxims of the CP prescribe.

Grice has suggested the following categories for the CP:

- (i) The *maxim of Quantity* ensures that participant contribution is as informative as required. When in a casual conversation somebody asks how much something is, it is appropriate to answer with a round figure, as opposed to an invoice, for instance, where every penny counts.
- (ii) The *maxim of Quality* requires that the participants make their contribution one that is true: not telling the truth is normally penalised, so speakers are expected to say what they believe to be true and for which they have adequate evidence.
- (iii) The *maxim of Relation* requires that the participants' contributions are relevant and 'to the point'. It must be borne in mind that the appropriateness of behaviour commanded by this maxim is always *relative* to the particular interaction.
- (iv) The *maxim of Manner* relates to the way something is said and requires that the participants make their contributions as clear as possible. It includes various maxims such as:
  - "1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
  - 2. Avoid ambiguity.
  - 3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
  - 4. Be orderly." (Grice 1975:46)

It is important to note that Grice's maxims are not rules and as such are not meant to tell speakers how they have to behave. They are, rather, *guidelines* which form the 'quasi-contractual' basis for the general assumption by the participants that there are certain regularities in interaction which are observed unless there are indications to the contrary. As Thomas has also remarked (see 2.5.3), maxims or principles are more appropriate concepts to apply to the description of language use as they can co-occur, are regulative and 'more-or-less', rather than constitutive and exclusive. The common misunderstanding and the consequent critique of Grice's maxims is then often due to an interpretation and treatment which would suit rules but not principles.

It is an essential and often ignored characteristic of the CP that cooperativeness and the degree to which the maxims need be observed are 'more or less' and *relative* to the

requirements of the situation in which the utterance occurs. A research paper, for instance, is much more constraining in terms of clarity and relevance than a casual conversation where similar precision is, in fact, perceived as annoying and deviant (see example in 3.1.2).

Furthermore, the four maxims are not exclusive, which means that they do not necessarily have to be obeyed. In unmarked cases, whereby the CP is observed and communication is conducted 'correctly', according to the conventions of the given situation type, the recognition of an intention is a fairly straightforward matter. The 'Fine, thank you' answer to the 'How are you?' question, for example, means that the participants have interpreted the clues provided by the situation and language as indices pointing to an act of greeting. The speakers/hearers have both invoked more or less the same schema and acted according to the appropriateness rules of the situation.

In marked cases, when the maxims of the CP are not fully observed, the apparent discrepancy between what is said and what is actually implied can be worked out in reference to the maxim that has not been obeyed. This is how a letter saying "Dear Sir, Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours etc." (Grice 1975:52) can, given that a professor is writing a testimonial about a student, carry the implication that the pupil is not good at the given subject. The readers will recover this concealed meaning by matching the linguistic evidence to the requirements of the 'testimonial' schema/genre which has been evoked by other circumstances of the situation e.g. the format and purpose of the letter, the social position of the participants etc.. In so doing, the target audience will inevitably realise that the testimonial deviates from what is considered normal in the circumstances. Acting on the assumption that the professor intended to be cooperative and had some reason to violate the maxim of Quantity, they will make additional assumptions so as to establish an acceptable and sensible link between the elements of the situation and their expectations. The role of the CP in the process is to trigger off this extra reasoning and arrive at an alternative understanding.

#### 3.2.4 Grice's Contribution

Grice's CP and its maxims present what the ethnomethodologist defined as *practical reasoning shared by all participants*. The importance of CP lies in the fact that it is a set of commonsensical guidelines which provides the general basis for procedural work and can be applied to all instances of interaction including non-conventional and deviant ones. It

represents the participant's perspective and supplies a highly feasible framework for a procedural model of context.

As the whole apparatus is meant to be simple and straightforward, difficulties arise when attempts at a more complex and detailed analysis reinstate the analyst's perspective and make the purposes of language description prevail. Along with Schiffer, Thomas provides another example of misinterpreting Grice's original intent (Thomas 1995:87). When asking how to distinguish between different types of non-observance, she, in effect, fails to observe the maxim of Relation in that she refers to problems of language description rather than language use. The connection thus made therefore deviates from the one Grice has intended and cannot be seen as pertinent. The simple fact that participants normally do not ponder over whether they are violating or flouting a maxim when using language in context provides another, more commonsensical explanation as to why Thomas's question is irrelevant to Grice's participant-oriented investigation.

While considerable effort has been made to identify the various kinds of non-observance of maxims by Grice himself (1975, 1978), he has not given any detail as to the other types of maxims that he has suggested exist alongside the four elaborated ones (only 'Be polite' is mentioned briefly 1975:47). The questions of whether the maxims are of equal importance or some are more salient than others, or whether there are other forces regulating the cognitive procedure of making sense have not been raised either.

These issues will be taken up by the Relevance Theorists and Widdowson who incorporate Grice's original insight into their own framework of language use in the following sections.

### 3.3 Relevance Theory

#### 3.3.1 The Definition of Context

Relevance Theory (RT) provides what ethnomethodologists and Grice have failed to yield - a comprehensive and workable definition of context:

“The set of premises used in interpreting an utterance (apart from the premise that the utterance in question has been produced) constitutes what is generally known as the *context*. A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of the utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation.” (Sperber & Wilson 1986:15-6 - also quoted in 1.1.1)

“By ‘context’ here, I mean not simply the preceding linguistic text, or the environment in which the utterance takes place, but the set of assumptions brought to bear in arriving at the intended interpretation. These may be drawn from the preceding text, or from observation of the speaker and what is going on in the immediate environment, but they may also be drawn from cultural and scientific knowledge, common-sense assumptions, and, more generally, any item of shared or idiosyncratic information that the hearer has access to at the time.” (Wilson 1994:41)

The first and most important feature of context is the fact that it is a *psychological* entity. Context exists ‘in the mind’ and represents the internal projection of the outside world rather than a phenomenon that prevails ‘out there’. RT’s definition of the notion thus coincides with Firth’s in that context here is also defined as a mental representation, a schematic construct which includes both the co-text and the physical setting to the degree and in the manner they are reflected in the mind of the hearer.

Secondly, the RT definition of context puts more emphasis on the *hearer*. Its main concern is how an utterance is interpreted by the audience. Thus, RT prefers the second person as opposed to Grice’s maxims which are directed equally at both participants whose concerted effort is under investigation.

Furthermore, RT’s context is an amalgam of species-specific, culturally-bound and individual features. While the first two types of feature promote convergence between



humans, the third, individual characteristics foster divergence. In direct opposition to Firth (cf. 1.2.3.1), Sperber and Wilson emphasise the *individual aspects* of schemata, and argue that since differences in life history inevitably lead to dissimilarities in memorised information, “cognition and memory superimpose differences even on common experiences” (Sperber & Wilson 1986:16).

Context in RT terms obtains a highly *ad hoc* nature as well. On a particular occasion any subset of the hearer’s schematic construct can bear upon comprehension, hence the modality (‘may all play’, ‘may be drawn’) expressed throughout both RT definitions. What part of an individual’s schema becomes relevant in a real-life situation will often depend on unpredictable and accidental factors, e.g. participant’s tiredness, the section of schema which is most readily accessible at the time of speaking etc. As a result, the type context someone will have in mind at a given moment will necessarily fall outside the analyst’s control (Sperber & Wilson 1986:119).

In RT context is a *dynamic* concept which changes constantly even within the period of the same interaction: “each new experience adds to the range of potential contexts. It does so crucially in utterance interpretation, since the context used in interpreting a given utterance generally contains information derived from immediately preceding utterances. *Each new utterance*, while drawing on the same grammar and the same inferential abilities, *requires a rather different context.*” (Sperber & Wilson 1986:16, my emphasis)

Drawing on context(s) therefore necessarily entails some alterations in the cognitive environment of the hearer which, in line with Grice’s theory of meaning, is the primary intention of the speaker (Sperber & Wilson 1986:46). The result is some kind of contextual effect which may either erase or modify the strength of an assumption from the context, or, by combining with an existing assumption, yield a contextual implication. Contextual implications, in fact, represent the modified context, a synthesis of old (particular schematic set-up) and new information (provided by language and situation) and results from the interaction of the two. It must also be emphasised that contextual implications are not the sum of the two kinds of information but represent a qualitatively new contextual set-up for the interpretation of the next move: “At each point in a discourse, the hearer has in the forefront of his attention a different set of assumptions, which he may have never processed together before, and may never process together again.” (Sperber & Wilson 1986:119). It is worth noting that this view of context bears a close resemblance to the connectionist model in that both RT and PDP describe mental representations as fluid patterns which are constantly

adjusted and modified (cf. 1.3.4.2).

To summarise, context according to RT is a unique, highly individual and constantly changing phenomenon. It is the *variable* part of the comprehension process which at no point of the interaction can be fixed or (pre)determined. As contextual parameters vary as and when the occasion requires, the determination of context is seen not as a prerequisite to understanding but, in fact, part of it (Sperber & Wilson 1982:76). The selection of the subset of context which bears on comprehension is carried out by the participants who consequently control relevance.

Given the dynamic and highly individualistic nature of context outlined above, the concept formulated by RT undoubtedly represents the *procedural paradigm*. It suggests a real-time, on-line model whereby context is constantly (re)created by the hearer in the process of comprehension. Being a procedural model, RT does not concentrate on what constitutes context but *how* it is created in real-life situations (cf. 1.4.2.2.).

As a consequence, of the three factors necessary for comprehension - linguistic knowledge, background knowledge and some principles governing the exploitation of the two types of knowledge - RT, like ethnomethodology, places the emphasis on the procedures that control the activation of schemata, which are called inferential abilities by Sperber and Wilson (1986:16).

### 3.3.2 Context as Inferential Abilities

In line with Grice's definition of meaning, RT proponents, Sperber and Wilson argue that communication is successful not when hearers recognise the linguistic meaning of the utterance but when they infer the speakers' meaning, i.e. speakers' intention from it.

It follows from this model of communication, too, that understanding an utterance implies more than simply knowing the language. Every sentence is multiply ambiguous with a wide range of interpretations compatible with its semantic and referential properties. Even though available contextual assumptions further delimit the choice of possible interpretations, it is the hearer's task to choose the one intended by the speaker. It is claimed that hearers are normally able to select a single one of the possible interpretations without often realising that they have made a choice (Sperber & Wilson 1981:298, Wilson 1994:43).

Sperber and Wilson argue that the selection of a single interpretation for any utterance is governed by a constraint which simultaneously determines context, content and

the intended inferences (Sperber & Wilson 1982:71). They suggest that the general standard that enables hearers to exclude all but one interpretation is the *Principle of Relevance*, a universal and simple framework that can replace Grice's Cooperative Principle and all its maxims.

### 3.3.3 The Principle of Relevance

RT maintains that the selection of a particular context for recovering the intended interpretation is always determined by the search for relevance. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986:165), in order to infer the speaker's intention, the addressee has to construct possible interpretative hypotheses and then choose the intended one. This process of selecting and creating the intended context is governed by the *Principle of Relevance* which is treated as axiomatic by the hearer and can be summarised as follows:

The speaker tries to express the proposition which is the most relevant one possible for the hearer. The hearer, on the other hand, assumes that the speaker has done everything to be optimally relevant. Every act of communication therefore conveys the presumption of its own optimal relevance. (Wilson & Sperber 1981:170, 1986:158)

The criterion of relevance is based on the assumption that human cognition is relevance-oriented and people pay attention to information that seems pertinent to them. As a result, every utterance raises expectations of relevance in the hearer around which the evaluation of possible interpretations of the utterance is built. These interpretations will be relevant to varying degrees and hearers will choose the one which satisfies their expectations best. Given that speakers aim at optimal relevance and attempt to formulate their utterances in such a way that the first interpretation that occurs to the hearer is the one intended by them, the first interpretation tested and found consistent with the principle of relevance is the one that the speaker had probably in mind and which the hearer should therefore choose. This general intention to be relevant gives the crucial guide for the recovery of meaning intended by the speaker.

Relevance within this framework then functions as an *indexical beeline*, which connects elements of the situation with the schema of the hearer to yield contextual implications. In Sperber and Wilson's words: "Relevance is a relation between the proposition expressed by an utterance, on the one hand, and the set of propositions in the hearer's accessible memory on the other." (Sperber & Wilson 1981:169).

The RT argument is that connecting up these two sets guarantees understanding and therefore no other principles or maxims are necessary. The principle of relevance thus subsumes Grice's maxims as it is supposed not only to guide the hearer towards correct disambiguation and assignment of reference, but also to help to decide whether any additional premises are needed or whether a figurative interpretation was intended (Sperber & Wilson 1981:170-1).

The notion of relevance is defined in terms of *contextual effects* and *processing effort*. It is claimed that newly presented information is relevant only when it interacts with existing assumptions in the hearer's schematic construct and produces contextual effects. While the effect factor is in direct, the effort factor is in inverse proportion to relevance which is defined by the following formula: "The greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance; but the greater the processing effort, the lower the relevance." (Wilson 1994:46)

The information "It will rain in Paris tomorrow", for example, can be very relevant to somebody who is going to Paris and has had some assumptions about what the weather will be like there. The statement, by either strengthening/weakening one's suspicions or getting the person to pack a raincoat or umbrella, will inevitably yield contextual effects which will then contribute to the relevance of the utterance.

If, however, the longer and linguistically more complex version - "It's raining in Paris and fish swim in the sea." - is uttered where the hearer needs no reminding that fish swim in the sea, more processing effort is required to understand the statement which, in turn, will detract from the overall relevance (Wilson 1994:45-6).

### 3.3.4 Relevance Theory - an Alternative to Grice's Cooperative Principle?

The main question for this study is whether RT offers a more viable conceptual framework for a procedural model of context than the one suggested by Grice. In this respect, RT fails on several accounts.

First of all, it dissociates itself from interaction and the negotiation of meaning. RT disregards the fact that the indexical beeline of relevance can miss, in which case the speaker's intention needs to be recovered through a process of overt negotiation. Widdowson, who argues that RT treats communication solely as cognitive and neglects other aspects especially those of interaction, takes Wilson's (1994) sentence to provide an apt example for highlighting the importance of negotiation in interaction:

"A. How is your new tennis player?

B. He has much in common with John McEnroe.

A. Good server?

B. Bad temper. " (Widdowson 1998:12)

Secondly, RT does not seem to account for the situation in which utterances occur. It automatically takes the view that the additional information of 'fish swim in the sea', for example, supplies extra linguistic complexity without providing extra contextual effects and is therefore less relevant than the shorter version. Widdowson, however, points out that in actual language use the speaker would mention 'fish' deliberately in order to create some extra contextual effects, i.e. implicatures that the hearer should work out in reference to the quantity maxim of Grice's Cooperative Principle. Given the purposefulness of communication including language play (Cook 1997b), the 'fish' clause would always be uttered with some intention on the part of the speaker.

The assumption that there is some correlation between the surface complexity of structures and the effort required to process them represents a fairly simplistic view of language use. It also creates a situation whereby the judgement of what is considered more or less relevant in a situation is cast by the analyst who does not necessarily represent the participant's perspective.

It appears that advocates of RT are concerned with how participants *should think* in order to reach a relevant interpretation rather than what communicators actually *do* on particular occasions. As Levinson (1989) rightly points out, the deductive device proposed by RT represents an *extrinsic constraint* on the processing system whereby the principle controlling comprehension is objectively assessed in the quantitative terms of achievement and expenditure.

While Grice's original notion of relevance is *relative* (to the purpose and stage of interaction), RT treats relevance as a *quantitative* concept which can be calculated and evaluated in a manner like factory output by outside experts (Sperber & Wilson 1986:129). In a similar vein, inferential processes are described as rational rather than intuitive procedures starting from a set of premises and resulting "in a set of conclusions which follow *logically* from, or are at least warranted by, the premises" (Sperber & Wilson 1986:12, my emphasis).

The view of relevance as a logical and objectively measurable cognitive device is in sharp contrast with RT's definition of context as a dynamic, individual and relative concept. Given the fact that any feature of a situation can become relevant and context is a constantly

changing subjective phenomenon, any connection established between the participant's schema and the situation is inevitably as subjective and fortuitous as the reference points to which it is related. This then results in a basic contradiction inherent in RT: while the notion of context as defined by RT represents a procedural model, the procedure which governs the creation of context, i.e. relevance is defined by the analyst in objective terms and embodies a different, analytical paradigm.

One of the consequences of this view is that, although relevance is a key and indispensable notion for any theory of context, the manner in which it is defined and treated by RT restricts its implementation to unmarked cases since implicatures cannot be explained without recourse to Grice's maxims. When the speaker suddenly changes the subject of a conversation, for instance, the hearer understands what is implied by the seemingly unrelated utterance in reference to the maxim of relevance that has been deliberately disobeyed by the speaker.

The concept of relevance replacing all the maxims is supposed to function the same way as Grice's Cooperative Principle which is assumed to be constantly obeyed. This being the case, the utterance judged as irrelevant with respect to a specific situation according to Grice's Cooperative Principle is necessarily seen as pertinent within the RT framework. With the elimination of 'local' relevance, all implicatures disappear too. This limitation of RT has, in fact, been explicitly noted later on by Wilson: "I want to leave aside these cases of covert communication and concentrate instead on a more basic, *overt* type of communication" (Wilson 1994:37).

Furthermore, relevance as an analyst created and imposed formal device fundamentally differs from the commonsensical, participant-generated and fairly straightforward reasoning ethnomethodologists claim interpretative procedures ought to represent. RT's hypotheses (Sperber & Wilson 1986:145-149) about the way thoughts follow one another in the participant's mind bear a close resemblance to Searle's rules of identifying speech acts (cf. 2.5.3) and contradict Sperber and Wilson's own observation on how relevance in actual language use works. The Principle of Relevance as a logical device necessarily excludes those instances whereby context is created as a result of heuristics, despite the fact that the importance of it in cognition is, in fact, acknowledged by RT (See Sperber & Wilson 1986:45).

### 3.3.5 The Contribution of Relevance Theory

In spite of its claims, the conceptual framework of context proposed by RT cannot be considered as an appropriate procedural model that can replace Grice's Cooperative Principle. The contribution of RT to the development of a procedural model of context is therefore limited to the concise definition of context it has provided and the renewed attention to the notion of relevance which plays a crucial role in the creation of context and, depending on whether it is controlled by the analyst or the participant, the determination of the type of context to which a linguistic theory subscribes.

### 3.4. Widdowson's Model

#### 3.4.1 The Definition of Context

Following in Firth's footsteps and acknowledging his contribution, Widdowson defines context as a schematic construct:

"Context is not to be thought of as an undifferentiated mass of amorphous reality but as a set of schemata which define conventionalized patterns of experience ... In language use, then, the linguistic sign is interpreted indexically as a means of engaging with the schematic constructs of context." (Widdowson 1984a:151-2)

"When people make an indexical connection, they do so by linking features of language with familiar features of their world, with what is established in their minds as a normal pattern of reality or *schema*. In other words, context is a schematic construct. It is not 'out there', so to speak, but in the mind. So the achievement of pragmatic meaning is a matter of matching up the linguistic elements of the code with the schematic elements of the context." (Widdowson 1996b:63)

Widdowson stresses that context is not given, residing outside in the situation. It is, rather, a psychological entity, which comprises patterns that convey the sense of normality for participants. Context as schema is necessary but not sufficient for the creation of meaning. In a true ethnomethodologist vein, the active engagement of interlocutors is emphasised: although the situation will supply conditions whereby an utterance can be interpreted as representing a particular communicative act, it is a prerequisite that these conditions are recognised by the participants who need to take bearings from their schematic knowledge in order to be able to achieve the indexical value of the linguistic signs.

The reference to pragmatic meaning (cf. 1.4.2.2) implies that the connection between the linguistic features and the parameters of the situation is not permanent, and needs to be worked out by the individual speakers/hearers each time they engage in an act of communication. *Relevance* in this framework thus inevitably lies with the participants, who include both expert and non expert users (See the use of 'people' in definition 2).



### 3.4.2 Schemata

Schemata, defined as stereotypic patterns derived from past experience which represent the organisation of language at the pragmatic level of communicative readiness (Widdowson 1983:37), provide, apart from the shared elements of the language system, the means of connection between the otherwise disparate individual worlds of the speaker and hearer. Communication, in Widdowson's view, is "achieved when these elements are exploited to bring the different worlds into convergence, thus, for the interlocutors, extending the common ground of shared knowledge" (Widdowson 1984a:130).

According to Widdowson, the schematic knowledge participants employ constitutes patterns of conceptual organisation and patterns of participation in social life. The former patterns are related to the ideational function of language (cf. 2.3.2) and comprise the *ideational* knowledge\* of the conceptual context, that is, of how language serves as a device for forming propositions about the world. In relation to what is being said, i.e. is the propositional content of discourse (cf. 2.5.1), Widdowson views schemata as *frames of reference*. Lexical units commonly occurring together often refer to a frame of reference: e.g. words like *goods*, *shipment*, *bill of lading* etc., for example, point towards a commercial content (Widdowson 1983:37).

The second type of schemata is related to the interpersonal function of language, of how language serves to perform social actions and constitutes the *interpersonal* knowledge of social behaviour (Widdowson 1983:55; 1984a:101). In relation to what is being done, i.e. the illocutionary activity (cf. 2.5.1), schemata are described as *rhetorical routines*. Making reference to routine conditions of invitation, for instance, will result in knowing that the response to it is generally either acceptance or refusal. (Widdowson 1983:37)

It must be stressed that in Widdowson's theory schemata are not perceived as rules but, rather, as approximate guidelines to actuality which do not always fit a particular instance of use and are therefore modified by the new experience such an encounter represents (Widdowson 1984a:236-7). The notion of context within Widdowson's framework thus represents a *dynamic*, constantly changing phenomenon. As the purpose of people talking is

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\* Although Widdowson uses Halliday's terminology, his main concern is how these functions of language are internalised and actualised as behaviour (i.e. language use), as opposed to Halliday who focuses on how these functions are reflected in the structure of language (i.e. text analysis).

to bring about some schematic change, the transmission of information inevitably results in a different arrangement at every turn of the interaction:

“(A) and (B) are talking to each other. The one taking the speaker role has some information to impart for some purpose. In general this purpose is to change the state of affairs that obtains in the mind of the addressee at the moment of speaking. (A) has reason to suppose that he knows something that (B) does not know and which he believes it is desirable for (B) to know. So he alters this state of affairs by passing this knowledge on and the situation then shifts into a new state, itself then subject to further change, and so on.” (Widdowson 1984a:81)

In this respect, Widdowson’s conception of schemata, too, resembles the connectionist model. It represents the amended version in that it goes beyond the simple stimulus → modification → response course of action. Activating schemata here implies not only retrospectively relating incoming information to established patterns and then bringing about change. Schematic knowledge also works prospectively and projects anticipations about what is to come (Widdowson 1983:61). Engaging mental representations therefore is not a one-way process but an *interaction* between the speaker/hearer and the linguistic/non-linguistic environment.

Schemata, however, do not tell the whole story of language use (Widdowson 1983:40). Cognitive patterns need to be activated even in highly ritualistic situations where the connection between the participant’s context and the language is almost automatic. More often than not however, the projection of schemata includes negotiation, which results in some modification of the schemata themselves.

### 3.4.3 Procedures

Widdowson (1990:105) therefore claims that taking bearings on participants’ knowledge of the language and the world calls for a *procedural* activity. In line with the ethnomethodologist view, he argues that “interpretative procedures are required to draw knowledge into the immediate executive level of schemata and to relate these schemata to actual instances.” (Widdowson 1983:106) These procedures or procedural principles mediate between context and situation and activate knowledge to generate discourse. The process is summarised by Widdowson as follows:

DIAGRAM REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



(Widdowson 1984a:108)

It is emphasised that procedures are distinct from rules in that they do not represent what people know in the abstract but, rather, what they *do* with this knowledge in the discourse process. Procedures are exploited to match up and adjust schemata as the discourse proceeds. Based on the directions provided by language and the setting, they function as interpretative activities which establish relevance by providing the connection between linguistic signs and aspects of schematic knowledge.

An act of communication is thus seen as a procedure whereby abstract knowledge is converted into actual behaviour, in linguistic terms: symbols into indices (see Preamble). The two kinds of schemata are exploited and created by *two types of procedure*: one which serves to establish and maintain frames of reference, and one that realises illocutionary value. On the one hand, tracing anaphoric reference, e.g. finding out what a definite article or a pronoun points to, is an inference that activates a specific schema. On the other hand, by drawing upon the knowledge that routine behaviour to invitation is either acceptance or refusal, the hearer can easily make sense of a seemingly unrelated response such as “My examination is tomorrow”. Obviously, the closer the schemata of the speaker/hearer are, the less procedural activity will be needed in order to call on the appropriate frame of reference or to realise a specific illocutionary value.

Although Widdowson details how some of these procedures work (1983:42-45), he is quick to point out that such an analysis is a methodological device, and does *not* reflect what goes on in actuality. Interlocutors in real-life situations do not go through interpretative procedures in such a conscious and laborious way unless it is not at all clear what constitutes

the frame of reference e.g. in the case of riddles. Instead, understanding is normally the kind of nimble and efficient mental activity Searle (cf. 2.5.2) describes.

The process of making sense then results in a change of state: schemata are realised, modified and extended so that shared ground is achieved through reciprocal exchanges. In this respect, *language use equals learning* in that both processes represent a kind of interaction with the environment whereby the required adjustment of the interlocutors' schemata is brought about in order to account for new experience. On the whole, using language is seen as a fundamentally creative activity involving an ever-changing notion of context.

#### 3.4.4 Capacity

With respect to the language user, the procedural ability which realises schematic knowledge as communicative behaviour is called *capacity*. It is the ability to produce and understand utterances for making meaning by enabling the participants to exploit the language system as a meaning resource and their schematic knowledge of the conventions of language use in order to actualise the interaction of the discourse process (Widdowson 1983).

Capacity makes it possible for the participants to construct or interpret not only formulaic or conventional but novel language and situation as well. In this sense, it represents the *active force for creativity* in human communication (Widdowson 1983:42-45). The degree to which this creative force is employed, of course, varies according to the type of situation. In the case of what Firth calls restricted languages (cf. 1.2.4) or other highly ritualised and predictable routines there is little room for creativity, and interaction is largely about conforming to established norms and practices. Literature, on the other hand, allows readers to employ their capacity in an almost unlimited way.

Due to the fact that primacy is given to procedural activity in language use, Widdowson defines *communicative competence as a capacity* for solving problems. He argues that communicative competence is not a matter of knowing rules for the composition of sentences. It is, rather, the ability to exploit such a knowledge of rules in order to produce utterances as and when the occasion requires, and arrive at a negotiated settlement (Widdowson 1984a:197; 1989:135). In other words, "communicative competence in this view is essentially a matter of adaptation, and rules are not generative but regulative and subservient" (Widdowson 1989:135).

It should be noted here that Widdowson's terminology differs from that of Hymes's in a fundamental respect. Whereas Hymes's communicative competence (including the aspects of both knowledge and ability) retains an analytical perspective in that it is concerned with judgements about the degree an utterance conforms to norms (cf. 2.2.2), Widdowson's capacity is an *ethnomethodological* entity, representing the user's ability to exploit the knowledge of language as a resource for the creation of meaning rather than assess normality (Widdowson 1983:24-5).

As the knowledge of rules is considered useless unless it is acted upon and unless the scope and conditions of how to employ these rules are understood by the participants, the main concern of Widdowson's study of context is the notion of capacity. Since capacity covers a wide range of different activities such as inference, problem solving, practical reasoning, negotiating meaning etc. (Widdowson 1983:41), it would prove a futile effort to identify exactly which of these procedures are exploited in a specific instance of language use. The analyst's task is, instead, to establish those fundamental and highly general principles which govern the implementation of interpretative procedures.

#### 3.4.5 Imperatives

Widdowson argues that the general basis for the procedural work of capacity is Grice's Cooperative Principle (Widdowson 1983:68) which ensures that the clues provided by language and situation become meaningful for both the speaker and hearer. The general assumption that people engaging in discourse will make a joint effort by observing or disregarding maxims serves as a basis for identifying the relevant features of a situation and thus creating context. In this respect, the CP relates to, what Widdowson terms, *cooperative imperative*, which disposes the participants to assume a social role and allow and accept a modification to their own world in return for social benefits (Widdowson 1983:47).

At the same time, individuals wish to take control and protect the domain of their experiential territory. Therefore, there exists another, opposing force, the *territorial imperative*, which allows people to defend their own schematic space against invading influence. As a consequence, participants in an act of communication must make sure that the conveyance of information is carried out in a manner which is acceptable to the addressees and renders the intrusion into their private space least hurtful. This can be achieved by a number of procedures, such as avoiding disagreement and fostering accord. Linguistic means,

for instance modality, can also mitigate (e.g. Would you open the gate, please?) or aggravate (e.g. Open!) the force of what is being said.

The cooperative imperative represents the *speaker's* perspective in the sense that it enables the speaker to make his or her intentions clear. The territorial imperative, on the other hand, is about understanding the intentions of others. It is concerned with the protection of the *hearer's* schematic life space. While the CP guarantees that the propositional information and the illocutionary intent are expressed in a way which is *accessible*, the territorial imperative renders the utterance *acceptable* and makes the perlocutionary effect possible. Since communication as a concerted effort of participants works best if the interlocutors are receptive and make their contributions both accessible and acceptable, interpretative procedures have to service both the cooperative and territorial imperative and maintain an equilibrium between the two potentially opposing forces. (Widdowson 1983:50).

By introducing the force of territoriality, Widdowson expands on Grice's framework which contains the cooperative imperative only. Despite the thoroughness with which other aspects of Widdowson's theory have been worked out, the territorial imperative, the relationship of the two opposing forces together and particularly the place of politeness within the scheme appear slightly less elaborated.

In Widdowson's framework the CP, which takes care of the cooperative imperative, is on a par with 'territoriality' and the territorial imperative, which are related to Brown and Levinson's (1987) term of 'face' and the procedures which mitigate face-threatening acts that have the effect of intruding into the hearer's life space. At the same time, Widdowson also acknowledges that, since everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained and it is in the best interest of all participants to co-operate in upholding face during interaction, the mutual recognition of territorial rights is also part of being cooperative. Widdowson therefore accepts Lakoff's reducing the CP to two maxims: 1. Be clear (i.e. accessible) 2. Be polite (i.e. acceptable) (Widdowson 1983:78-9).

Even though the argument appears properly rounded off, starting from and arriving at the concepts of accessibility and acceptability, the Cooperative Principle is, in fact, presented at two different levels of abstraction. While at the outset, the CP is separate and carries equal weight with territoriality, later it represents a superordinate concept raised above both the territorial and cooperative imperatives. Similarly, whereas in the beginning and towards the end of the discussion politeness is related solely to territoriality, in mid-argument its function is extended to both co-operation and face-saving.

The changing conceptions of the CP are all the more unfortunate since a similar incongruence of interpretations prevails in the literature. In Grice's work, politeness appears in small print as one of the Gricean maxims. In Leech's (1983:15-6) framework, on the other hand, the Cooperative Principle is one of the principles guiding the interpersonal rhetoric alongside the Politeness Principle. The CP entails Grice's four maxims, which are then further divided into submaxims. The end result is a fragmented picture which, as Searle and Widdowson argue, cannot reflect the quick and nimble process of actual meaning making.

It seems that a possible solution to the definition of what should comprise the CP could be the alteration of terminology, which can be found, although not very explicitly, in Widdowson's own text (Widdowson 1983:79). If, for instance, the term 'cooperative contract' (which is actually used in Widdowson's discussion) were exploited to mean the CP in the *general sense* amalgamating both imperatives, the Gricean Cooperative Principle could retain its original meaning and imply only the cooperative imperative.

#### 3.4.6 Widdowson's Contribution

Widdowson's contribution to the development of a contextual model is a *procedural framework*, which incorporates and binds the insights offered by various theories, including Firth's influential definition, into a conceptual scheme for the description of what speakers/hearers do in the actuality of *language use*. It is the most comprehensive and consistent treatment of context in the procedural mode, which not only recognises the importance and interdependency of schemata and procedures ("just as schemata cannot be realized without procedures, so procedures have no point unless they are schematically orientated" (Widdowson 1993:89)) but amalgamates them into a coherent theory too.

In his application of the definition of context Widdowson follows a procedural paradigm with rigorous consistency. In so doing, he manages to avoid the pitfalls that ethnomethodology and Relevance Theory, which switch into an analyst-oriented mode as soon as they set out to explicate how meaning is actually created on a particular occasion, could not avert. Moreover, Widdowson appears to be fully aware of the conceptual difference that lies at the core of various studies of context. Clearly marking the distinction between ethnomethodology and ethnography throughout his argument is a testimony to his efforts in this respect (Widdowson 1983:24-5).

Widdowson's inquiry also surpasses other attempts, e.g. that of Goodwin and Duranti (1992) which, although it promotes a fundamentally procedural model and offers an impressive overview of the research into the notion, fails to supply an all embracing framework of reference for the systematic analysis of language use.



### 3.5 The Procedural Model of Context – Conclusions

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, despite the lack of references in the literature, there *exists* a procedural model of context in language study. Characteristically, rather than dividing the knowledge context entails in different ways as with the analytical models, the definition of context here *evolves* and comes about as a result of the contributions various theories make. The title of the chapter should therefore correctly be ‘model’ in the singular, as opposed to Chapter 2 where the inquiry consists of a number of possible contexts.

First, ethnomethodology lays down the foundations by recognising that there are interpretative procedures, which mediate between schemata and the situation, and allow the participants to assign relevance. The straightforward, commonsensical principle Grice offers as the reasoning that speakers/hearers exploit in the actuality of language use, provides those approximate and relative categories in the form of maxims that have to replace rules due to the different contextual perspective. Relevance Theory then supplies a workable definition that is incorporated into Widdowson’s framework, which clarifies and systematically applies the wide range of terms available in linguistics. By introducing the *Cooperative Contract* as its main guiding principle, Widdowson also suggests a comprehensive theory for the description of language use from the participants’ point of view.

Even though the path leading to the procedural model appears fairly straightforward, the application attempts have made some inquiries career off the designated track. Throughout, the task of this study therefore has been, apart from identifying the theories that adopt a procedural perspective, to filter out elements of analysis which pull towards an analytical inquiry.

## Chapter 4

### From Language Study to Language Pedagogy: The Definition of Context and its Implementation

#### 4.1 Theoretical Framework

##### 4.1.1 General Description of Context

The aim of this chapter is to recapitulate what various brief as well as more comprehensive definitions of context have offered in order to provide a framework which can serve as a basis for the systematic analysis of major language teaching methods and approaches.

The findings of the present study suggest that the notion of context can be best defined as a *schematic construct* which comprises those features of the physical, social and linguistic situation that become relevant when language is used for communicative purposes in the performing of social actions. This then implies that context should not be seen as a phenomenon 'out there'. It, rather, has to be regarded as a *psychological concept* that comes about as a result of the human agent's interaction with the setting in which communication takes place. It also follows from this definition that context reflects but does not necessarily coincide with the objective reality in reference to which it is created.

Since communication is a social enterprise whereby in order to be successful, i.e. make and understand meaning, the interlocutors, in their efforts to construct context, have to adhere to commonly shared norms, participants' acts are meaningful only if their choice of relevant features is in agreement with what is judged as acceptable and appropriate practice within the speech community. *Relevance* therefore is inextricably interwoven with *appropriateness*, which can be seen as the governing principle of the former.

The two fundamental questions of *what* relevant features constitute context and *how* these features become pertinent have been addressed by two schools of thought which represent the analytical and the procedural perspectives. It has been argued that the two conceptions are complementary in that they shed light on different aspects of the same notion and are distinguished according to the **emphasis** they lay on either the *constituents* of context

or the *process* of creating context.

#### 4.1.2 Definition of the Analytical Model of Context

Since the aim of language description is to provide an analytical model, i.e. a systematic delineation of context in terms of its *components*, the investigation entails identifying the relevant features of the situation which make up context. The analysis is based on the following postulations.

The involvement of participants with the situation does not present random behaviour. Speech is not 'boundless chaos' and language behaviour is perceived as meaningful only if it is conducted according to conventions which reflect the social order that prevails in human society. As a consequence, it is assumed that there exists some kind of system in reference to which relevant features of situation are singled out in acts of communication.

Proponents of the analytical paradigm maintain that all members initiated into a speech community possess a knowledge of 'rules of speech' which govern relevance, the guiding force for the selection of those features of the situation which come into play when interactants make meaning. The assumption is that these rules, which form the schemata of the interlocutors, can be explicated by linguists in their capacity as analyst-observers or analyst-expert users. This circumstance then entails two contexts, those of the participant's and the analyst's, which do not necessarily coincide and of which the analyst's takes precedence. In consequence, context is considered the schematic representation of *linguists* delivering their view of what is considered an appropriate choice and combination of relevant features in a speech community.

In this paradigm, context is identified in relation to different notions regarded as units. Thus, components can be singled out in terms of the stereotypical schemata of speech events, called situation types (Mitchell, Hymes, Halliday), in reference to formal schemata which account for rhetorical routines and structures (Genre Theory), or with regard to the conditions that need to obtain for an utterance to count as a specific speech act (Speech Act Theory). In the case of situation types, contexts are described either as specific constellations of all or some of the parameters proposed by the analyst (Hymes) or as variations of a framework with given but more general co-ordinates (Mitchell, Halliday).

Since the relevant features of the situation which make up context are defined by the

linguist in reference to some general order characterising speech, an analytical inquiry of context is concerned only with those stereotypical mental representations that are commonly known and shared by language users of a speech community. In consequence, the focus is on repetitive and ritualistic situations or texts that require formulaic language and lend themselves more readily to outsider observation and idealisation.

The definition of context according to the analytical paradigm can then be put forward as follows:

*Context is the analysts' mental representation of what constitutes the knowledge of appropriate language behaviour, that is, the knowledge of what features of the situation need to pertain in order to create meaning in a socially appropriate way. The analysts' stock of representations of speech events, texts or speech acts, however, is necessarily restricted to the socially constrained schemata that comprise routine interactions exploiting formulaic language. The aim of inquiry is to explicate this knowledge of norms and provide a delineation of schemata in reference to their constituents whereby the governing force of selection, relevance, lies with the linguists in their capacity as expert language users or observers. The result, i.e. context, is a research device, which presents order from a scientific point of view and not the actuality of language use.*

#### 4.1.3 Definition of the Procedural Model Context

The abstract knowledge of what features of situation can or should become relevant is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for language use. In order to participate in communication, interlocutors need to *engage* their schemata in interaction with the situational setting.

Writing a letter, for example, is not merely about evoking the relevant schema with regard to the frame of reference (e.g. complaint) and rhetorical routines (e.g. organisation of such letters): in real-life situations, the knowledge of letter writing norms has to be brought into alignment with the particularities of the specific instance of language use. Since the degree of formality/informality that needs to be applied in a given situation in order to display appropriate language behaviour is not given, it is always the writers' task to gauge it by assessing their relationship with the reader before selecting the fitting form from their mental list of linguistic realisations (e.g. Yours sincerely, Best wishes, Kind regards etc.) when, for example, finishing a letter.

Each new situation thus presents a new cognitive task, the fulfilment of which inevitably modifies existing schemata. As a result, no contexts can ever be identical even within the same interaction. Given the fluid and constantly changing nature of context, the study of the procedural model focuses on the *interpretative procedures* speakers/hearers employ in their effort to relate stereotypical representations to actual instances.

When engaging in an act of communication, interlocutors are not 'instructed', as it were, as to what features of the situation they should select as relevant. They, rather, work out relevance themselves by connecting up their schemata to the clues provided by the situation. Making sense therefore requires the participants' active interpretative involvement: language users need to recognise the constraints a situation represents and realise the relevant features accordingly. Context, in this respect, therefore, will present the *participants' ability* to employ their schematic knowledge for selecting the relevant features of a situation in a socially appropriate way.

It has been suggested in Chapter 3 that establishing relevance in accordance with social norms stems from the participant's intention (and the assumption of intention on the part of the other interlocutor) to cooperate. Communication, the convergence of two sets of schemata containing common as well as individual features, is made possible by a *cooperative contract* ('What Everyone Knows' in 3.1), which is based on the mutual recognition of territorial rights and the need to protect face (cf. 3.4). In order to honour this contract, participants have to ensure that information is conveyed in a manner that is both accessible and acceptable to the addressee.

The procedural definition of context can then be drawn up as follows:

*Context is the participant's capacity to activate and adjust existing patterns of knowledge to particular instances in a way that ensures mutually agreeable and socially appropriate creation of meaning in an act of communication. It is the ability to realise the relevant features of the situation in a manner which suits the communicative purposes of the interaction best. The general principle that guides interlocutors in their procedural work is the Cooperative Contract, which represents the practical reasoning as to how much freedom of choice participants can enjoy when establishing relevance and creating context.*

#### 4.1.4 The Definition of Context

Despite the differing perspectives, the two disparate definitions of context can be drawn into one framework representing a comprehensive overview of the notion.

The analytical and procedural conceptions can be united if context is seen as a *continuum* with the socially most constrained mental representations at one end and the socially least regulated, highly individual schemata located at the other end.

At the social extreme of the scale, the selection of situational factors that come into play for creating meaning is heavily restricted. Relevance is to a large extent pre-determined and the interlocutor has little freedom in deciding what feature of the situation s/he can choose as pertinent. The schema of wedding, for example, does not leave much room for manoeuvre: participants either fit in well with what is considered as an instance of the stereotype or the ceremony will not be legally binding. Readers of poetry, on the other hand, know that they can be more creative, and they are allowed to evoke any pattern, however individual or fortuitous it may be, to make meaning without being penalised for it.

With context presenting a varying degree of conventional constraints and interpretative independence, what participants have to know when making indexical meaning (see 1.1) is *how to move along the contextual continuum*. In other words, they need to recognise to what extent they have to conform in their choice of relevant features in order to be meaningful, i.e. display appropriate language behaviour.

In summary, context can be defined as follows:

**It comprises the schematic representations of socially appropriate language behaviour ranged on a continuum with one end presenting conventional and the other idiosyncratic schemata. Context, on the one hand, constitutes the *knowledge* of socially sanctioned situations and genres as well as speech acts. On the other, it entails the *capacity* to employ the schemata located along the continuum in accordance to what the participants perceive as the Cooperative Contract. The two components complement each other and are employed in the creative act of meaning making to varying degrees.**



#### 4.1.5 Implications for Language Pedagogy

Given the definition of context provided by the present thesis, the following hypotheses can be put forward concerning its pedagogic implementation.

As with language study, two disparate perceptions of context are expected to prevail. On the one hand, there will be language teaching movements which focus on the *knowledge* learners have to acquire in order to display appropriate behaviour in the foreign or second language.\* This implies learning what relevant features of situation make up context in another speech community. To facilitate the process, the findings of componential analyses of various theories will be carried over and applied for pedagogic purposes. Such a circumstance will inevitably retain a situation whereby two contexts coexist – the outside expert's and the inside participant's. It can also be assumed that, as normally the former takes precedence, learners will be expected to employ expert schema as closely as possible. A further corollary of this set-up is the emphasis on contextual constraints, which cannot be negotiated and which will render the approaches rule governed and prescriptive.

On the other hand, there will be approaches which accentuate the *procedural work* learners have to carry out when communicating in the foreign language. Such language teaching movements will therefore seek to develop students' capacity through stimulating the actual experience of creating context. Learners, therefore, will not be given contexts but, rather, will have to work out on their own accord what features of the situation should pertain in order to achieve appropriateness in LT.

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\* The distinction between a *foreign* language (which is taught as a school subject but which is not used as a medium of instruction in schools nor as a means of communication within a country) and a *second* language (which is not the native language but is widely used as a medium of communication in a country) (Richards et al. 1985:143) will be acknowledged in this thesis, and the terms will be used as the situation requires. The abbreviation LT (i.e. target language) referring to both foreign and second language will also be widely employed.



## 4.2 Context in Language Pedagogy

In the following section we shall examine the similarities that prevail in language study and pedagogy as well as identify the specific problems the language teaching situation poses in terms of context. In order to shed light on how context is viewed in language teaching, the procedure employed in language study will be applied and first the various definitions provided by language pedagogy will be briefly analysed. The emerging framework is then related to the delineation that has evolved as a result of the investigation of context in linguistic theory. The comparison and alignment of the two frames (theory and pedagogy) will then give rise to the development of a model of analysis in reference to which language teaching trends can be distinguished and described.

### 4.2.1 Definitions of Context in Language Pedagogy

The following is a selection of definitions of context in language pedagogy:

- (1.) "Situation is extra-linguistic but still helps determine the language used in the exponents; *context is linguistic*." (Finocchiaro & Brumfit 1983:66-7 my emphasis)
- (2.) "**context:** the setting in which a communicative event takes place." (Malamah-Thomas 1987:145)
- (3.) "**context:** the social and physical world which interacts with text to create discourse." (Cook 1989:156)
- (4.) "**context:** the social, psychological, and physical setting in which language use takes place." (Batstone 1994:136)
- (5.) "In working out what information you needed in order to make those meanings clearer, you probably used any or all of three types of information: your knowledge of English, the context, and background knowledge. ... In face-to-face conversation the immediate physical context provides information about *who, what, when, where*, and so on." (Lynch 1996: 20,22)
- (6.) "**context of situation:** the significant set of social factors which define the nature of the occasion of talk and with which every linguistic interaction correlates." (Odlin 1994:319)
- (7.) "The 'context' of an utterance can mean two different things. (1) It can refer to the situation in

which the utterance is produced; this is the 'situational context'. (2) It can refer to the linguistic environment - the surrounding language; this is the 'linguistic context'. Both types of context influence the choice of language forms and therefore have an effect on output." (Ellis in Lewis 1993:80)

(8.) "In this book I use the term **context** for situational factors, and **co-text** for the linguistic environment." (Lewis 1993:80)

(9.) "Language is thus to be considered in two contexts: on the one hand, human systems of conceptualization and perception, on the other, the actual use of language in society." (Yalden 1987:10)

(10a) "Context is the situation in which communication is taking place: the who, what, when, where, why (...) of basic journalism."

(10b) "Contextualization, especially with respect to mechanical drills, does not seem to be the same as creating a context, which is the topic and situation of a communicative act that are necessary for understanding."

(10c) "... the notion of context as background information essential for understanding comes from theories of reading." (Walz 1989:161, 162, 164)

(11.) "The ability to use language appropriately - and the process of acquiring sociolinguistic competence - is largely determined by the context of situation (the immediate context) and the context of culture (the broader culturally-specific social context) (...)." (Porto 1996:14)

(12.)

background knowledge

*schematic*

- factual

*knowledge*

- sociocultural

procedural knowledge

- how language is used in discourse

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knowledge of situation

- physical setting, participants, etc.

*context*

knowledge of co-text

- what has been/will be said (written)

---

knowledge of the language system

- semantic

- syntactic  
- phonological

*systemic*  
*knowledge*

(Anderson & Lynch 1988:13)

(13.) "Context is created in interaction partly on the basis of particular and individual choices by speakers at a local level and partly by those speakers being able to make inferences about each other on the basis of shared knowledge and assumptions about the world and about how to accomplish things interactionally." (Ellis and Roberts in Kramsch 1993:41)

(14.) "Context should therefore be viewed not as a natural given, but as a social construct, the product of linguistic choices made by two or more individuals interacting through language." (Kramsch 1993:46)

(15.) "CONTEXT OF SITUATION. Establishes the rules of appropriateness for the behaviour of participants in a language event on the basis of who they are, where they are, and why they have come together, and gives meaning to that behaviour." (Savignon 1983: 303)

(16.) " In sum, the notion of context is a relational one. In each of its five dimensions: linguistic, situational, interactional as well as cultural and intertextual, it is shaped by people in dialogue with one another in a variety of roles and statuses. Because language is at the intersection of the individual and the social, of text and discourse, it both reflects and construes the social reality called 'context'.

Because of the multiplicity of meanings inherent in any stretch of speech, contexts are not stable; they are constantly changed and recreated by individual speakers and hearers, writers and readers. ...

Teaching a language is teaching how to shape the context of the 'lesson' as an individual learning event and as a social encounter with regard to its setting, its participant roles, the purpose of its activities, its topics of conversation, its tone, modalities, norms of interaction, and genre of its tasks."

(Kramsch 1993:67)

(17.) "... we must draw a clear distinction between situations as they occur in real life and situations which are fabricated for language teaching purposes. The former can never be adequately defined, for they embrace the sum total of human activity; the latter need to be defined fairly precisely, given the accepted limitations of any published course." (Alexander 1980:56)

(18.) " By *situation* we mean the complex of extra-linguistic conditions which determines the nature of a language act (...). Properly speaking, situations are strictly personal and unique. One of the conditions is always the individual language-user himself with his unique background (the sum total of his experiences). For our purposes, however - the definition of a level of general language ability will be an objective for a very large and heterogeneous population - we must ignore strictly individual conditions

and we may concentrate on four components of situations, which together, provide a sufficient basis for the further steps in our procedure. We shall henceforward, distinguish four components of situations:

1. the *social roles* which the learner will be able to play;
2. the *psychological roles* which the learner will be able to play;
3. the *settings* in which the learner will be able to use the foreign language;
4. the *topics* which the learner will be able to deal with in the foreign language.”

(Van Ek and Alexander 1988:17)

(19.) “The relationship between evaluation and the context in which evaluations are undertaken is of fundamental importance. Context consists of a range of aspects, beginning with the socio-cultural environment and political considerations, which includes the politics of the education system, moving through to all those involved in the process of education: directors of education, inspectors, learners, teachers, and so on. ” (p.19)

“ The teacher does not live and work in an isolated environment. The classroom is itself a context influenced by the individuals in it. Group interaction affects the climate of the classroom. A school has its organizational structure. The school is situated within a regional setting which in turn is part of a larger social and political environment with its own outlook on education. Views on education range from seeing it as training manpower, transmission of culture, social control, or individual development. All these things influence both directly and indirectly how language is taught, learned, and evaluated in the classroom.” (p.20)

“ *The context affects evaluation*

The context in which we teach will modify any innovation: how it is introduced, implemented, and evaluated. Evaluation, therefore, is directly affected by context.” (p.20)

“ *Evaluation affects the context*

Evaluation can break the cycle of old influences and initiate new ones.” (p.21)

(Rea-Dickins and Germaine 1992:19-21)

(20.) “What we see here, then, is that the non-native English-using speech fellowships are using Englishes of the world in their divergent *situations* and *contexts* and with various linguistic and ethnic *attitudes*. Let me explain what I mean by these three terms: *situation* includes the linguistic, political and sociocultural, and economic ecology in which the English language is used. *Context* refers to the roles of participants in these situations and to the appropriateness of language used in these roles. And *attitude* is specifically used here for the overt and covert attitudes toward a language, its varieties, and the uses and users of these varieties. ” (Kachru 1985:16)

## 4.2.2 Similarities between Language Study and Language Pedagogy

### 4.2.2.1 Terminology

One striking feature language pedagogy shares with linguistic study is the wide range of interpretations and the confusion as to what exactly context entails. In fact, according to the definitions in the selection, the notion can entail anything from a very restricted view of context comprising the linguistic element only (1) to a notion that incorporates a whole range of aspects including the education system (19). In between are the perceptions where context is made up of certain elements of the situation e.g. social (6,14); social and physical (3); social, psychological and physical (4) etc. Most references to the 'size' of context appear to be *quantitative* and are concerned with the number of domains covered. With regard to constituents, the definitions represent a wide variety. Context can imply either linguistic (1) or non-linguistic features (8), or both (7,12). As a situational entity, context may contain physical (3,4,5), social (3,4) and/or psychological (4) components.

There are also definitions (6,10b,10c,18) which take a *qualitative* view and account solely for those features of the situation which are necessary for rendering meaning. However, there is no mention of who decides what should be considered salient in the process of making meaning, the expert language user or the participant of the interaction. In other words, there is no reference to *relevance*.

So far it has been demonstrated how one term, i.e. context, can take on a whole range of different meanings. In the examples the opposite trend can be observed as well, i.e. how the same phenomenon is described in different terms. Whereas the linguistic environment is defined as context by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1), it represents co-text for Lewis (8). References to extra-linguistic conditions are also made in different terms, such as context (3, 8), situation (1,18) or the context of situation (15).

Context is often described as the setting (2,4) or situation (10a,10b,) *in* which a communicative event takes place (2,4,7,10a). As in language study, context is often perceived as a "container" of extra-linguistic matter in which an act of language use unfolds (cf. 1.1.3.1).

The most common view concerning the function of context is that it *determines or influences* the kind of language that is used in communication (1,6,7,11,18). This one-way

“from context to language” directionality, according to which context provides a relatively stable environment which defines language use, is questioned by definitions 3, 13, 14 and 16. Cook (3) considers the relationship between the extra-linguistic and linguistic elements more dynamic and argues for a two-way process whereby ‘context and text’ *interact* to ‘create discourse’. This point is taken further by Ellis and Roberts (13) who claim that context is created rather than given and comes about as the result of individual choices made by the participants on the basis of assumptions and knowledge they share as members of a speech community. Kramsch (16) also rejects the idea of context as naturally given and defines it as a product of human interaction.

#### 4.2.2.2 Polarities in the Perception of Context

A closer inspection reveals that, despite the variety of definitions and interpretations, the polarities identified in linguistic theory (cf. 1.1.3.2) have not only been carried over into language pedagogy but entail similar domains as well. However, the borderlines are often fuzzier and the categories are less distinguishable. Since the physical/mental and the concrete/abstract axes are less explicitly defined, the two are merged thus resulting in one entry fewer than in 1.1.3.2.

References to context as (partly) the physical setting (2,3,4), or the actual use of language (9) point to the fact that the notion is seen as a *concrete* phenomenon. Descriptions of context as a social construct (6) or as a system of conceptualisation (9) are, on the other hand, concerned with context as an *abstract* concept that has been generalised from concrete instances of language use. Context as an abstract notion and context as a concrete speech event is clearly distinguished in Yalden’s definition (9), which incorporates both facets of the conception.

Reference to social factors (6,19) or context as a social construct (14) and to rules of appropriateness in social encounters (15,20) suggests that context is wholly (6) or partially (14,16,19) regarded as *generality*. Although Van Ek (18), for example, acknowledges that in reality contexts (or situations as he calls them) are always unique, he argues that for the specific purposes of the inquiry, which is concerned with the level of general language ability for a large population, situation needs to be stripped of its individual features and has to be treated as a more general and abstract notion. In Van Ek’s framework all the distinguished components of the situation are related to the learner who, as a result, also becomes an

idealisation. It is worth noting that among the definitions, Van Ek's is the only attempt to identify the constituents of the extra-linguistic environment, apart from the very general "who, what, when, where, why" list - a direct quotation from Hymes left unelaborated in both examples (5,10a). Definitions 13, 14 and 16 represent a more holistic approach in that they include both *individual and general* features. On the one hand, context is created by the participants who act as individuals making specific choices on particular occasions. On the other, interlocutors also function as members of a society who share a common ground comprising the knowledge of the rules and regularities of the outside, social world and the interaction in particular.

Most definitions consider context as something objectively *given and stable* that can be examined by the analyst in order to be able to identify what constitutes this segment of the world: linguistic, social, physical or psychological components. Descriptions 13, 14 and 16, however, challenge this view: they represent context as a *dynamic* notion which is constantly created and recreated by the participants. Furthermore, Kramsch (16) as well as Rea-Dickins and Germaine (19) argue that different settings of language teaching - the classroom in the former (16) and evaluation in the latter case (19) - are not stable either, but rather, interact and bring about changes at all levels of education.

#### 4.2.3 Specific Features

Although there is a small number of definitions (17,18,19) which are particularly concerned with *language teaching*, they still manage to shed light on the problems that arise from the unique setting language learning in the classroom presents.

First of all, in the case of language teaching two situations run parallel: real-life language use outside the classroom and LT language use/learning within the classroom. In Alexander's view (17), real-life situations are far too complex to be exhaustively analysed as opposed to classroom situations which are more limited by nature and therefore can and, indeed, should be defined. While the former obviously refers to situations of language use outside the classroom, the latter, "fabricated" ones may imply either the selection and practice of situations in which learners will find themselves in the future (18), or the communication that occurs as part of formal instruction. This, in fact, brings the number of prevailing settings to three with the scripted projections of future events representing a third type termed as "realistic" by Medgyes (Medgyes 1986a).

While Alexander views the classroom as, “by definition, an extremely limited environment.” (Alexander 1988:24), Rea-Dickins and Germaine (19) point out that it is by far more complex and multi-layered than it appears at first sight. In fact, together with Kramsch, they maintain that the language teaching situation should be regarded an instance of real life language use that has its own dynamics. It is argued that the classroom is a real and self-contained entity which does not exist in isolation but forms part of a wider setting that ranges from the particular school to the broader social and political environment whose views and ideology have an imprint on what happens inside the classroom. The classroom and the broader educational background thus mutually affect each other. As a consequence, the embeddedness of various settings is not seen as a one-way process whereby the wider context affects the narrow one. Instead, it is maintained that the same two-way interaction Cook (3) refers to in his description of context prevails in language teaching too.

Kramsch provides a comprehensive definition (16), which includes both language use and language teaching. She claims that the two share similar features in that both represent social reality and are created and shaped by the participants. Kramsch, too, is at variance with Alexander when she observes that the language teaching situation is no less dynamic or malleable than real-life language use.

It must be clear from the above that the complexity of context in language pedagogy stems partly from the prevalence of two settings: one of *language use* outside the classroom and the other of *language instruction* within the classroom. In fact, the way the two environments are seen determines the value and importance attached to them. Those who juxtapose the classroom with real-life situations and perceive the former as less natural regard future language use as more befitting for language teaching (18). Others, who conceive of classroom communication as a type of natural language use consider the classroom situation as an equally suitable venue for instruction.

#### 4.2.4 Summary

As has been demonstrated, in language pedagogy there appears to be an even wider variety of context definitions with more inconsistencies than in language study. All the problems of the description of the notion of context in linguistics appear to have been transferred to language pedagogy with the addition of new, specific issues. The reasons for this, among other things, may lie in the automatic adoption of unresolved issues from



linguistic theory, the increased number of contexts to be reckoned with, as well as the many different contributors who represent an even broader range of individual views and terminology. Despite the added difficulties, what emerges from the analysis of the definitions is that there exists a common ground between language study and pedagogy which can provide a point of departure for further investigations.

First of all, although in an embryonic state and often unrefined, notions which have proved crucial for the definition of context can be found in language pedagogy as well.

One of them is the view of context as some kind of *background knowledge* that is exploited for the creation of meaning. Definitions such as 'human systems of conceptualization' (9), or 'background information essential for understanding' (10c) point to the fact that, even though a minority, some language educators go beyond the rudimentary conception of context as raw, physical environment and, in a vein similar to linguistic theory and the formulation offered earlier in this thesis (cf. 4.1.1), describe the concept as the interlocutors' representation of the world instead.

The contours of the analytical and procedural perspectives can also be traced in the pedagogic definitions. Van Ek's delineation (18) represents, by and large, the *analytical* paradigm in that it subjects the otherwise personal and unique situation to an idealisation process which disposes the notion of its individual properties and renders it a generalisation necessary for the particular purposes of the inquiry. Since his aim is to establish a level of general language ability that will be required of the learner at the end of the course, all parameters of the context are, in fact, predictions concerning the relevant schematic structures students *will* have to possess in future situations of language use.

On the other hand, those who see context as a dynamic notion (16,19), which comes about as the result of individuals' choices and their interaction with the environment, adopt a *procedural* perspective whereby context is not predicted or given by the linguist but is, rather, created by the participants in flight. The definitions in language pedagogy also reveal a tendency whereby the analytical perspective is predominantly associated with future language use while the primary concern of the procedural conception is the present classroom situation and those acting in it.

*Appropriateness* appears on three occasions (11,15,20) as the notion which is determined by context. It is seen as the external force that establishes the rules for the participants in their effort to acquire socially acceptable language behaviour. The problem of how context relates to appropriateness, however, remains unresolved.

### 4.3. Pedagogic Framework

#### 4.3.1 Amendment of Pedagogic Definitions

Although the main issues identified in language study have surfaced together with the specific problems the classroom entails, pedagogy has failed to supply a comprehensive definition that could serve as a basis for the systematic analysis of context in language teaching. In order to rectify the situation, the assistance of linguistic theory, which has already provided such a delineation (cf. 4.1), needs to be summoned.

First of all, the confusion around context has to be cleared up for the notion to present an orderly concept that can be subjected to systematic analysis. As has been demonstrated earlier in the thesis, this is only possible if context is treated as a schematic construct. Apart from the necessary theoretical backing cognitive psychology provides (see 1.3), the concept of schema also allows for the crucial distinction between the *situation en masse* and the *context* which constitutes the relevant elements of the situation only. Differentiating situation from context then inevitably implicates *relevance* which serves as the decisive force for the establishment of which components of the situation should become salient in order to produce socially *appropriate* language behaviour. The addition of relevance also provides the link which has been missing in language pedagogy in that it explains how context connects up with appropriateness, i.e. that relevance guides the selection of the pertinent features of the situation which results in language production and interpretation conforming to the norms of a speech community.

#### 4.3.2 Framework for Pedagogic Analysis

The pedagogic definition of context thus amended can serve as the basis for the exploration of language teaching movements, the purpose of which is to set apart methods and approaches according to their conception of context.

As the analysis of the pedagogic definitions has indicated, the traces of the two perspectives, which have been identified both in linguistics and cognitive psychology, can be detected in language pedagogy as well. This then carries the implication that once the theoretical framework, which has been developed in earlier chapters, is amended to fit the specific requirements and circumstances of ELT, it can serve as a device for the classification

of language teaching movements, the same way the original design has made the categorisation of linguistic theories possible (see Chapters 2 and 3).

While the two prevailing schemata in a research setting belong to the expert user/observer and the participant/observed, the co-existence of real-life and classroom situations in language teaching (cf. 4.2.3) entails that the two contexts in the **analytical** paradigm of language pedagogy will coincide, on the one hand, with that of the expert user's and, on the other, of the classroom participants', i.e. the teacher and, more importantly, the learner. The former set of schemata will comprise the analyst's mental representations of the right constitution of situation types, genres and the felicity conditions of speech acts. Since expert contexts present what is considered proper language behaviour in the LT, they will take precedence and will have to be acquired by the learner relatively unchanged in order to remain appropriate when using the LT. This then means that the stereotypic patterns, which have been obtained through an idealisation process by the analyst, have to be adopted and applied by the owner of the other set of contexts, i.e. the learner. It follows from this circumstance that the aim of language teaching movements subscribing to the analytical model of context is to make it possible for the learners to exchange their L1 schemata for the thoroughly described and prescribed expert user LT schemata. Another consequence is that learners will be *given* relevance and will, by and large, remain at the socially constrained conventional end of the continuum creating contextual meaning (cf. 1.4.2.1).

Since the schematic representations of future real-life LT situations prevail and assume more value as well as importance (cf. 4.2.3), the objectives of language teaching will necessarily be formulated in reference to them. The goal of teaching trends applying an analytical model of context will thus be outlined in terms of the *knowledge* of the appropriateness conditions of situation types, genres and speech acts learners *will* possess as a result of language instruction. In other words, the overall emphasis throughout will be on the *terminal behaviour* of the learner.

To summarise, the above characteristics clearly point to the fact that movements advocating the analytical paradigm will primarily be concerned with language use in LT settings rather than the classroom situation. With the knowledge of the rules of appropriate LT behaviour brought to the fore, the content, i.e. what is or should be taught, will be stressed.

One of the challenges language teaching trends adopting an analytical perspective will have to face is how to facilitate the acquisition of real-life language use schemata in a

'foreign' environment, i.e. the classroom. A problem that will have to be addressed in this regard is, for instance, the help learners need to be given when they particularise the idealisation the experts' schemata represent. Another question is whether and to what extent language educators will be aware of the constraints of this model of context, i.e. that they are dealing with schemata positioned at the conventional end of the contextual continuum requiring a limited amount of procedural work. Furthermore, if they are, whether any efforts are made to make up for the lack of the creative trait of context.

When the participant-oriented **procedural** perspective reigns, the schemata that pertain in the analysis will necessarily belong to those *participating* in the teaching process, i.e. the learner and the teacher, who are allowed and, in fact, expected to draw on their own conceptual knowledge and seek relevance. The main concern of such language teaching approaches will be to develop the learners' *ability* to constantly modify their schemata in order to learn how to move along the contextual continuum in a way which is accepted in the LT community. During the teaching process, students will have to work out what changes need to be made to their schemata in order to display appropriate language behaviour. This will necessarily entail, for example, the recognition of the differences in the way the Cooperative Contract works in the LT.

Recent developments in language pedagogy stressing the role of English as an *international language* which functions mainly in non-native speaker interaction (Jenkins 1998, 2000a/b, Prodromou 1999) suggest that, since the procedural perspective is primarily concerned with the non-native learner, it would be more befitting to relate the development of capacity to the appropriateness conditions of various speech communities rather than a group of expert LT users. Although the issue will be explored further in a later chapter, the relevance of the multiplicity of potential Cooperative Contracts at this stage is that the goal described in the previous paragraph needs to be refined. Instead of referring to the workings of the Cooperative Contract in the *LT*, the objective should be defined as sensitising the learners to the fact that there exists a number of such contracts and their task is to learn how to apply and adjust their schemata to the appropriateness requirements of any speech community they may get into contact with. As Jenkins (Jenkins 2000:22) points out, in this regard the key is *flexibility*.

The main task of language teaching methods and approaches adopting a procedural model will therefore be to create conditions which enable the learners to realise schematic modifications within the classroom. Since the schemata that take precedence belong to the

learner here, the classroom situation will override real-life settings. As a result, the focus will be laid on classroom discourse, which will have to be shaped in a way that allows to develop learner capacity. This will necessarily imply increased responsibility for the teacher and the localisation of pedagogic decision making. A further consequence will be the emphasis on the transient stages of learners' schematic development, i.e. the *process* of flexibilising their mental representations of LT use.

To summarise, in contrast to the pedagogic movements adopting an analytical view of context, practices subscribing to a procedural model of context will give primacy to the teaching situation and will above all aim to develop methodology rather than specifying the teaching content.

Among the questions that will inevitably arise with the pedagogic application of this contextual model is whether the teachers can or are willing to take up the challenge of added responsibility and can work out or utilise the kinds of methods and means that facilitate the students' schematic changes.

To conclude, one criterion that is crucial when establishing which perspective various language teaching trends subscribe to is the ownership of the dominant schema: whether it belongs to the learner (and teacher) interacting 'inside' and in flight, or to the expert user who describes and prescribes the rules of future LT use. The owner of the schema which takes precedence will also determine relevance and, consequently, appropriateness. Another distinguishing feature of the analytical and procedural models will be their disparate objectives. As has been indicated earlier, while the former will aim to build up the knowledge of what constitutes appropriate language behaviour and lays the emphasis on content, the latter will seek to develop the learners' capacity for realising schematic knowledge as proper communicative behaviour and centres around methodology.

It is assumed that these parameters will suffice to allow for the classification of various language teaching trends. The categorisation can then be followed by the outlining of the specifics of different methods and approaches within a paradigm. The analysis will also have to shed light on the relative merits and disadvantages of language teaching movements. In the following chapters attempts will also be made to answer the ultimate question of which model of context enhances learning more effectively: the one that prepares for out-of-class use by presenting future schematic reality, or the movement which exploits ongoing classroom discourse in order to induce schematic and linguistic change.

#### 4.3.3 Linguistics Applied

The pedagogic chapters will bear testimony that linguistic theory can, indeed, serve pedagogic research. Through the implementation of the insights of language study including the present thesis, it is hoped that it will be possible to find answers to the issues raised at the beginning of the thesis (see Preamble), uncover the discrepancies which inhere in language teaching approaches as well as shed light on the contradictions that lie between the claims made and the kind of language teaching practice actually employed.

It must be stressed however that, as with linguistic theories, the division of language teaching practices into two categories represents a research device designed for the purposes of this inquiry. It may not therefore coincide with the classification to which advocates of various approaches would subscribe, nor does it necessarily reflect how teaching is conducted in actuality since there may be many teachers who adopt eclectic approaches or those who, like Nunan (1993b), make a deliberate attempt to incorporate both perspectives outlined above.

## Chapter 5

### Language Teaching Approaches and Methods Adopting an Analytical Perception of Context

As with language study, the analytical model in language pedagogy will also manifest itself in three types of schematic structures (situation types, genres and speech acts), which mark the different content language teaching methods and approaches adopt as the core of the part of instruction that aims 'to teach language in context'. Like elsewhere in the thesis, it must be noted here, too, that this categorisation entails a generalisation which represents a device of investigation rather than the actuality of language teaching.

#### 5.1 Situational Language Teaching (SLT)

The rationale for including this movement in the analysis is that both of its trends explicitly refer to *situation* in their names and, in the case of one, the approach indeed hinges on the recognition and implementation of situation types. Interestingly, it is the defects and dissatisfaction with this contextual view that have led, to a certain extent, to the development of the Communicative Approach which is supposed to succeed where SLT has failed.

##### 5.1.1 Structural SLT

###### 5.1.1.1 Characteristics

This type of SLT is recognised as the Situational Language Teaching by Richards and Rogers (1986) while others distinguish it as grammatical (Canale and Swaine 1980:2) or 'Structural-Oral-Situational' (Prahbu 1987). Alexander calls it 'classroom situational' (Alexander 1988:239) mainly because it takes the classroom situation as the centre of language learning. Although structural SLT recognises the 'artificial conditions' the classroom offers, it still engages in exploring ways in which the educational setting can provide 'real situations' for language teaching (Hornby 1950a:98).

With the classroom situation treated as natural, the dominant schemata belong to the

participants, i.e. the teacher and the learners, who both display typical features of their traditional social roles. The teachers take full control of learning and aim to impart knowledge. They exploit the classroom, pictures or their own actions to provide the input that constitutes the body of knowledge learners are expected to acquire. The sense of completeness the Present Perfect tense conveys, for instance, is often taught by the teacher closing the window, door etc. and saying 'I have shut the window, door etc'. Various pictures or picture books, like the ones used by children learning to speak, help the acquisition of lexical units in various semantic fields.

Teachers provide stimulus to elicit correct response, doing a considerable amount of speaking in the process, thus adhering to the conventional view according to which "the language teacher must do a good deal of talking." (Hornby 1950b:124). The students, on the other hand, are supposed to accumulate that knowledge, accurately reproduce and perform whatever is required within the situation. This set-up leaves little room for manoeuvre: the teacher's non-verbal actions, such as pointing to an object in the classroom or verbal actions, for instance questions, normally allow for only one correct response.

Language learning is mostly seen as *habit formation* with accuracy being the main concern. This creates a carefully controlled classroom environment whereby there is no negotiation taking place between the participants. Appropriateness is steadily fixed by the teacher, which leaves the learners with limited choice with regard to the language they choose and the behaviour they adopt. All in all, the classroom situation is used to fulfil the purpose of teaching the learner the meaning of different *grammatical structures and vocabulary* mostly available in the classroom (Hornby 1950c).

#### 5.1.1.2 Criticism and Evaluation

Criticising structural SLT for using a classroom situation which "has little to do with ordinary human situations" and enhances "totally absurd use of language" (Alexander 1988:240) reflects the view of language teaching experts who consider classroom situations limited and unnatural (cf. 4.2.2.2).

More importantly, opponents like Widdowson (1978) point out that the main problem with structural SLT is that it is concerned with sentences which have meaning as an instance of *usage* rather than use (see Preamble). As a result, learners will find out the symbolic meaning of words and acquire the *knowledge of language as an abstract system* but



will not know how to put vocabulary and grammar to use to achieve some kind of communicative purpose. For the present thesis it means that, despite its name, structural SLT falls outside the scope of this analysis as it is not concerned with schematic representations.

A situation engaging learner schema would be one where the teacher holds up a pen and says "This is a pen.", and the learner does not know what kind of an object a pen is. The lack of this knowledge might characterise a young first language learner's schema (hence the picture books), while students in the SLT classroom are fully aware of what kind of object they can see: what they do not know is what it is called in English. As a consequence, authentic behaviour on the part of the teacher acknowledging this relevant feature of the learner, i.e. involving the student as a language learner, would be to ask the question differently and say something like: "This is called a 'pen' in English." (Widdowson 1978:8) In this case, the sentence would have the communicative value of naming and as such would take on a natural function in the language classroom.

Similarly, learners will, for instance, understand that the Present Continuous means action which is taking place NOW by watching the teacher performing an activity in the classroom. However, this is not the kind of information that engages the students schematically since they can very well see what the teacher is doing. What pertains then in the situation is judged by the teacher who, for the purpose of teaching the general meaning of the Present Continuous, ignores those features of the learners which would enable them to take part in normal classroom communication.

In sum, even though structural SLT aims to exploit the classroom situation, it fails to utilise its potential as a setting for genuine communication. Rather than activating learners' schemata it, in effect, only develops the student's *systemic* knowledge by applying methodological solutions that enhance the learning of correct usage. Despite the terminology and the primacy given to the classroom, this type of language teaching does *not* intend to activate or modify the student's *schematic* knowledge and therefore cannot be considered as a method which is concerned with context. In Johnson's terms, structural SLT remains a fundamentally *systemic* approach which emphasises teaching the language system (Johnson 1982:9).

## 5.1.2 The Situational Syllabus

### 5.1.2.1 Characteristics

Unlike structural SLT, the situational syllabus pushes real-life language use into the fore and employs the *situation type* as its main organising principle. Since its primary concern is defining the teaching content, it is normally referred to in relation to *syllabi* (Wilkins 1976, Canale & Swain 1980, Yalden 1987).

The theoretical background to the situational syllabus is the realisation that language use always entails acting in social settings, i.e. in different kinds of situation outside the classroom, the specific features of which i) make up context as a schematic construct and ii) restrict the choice of linguistic forms that can be employed in order to display socially appropriate language behaviour (Wilkins 1976:16). This then necessarily carries the implication that in the case of the situational syllabus two contexts co-exist: the expert user's schematic representation of those real-life situations with which learners will have to cope in future language use and the schemata of the classroom participants. As has been observed in 4.3.2, the prevalence of real-life situation results in the primacy of the expert schemata, the acquisition of which constitutes the objective of language teaching.

Since the argument is that "language, as a living phenomenon, must provide the student with the facility to express himself in real-life situations" (Born 1975 quoted in Yalden 1987:37), the course designer's aim is to predict the types of situation the learner will encounter in real life and make provision for them. Real-life situations presenting practical future value, such as the 'Post office' or 'Buying a cinema ticket', are then selected and subjected to an idealisation procedure which bears a close resemblance to Mitchells's doctoring of "buying and selling in Cyrenaica" (cf. 2.1) or Hymes's ethnographic analysis (cf. 2.2.3).

The number of the relevant features of the situation are often reduced to the participant component and the physical setting, e.g. at the doctor's; the doctor and the patient. In some cases, such as the Streamline English Departures (Hartley and Viney 1978) for example, the picture of the interactants and what they say supply enough clues to identify the situation without even a title. One of the reasons why there is no need to provide more parameters for everyday settings is probably the common human experience on which

students draw when speaking the LT. It must be noted, however, that given the almost exclusive focus on LT expert schemata, this notion of exploiting the learners' existing knowledge does not obtain relevance in situational syllabi.

The skeleton of a situation type is then furnished with those frequently occurring lexical and grammatical units that most often accompany them. The result is a sociolinguistic abstraction which resembles scripts in Schema Theory (see 1.3.2.1) and is similar to the example Firth provides to illustrate his definition of the context of situation: a chapter from a language manual with the picture of a railway station and the operative words that are necessary for travelling (see 1.2.3.1).

In the classroom students are then given these templates, which represent accepted practice in terms of situation types in the LT community. Learners are thus saved the trouble of working out the salient features of the situation, i.e. relevance, themselves and are presented with a cleansed, orderly portrayal of real-life language use whereby there exists a fixed correspondence between a particular setting and the linguistic formulations that customarily occur in it. In terms of the definition provided in the present thesis, this implies dwelling at the socially constrained end of the contextual continuum and a concern with *contextual* meaning (c.f. 1.4.2.1).

The most common pedagogic device used to help learners bridge the gap between the out-of-class and classroom situation is the rehearsal of real-life situations in which students have to take on the characteristics of an idealised native speaker. As a result, they do not portray themselves as individuals or language learners but are given parts to play in which their relevant features will have to coincide with those of imaginary native speakers in the LT environment. The roles in these generalised situations are fixed with predictable outcomes: everybody politely says their lines and gets what they want e.g. their airline or train tickets, stamps, shoes etc. There is no conflict and the participants work towards the achievement of a common goal which is usually a practical one, like the customer wanting to buy and the shopkeeper wishing to sell. In Di Pietro's terms, these are complementary roles with a low degree of strategic interplay (Di Pietro 1987:45). Within the framework of this study it means that such transactions involve little or no interpretative work and the employment of the learners' procedural ability.

The transfer of correct language behaviour practised in replicated situations of real-life settings is seen as unproblematic, the assumption being that once relevant behaviour has been habitualised in the classroom, it can automatically be evoked in genuine instances of

language use. All learners will need to do is recognise that they are in a shop, their role is that of a customer's etc. and the rest should follow naturally. Teaching language in future situation types therefore is very similar in its approach to structural SLT in that both view language learning as *habit formation*. But instead of providing grammar as a fixed point of reference, the situational syllabus offers an inventory of conventional situation types together with a description of their linguistic content which gives the learners the security of being able to perform in conventional situations. The 'Everyday Conversation' pages of the Streamline English series Departures book, for instance, provide an apt illustration of the point in case where the sample dialogues are practised through the substitution of one word or phrase, e.g. the name of various goods when the topic is shopping (Hartley & Viney 1978).

#### 5.1.2.2 Main Pedagogic Implications

Since learners act mainly as users-to-be when acquiring the schemata of common everyday situations in the LT, there will always be an incongruity between the practised and the students' existing L1 schematic structures. As has been indicated above, the most commonly used device to smooth out this impediment is *rehearsal*. Despite this widespread practice, the assumption that simulating real-life situations is the most effective way of acquiring the appropriateness rules of LT is not supported by any evidence and also lacks theoretical backing here. It is, rather, taken for granted that taking on future identities and acting out pre-formulated parts ensures that learning what is considered proper LT behaviour takes place. The question of whether and how the transfer and application of this knowledge comes about later in the actuality of LT use is not raised either as it is thought to be automatic.

Pre-fixed relevance, as is the case in Schema Theory, gives the impression that social events or scripts occur in 'precisely' the same fashion all over again (cf. 1.3.2.1). Teaching situational patterns also promotes Firth's view of language use as a 'roughly prescribed social ritual', in which participants say what is expected of them by their culture (cf. 1.2.3.1). As a result, students get a limited view of target language use and are presented with predetermined patterns rather than being taught how to work out meaning by making choices. Being encouraged to take a partly alien schematic construct on board without really involving their own systemic and schematic knowledge means that learners remain at the socially constrained end of the contextual continuum and do not really learn in class how to

engage their capacity. Although, as a result, students are deprived of the experience of creative language use which gives rise to more individual, idiosyncratic schemata in the classroom, it is assumed that the little creativity that is needed out of class will, yet again, come about automatically.

#### 5.1.2.3 Strengths and Weaknesses

Apart from the lack of creative schematic engagement, there are other facets of the approach which hinder the learning process. The operation real-life situations undergo in order to become pedagogically presentable involves the dissociation of linguistic forms from their communicative function and the specification of the kind of language that most frequently occurs in certain types of situations. The result is a list of language situations and the description of the concrete linguistic content, an inventory which, in fact, comprises the situational syllabus. Considering this problem, Widdowson (1983:34) argues that the doctoring of data renders the situational syllabus atomistic in that it reduces the dynamic process of communication to a static inventory of items. He also observes that, due to the fact that SLT does not pursue the involvement and interpretative effort on the part of learners, students have to learn how to exploit their knowledge to achieve particular communicative purposes (i.e. develop their capacity) under their own steam.

In addition, Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:8-9) point out that because a set of typical sentences is related to one social situation, learners are not shown how a structure or a phrase could be used in another - a practice which runs counter to real-life communication where speakers seldom adhere to the same vocabulary and structure in one type of situation.

Piepho (1981:19) and Edelhoff (1981:50) note that one of the reasons why students do not get involved is the social and national stereotypes situational language teaching perpetuates through its generalised picture of the foreign milieu. They suggest that it would be more worthwhile to come near to 'what the learners really want to talk about'.

Alexander (1988:240) criticises the situational syllabus for falsely assuming that it is possible to predict precisely what people will say in various situations. He argues that students need to be taught to cope with the unexpected.

Wilkins is also concerned with the question of unpredictability and the relationship between language and situation. He, first of all, limits the situation to "the sum of the observable and independently describable features of the context in which a language event

occurs.” (Wilkins 1976:17). Then he claims that instances where language use is defined by this physical/social setting are atypical: speakers are not normally at the mercy of the physical situation in which they find themselves. Instead, what they say is a matter of their intentions and purposes, for example, someone can go into the post office with the purpose of not wanting to buy stamps but to make a complaint. Making a complaint then is not situationally determined and may be encountered in other settings. Wilkins argues that when students are taught how to complain, they are not prepared for something ‘out of the ordinary’ in the post office but, rather, are provided with the means to handle significant language needs that can be utilised in an unlimited number of situations.

In Yalden’s view, the absence of this functional component from the situational syllabus is “one of the major limiting factors to its capacity to meet the claims that have been made for it, in terms of preparing learners for real life situations.” (Yalden 1987:38-9).

Despite the shortcomings, the teaching of situation types has never really lost its appeal and still features in teaching materials. The Everyday Listening and Speaking Pre-Intermediate book of the Making Headway series (Cunningham and Moor 1993), for example, is organised around common topics, such as ‘In the air’, ‘At the bank’ etc., and provides a wide variety of tasks to practise dialogues which frequently occur in the given situation. New coursebooks, too, often include situation types, e.g. ‘Staying at a hotel’, ‘At a restaurant’, ‘Telephoning’ etc., in sections which are designated to deal with ‘language use in context’ labelled as ‘Social English’ (Taylor 1996) or ‘Everyday English’ (John and Liz Soars 2000). The exercises frequently present the traditional pattern of sample conversations followed by role-play with the help of lexical cues (John and Liz Soars 2000:77) or situation cards which may form flow charts (Taylor 1996:33) similar to the ones that have been developed by linguists like Ventola (see 2.1.2).

The reason for the continued appeal may lie in the fact that, in spite of the rightfulness of criticism, the situational syllabus, no doubt, has its advantages. For instance, it may prove helpful for both teachers, especially non-native ones who are learners of the language themselves, and students by offering those much needed stable reference points on which language learners can always rely. It also gives the participants the reassurance that even if everything else fails, they will still know what to say and what to expect to be said in conventional everyday situations. It is no coincidence therefore that situation types mainly appear at the pre-intermediate stages where hard and fast rules, which can be refined later, give the learner the assurance straightaway of being correct and appropriate. It is also at this

level that repetition is often used to enhance learning. In his review of *Listen and Speak: Situational English*, John Fagan (1999) stresses this point: 'Practice makes you perfect! Lower level students or those with a learning preference for learning through constant repetition will enjoy this material.'

#### 5.1.2.4. Conclusion

In effect, what the situational syllabus has been mainly criticised for is the fact that it is analytical in its perception of context and presents the notion as a set of parameters fixed in advance by the course designer. As has been indicated earlier, such a conception is necessarily atomistic and focuses on those ritualistic contexts which are positioned at the socially constrained end of the context continuum whereby situational variables chosen as relevant by the expert determine the kind of language behaviour that can and should be adopted in order to achieve social appropriateness.

It has also been observed that due to these features, the approach does not effectively promote schematic engagement on the part of the learner and cannot provide for the entirety of the learning process. It also adds to the difficulties that situational language teaching presents the most straightforward application of theory on language use. One consequence of this is the fact that, apart from habit formation as a learning device, no other pedagogy related issues, such as the transfer of knowledge or the development of capacity for example, are properly addressed or solved.

The new, communicative approach, which has partly been brought about as a response to the situational syllabus and the structural SLT, has claimed to attempt to make up for the above outlined deficiencies, and shift the focus away from observable situation types towards the user, "emphasizing the effectiveness with which the communication takes place, and the skills which the user can muster in order to maintain and promote it" (Howatt 1984:278-9).

In the following section, we will examine whether the approach which has succeeded Situational Language Teaching has fulfilled this task and has, indeed, introduced a new, more learner and learning centred paradigm.

## 5.2 The Notional-functional Approach

For many professionals, this approach represents the communicative movement. Others consider it as one of the approaches within a wider framework, but probably all agree that it is the Notional-functional Approach (NFA) that has initiated those fundamental changes which have characterised the past 25 years of language teaching. In this thesis, for reasons that will be spelt out in the following contextual analyses, the NFA will be treated as one of the approaches within Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Like all teaching trends adopting an analytical model of context, the NFA, too, lays the emphasis on *language use* and sets the goal of instruction with regard to the *knowledge* that constitutes context. But while SLT has defined the content of teaching in terms of situation types, the NFA is concerned with another type of content schemata, i.e. *speech acts* (cf. 2.5).

### 5.2.1 Communicative Functions

Rather than employing the more sizeable unit of situation type, the NFA is defined in reference to functions instead. The fundamental tenet is that what learners will say in predicted future settings is determined by what they will *do* through the language, that is, the communicative functions they are expected to fulfil e.g. whether they will apologise, request, express various emotional attitudes in various contexts of language use etc. This novel element, i.e. the introduction of the more general notion of function, is supposed to make up for the much criticised specificity and concreteness of SLT whereby specific linguistic forms are directly linked to particular situation types (see Wilkins in 5.1.2.3).

These communicative functions, which provide the basis for the NFA, originate from *speech acts* in linguistic theory (cf. 2.5). By adopting the central notion of Speech Act Theory, the NFA, too, inevitably places the focus on those conventionalised instances which are located at the socially constrained end of the contextual continuum. One of the implications of such a position is that the obtained meaning is *contextual* whereby there is a direct link between the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the situation. This being the case, the NFA can realistically set the goal of compiling a list of functions with their commonest linguistic realisations.

There are, however, differences between the ways educationalists apply linguistic



theory and transfer the notion of speech acts from SAT to language pedagogy. SAT and linguists like Widdowson set out to examine the social knowledge participants share in order to realise and recover intentions. Widdowson's (1979) starting point is that the description of what conditions must obtain for an utterance to be interpreted as a particular communicative function can be found in the work of Searle and Labov who are concerned with establishing the rules of interpretation that generally exist in a given speech community. In a vein similar to Searle, Labov and Fanshel's (see 2.5.2.2 and 2.5.2.3), Widdowson intends to investigate what features of context must prevail for an act to count as a particular communicative function, that is to establish the assumptions the speaker and hearer must share in order to be able to interpret an utterance as a request, for example. It is suggested that once a framework of the relationship of communicative acts and contextual conditions has been drawn up, the specification of functions can be done in a more systematic and exhaustive manner.

While Widdowson's proposal has never really got off the ground, the alternative approach has been dominating the language teaching scene. Its representatives, the designers of communicative syllabi, e.g. Munby (1978) or the Council of Europe projects, take stock of pedagogically utilisable social situations and derive the functions from them. The undertaking is based on the assumption that settings have particular functions commonly linked with them. As one of the proponents of this view has put it: "The setting may prove very significant from the teaching point of view because the regular occurrence of a function in a specific setting may lead to one particular form becoming associated with that setting." (Wilkins 1976:63). Identifying functions in relation to situations is, in fact, not only a research device but a pedagogic convenience as well since it is easier to centre syllabi and lessons around the more sizeable units of situation or topic than the often utterance-scale function (Johnson 1982).

Furthermore, Wilkins observes that given accepted conventional interpretations, it is possible to look for recurrent associations between certain functions and their linguistic features. He argues that "conventions of use do exist and it is these that would be exploited in the construction of a notional syllabus." (Wilkins 1976:56-7) The task of the syllabus designer is then to identify those functions which are of maximum communicative and practical value to the learners and examine the kind of language that most frequently occurs with them. An example of typical teaching material designed in this manner is Leo Jones' *Functions of English* (1977), in which each unit tackles a general function and provides a list of its commonest linguistic realisations.

In this respect language pedagogy appears to have largely ignored the findings of

linguistic theory where it has already been observed that attempts to relate language to function pose considerable difficulties (see 2.5.1). First of all, there is no one-to-one correspondence between linguistic forms and communicative functions (Widdowson 1972). The interrogative sentence "Is the cook new?" may be interpreted as a question asking for information or could have the illocutionary force of a complaint if said by a dissatisfied customer in the restaurant to a waiter (Schmidt and Richards 1980:154). Similarly, apart from highly ritualistic instances, one function can be fulfilled by a variety of linguistic forms. It is therefore impossible to recover the speaker's intention solely on the basis of form, and vice versa, to advise learners on the language through which certain functions are expressed.

The problem of the interrelationship between function and language is even more acute since the notional/functional syllabus's suggestions concerning the linguistic realisations of communicative functions are often based on the analyst's introspection, and do not present the result of more objective, observational research (Wilkins 1976:42). Munby, who also notes the lack of sufficient empirical investigation, proposes a compromise whereby both the analyst's judgement of the stereotypical and the results of available empirical research on various conversation styles and situations (e.g. Sinclair and Coulthard's analysis of classroom English 1975) are taken into account for the definition of functions (Munby 1978:49,50).

### 5.2.2 Real-life Language Use and Learner Needs

While SLT introduces real-life language use in the classroom without providing any pedagogic rationale, the NFA goes to great length to explain why out-of-class communication should override classroom interaction.

The practical reason for giving primacy to real-life language use is to save the students the trouble and struggle that the disparity between the English they learn in their country and 'the English as it is actually used' may cause. It is thought that constant exposure to 'authentic English' will allow learners to handle encounters with native speakers (Walkinshaw 1999/2000) which is the goal of language teaching.

The other, pedagogic incentive is motivation, which is seen as the prime pedagogic device that ensures the involvement of students in the learning process, and which therefore has been one of the central tenets within the NFA. Canale and Swain go as far as to claim that "sustained learner and teacher motivation may be the single most important factor in determining the success of a communicative approach relative to a grammatical one". (Canale

and Swain 1980:38) The basic tenet of the movement is that the NFA increases both student and teacher motivation by engaging them in tasks which they find both *useful* and *enjoyable*. The latter entails, for example, themes to which the learners can relate and in which they are particularly interested. Usefulness, on the other hand, is seen in terms of *possible future uses* to which the target language will be put.

Piepho attributes the advantage of a communicative approach over the situational specifically to the fact that '*interests*' and '*utility*' become key factors: "The importance of the communicative approach to language teaching and learning derives in great part from the opportunity it offers of linking language learning to the everyday life and interests of learners and their future communicative needs." (Piepho 1978:51). Empirical evidence supplied by course designers seems to prove this point. Cotterall, for instance, reports that "incorporating tasks drawn from learners' future communication situations resulted in enhanced motivation" (Cotterall 2000:114). She therefore concludes that in the design of any course that promotes learner autonomy, the students' goals and needs must be paramount: "This means the tasks in which the course provides preparation, practice and feedback should be those in which the learner *will participate in the future*" (Cotterall 2000:111, my emphasis).

The communicative needs of learners are identified through needs analysis. The role of needs analysis, in fact, acquires such importance that it represents two amongst Savignon's six guiding tenets of the communicative approach to second language teaching: "3. L2 learning, like L1 learning, begins with the needs and interests of the learner. 4. An analysis of learner needs and interests provides the most effective basis for materials development." (Savignon 1983:23-4). Van Ek takes it further and equates efficient learning with the satisfaction of the learners' individual learning-needs in the most direct way possible (Van Ek 1988:5).

Learners' needs are specified by the course designer and serve as a basis for the formulation of learning objectives which are subordinate to the main aim of the communicative course, the development of *competence*, i.e. the knowledge and ability for use (of which knowledge is given primacy in the analytical paradigm), which enables the learners to *do* something at the end of the course they could not do at the beginning of the learning process. The notion of competence, in addition to the utility factor, thus directs the attention to prospective schematic constructs the learner will have acquired. In fact, the common goal of developing communicative competence (Hymes) and the emphasis on learning by doing (SAT) are sometimes considered as the unifying force for a variety of approaches that form

part of the 'Communicative Approach'.

It follows from this that data about the present state of the learner is regarded irrelevant unless it provides useful information about *potential* instances of *future language use*. As Munby puts it forthrightly: "To be told that a participant is twenty-five years old, female, English, and from London, is not especially revealing; but if we find that this person, or category of person, will be communicating with middle-aged, male, northern Nigerian, in Nigeria, we have culturally significant information which will affect decisions to be made in the communicative key box." (Munby 1978:34)

The psychological features of the participants are therefore given less consideration than other, more systematisable extra-linguistic features. The well-known examples of Van Ek's and Munby's studies demonstrate how the observable physical and social components of the situation are viewed as more important for the analysis of language use than the individual roles of the participant (Van Ek 1988:17-8) or the participant category (Munby 1978:34). The profile of participants in both cases is limited to the social roles e.g. patient/doctor, waiter/customers and social relationships (e.g. equal, hierarchical etc) learners will predictably assume.

In conclusion, the focus on real-life language use necessarily implicates that the identification of learner needs in terms of future communicative events becomes the starting point for the FNA. Walkinshaw sums it up as follows: 'The first thing we need to do is prepare students for authentic situations which they are likely to face. This might include exposure to some of the English that is used in such situations, depending of course on what kind of situations the students are likely to find themselves in. Some information could also be provided on what to expect from discourse with a native speaker.' (Walkinshaw 1999/2000:18)

### 5.2.3 Contextual Analysis

#### 5.2.3.1 Characteristics of Context

As with SLT, since language teaching is geared towards predictable real-life use, of the two situations co-occurring in the classroom, anticipated reality takes precedence over the immediacy of the educational setting. As a consequence, context will constitute the *expert user's knowledge*: this time, however, not of situation types but of communicative functions

and their linguistic realisations.

Given that the dominant context belongs to the course designers in their capacity as competent LT users, all relevant features of context, including relevance, will be determined by them.

As for the *participants* of future interactions, the emphasis is on the observable and generalisable features of social nature rather than the internal processes of language use. Wilkins (1976) notes that if the meaning of an utterance is determined by the state of mind of the speaker/hearer, the person's whole life experience needs to be accounted for, which would, in turn, render the context undecipherable and inoperable. Adopting a perception of context which bears a close resemblance to Sperber and Wilson's definition in 3.3.1, for example, would lead to a situation whereby the analyst would be unable to make the semantic and behavioural predictions course design requires.

In an attempt to present language use as a quantifiable and exact system, the schemata language learners are expected to adopt are devoid of individual features and contain the knowledge that the expert LT users assume members of their speech community share about what counts as acceptable language behaviour in predictable social encounters. This then implies that, apart from knowing what is systemically allowed in the language (Hymes's first parameter of communicative competence, see 2.2.2), learners have to be aware of how to render an intention *appropriate* in LT social settings (Hymes's third component of communicative competence). Since in the NFA the emphasis is on fluent and acceptable language use rather than accuracy in terms of formal correctness, **contextual appropriacy**\* (Munby 1978:23, Finocchiaro & Brumfit 1983:92,) comprises the most salient constituent of communicative competence in the NFA, overriding other factors of possibility, feasibility and attestedness. In fact, the shift away from the study of the '*possible*' to the only Hymesian parameter which is linked to context, i.e. the notion of the '*appropriate*', lies at the core of change that has brought about the 'new tradition' of CLT both in the theory and teaching of language (Johnson 1982:14).

Since the NFA focuses on the link between language and function rather than the realisation of what conditions must prevail for the realisation of an intent, *the schemata that present the relevant features of situation comprise the knowledge of the ways functions are commonly expressed in compliance with the conventions of appropriateness in the LT*. The

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\* Note: There appear to be two terms for the same phenomenon - *appropriateness* used in linguistic theory and *appropriacy* preferred by language pedagogy.

knowledge of how a specific function is typically realised in a routine social setting is determined by experts, usually native speakers who are believed to be in possession of the necessary intuition and insight into socially acceptable LT behaviour.

All these characteristics of the NFA are well reflected in teaching materials where the main focus is on how different types of functions, e.g. requests or permission, are conventionally realised in the LT. Sections dealing with functions in the intermediate level book of the Landmark series, for example, first employ listening tasks which require the students to identify expressions that are commonly used to express requests or permission etc. (Haines & Stewart 2000:43, 63). The practice of learning functional lexis, i.e. using the collected phrases in new situations is carried out by way of role play.

The communicative purpose (Finocchiaro & Brumfit 1983:22), seen as the pivotal notion of the approach as in SAT (2.5.1), pushes the second Firthian category - the *relevant object* - to the fore. The main aim and, in fact, the other novel element of the approach, is the unravelling of the various purposes different communicative acts serve, e.g. what the speaker intends to do by asking "How are you?". In this respect, the NFA perceives meaning in the Gricean sense (Grice 1957) in that both construe meaning in relation to the *intention* of participants. But unlike Grice (cf. 3.2), who is interested in general maxims that help the hearer to understand what is signified by speaker, the NFA classifies intentions and establishes the correlation that exists between language and categories of function resulting in an inventory which provides the content specification of the syllabus.

How intentions are interpreted by the other participant, that is, Firth's third category, the *effect* of verbal action, is not dealt within the NFA. As with SAT, the notional-functional analyses are considered complete with the listing of the linguistic realisations of functions and general notions. It is assumed that venturing further would impose more unpredictability and uncontrollability on the inquiry. In Wilkins's words: "Broadly, we are more concerned with what the speaker intends to achieve than the effect he may inadvertently or indirectly have. The effect of one speaker's utterances may be to bore his hearers, but it would be foolish and irrelevant to look for the linguistic means by which one succeeds in boring one's hearers. To use Austin's terms, we are concerned with *illocution* and not *perlocution*." (Wilkins 1976:43)

Since all parameters of context are determined by the course designer, *relevance* and the definition of what counts as appropriate belongs to the observer-analyst, who can also foresee and identify those instances of use in which the learner will have to take part in the future. The hegemony of real-life user also results in a situation whereby the educational

setting is viewed as 'unnatural' and, at best, secondary, presenting little pedagogic value which should therefore be avoided whenever possible.

With the pedagogic considerations pushed aside, learner and learning specific components of the context also become secondary. Thus, the relevant features of participants exclude elements such as L1 experience, the need to focus on form or the knowledge of how functions are exploited and realised in another language etc. As in SLT, there seems to be a consensus among the advocates of the NFA that the pedagogic objective of acquiring native speaker LT competence can, by and large, be achieved without the interference of classroom discourse.

#### 5.2.3.2 The Teaching of Functions

As has been pointed out earlier (see 4.3.2), one of the challenges that trends adopting an analytical view of context face is the reconciliation of the two co-existing sets of schemata learners are faced with in the language classroom. The issues that have been raised in this respect include the particularisation of idealised expert schemata, the transfer of the knowledge of functions that has been acquired in class and will be used outside, in 'the real world', as well as the lack of attention to less conventional language use.

According to the proponents of the NFA, the answer to most of these questions lies in the *replication of future use* in the classroom. Given the overall emphasis on real-life discourse, the language class is commonly seen as too contrived for the use of language as a tool of communication – for characteristics such as practising language for its own sake, the hierarchical relationship of teachers and students, pseudo-communicative interactions, controlled practice etc. (Nunan 1987). The only exception whereby the classroom is recognised as a suitable setting for developing communicative competence is when it gives rise to 'naturally occurring' language use, i.e. when students talk about their real-life experiences, express their views and opinions etc. Otherwise, concerted attempts are made to reduce the 'artificiality' of the language instruction setting by recreating or simulating outside world speech events (Johnson & Morrow 1981:115).

One of the arguments in support of replication and rehearsal is that the objective of developing communicative competence is thought to be best achieved by *doing*, that is, by allowing learners to use language in situations they might encounter in an LT environment. The main task of the teacher is therefore to create conditions which closely mimic the way

language is employed outside the setting of instruction. As Geddes observes: "the nearer we can get to simulating the kind of communicative situations that the student will encounter outside the classroom the better" (Geddes 1981:80).

Secondly, rehearsing predicted instances of use also keys in with the objectives of the needs analysis which provides the basis for the specification of the course content. Furthermore, presenting and practising future LT contexts in class is backed by the hypothesis that once learners have been exposed to pre-packaged configurations (in which there is a standard relationship between the parameters of situation, the corresponding functions and their language realisations), they will internalise them in the form of schematic blueprints which they will be able to apply automatically when encountering similar situations. In other words, once learners have gained enough classroom experience of, for example, how to ask for directions, they will be able to draw on this established schema without difficulties should the need arise. As in SLT, the routine of transferring and recalling real-life schemata rehearsed in the classroom is regarded as a slick operation which does not require special attention.

Furthermore, since the persons who both represent the competence to be achieved and embody the interlocutors-to-be, i.e. native speakers, are granted the authority to set the norms, learners are expected to adopt the kind of native-like language behaviour and the corresponding native speaker schemata that have been presented to them as the appropriate model. One of the consequences of the uncritical take-over of the preferably unaltered native speaker schemata and language is that the disturbing noises of L1 and L1 language experience are shut out of the teaching process as much as possible. Throughout, it is believed that straightforward schema switching is sufficient to bring about the changes that are necessary to use the LT appropriately.

It is also assumed that such shortcomings of the NFA as the partial portrayal of communication, which is limited to routine situations where capacity is employed to a much lesser extent, will be overcome automatically once the students have had ample practice of real-life situations.

### 5.2.3.3 Authenticity

The prevalence of the analyst's generalised real-life schemata necessarily implies that authenticity, i.e. what is 'dependable', 'true and deserving to be believed or trusted' (Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture 1998:69-70), entails the 'degree to



which language teaching materials have the qualities of *natural speech*' (Richards et al. 1992:27 – my emphasis).

In the NFA contexts can be authentic in two senses, both of which are related directly or indirectly to real-life LT use. On the one hand, predicted contexts are considered authentic insofar as they are relevant to the *students' future needs*. Xiaoju (1990) provides the following apt illustration with respect to the choice of language: "If after graduation our students have to read encyclopaedias, then the language of encyclopaedias is authentic for them. We can give them samples of it to read. If in actual work our students will have opportunities to listen to Africans speaking English, then African English is authentic for them. We will try to give them some samples of it to listen to. Of course, we also give them standard native-speaker English, because standard native-speaker English happens to be in actual use in communicative situations that are relevant to our students. "(Xiaoju 1990:62).

On the other hand, contexts can be authentic because they pertain to *native-speaker users* who engage in genuine acts of communication and create contexts which provide the models and targets for language learning (e.g. Walkinshaw's 'authentic' English or situations always refer to using English with native speakers in an LT country, see 5.2.2). Authenticity here refers to actually attested language constructed for a real-life communicative purpose by native speakers who make their own interpretations by drawing on the knowledge of conventions, assumptions etc. they share as members of the LT speech community. It is worth noting that the criteria of attestedness has become particularly prevalent in the selection of the language that is judged as worthwhile for teaching. The native speaker's claim, for instance, that the phrase 'raining cats and dogs' is not in use any more (McLean 1999) may prove to be enough reason for it not to be included in the syllabus.

In the light of this, authentic *materials* are those which have not been specially prepared for the foreign learner but have originally been written by and directed at a native-speaking audience to communicate real-life messages for real-life purposes according to the conventions of the LT speech community (Wilkins 1976, Wong, Kwok and Choi 1995, Kramersch and Sullivan 1996). It is claimed that research into the effectiveness of authentic versus artificial (i.e. scripted) materials has indicated that the use of authentic materials can significantly increase learner motivation - a key element of CLT (Peacock 1997 and 5.2.2).

Similarly, *syllabi* are considered authentic if they are based on the idea that language learning can be made more successful by organising learning according to categories designed to reflect predicted use of the LT. Functions, which have originally been devised for the

purposes of language description, are therefore particularly suitable for making up the syllabus content.

Given that all aspects of authenticity are closely linked to real-life LT communication, *pedagogy* in the NFA is *authentic* as long as it aims to apply appropriate native-speaker practices in the classroom (Murray 1996, Kramsch & Sullivan 1996). Since real LT situations are impossible to recreate exactly, the approach is based on approximation (Maley 1986:90) and promotes activities such as role play\*, simulation, information gap exercises etc. Scott, among other authors, summarises the advantages as follows: "Role-plays and games are important because they present the learners with the opportunity to practise speaking under conditions that are as close as possible to those of normal communication, involving information gap, choice and feedback. The criterion for success is how well the learner can perform the target operations, responding to information gap, choice and feedback." (Scott 1981:77)

As all facets of authenticity are defined in terms of the learner's terminal behaviour and the desired end product of appropriate native-speaker communication, expert users of the LT gain a privileged position: their contexts not only prescribe the course content but determine methodology as well. This implies that, if they wish to meet the objectives of the NFA, non-native speaker teachers should have the same insight into LT language use as their native-speaker counterparts. In other words, all teachers of LT must share similar schematic representations of LT situations, regardless of their first language affiliations. Native speaker experts, on the other hand, can assume authority for both language use and language instruction. As Widdowson puts it: "They become the custodians and arbiters not only of proper English but of proper pedagogy as well." (Widdowson 1994:387)

Given this state of matters, methods, materials and techniques developed by native-speaker teachers gain universal currency. Hence the confident statement of the editors of the Pilgrims Longman Resource Books in a letter to the teachers: "Our aim is to pass on ideas, techniques and practical activities which *we know work in the classroom*. (Lindstromberg 1990:iii, my emphasis) This remark implies that if the ideas presented in the book have worked on the Pilgrims courses, they should be just as effective in other settings where language is to be taught communicatively.

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\* The term 'role play' may describe disparate activities in the literature. In the present thesis, role play refers to 'all sorts of activities where learners imagine themselves in a situation outside the classroom, sometimes playing the role of someone other than themselves, and using language appropriate to this new context.' (Ur 1996:131).

One of the consequences of the authority bestowed on LT experts is that an overwhelming majority of materials, coursebooks in particular, are written by native LT speakers, which then inevitably reflect the natives' particular view of the world. Students can therefore read passages on people like a friendly shopkeeper in Oxford (who happens to be the narrator's uncle) (John and Liz Soars 2000:33) or an article on Michael Palin in a reading section on travelling (Haines and Stewart 2000a:36). Elsewhere, the discussion of various brands includes international as well as British brands such as The Body Shop, Harrods or Marks and Spencer (Haines and Stewart 2000b:46).

With the primacy of language use and native speakers having the upper hand, non-native speaker teachers obviously occupy a less advantageous position. While natives own both language and methodology, non-native teachers do not seem to have control of either of them. This then may lead to incidents, such as the one Medgyes reported whereby an Hungarian teacher of English seemed to be of the view that 'a non-native speaker of English can have no pertinent ideas in the presence of native speakers' (Medgyes 1983:3).

#### 5.2.4 Critique and Evaluation

##### 5.2.4.1 Context

The similarities in contextual set-up give rise to problems that have flawed SLT as well. The duality of contexts and the primacy given to predicted future mental representations necessarily precludes what has been considered natural language use in this thesis whereby cues provided by the language and situation enable the interlocutors to make inferences and identify as well as create contexts. Instead, in the NFA when speaking in the LT students are given ready-made representations of situations with predetermined functions and linguistic realisations. What, in fact, remains to be done is choosing, completing or altering the supplied language. As with SLT, the NFA does not move away from the conventionally constrained end of the contextual continuum either. Since the assumption is that routine situations comprise most of communication, no attempts are made to teach the students how to engage their capacity in other, less ritualised instances of LT use. As a result, learners are left to rectify this deficiency under their own steam.

A further hindrance caused by the limited contextual engagement is that learners are not prepared for unforeseen eventualities. If the teaching of 'raining cats and dogs' is ruled

out on the basis of its infrequency in native speaker use (see 5.2.3.3), students will not be able to recall the schema of rain and make sense of the sign 'Cats and Dogs? We'll give you an umbrella?' that they may encounter at a supermarket check-out. Furthermore, even though the phrase may not have currency for native speakers, its pedagogic value has not diminished as it is still one of those interesting expressions which motivate learning.

Doubts have also been raised about the efficiency of replicating real-life language use in the classroom. An experienced teacher, Medgyes (1994:27) remarks that although role-play is a standard form of practice, many students detest it because they find it tiring to use the LT and their imagination for acting a fictitious persona at the same time. His observation then supports the view that imposing alien contexts places additional processing burden on the learner and, to a certain degree, impedes the learning process. It also contradicts the NFA argument that the utility of future instances of use may act as a strong motivational force for the learner.

The kind of interaction that is accepted to provide for naturally occurring communication engaging the learners' schemata in the classroom (see 5.2.3.2.) often misses the target too. It is common that conversations including personal feelings, interests etc. are intended to practise some kind of structure e.g. what learners like and dislike for teaching the present simple (e.g. Liz and John Soars 1993:26-27) or to rehearse how to take part in conversations. In fact, some practitioners and textbook authors openly admit to the fact that asking questions relating to the students' out-of-school life has often little to do with genuine interest on the part of the teacher (Medgyes 1997:98, Moskowitz 1978:51).

The peculiarities of the contextual arrangement then results in a teaching practice which is inherently deficient in its facilitation of the more prevalent creative aspects of language use and, consequently, learning. At the core of this problem lies the fact that the findings of language study have been taken over without much pedagogic adaptation, even though the analytical model of context has obviously been created for scientific language description and not for language teaching purposes (cf. 4.1.2).

The pedagogic shortcomings brought about by this particular contextual set-up has inevitably affected fundamental tenets of the movement and resulted in contradictions that have already been mentioned earlier in this thesis (see Preamble). The following sections will deal with them in turn.

#### 5.2.4.2 Learner and Learning Needs

One of the major assumptions of the NFA is that the learner's future needs in LT can be specified and, in fact, should serve as the basis for the specification of course content and methodology. There are, however, difficulties with this argument in more than one respect. On the one hand, it is doubtful whether it is at all attainable to identify those potential situations and corresponding functions which the learners are expected to perform outside the classroom. Brumfit (1981:92) is also of the view that it is not possible to foresee what specific demands learners may need to cope with since the exact nature of these needs is unpredictable as they always depend on the uncertainties of everyday life and communication. Moreover, what in effect takes place when a needs analysis is conducted is recording the present state of affairs and extrapolating from it. The manner in which it is carried out is also open to criticism. As Hill (1977) remarks in his critique of van Ek's Threshold Level, in the absence of systematic theoretical inquiry, the identified needs of target groups do not seem to go beyond well-educated guesses of a committee of experts.

Young (2000) makes the point that there is considerable ambiguity in the identification of needs. On the one hand, there is what he calls an 'unfortunate tendency' of treating learners as 'a homogeneous bunch' who, in effect, may have very dissimilar needs. On the other, there may be a discrepancy between the students' perception of their needs and what the outside analysts see as such.

In addition, summaries of terminal behaviour cannot avoid reflecting values of the speech community in which they have been drawn up. Brumfit (1979:186) points out that in the ideological climate of the NFA, very few writers would argue for the intellectual benefits of language learning. Instead, *practical utility*, a virtue held in high esteem in western societies, becomes the central issue underlying the basic principles of learner needs and motivation. It is questionable, however, whether the prime motivation of all foreign language students would be driven by the notion of usefulness and whether rendering language teaching as a purely technical problem largely isolated from cognitive and pedagogic needs can be effective in other cultures as well.

Giving paramount consideration to future needs also creates a psychological distance between the means and ends of learning. In the NFA, learners have to act in situations with features and intents that may not be congruent with their immediate reality. So even though

sentence (a) "Could you please tell me the times of flights from London to Manchester?" seems better suited to serve future purposes, the question (b) "Could you please tell me what time the lecture begins?" (Johnson 1982:44) is probably more relevant to the student. If sentence (b) occurs when the need for such an utterance naturally arises in class, learners can engage on their own terms, activating their own schemata in order to meet immediate individual purposes. As has been observed, turning sentence (a) into an utterance in the classroom requires taking on an imaginary persona which entails added burden on schematic processing for the learner who struggles controlling systemic LT knowledge anyway.

This then poses the question of whether the proposition of the NFA that foreign languages are more successfully acquired when learning is organised according to categories designed to reflect anticipated uses is tenable. From the example it appears that supplying learners with 'ready-made' contexts fails to engage capacity, entails added procedural burden and cannot, therefore, effectively enhance learning. This may lie at the heart of Murray's claim (1996:105) that, contrary to popular belief, there exists no theory of learning which allows us to assume that foreign languages are acquired efficaciously when learning is centred around categories of potential uses.

It follows from the above that despite attempts to revive needs analysis (Seedhouse 1995), basing course design and methodology directly on future learner needs provides only limited opportunities for learning and fails to satisfy the learner's learning needs.

#### 5.2.4.3 Authenticity

The definition of authenticity in terms of real-life communicative purposes implies that appropriate interpretation lies with the native speaker for whom, for example, a text has originally been produced. In the NFA it is assumed that the same text can be given to the learner who, through continuous exposure, will learn how to respond appropriately, i.e. in a native-like manner. The idea of adopting texts intended for LT speakers is also supported by the basic principles of motivation and utility as the prime forces that are thought to induce learning. Materials produced for LT target audiences are therefore regarded more interesting and motivating because they meet the students' long-term communicative needs (Yuk-chun Lee 1995).

However, a closer examination of how this type of authenticity fares in relation to context reveals discrepancies. Widdowson (1979:166) makes the point that authenticity is

realising the intentions of the speaker/writer by reference to a set of shared conventions. In genuine communication, the speaker/writer, with a certain audience in mind and equipped with the knowledge about their assumptions and cultural expectations, provides linguistic/non-linguistic clues for the hearers/readers with the help of which they can look for relevance. The audience, in turn, will recognise where these signals point in relation to the context and create an interpretation which approximates the speaker/writer's original intention.

Materials written for native speakers thus assume a certain type of readership with a set of relevant participant features. When authentic, that is (according to the NFA definition) unscripted, pedagogically unprocessed materials are taken into the classroom, learners will try to make sense of the text by activating their systemic and schematic resources: their knowledge of the LT and the world. However, their schematic configurations, by their very nature, cannot coincide with those of native speakers representing different conventions of another speech community. As a result, either a discrepancy may arise between the writer's intention and the learner's interpretation or there may be no engagement with the text at all. If understanding takes place, the learner, lacking some or all the required relevant features of the reader for whom the material has originally been produced - knowledge of culture, shared assumptions etc. - can only arrive at a pedagogically authentic interpretation which will, to varying degrees, deviate from the expected response of the intended native audience. So while with respect to (replicated) real-life situations where native-speaker behaviour and response are the norm, the learner's own interpretation may seem inauthentic (i.e. non-native speaker-like), the same response may be authentic in relation to the learning situation in that it induces schematic modification.

On hearing or reading the word 'Europe', for instance, Eastern Europeans will understand the huge territory between the British Isles and the Ural. Many native speakers of English in Britain, however, would probably discount the UK and go no further than Austria. Consequently, on hearing about an unspecified 'European country' on the radio, a Hungarian, for example, will probably have a wider range of countries to choose from than an English listener.

Similarly, the mention of Michael Palin or Marks and Spencer (see 5.2.3.4.) evoke different allusions in people who grew up in Britain or in Hungary. While, for example, the British department store normally represents the middle range in Britain, due to its prices in Hungary, it is associated with luxury there. Palin's name may not cause the same flutter or the

urge to read about him in a country where he is hardly known. Consequently, what is real or interesting to the native speaker may prove extremely boring to the non-native speaker. In Prodromou's words, 'to assume that what is 'real' is also interesting and useful is a fallacy' (Prodromou 1996a:88)

Apart from the general features of context, when taken out of their original setting, participant schemata lose those ad hoc and idiosyncratic elements which characterise the here and now of actual communication. As Prodromou points out, when natural discourse is put into a textbook for consumption of learners of English, it is stripped of those contextual features 'that gave it life in the first place' and cannot therefore be called authentic (Prodromou 1996b:371).

Given these differences, texts written for native speakers are not automatically authentic for the language learner. Native speaker-like authentication pursued by the NFA, in fact, reflects what should eventually be achieved by the students and therefore necessarily deviates from the responses produced by the learners who create their own immediate schematic reality.

Thus, with regard to context there exist two types of authenticity: one is related to native-speaker schemata, while the other is established in reference to learner mental representations. Widdowson, who recognises only the procedural perception of context (cf. 3.4), argues that attested instances of language, i.e. the product of NFA language teaching, ought to be termed '*genuine*' (Yuk-chum Lee (1995) calls it 'text authenticity') whereas the term '*authenticity*' should exclusively refer to communicative activities in which the learners engage interpretative procedures for making sense (Widdowson 1983:30).

It seems that in the present study where the investigation is concerned with both perspectives of context, it is more appropriate to retain '*authenticity*' as the common superordinate. In order to mark the schematic distinction, however, two types of authenticity will be distinguished: the one promoting native speaker schemata (as in SLT and the NFA) termed as '*product*' and the learner oriented kind called '*process*' authenticity.

As regards NFA's '*authentic*' methodology, Murray (1996) draws attention to the fact that communicative activities such as role-play, simulation or information gap exercises cannot be considered authentic even in the NFA sense since these situations are unlikely to occur out-of-class. In relation to context, these activities pose the same problem as materials: when learners engage in role-play, for instance, they have to take on features and intentions which are not their own - an act which seldom characterises genuine communication. In a



similar vein, Breen (1985:67) argues that requiring the learners to believe in an imagined world within the real world of the classroom leads to the contrivance of the mimicked real-life world which may be not only inauthentic for the learner but unnecessary as well.

Learners of ESOL in Britain (the term here is used in the sense that prevails in ELT in England these days and means the teaching of English as a second language) bear witness to the fact that encounters with genuine materials in genuine LT situations do not necessarily guarantee that learning takes place. After years of extensive exposure, many ESOL students cannot achieve more than what Murray describes as "a repertoire of (often short-cut, if effective) communication strategies frequently involving deviant language forms." (Murray 1996:110-1) and "fossilisation and a plateaued linguistic competence." (Skehan in Murray 1996:111). Even though ESOL learners are surrounded by real-life language and situations and develop sound communicative strategies, many still fail to notice the LT or become aware of its workings. Although phrases like "Me going yesterday." will not stop students from being understood by any native or non-native audience, such use of language will prove hardly satisfactory in more serious situations like a job interview. A considerable number of students are thus disenfranchised by the unbalanced language development which stems from the disregard of their schemata and the need to deal with form in particular.

The reason why being surrounded by a wealth of native-speaker contextual models provides ample input does not necessarily result in proficiency in the LT is that exposure does not necessarily warrant that *input* becomes part of the learning process and evolves into *intake*. Input is a necessary but insufficient condition of second language learning since it turns into intake only when learners consciously *notice* and *engage* with it (Batstone 1996, Schmidt 1990). Teaching therefore does not end with the presentation of appropriate materials but should include the noticing of language both in terms of meaning and form and the authentication process on the part of the learner through capacity.

The contradictions surrounding product-oriented authenticity also raise the question whether native speaker appropriateness is realistic and achievable, if at all desirable. As regards context, it seems that, given that language learners enter into interaction in the LT with an established schematic set-up rooted in L1 language use and *not* a tabula rasa that need to be filled in from scratch, product-oriented authenticity can be approximated but never really achieved.

In fact, by the time they reach the foreign language classroom the baggage students carry in terms of the knowledge of how speech acts (i.e. functions) work in their first

language is substantial. What they need to acquire, however, is what aspects of speech acts are universal and what differences in conventions exist concerning the ways intentions are thought to be rendered appropriately in the LT speech community (Schmidt and Richards 1980).

#### 5.2.4.4 Learner-centredness

Like authenticity, the central notion of learner-centredness is also laden with incongruities (see Preamble). The NFA is considered student-oriented because its objectives are defined in terms of *future* needs (Xiaoju 1990) and not due to its concern with the learners' actual *learning* needs. It is for this reason that learner-centredness here entails little more conceptually than in Situational Language Teaching, except for the fact that needs analyses in the NFA are more detailed and include the functional and communicative demands of the situations in which learners will be required to use the LT (Tudor 1996:8).

The NFA also claims to be learner-centred because it allows the students increased freedom and to take more responsibility in relation to their learning (Maley 1986:89). However, Widdowson (1996a) claims that two key issues in CLT, student autonomy and the prevalent NFA interpretation of authenticity are contradictory. While product-oriented authenticity gives primacy to the goal of learning and appropriate real-life language use, autonomy should focus on the process of learning, on how the language can be appropriated as a result of instruction. The two thus represent disparate contexts: product authenticity is concerned with the schematic representations of the native speaker whereas autonomy concentrates on what is real for the learner. This contradiction, the clash of two contexts and their relevant features, raises the question of whether it is possible to be concerned with both. Since the overriding principle of the approach is the primacy of LT users' schemata in real-life language use, learner autonomy can only be seen as a token issue which serves ideological rather than educational purposes.

Despite Widdowson's revelation, the paradox still persists in language teaching. Trim (1997), in his article on learner autonomy and the Council of Europe, goes into length on the new and wider perception of autonomy which now includes developing students' ability to control learning strategies, using the LT as a tool rather than an object of study, increasing self and peer evaluation etc. When preparing the learner for independence of action, however, he retains the focus on future needs and long-term benefits. He also fails to elaborate on how

an approach, which advocates the dominance of language use and promotes the monolingual native-speaker teacher (often without any language learning experience) can meet the requirements of developing learning strategies and teaching the students 'to learn'.

#### 5.2.4.5 Communicative Syllabus

Since the NFA is primarily concerned with the stock of *knowledge* an idealised native-speaker possesses in order to perform communicative acts in an effective and socially acceptable way, the syllabus specifying the content of the language course in terms of functions and the corresponding language gains paramount importance. In this respect, the NFA bears a close resemblance to SLT, the difference being only the unit (situation or function) around which the syllabus is being centred.

As has already been discussed in SLT (cf. 5.1.2.3), the practice of presenting language use as a list of items has been criticised for being misconceived both in relation to language use and language learning. Widdowson points out (1983) that the analysis of language use into constituent parts reduces the dynamic process of communication to a static inventory of items and misrepresents the true nature of human interaction. As regards instruction, students exposed to items that have been separated out and isolated from the process of which they are an integral part will have to synthesise these elements in order to be able to internalise them as an act of communication. Connecting up items from the list and turning them into negotiated interactions is part of the learning process which needs to involve the student as a learner. This is, however, beyond the scope of the NFA and students are expected to re-particularise the generalisations they have been presented by themselves.

An inventory of items also appears an inadequate learning device: "To ask learners to learn a list instead of a system goes against everything we know about learning theory." (Brumfit 1978:81). Willis argues along similar lines and notes that second language acquisition research suggests that "learning does not occur in this simple additive fashion" (Willis 1993:27). In fact, learners who have been taught a catalogue of functions and forms know from experience that it is harder to learn the more abstract functions than, for instance, phrases associated with situation types, the categories of which can be more easily related to the commonsensical mental representations one has of everyday life.

Another criticism against the course content is that it deals exclusively with the LT and LT settings and is not concerned with cross-cultural issues. In some cultures certain

speech acts do not exist (e.g. complaining in Japanese), in which case the very function has to be taught together with the language (Paulston 1981:94) In many cases, however, there are universals for the social use of speech acts and difference is mainly in the social conventions and the way language is used to express the intention. In Hungarian, for example, the direct imperative is more often used for giving instructions than in English without making one sound rude. What learners have to learn then is to 'wrap up' their communicative intent to sound more polite and therefore acceptable in English. A further drawback, however, is that including the cross-cultural aspect would entail the compilation of another inventory, this time that of differences which would make additional demands on the learners in their efforts to internalise rules of speech.

In terms of context the reason for all the difficulties lies in the fact that LT schemata are supposed to be acquired as new, unconnected units almost in a parrot-like fashion without activating the elements necessary for language use and learning - the learner's schematic knowledge through capacity.

Despite its defects, the communicative syllabus conceived in the NFA vein still holds strong: the new Hungarian syllabus has been built around Council of Europe specifications and attempts have been made in the Eastern European region to revise the national curricula on the basis of functional, notional and skill-based objectives (Enyedi and Medgyes 1998).

#### 5.2.4.6 Further Implications

Communicative Language Teaching, and the NFA in particular, has been conceived in an educational setting and culture in which notions like motivation, utility and cost-effectiveness have gained utmost importance. This western view of teaching is, however, in sharp contrast to the practice of Eastern European countries for instance where, particularly before the introduction of CLT, language teaching was and has been mainly considered a discipline with a strong tradition of linguistics and a consciously cognitive view of the language learning process (Howatt 1997:264). With the introduction of new methodologies originating in LT countries, this perception of language teaching, however, is increasingly a thing of the past.

It is only recently that language teaching experts admit what jumping on the bandwagon and adopting alien schemata unconditionally entail. As Jacobson points out, teachers 'risk losing some of the very good old ways: the thoroughness, the rigour, the

attention to detail, in short, the academic excellence that we in the West have lost under all our communicative frippery' (Jacobson in Enyedi and Medgyes 1998:5).

Cultural differences in language teaching traditions also raise the question of whether the success of a teaching method conceived in one type of setting presenting particular contextual features, i.e. teaching English to foreigners in private language schools in England, guarantees similar results in another place which displays a different set of characteristics. In a highly charged article, Toledo reveals the great disparity that lies between the world of private language schools in Britain where many of the books for international use are produced, and the reality of language teaching in a state secondary school 'where the students are unmotivated, the tape recorder does not work, a VCR is a utopia' (Toledo 2001). Given these circumstances, the ideas and ideals conjured up by native speaker teachers working in conditions which could not be more different are doomed to failure when implemented.

In fact, classroom research has confirmed that CLT has brought more innovation on the level of theory than on the level of actual classroom practices (Nunan 1987, Karavas-Doukas 1996). This then indicates that the transfer from one setting of instruction to another has not been widely successful. The main reason for this probably is an often neglected participant of classroom use, the *non-native teacher*. The overriding focus on the learner and real-life language use as well as the fact that the approach has been designed by and for native-speaker teachers (in his spirited defence of CLT, it is this charge that Thompson finds hard to refute 1996:14) has resulted in a set-up where a salient component of the teaching scene has been overlooked entirely (Karavas-Doukas 1996).

Non-native teachers have found themselves in a situation which is, to a great extent, alien to them. Like their learners, they are also supposed to take on features which are not their own but belong to LT users, that is "teachers are expected to be linguistically and pragmatically (i.e. sociolinguistically and culturally) competent, and to be equally competent on the discourse (strategic) level" (Basanta 1996:263). At the same time, all their attributes which are related to the learning process (e.g. having the experience of learning the LT themselves, knowledge of the learner's language and culture, of LT grammar etc.) become, to a large extent, obsolete and irrelevant.

Given the dominance of language use and the native speaker, non-natives are inevitably pushed into second position. To make matters worse, their case holds no hope as they will never have the schematic set-up of a native speaker who has been initiated into society in an LT community. According to Medgyes, this results in an inferiority complex

among non-native teachers. In his flawless English, he describes what it feels like to be a Hungarian teacher of English: "We are in a constant distress as we realize how little we know about the language we are supposed to teach. Indeed, most non-NESTs are all too aware that they are teachers and learners of the same subject." (Medgyes 1994:40 NEST=native-speaking teacher of English)

Since teachers are expected to accept pedagogic decisions made by experts of LT use as naturally correct and teach as if they were native speakers themselves, teaching communicatively makes more demands on the teacher in that it requires adaptability, LT speaker proficiency and innovation. These exigencies and the assumed lack of linguistic competence and confidence (Basanta 1996, Liu 1998) put further pressure on the non-native language teacher which can result in more frustration, diminished self-esteem and practically less time available for their students (Medgyes 1986b:109).

However, the idea of non-native speaker teachers being less competent than their native-speaker counterparts is a highly questionable assumption. The majority of those who have learnt to communicate in the LT have been taught by non-native speaker teachers whose command of the target language - maybe except for a minority - seldom reaches native-speaker mastery. Yet, many foreign students bear witness to the fact that it is well-nigh possible to reach proficiency in the LT and surpass their teachers. The explanation of this success lies in the circumstance that Medgyes views as a drawback, i.e. that non-native speaker teachers are learners of the language and thus contribute something which goes beyond providing an appropriate model of real-life use. It is, in fact, the qualities that have been dismissed by the NFA: the awareness of *learning needs* and the knowledge and experience of the LT *learning process*.

Although the importance of language learning experience has been undermined by the CLT, it is a participant feature that should be a prerequisite for all language teachers. The monolingual professional is a contradiction in terms which, despite the paradox it presents, is still prevalent in ELT. As Morris observes (2001), a great number of native speaker teachers do not even make the effort to learn their students' language, which not only undermines their credibility but raises the question of what they are promoting, the use of one language and learning taking place on one side, or a more balanced world where other languages are equally important and the aim is multilingualism.

In spite of the deficiencies outlined above, the functional approach enjoys a revival with many recently published coursebooks teaching functions in the sections dedicated to the

development of language use in context (see New Headway Course Pre-Intermediate; Landmark Intermediate, International Express Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate – just to mention a few).

The causes of renewed success can probably be found in the fact that there are aspects of the NFA that appeal to both native and non-native teachers. For the latter group of professionals the rule-oriented world of functions gives the sense of security only the domain of grammar can offer. Firth's perception of context as a notion similar by nature to grammar (cf. 1.2.2) gives rise to features like predictability, fixed relevance and stable connection between context and language, all of which provide the safety net many non-native teachers crave (Medgyes 1994).

Native speaker experts, on the other hand, would doubtless be reluctant to relinquish the power and financial rewards their contextual supremacy ensures. By now English language teaching has become a huge industry, which is regulated by market laws rather than educational concerns (Medgyes 1994:68, Prodromou 2000). A shift of emphasis away from language use, however, may result in changes that would reduce the influence of native-speaker centres of ELT as well as their earnings.

#### 5.2.5 Summary

Despite the inclusion of the more general notion of function and the claims made, the NFA does not represent a new paradigm in that it retains the analytical perspective of context SLT has also applied. In both cases, context is defined as the expert language user's *knowledge of appropriateness* which consists of stereotypical mental representations described either in terms of situation types or functions.

It appears that the major difference between SLT and the NFA is that rather than establishing a direct link between the salient parameters of situation and language as in SLT, the communicative function is wedged between the two while retaining the same linear relationship whereby certain situational configurations give rise to functions which, in turn, are associated with stereotypic language forms. The correlation can be illustrated as follows:

situation ----> functions ----> language

and results in a similar concern with *contextual meaning* (cf. 1.4.2.1).

The pedagogic outcome of these contextual models are syllabi comprising the elements of the corresponding categories as well as the linguistic realisations which

commonly occur with them. Since a componential analysis is only possible if the emphasis is on the stereotypical and predictable, the domain the NFA covers is located at the socially restricted end of the contextual continuum. Swan, in fact, echoes Firth's words (see 1.2.3.3) when he maintains that "this stereotyped, idiomatic side of language accounts for a substantial proportion of the things we say, and this is the area with which the Communicative Approach is perhaps mainly concerned, investigating the meanings we most often express and tabulating (in semantic syllabuses) the ways in which we conventionally express them." (Swan 1990:91)

Like SLT, the NFA also gives primacy to real-life use over language instruction. As a result, of the two settings present in the classroom the pedagogic one, which would engage the participants in normal communication, is regarded subsidiary. Wilkins seems to have been aware of this limitation of the NFA. He points out that since functional generalisations are like grammatical ones in that they are both abstract and entail the filtering out of inconsistent, individual instances, the approach cannot and does not concern itself with communication:

"... we are talking about *meaning* and *not* about *communication*. It seems indisputable that there is little point in teaching instances of communication. An act of communication is unique and ungeneralisable, although, of course, it may contain linguistic (including grammatical and semantic) features that are generalisable." (Wilkins 1981b:98, my emphases)

As a corollary, language teaching within the NFA is limited to the acquisition of conventional correlations between functions and forms, the accumulation of an investment which can be 'cashed' later with the students left to do the actual interpretative work, the appropriation of LT communication without classroom assistance.

It is for this reason that linguists like Widdowson (1978) and Murray (1996:105), who define communicative language teaching solely in terms of teaching language *as* communication, put the NFA in the same non-communicative category as structurally oriented movements. The explanation lies in the fact that by promoting LT users' schemata in the classroom both the SLA and the NFA present language instruction as preparation for communication rather than teaching language as communication which would entail the activation of participant schemata including capacity.



### 5.3 Genre Based Teaching Practices

Although Genre Theory has been developed in the context of broad concerns with literacy, its implementation has extended to the fields of academic and research settings (Swales 1990) as well as the teaching of writing in the foreign or second language. Since some of the areas are beyond the purview of the present study (e.g. L1 development), the following analysis will concentrate on the commonalities that prevail in the various language teaching domains involved. The inquiry will also retain the general focus on *writing* which characterises the majority of pedagogic applications despite the fact that there exist generic approaches to listening and speaking as well as the use of genre in reading (Kay and Dudley-Evans 1998).

#### 5.3.1 Model for Teaching

It follows from the basic tenet of GT (see 2.4), i.e. that in order to be able to function fully and effectively in a literate society interlocutors have to possess the knowledge of various genres, that the understanding of how language use is guided by conventions of generic form has to be part of the teaching programme. It is argued that since the knowledge of genres cannot be picked up automatically during the course of instruction, they need to be taught explicitly (Barrs 1994, Christie 1993).

Genres to be included in the course content are, by and large, selected according to their *future uses and utility*. As in the NFA, genres for the syllabus are selected on the basis of the activities in which the learners are likely to engage in the future. If, for instance, students are to work in public relations, they will need to be competent in customer interview, press release, oral presentation etc. (Flowerdew 1993:306). Similarly, in ESL, normally genres meeting anticipated vocational/professional (e.g. job application forms, letters etc.) requirements are pursued. EFL with its less specific domain of objectives normally concentrates on genres fulfilling real-life writing (e.g. letter writing) or exam tasks (e.g. narratives), which often coincide. In all cases, learners have to acquire how to grapple with genre types of which they have no immediate direct experience but which are thought to prove beneficial at a later stage.

In the course programme, genres are presented either in the form of writing frames that provide a skeleton outline for a piece of writing (e.g. Wray 1995, Lewis & Wray 1997)

or of units comprising models (e.g. sample letters or essays) supplemented with exercises (Hopkins 1989, Hopkins & Tribble 1989, Stephens 1992, Evans 1998 etc.) or with tables summarising salient features (e.g. Jordan 1992). Despite the surface differences, all these content manifestations are uniform with regard to the genre features they recognise as necessary and relevant to teaching purposes. In particular, they aim to familiarise learners with (i) generic structures (ii) the vocabulary commonly associated with a specific genre, and (iii) cohesive devices. The main objective of the teaching of genres stems from these components, and can therefore be defined in terms of the *knowledge* that contains these pieces of information about particular genres.

Approaches designed to raise awareness of what constitutes various genres are therefore necessarily *product-oriented*, and follow a similar route through the teaching process where the subsequent stages represent a move away from controlled class activities to guided and eventually free individual writing.

The first phase is normally the presentation of a model through which the social purpose, the text structure and the linguistic features can be identified and examined. The succeeding stage entails joint activities such as writing a piece in a generic text type with the close guidance of the teacher (Lewis & Wray 1997; Callaghan, Knapp & Noble 1993) or performing tasks relating to one of the three main target features outlined above (e.g. Jordan 1992). Next comes assisted writing which may imply tasks such as rewriting, completion, composing part of the genre structure (e.g. ending of an essay), filling in the slots of writing frames etc. before reaching the final stage when the students are considered competent enough to produce a piece on their own.

### 5.3.2 Context

#### 5.3.2.1 Analysis

The pedagogic implementation of GT implies the presentation of the *linguists'* schematic representation of genre as the model for the learners to apply. Such a set-up then necessarily creates a duality of situations with two sets of participants whereby the schematic features of the former group, which epitomises the socially appropriate terminal behaviour that students will have to be able to display after completing the course, takes precedence. Since it is the outside experts' schemata that signify, the analysts automatically gain control of

relevance as well. As a result, the definition of what pertains to a particular genre will also be given by the expert rather than worked out by the learners.

It follows from this that instruction will focus on acquiring the knowledge that will enable the learners to produce texts adhering to LT genre conventions. Since this knowledge represents what the expert writer considers as textually appropriate, the *relevant features of the participants* have to coincide with the third person's schemata of generic texts.

Thus, when writing the learners need to put themselves into the social situation from which the genre arises. Since the central aspect of the situation is *purpose* in GT (see 2.4.1), the whole activity of writing is governed by it. If, for example, the task is to take on the role of an estate agent and write a description of a house, the particulars of the text will reflect the overall aim of trying to sell the property. As a consequence, the students must ensure that the description appeals to the imaginary audience, it contains all the necessary information, and is presented in a way that makes the text convincing (Badger & White 2000). In terms of context, these requirements correspond to the three Hallidayan parameters of context, the tenor, the field and the mode (see 2.3.2), in reference to which the analysis of context in genre approaches is normally conducted.

Since it is the expert writer who determines what features of the schema a genre represents should pertain, the acceptability and appropriateness of texts composed by learners in the classroom are assessed in the same terms as of those texts which are put together for real-life communicative purposes (Kress 1993), regardless of the children's particular stage of cognitive development (in the case of L1 instruction) or the language students' interlanguage or 'interschemata'. As for the pedagogic outcome, it is thought to be achieved through the practice of producing texts which comply to the generic conventions of the LT community, i.e. by mimicking the language behaviour of expert users through the adoption of their idealised contexts.

This contextual arrangement suggests an interpretation of key issues which is similar to the NFA. Learner-centredness in genre based approaches, for example, also entails meeting the demands of the students' assumed (e.g. allowing disadvantaged social groups access to 'powerful' genres Kress 1993) or predicted (e.g. letter writing for ESOL students) future needs.

### 5.3.2.2 Authenticity

As with the NFA, authenticity here, too, links up with expert schemata the learners are expected to have acquired by the end of the course. A piece of writing is considered 'authentic' as long as it has been produced for LT audience and serves some out-of-class purpose. Authenticity also keys in with learners' future needs since the genres taught in class are selected according to their real-life utility. Given its affiliation with expert LT schemata, the type of authenticity GT approaches apply is what has been termed as *product* in the present thesis (cf. 5.2.4.3).

As a corollary, the methodology of GT approaches aims to apply LT practices in the classroom as well. Like in the NFA, teachers are encouraged to replicate real-life situations as closely as possible. Furthermore, the use of model texts and their analysis suggest that the students are encouraged to learn through the imitation of real-life samples and the conscious application of the rules that inhere in them (Badger & White 2000).

### 5.3.3 Critique and Evaluation

The majority of the criticism seems to stem from the approach's perception of context. Most importantly, the genre approach has been severely criticised for adopting a product-based orientation to teaching while ignoring issues of language learning. Callaghan, Knapp and Noble (1993) claim that GT pedagogy appears to have simplistic ideas about language learning and takes a behaviourist model whereby previously set patterns are practised until their correct use becomes habitual.

Barrs (1993) strongly disapproves of giving primacy to real-life language use over the promotion of learning in an educational setting. She disagrees with Kress and maintains that texts written by children should be judged according to their level of conceptual development rather than criteria set for adults by expert users. She argues for learner experience (schemata) to be recognised, built on and extended - i.e. for the salience of learning. In fact, Barrs considers the inability to enhance learning a major drawback of GT pedagogy: "Members of the 'genre school' may know a great deal about language, but seem to know little about learning, and this handicaps them when they come to advise teachers about what they should be doing." (Barrs 1993:255).

As has been demonstrated in the NFA, this ineffectuality has its roots in the contextual set-up whereby the linguist's schemata of LT real-life language use overrides pedagogic considerations and determines how learning should be conducted in the classroom without recourse to the participants' immediate learning needs and reality. The lack of pedagogic reasoning can also be explained by the fact that GT models, which have been taken over by pedagogy almost unchanged, have originally been devised for the purposes of language description.

A further corollary of the linguists' schemata and judgement being treated as standard and desirable is that GT pedagogy tends to be *prescriptive* in that it leads teachers and learners to expect to be told how to write types of text by replicating models which display the socially appropriate forms various genres take. Teachers and learners are supposed to adopt uncritically what has been presented as appropriate genre form and structure, often without any reference to how and to what extent they may be allowed to make alterations or deviate by letting their individual contexts enter the process of writing.

Flowerdew (2000) points out that, given the dissimilarity of expert/learner schematic set-up, the latter are incapable of replicating the expert generic model presented to them. In order to remedy the situation, she suggests that learners should be exposed to good 'apprentice' exemplars which offer a more realistic model and an attainable goal.

Since an analytical conception of context necessarily retains a position at the conventionally constrained end of the contextual continuum, what is presented by the linguist as language use is restricted as it does not extend beyond the domain of situations with relatively stable features and fairly predictable linguistic realisations. Widdowson sums up the pedagogic consequences of this preoccupation with contextual meaning (cf. 1.4.2.1) as follows: "The danger of such analysis is that in revealing typical textualizations, it might lead us to suppose that form-function correlations are fixed and can be learnt as formulae, and so to minimize the importance of the procedural aspect of language use and learning." (Widdowson 1983:102).

A further hindrance for learning is the itemisation of the course content that characterises the NFA and SLT as well. The generic structure of genres are often broken down into moves such as background information, statement of results, reference to previous research etc., as in the case of dissertations, for example. Similarly, the correspondence between a generic structure or moves and their linguistic realisation is presented in the form of a list (e.g. students are provided with useful phrases to begin and end letters of request in

Evans 1998:85), which is not claimed to enhance learning.

The positive aspects of the pedagogic application of GT, however, can also be traced back to its particular view of context. Writing poses many difficulties and is a daunting experience even in real-life settings. One of the reasons for this is the physical dissociation of participant roles, which results in a situation where there is no face-to-face communication and the interlocutors cannot clarify misunderstandings or check comprehension there and then.

Furthermore, since writing is recorded and can therefore be stored, retrieved and recollected, it carries more weight and prestige than oral communication. There are therefore probably very few who would disagree with Widdowson: "In my experience writing is usually an irksome activity and an ordeal to be avoided whenever possible. It seems to require an expense of effort disproportionate to the actual result. Fortunately for my self-esteem, the experience is a common one. Most of us seem to have difficulty in getting our thoughts down on paper." (Widdowson 1984a:54).

Given this state of affairs, writing tends to be the area where teachers and learners feel least confident and require most support. Hard and fast rules, clear structures and uncomplicated connections between form and function allow for a safety net on which writers can always fall back. In fact, it is the stability and conventionality of the pedagogic application of GT which provides the security both learners and teachers yearn for when engaging in writing activities. As a result, despite the obvious flaws of the teaching model, the assistance provided by genre theorists is often welcomed and highly valued by practitioners (Braddock & Huxley 1998; Kay & Dudley-Evans 1998).

#### 5.4 Pedagogic Application of Analytical Models of Context - Summary

Despite the variance between the contextual units they adopt, language teaching approaches applying an analytical model of context display similar features.

First of all, in all three cases the objective of language instruction is set in terms of the *product* of teaching, i.e. with regard to the schemata that learners are expected to employ in future instances of LT use. Given the primacy of *language use*, target contexts are defined by the expert native speaker and are presented as generalisations of appropriate LT behaviour with reference to the categories of situation types, speech acts or genres. The three kinds of analytical model could be taken over from linguistic theory almost unaltered since they serve as the descriptive devices of the same object of inquiry (i.e. language use) both in language study and language pedagogy.

The focus on language use affects all areas of language teaching. The course content, for instance, is compiled in terms of the contexts students will need in order to be able to function in real-life LT situations later. Key terms like learner-centredness and authenticity also become product-oriented and are considered the 'genuine article' as long as they are related to the LT speakers' values and reality. Motivation, too, is linked to the target world and is based on the assumption that the interests of the learners and LT users coincide.

Learning the LT implies replacing existing learner schemata with the prescribed expert contexts that are believed to be the sole carriers of LT appropriateness. This is achieved by a methodology that promotes the rehearsal of those future situations with which the students will have to cope when they leave the classroom. This, in practice, means the unconditional adoption of a foreign body of knowledge in replicated settings whereby learners are given context and do not have the opportunity to work it out by and for themselves. In other words, students are not taught how to engage capacity and carry out the procedural work that is necessary for the creation of context.

This is particularly unfortunate in the case of analytical models where the focus is on the knowledge of highly conventional acts of communication at the socially constrained end of the contextual continuum with very little procedural activity involved anyway. Since these deficiencies have not been counteracted by language pedagogy, the task of developing capacity and learning to cope with the creative aspects of language use is left to be done by the learners on their own initiative.

The fact that pedagogic adaptations of the analytical model disregard learner specific features of schemata (e.g. different interests or motivating forces, immediate learning needs, such as the concern with form etc.) and have failed to develop methods that could solve the problems inherent in the paradigm (see 5.3.2) suggests that they do not really enhance effective learning and cannot be said to be truly learner centred despite their ambitious claims.

As for the other classroom participant, the teacher, the primacy of language use and the dominance of the LT user's schemata benefit the group that is in possession of the target contexts, i.e. native speakers. Such a set-up then necessarily disenfranchises non-native teachers who, like their students, are learners of the LT themselves. Since their schemata also differ from those of the native speaker teachers, the way of teaching promoted by native speakers will be, by and large, imposed on them rather than developed by them to suit their own purposes and circumstances.

Despite the shortcomings, teaching language for communication still holds strong. One reason for its appeal to the non-native speaker classroom participants lies in the fact that, like grammar, analytical models of context provide teachers/students with those stable points of reference and the sense of finiteness that make them feel secure in the alien world of the LT. Many of the native-speakers, on the other hand, enjoy the privileges (e.g. of being allowed to remain monolingual) that have been bestowed on them, and are reluctant to change the situation and adopt a more learning-centred approach to language teaching.

The movement outlined in the next chapter presents an attempt at offering an alternative to this way of thinking.



## Chapter 6

### **Language Teaching Approaches and Methods Adopting a Procedural Model of Context**

#### **Teaching Language as Communication (TLC)**

The language teaching approach commonly referred to as Communicative Language Teaching has, in fact, never represented a single coherent movement, particularly with regard to its perception of context. As the following section will demonstrate, the trend outlined below differs qualitatively from the NFA, of which it has often incorrectly been thought an integral part.

#### **6.1 Theoretical Background**

TLC stands apart from other language teaching methods and approaches in that its theory has been directly linked up to language pedagogy: Widdowson has not only provided a comprehensive theoretical framework for the analysis of context in the procedural mode (see 3.4) but has formulated the general principles of the corresponding language teaching approach, the TLC as well.

Even though the pedagogic implementation of theory has been given substantial consideration, the procedural model of context by its nature is more suitable for language teaching purposes than its analytical counterpart. First of all, there is no duality of contexts as only the participants' schemata pertain. Secondly, schema with its indefinite variety of features, including both idiosyncratic and conventional, fortuitous and predictable elements, is not an idealisation serving as a means of description. It rather presents a notion in the way in which it exists and functions in the actuality of communication.

Context in TLC represents a dynamic concept which amalgamates the findings of not only linguistics but cognitive psychology as well. It bears a close resemblance to connectionist networks whereby the stability of patterns is temporary with each new act of interaction leading to a novel constellation (cf. 1.3.4.2). Since the interaction with the linguistic/non-linguistic environment always entails schematic change, language use can be perceived here as

a continuous learning process. Thus, the procedural model by its very nature facilitates learning and allows for the realisation of teaching/learning through natural communication that engages participants with their own reality.

As in linguistic theory, in TLC the emphasis is also put upon the process of context generation by the participants in actual instances of language use rather than the specification of parameters for idealised schemata representing an outsider's view of the appropriateness of speech events. In other words, the focus shifts from the content of language teaching to the development of capacity which will enable the learner to move along the contextual continuum efficiently in the LT and embrace the whole of language use rather than just conventional instances.

## 6.2 Pedagogic Implications

For language teaching the adoption of a procedural conception of context necessarily implies that instead of being given constant, prescribed patterns, learners are encouraged to learn how to create new contexts by bearing on the schemata available to them at the time of the interaction. The aim of instruction is therefore not to present the linguist's set of predictable future schemata in the form of a syllabus-like inventory and rehearse them in replicated real-life situations, but to appeal to the learners' existing knowledge and expand or alter it by putting the LT to communicative purposes in the classroom.

The qualitatively different perception of context inevitably alters the definition of communicative competence in TLC as well: "Obviously he (the learner) cannot be said to have acquired communicative competence if he only learns a fixed connection between a particular linguistic form and a particular context or situation. For someone to correctly interpret discourse he needs to be able to recognize relevant conditions in situations he has never encountered before, and the manner in which these give value to structures he may never have specifically associated with these situations in the past. Linguistic ability must be essentially *creative*." (Widdowson 1979:156, my emphasis).

Language education thus needs to engage students in such a way that allows them to create *pragmatic meaning* in the LT (cf. 1.4.2.2). In order to achieve it, learners have to take part in acts of *genuine language use* which will enable them to practise how to work out, by drawing on their systemic and schematic resources, what features of the situation should pertain in order to render a message in compliance with the conventions of LT communities.

Activating one's knowledge and experience, however, necessitates a *strategic* component which therefore appears alongside the grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse aspects of communicative competence in Canale's pedagogic definition (Canale 1983). According to the weak version, this strategic competence is limited to a remedial and enhancing resource. The advocates of the more prevalent strong conception, however, maintain that strategic command is the creative force that lies at the centre of our ability to communicate and covers a wide range of activities such as inference, practical reasoning, negotiation of meaning etc. (Candlin 1981:39, Widdowson 1983, 1984a).

In fact, this strategic component corresponds to what Widdowson has identified as *capacity* (see 3.4.4), the creative force 'which will enable the learner to deal with a range of different frames of reference and rhetorical routines as occasion requires in the future and after the completion of the course' (Widdowson 1983:81). Given the importance assigned to capacity, the objectives of TLC are formulated in terms of the development of this interpretative ability.

#### 6.2.1 Context in TLC

Since the focus is on the actuality of classroom language use, the *participants* whose *features* pertain in TLC are necessarily those present in the classroom, i.e. the learners and the teacher with their immediate and idiosyncratic reality. As opposed to the NFA, students here are not seen as empty containers that have to be filled with correct information about LT language use, or interactants who are expected to exchange their existing schemata with those of expert users. Instead, it is acknowledged that learners already know how language generally operates and are, in fact, encouraged to bring this knowledge to bear on learning the LT. As a corollary, the knowledge of the other participant, the teacher, has to extend well beyond the LT and its use, and needs to incorporate the understanding of the language learning process including, among other things, familiarity with the students' systemic/schematic background and specific learning needs and requirements.

Since the relevant participants are the learner and the teacher with their schemata undergoing constant change, the features that pertain in any concrete act of communication can never be defined exactly, especially not by expert language users working in educational settings elsewhere. Consequently, what should be relevant for the language teaching process can be best determined by the *expert participant*, i.e. the teacher. The information about the

nature of context in TLC will therefore remain local and accessible only to educators employed in a particular setting. This then necessarily carries the implication that decisions concerning *relevance* will also be made locally by those directly involved.

The *objective* of classroom interaction is to engage learners' capacity and develop flexibility (see 4.3.2), which will enable them to acquire how to move along the contextual continuum in a way which allows them to function felicitously in communities where LT is used as a means of communication. As has been noted in earlier (see 4.3.2), with so many users of English, the large majority of whom are non-native speakers, LT ceases to be the possession of the members of the 'exclusive club' of educated native speakers who also assume the authority to establish the norm (Widdowson 1994). With English as an international language, which is able to serve the communicative needs of many cultures, the goal of TLC is to prepare the students to be able to adjust to the appropriateness conditions of various speech communities as well as express their own perception of reality. One of the consequences of the multiplicity of LT communities is that *appropriateness* inevitably becomes a varied and relative notion, which is not connected to the norms of one group of LT speakers. Furthermore, context needs to represent the reconciliation of local identity and international intelligibility (Jenkins 2000a:9). Schemata which successfully combine these two elements present the target contexts in TLC.

As a result, the object of language education here is not to get the students to adopt idealised speaker schemata but to enable learners to develop an *idiolect* which can be seen as the expansion of Sperber and Wilson's contextual implication (see 3.3.1) in that it also represents a qualitatively novel synthesis of old (L1) and new (LT) language and schematic constellation which comes about as a result of the participants' interaction with their environment. Thus, the idiolect of a proficient user will never coincide with the LT of a native speaker. It, rather, epitomises a continuously evolving 'hybrid' that can best serve the diverse communicative purposes to which it is put.

On the whole, the TLC contextual conception translates into a kind of language pedagogy whereby teaching is not defined in terms of pre-defined future purposes relating to language use but concentrates on the process which will enable the learners to develop the capacity in order to constantly regenerate their linguistic and schematic knowledge. In Widdowson's words, it is a pedagogy of *learner participation* rather than expert imposition (Widdowson 1979:76) in which teaching is based on the description of *learning* and not on what has to be learnt (Widdowson 1983). It follows from this that the objectives in TLC are

formulated in reference to the immediate learning process and are *pedagogic* rather than utilitarian (see Chapter 5).

### 6.2.2 Classroom Use

As a result of the primacy given to the immediate educational reality over language use, the classroom setting is reinstated as a legitimate and natural environment with its own distinct culture and identity. Seedhouse (1996) suggests that classroom communication should not be compared to everyday conversation but, rather, be viewed as a sociolinguistic variety or institutional discourse type which should not be subjected to any value judgement. He points out that "there is no basis or mechanism in sociolinguistics for evaluating one variety of discourse as better, more genuine or more natural than another: the concept is a purely pedagogical one. A basic problem with communicative orthodoxy was the belief that it was possible to use terms like 'genuine' and 'natural', derived from pedagogy, to describe a sociolinguistic phenomenon such as discourse." (Seedhouse 1996:23)

Breen (1985) argues along similar lines when he describes the classroom as a setting in its own right where interaction moves along the same continuum from ritualised and predictable to unrestrained and unpredictable as with any other type of human communication. He also maintains that much criticised features like asymmetrical relationships or the inherently conservative nature of the classroom are the "inevitable characteristics of the social event in which most people learn a foreign language." (Breen 1985:149-150) His conclusion is that although the classroom is limited in providing opportunities for 'real world communication', it still has the potential to become a particular social context for the intensification of the cultural experience of learning (Breen 1985:154).

Cook (1997b) approaches the issue from a different angle and maintains that there is no such thing as 'unnatural' or 'inauthentic' language by showing how 'unnatural' classroom practices such as repetition, rote learning, saying things without understanding them etc. prevail in child as well as adult language use. He therefore claims that the classroom should be recognised and accepted as a play world in which people can practise and prepare.

All the above arguments point to the fact that there seems to be no reason to believe that classroom language use is inferior or less natural than any other type of interaction. Since the primary function of any educational setting is to enhance learning by attaching salience to the specific needs, features and objectives of the participants, the language class which aims

to create conditions that enhance linguistic and schematic change, i.e. learning, cannot be considered inadequate or inefficient either.

### 6.2.3 The Learner

As has been noted earlier, the features that pertain to the most important group of participants, the *learners*, necessarily include the schematic and systemic knowledge of L1 use (e.g. cultural presuppositions, discourse and grammar rules etc.) as well as the specific needs and attributes of the LT learner such as interlanguage, the overriding concern with form (especially at the early stages), individual learning routes and routines etc.

Since in TLC there is no clash between hypothesised future and current classroom reality, the emphasis throughout is on the ongoing learning process and the development of the students' ability to exploit their existing resources and produce their own interpretations with increasing awareness of the limitations and freedom LT pragmatic practices allow.

Given the focus on actual language use in the classroom, learners are expected to actively take part in acts of communication and carry out the interpretative work by and for themselves through relating the new information each novel situation provides to what they already know. In so doing, their main concern should not be so much to find out *what* correlations prevail between certain forms and situational configurations but rather, *how* these correlations are established in actual instances of LT use (Widdowson 1979:249). In other words, by engaging in the actuality of LT use learners are expected to develop the *procedural capacity* which serves as the creative force that will enable them to establish relevance and make sense of situation and language in unpredicted eventualities.

In this respect, TLC endorses *education* rather than training. Instead of equipping learners with restricted competence which allows them to cope with specific tasks entailing predominantly contextual meaning, TLC promotes language education and seeks to "provide for creativity whereby what is learned is a set of schemata and procedures for adapting them to cope with problems which do not have a ready-made formulaic solution." (Widdowson 1983:19)

Advocates of TLC have long maintained that developing strategies rather than presenting inventories is more beneficial both in terms of language use and learning. One of the arguments is that learners are more likely to learn effectively what can be seen as a system than what is perceived as unrelated items (Brumfit 1981:91). With regards to language use,

Meier, among others, observes that cultural assumptions and situational factors represent “a complexity that can never be captured by a list of cultural rules or by a recipe for every, or even most, possible constellations of contextual factors.” (Meier 1997:25) Her conclusion is that teaching awareness and sensitivity should replace instruction focusing on a fixed set of rules.

Candlin (1981:37) also raises the question concerning the nature of “expression rules” or rules of speech which, he insists, are different from the traditional rules of grammar in that they are “variable and not categorical”. Candlin argues that there cannot be cut-and-dried rules for real-life interaction partly because psycholinguistic processes comprise a wealth of individual features and partly because of the “built-in interdeternacy of communication”. This view of ‘communication rules’, in fact, keys in with that of Thomas who has long claimed that pragmatics should be concerned with generalisations different from those of grammar and should work out *maxims* rather than formulate rules (see 2.5.3).

As a corollary, learners cannot be provided with watertight scripts but rather, need to be given guidelines in the form of maxims which will help them to learn how to adjust and develop their capacity of discourse processing in novel settings. These guidelines may then serve as beacons for the learners in their discovery of, for instance, how far discourse procedures are universal and transferable or specific to a particular speech community.

Rivers (1980), an experienced language learner who is familiar with the problems that arise from the position, for example suggests that more attention should be paid to the comprehension and assimilation of fundamental conceptual differences between languages, “so that students are learning to operate within the total language system, rather than picking up minor skills in its application” (Rivers 1980:53). Her illustration, the explication of the use of the subjunctive as conveying a subjective view of the situation as opposed to the objective view of the indicative, demonstrates how it is possible to make the concept accessible and comprehensible even for those learners in whose first language this mood does not feature at all. Understanding the essence of the notion also spares the learners the tedious task of learning the list of verbs requiring the subjunctive. A similar attempt is Batstone’s (1994) description of the use of past tense as an indication of social, psychological and hypothetical distance. Once learners grasp this overall principle, they will easily be able to pragmatically interpret phrases in the past tense which, in fact, refer to the present in expressions such as “I was wondering ...”, “Could you ...” or the linguistic realisations of the conditional.

These broad guidelines on grammar translate into maxims in the procedural paradigm

of pragmatics. In TLC, students need to be sensitised to the diversity of the way the Cooperative Contract in various speech communities is applied. Learners will therefore have to be made aware of the fact that the importance of the two opposing forces that govern human communication, the Cooperative Principle and the territorial imperative (cf. 3.4.5), may vary and, as a result, appropriateness can carry different implications as to what acceptable language behaviour entails.

Hungarian learners of English, for instance, need to recognise that, because of the more forceful territorial imperative in English middle class culture, they need to appear more cooperative than they would in their L1 environment. In practical terms it means that given the bigger personal space that most English native speakers maintain, Hungarian speakers of English should seek to 'invade' it with more caution and politeness than they would when approaching a Hungarian. They should also be taught that given the significance attached to phatic communion, polite questions, such as 'How are you' when meeting an acquaintance, should be interpreted in reference to the greeting rather than the personal inquiry context.

Interestingly, the classroom provides excellent opportunities in this respect. With the hierarchy of the teacher-student relationship, interaction between the two participants naturally requires a certain degree of politeness on the part of the learner. Communication in the LT with the teacher can thus raise the students' awareness of the issues involved with cooperativeness.

#### 6.2.4 Learner-centredness

The shift of paradigm inevitably means that *learner-centredness* in TLC acquires an interpretation which is qualitatively different from that of the NFA. Whereas in the NFA the notion relates to the potential future *utilisation* of idealised expert contexts and the *motivation* which is generated by the recognition of their future benefit (cf. 5.2.4.4), learner-centredness here entails the salience of individual learner schemata and the objectives formulated with regard to the learning process.

As has already been indicated, in TLC only one context prevails: the immediate reality of the participants in a particular educational setting. One of the practical consequences of this singularity is that learners are spared the extra effort they are required to make when accommodating and handling a set of two schemata, one of which, to a varying degree, is alien to them (see Chapter 5). The fact that learners can 'play themselves' and act on their



own terms allows them to concentrate on the main object of the classroom enterprise, i.e. learning.

The overall aim of TLC is to engage learner contexts in a way that results in schematic changes. This is an ongoing process whereby the goal is not to exchange learner schema for native speaker schema but to constantly modify and develop the student's mental representation of what constitutes appropriate language behaviour. The end products, as it were, are contexts which retain a flexible, malleable and highly adaptable nature that enables the learner to find socially acceptable position on the contextual continuum in any speech community or eventuality. Such a decision involves judgement and, in fact, problem solving on the part of the learner. When finishing a letter to a supervisor in the LT, for instance, the research student has to gauge the degree of the formality of the relationship in order to be able to choose from the range of possible endings.

What the TLC classroom offers is a place where the students are involved in activities that allow them to learn and practise how to make such decisions. Since language use is seen as an act of learning in the procedural model of context, the learning process here entails genuine use of the LT with the immediate reality of the students engaged. In this sense, TLC represent what some researchers, such as Kumaravadivelu (1993), term as 'learning centred approaches' which provide opportunities for learners to participate in meaning-focused activities that foster the development of capacity.

The long-term objectives of TLC also reflect learner-centredness in the sense that students are expected to strive for the more realistic and achievable goal of multilingual proficiency rather than the unattainable native speaker LT competence. They are also encouraged to develop their own LT, i.e. to use LT on their own terms and for their own communicative purposes.

In sum, TLC is learner-centred because it promotes and enhances learning and thus attends to the learners' immediate needs. Rather than preparing students to behave appropriately only in socially constrained situations, it ensures that students can go beyond conformity and grapple with the more creative aspects of language use as well. In the long run, it makes it possible for learners to become proficient so that they can take possession of the LT and turn it to their own advantage (Widdowson 1994).

## 6.2.5 The Teacher

### 6.2.5.1 Characteristics

The inconstant and idiosyncratic concept of context in TLC has many consequences for the other party, the teachers as well. First of all, as relevant participants, teachers too have to create their own context: they are expected to activate their schemata and refer the particular constellation a classroom set-up presents to a general pattern in order to make sense of it. Since every teaching situation, like any other act of communication, is unique and unrepeatable, it demands constant matching and schema alteration on the part of the participants. As a result, teachers are required to engage in continuous problem solving and schema shaping.

Secondly, since most decisions concerning relevance and context are made locally, there cannot be prescribed syllabi or guidelines directly supplied from a central source by outside experts. The task of bringing about and fostering learning by establishing the particular conditions that induce linguistic and schematic change most effectively in the learner therefore falls on the teacher. In order to achieve this, educators need to possess knowledge of the relevant features of their learners (including information about the local education system, traditions etc.) as well as the schematic modifications they intend to instigate. In addition, they have to be aware of the available resources regarding approaches, methods, techniques etc. and be capable of selecting the one that makes it possible for students to engage in such a way that will result in learning at a particular place and time. All this pedagogic knowledge then necessarily forms part of the features which have to pertain to the teachers in their role as educators within their distinct schemes of instruction.

As each teaching situation requires specific conditions and teaching solutions, TLC rejects the idea of an overall framework comprising a set of fixed formulae for immediate implementation (Widdowson 1984c), and therefore of a single readily applicable universal approach which should be accepted unconditionally. Rather than aligning with one or other trend, teachers are expected to make informed decisions which should be based on the careful consideration of possible pedagogic solutions and on their experience.

The stimulus that triggers the modification of the teacher's schemata should not, however, be restricted to experience only. If this happens, teaching practice is limited to the

refinement of the approach or approaches with which the teacher is already familiar. In the interest of being able to work more effectively, it is therefore paramount that teachers have a widening range of pedagogic devices at their disposal so that they can meet the changing demands of language education. As with language use, the higher the number of potentially exploitable elements, the more targeted and appropriate the teacher's choice of teaching methods and aids can be.

Given the importance attached to professional development within TLC, teachers have to assume the role of mediators between domains of research and pedagogy: they have to interpret ideas suggested by theory within their own terms of reference as well as evaluate their relevance in relation to the specific setting of application (Widdowson 1990). Apart from intuition and craftsmanship, teachers must therefore be "intellectually equipped to assess the validity and immediate utility of ideas, modifying or adjusting them if need be. Without this 'vantage point' teachers cannot be said to be truly informed, autonomous decision-makers; nor, therefore, can their teaching be maximally effective" (Murray 1998:154).

Widdowson summarises the advantages of presenting teaching as a self-conscious inquiry as follows: "Seen in this way, the reflexive nature of pragmatism, with theory realized by practice, practice informed by theory, brings mutual benefits in that it serves the cause both of effective learning and, as a corollary, of the professional development of the teacher." (Widdowson 1990:30)

The perception of teaching as "a challenging intellectual enterprise" (Widdowson 1984c:88), whereby the knowledge of theories and their relation to teaching constitutes an essential part of the teacher's schemata, makes formal preparation of teachers for the profession a necessary condition for teaching. This, on the one hand, invalidates assumptions such as the one made by Maley (1990:73) who has raised serious doubts whether there is any necessary connection between training (normative) and successful teaching (performative). On the other hand, the fact that within TLC teachers are expected to work out pedagogic solutions to their local problems rather than adopt prefabricated ones entails that priming teachers should take the form of *education* and not training.

#### 6.2.5.2 Consequences

The most essential attribute of TLC, the shift of emphasis from language use (see Chapter 5) to the language learning process, has major implications for the teacher. Most

importantly, the primacy given to learner schemata and the knowledge on the part of the teacher of what may constitute it in terms of language learning reinstates the authority of non-native teachers who have the insider's view into the language/culture of their students. Having acquired first-hand experience of LT learning and therefore deeper understanding of what makes the LT 'foreign' for their learners, they are in a better position to judge how to trigger off and facilitate the language learning process. With the supremacy of the non-native teacher, the expert of the 'local scene', the notion of "globally transferable native speaker teachers" (Maley 1990) becomes as contradictory as the concept of a universally applicable approach.

Despite decades of NFA dominance, the idea of giving the responsibility of decision making to those in the front line seems to strike a chord with some of the teachers as well. Medgyes (1986b, 1994), among others, has observed that the imposition of an educational ideology and methods which are oblivious to the specific features of particular teaching contexts can, in fact, cause demotivation and resentment amongst the recipients. The question, however, remains whether non-native teachers, constituting the majority of language educators, who often work in more adverse conditions than their native speaker counterparts, have the time, energy and confidence to seize the opportunity and take on the challenge of the intellectual independence TLC presents. Furthermore, a situation whereby teachers exercise their autonomy and determine context within their own competence, may lead to lack of unity and common direction that have contributed to the recognition of language pedagogy as a distinguishable discipline (Murray 1998). These unresolved issues have, in fact, put hurdles in the way of the pedagogic implementation of TLC.

#### 6.2.6 Authenticity

Since the focus is on the learner representing a member of L1 speech community with a particular set of conventions and language, authenticity acquires an interpretation different from that of the NFA. First of all, in TLC a clear distinction is made between 'genuineness' or 'text authenticity', which is a characteristic of the text and refers to native speaker audience, and 'authenticity', 'learner authenticity' (Yuk-chun Lee 1995) or 'process authenticity' (Murray 1996) which is the result of the learner's interaction with the text.

In TLC, authenticity is, on the one hand, a matter of allowing the students to engage on their own terms - hence the term 'learner authenticity'. On the other hand, authenticity

also entails the process whereby through taking part in interactions learners experience schematic changes and gradually learn how to identify the intention of a speaker/writer who operates a set of conventions different from their own.

It is claimed that when engaging in learning situations, students relate the LT code and the particular setting to their own immediate reality and create the context accordingly. The connections between the code and relevant aspects of the extralinguistic world will therefore be mainly determined by the learner as an individual and a member of the speech/classroom community in accordance with the main purpose of the exercise - that of language learning.

The main question for pedagogy is then how to create conditions in which learners naturally engage in interaction with their linguistic and non-linguistic environment in order to produce pedagogically authentic responses. Breen (1985) suggests that the immediate reality of the classroom context should be fully exploited by utilising the potential of the classroom as a social as well as learning environment. He therefore proposes tasks which require learners "to communicate ideas and meanings and to meta-communicate about the language and about the problems and solutions in the learning of the language." (Breen 1985:67) The example he gives is a task whereby the learners are instructed not only to discover the meaning of a text but also to identify problems and share their solutions with other students.

Breen also proposes to use texts which can serve as a means to help the learner to develop an authentic interpretation. Although he does not elaborate on how to make genuine materials learner authentic, Widdowson (1979:166-9) and Yuk-chun Lee (1995) address the issue in their respective articles. Widdowson (1998) argues that real language use as data to learn from has the disadvantage of not providing adequately for the process of learning since it implies local language and knowledge (e.g. overhearing a conversation even in one's mother tongue may cause interpretative difficulties since all participants shape their message in relation to what they perceive as their interlocutor's reality). So for genuine materials to become classroom authentic, they need to be made local not in relation to real-life users but in reference to the community of learners in the classroom. Designing learner authentic material therefore should necessarily include pedagogic tampering with the data.

In this respect, Widdowson (1979) and Yuk-chun Lee (1995) identify two stages: the selection of discourse and the pedagogic processing of the material. The first phase implies that the material chosen by the designer needs to be thematically and rhetorically relevant to the course objectives and the specific features of the particular classroom setting (e.g.

learners' experiences, needs and interests etc.). Next, the text has to be modified in order to make LT conventions more accessible to learner response. One way of doing it is filtering out idiosyncratic variations so that the text will exemplify a type of discourse rather than demonstrate a particular instance. As learning progresses, pedagogic manipulation may be gradually reduced until the learners can eventually be given genuine materials. At every stage, however, it is advisable to add tasks relevant to the demands of the particular teaching situation to further facilitate the authentication process (Yuk-chun Lee 1995). It is worth noting that, in line with the general principles of TLC, both Widdowson and Yuk-chun Lee provide only general guidelines with regard to the processing of data and leave decisions concerning particular instances with individual students in a specific educational setting to the educator working locally.

As for the authenticity of the broader concept of pedagogy, its interpretation reflects the change in the meaning of the concept. Rather than being related to the replication of native speaker practices, the notion in TLC keys in with the approach's objectives and therefore "encompasses both a global, societal and local, individual meaning." (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996:210). In order to highlight the difference between the two types of pedagogy, the term 'appropriate pedagogy' is used for TLC, while 'authentic pedagogy' is retained for the description of the NFA.

#### 6.2.7 Syllabus and methodology

Syllabi, which define the aims of teaching, supply a framework within which the process of learning takes place and provide a device by means of which the aims should be achieved (Widdowson 1984:23), are large-scale generalisations that are realised in the form of inventories. As such they necessarily represent "a static view of the dynamic process of language learning and use" (Brumfit 1981:51) and can be seen as stereotypic constructs regardless of the type of stereotypes (e.g. situation types or functions) they consider effective in language learning. Brumfit (1981) and Widdowson (1984b) argue that exchanging the abstract elements of the language system for the notions and functions the language expresses does not fundamentally alter the stereotypic character of the syllabus. Since syllabi represent the analytical paradigm, they are at loggerheads with TLC which emphasises the dynamic and creative nature of communication, and context in particular. It is for this reason that Widdowson concludes that "there is no such thing as a communicative syllabus: there can

only be a methodology that stimulates communicative learning.” (Widdowson 1984b:26).

In other words, when communication and context are perceived in procedural terms, it does not really matter what is taught as long as it is actualised by a methodology “which develops a genuine capacity for communication.” (Widdowson 1984b:26) Consequently, structural syllabi can be taught just as communicatively as notional-functional ones and, vice versa, it is possible to teach communicatively without a notional-functional syllabus. (Johnson 1982, Medgyes 1986a)

It should be noted here that what has been suggested as communicative curriculum (Breen & Candlin 1980) or process syllabus (Breen 1984) in the literature do not represent what has been defined as syllabus at the beginning of this section. The reason for this is that both designs mentioned above are concerned with the means that develop capacity for communication rather than predetermined objectives, i.e. the repertoire of communication (Breen 1984:53), and prioritise process over content. It would, in fact, be more appropriate to refer to them as outlines of TLC methodology since they propose a set of principles on which individual schemes can be based. These principles include the characteristics of TLC, e.g. the recognition and activation of learners’ existing knowledge and abilities, exploitation of the productive relationship between using the language and learning the language, the classroom as the focal point of the learning-teaching process, the promotion of learner’s capacity etc. In true TLC manner, both the communicative curriculum and the process syllabus seek to avoid the specification of content and emphasise heterogeneity as well as the need to differentiate in order to meet the specific requirements of particular teaching/learning environments.

The question in a process-oriented approach is then not what type of syllabus should be selected but, rather, what kind of methodology needs be implemented in order to trigger systemic and schematic changes in the learner. According to Candlin (1981), such methodology has to meet the following demands: “Learners now need to be trained and refined in the interpretative and expressive strategies of making sense amid a negotiable reality where the ground rules for understanding what partners mean are not pre-set entirely, nor unequivocal. In fact, learners have to cope with the essential problem of communication - to acquire the mutually negotiated and dynamic conventions which give value to formal signs. They have to learn how to agree conventions and procedures, for the interpretation of non-verbal and verbal language, with which they temporarily abide.” (Candlin 1981:25)

The task of language pedagogy is to set up conditions whereby learners, by actually

engaging their systemic and schematic knowledge to achieve communicative outcomes, are required to engage in re-creating their existing contexts. Widdowson suggests that, in order to realise this, the conventional direction of dependency in the presentation of language needs to be reversed: instead of taking language items as a point of departure and devising activities which facilitate their acquisition, course design should begin with activities which call for contingent use of language and involve discourse procedures. As Widdowson puts it: "Where one has language-dependent activities, the language is seen as the problem and the activities are used to solve it: where one has activity-dependent language, the reverse is the case." (Widdowson 1984a:123)

In language dependent activities, where the function of situations is to exemplify language use, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of situation and language and the learner is given the relevance which connects them. Activity-oriented pedagogy, on the other hand, provides a situation which calls for natural language use whereby learners, in order to solve a problem, have to work out where language signals point to in the situation and create a context that will help them to grapple with the primary extralinguistic task. The question of how an activity-oriented pedagogy can be realised and in what kind of teaching it manifests itself will be addressed in the following section.

### 6.3. The Implementation of TLC Methodology

#### 6.3.1 Introduction

While the theoretical tenets of TLC and their general pedagogic implications have been the subject of systematic inquiry, practical suggestions as to how TLC can be implemented seem scarce and difficult to pin down.

One reason for this is the very nature of the approach itself: TLC does not intend to specify and prescribe what should be taught and how teaching should be conducted. It rather aims to offer general guidelines for the teachers to assist them in making local pedagogic decisions that suit their particular conditions best. Another difficulty is that although there have been proposals regarding the realisation of TLC, they have not been recognised as belonging to a separate movement within what is generally known as Communicative Language Teaching. The terminological ambiguity (see Preamble), which also has its roots in having two qualitatively differing movements under the same umbrella term, has put another



obstacle in the way of the identification of pedagogic designs that function in the procedural mode.

The following is an attempt to fill this hiatus and provide examples of how TLC can be implemented in teaching practice. Since the idea of a universally applicable method runs counter to the principles of TLC, all the designs outlined below will have limitations with regard to their sphere of application, which must be seen as a necessary corollary rather than an inherent deficiency. The next section thus offers *possible* avenues teachers can explore in their search for locally befitting resolutions.

### 6.3.2 Teaching Language Through Other Subjects

The teaching of LT through other school subjects within formal education has a number of advantages. First of all, it presents a setting which calls for genuine language use where language is a means rather than the end itself with the school subject ensuring schematic involvement. Furthermore, teaching physics, chemistry etc. in the LT not only draws on the learners' existing knowledge and experience (i.e. schemata) but aims to alter, modify and expand them. In class, language serves as the vehicle of the students' cognitive development, and the systemic and schematic knowledge evolve in parallel through the continuous engagement of the learners' capacity. In fact, this set-up represents a highly favourable situation in that the learning of the language forms part of another learning process.

In this scheme, usage will be controlled by use, and as in language teaching, "these methodologies are engaged in the production of simple discourse and its gradual elaboration into the more sophisticated kinds of communicative use." (Widdowson 1979:190) The suggestion is then to relate the teaching of LT to school subjects so that the learners can discover how the rhetorical conventions guarding the descriptions of different subjects - normally carried out in the students' first language - are realised through another language system.

Even though teaching language through various subjects provides particularly advantageous conditions for learning, its implementation is often laden with difficulties. For instance, the secondary dual language schools, which were introduced in Hungary a few years ago, find it hard to fit in the wider context of the education system. Instruction in the LT results in a situation whereby students wishing to be admitted to Hungarian universities face a

linguistic predicament both at the school-leaving and entrance exams. Materials also present a formidable hurdle in the way of practical realisation. Textbooks written for these schools have to meet the criteria of suitability both in terms of language and content. Given the highly academic nature of secondary education in Hungary, there tends to be a discrepancy between the required level of content and the existing level of competence in the LT. As a result, it is extremely difficult to design materials which can balance the two. Books written for native speaker students fall short in relation to content, whereas materials in L1 are deficient with regard to language. The obvious solution of devising teaching aids which would meet the specific requirements of these schools often fails to materialise due to the lack of expertise (the ESP experience has not really been transposed to benefit the teaching of the LT for general purposes), time and funding.

A further consequence of the above imbalance is that often students' cognitive and linguistic skills do not develop in tandem. As for the teachers, they have either the cognitive (non-native speakers) or the linguistic background (native speakers), but are seldom endowed with both.

One feasible realisation of this scheme may be implementation on a smaller scale, for example teaching a subject within the English lessons. Environmental or social studies could be an option for language teachers who are usually more interested in humanities than hard sciences. In either case, it is paramount that the subject and topic are selected by the individual teachers who know how to make them authentic both for themselves and their students.

### 6.3.3 Exploiting the Classroom

The classroom bearing the marks of a real social setting (cf. 6.2.2.) can provide ample opportunities for the teaching of language as communication. Like other interactions, classroom discourse is made up of participants who, by engaging on their own terms, enter into real social relationships and negotiation with each other. Furthermore, the classroom presents the two basic types of power relations (peer and hierarchical), which assist the students to explore the workings of the Cooperative Contract. Conducting interactions in the LT forces the students to make on the spot decisions regarding the degree of formality when communicating with their teachers or peers, and to select the language form that is appropriate to the occasion. The use of LT as a teaching medium and the language of

classroom management also allows for the practice of a variety of speech acts, e.g. asking for information, apologising for not having done the homework etc.

However, the exploitation of classroom discourse can only be successful if the teacher makes a conscious effort and carefully designs those 'free running' periods within the lesson. Giving instructions can, for instance, be perceived as listening comprehension. If understanding takes place, the students carry out the required task. If not, they can engage in negotiation with the teacher in order to achieve their common objective - just like in situations outside the classroom. Interestingly, such practice runs counter to what future language teachers are taught in Hungary, where the rule is that instructions must not contain structure or lexis which is unfamiliar to the students.

This case seems to provide an excellent illustration of the way rigid rules may hamper effective teaching and also highlights the need to challenge them. To question accepted practice, however, is only possible if teachers make informed choices firmly backed by expertise and experience.

Exploiting the classroom situation for the teaching of language as communication has traditionally been more accepted in the teaching of young learners. When taking part in classroom activities like playing games, singing songs or learning rhymes, children are involved in their own reality and are willing to carry out all the things - repetition, rote learning, substitution tables etc. that they would normally do in their first language (Cook 1997b).

Hawkes (1981) demonstrates that, in fact, in the case of young learners effective teaching necessitates a procedural rather than analytical model of context. The modifications of classroom teaching proposed by Hawkes question the tenets of the NFA and result in a methodology that is process-oriented and focuses on the setting of instruction rather than on future language use.

First of all, Hawkes points out that the objectives and content of the course have to cease to be informed by "a reflex of the socio-linguistic profile of the wider community, or of adult estimates of their (*pupils*)' future needs." (Hawkes 1981:32) Instead, it is the learners' immediate needs, the cultural context and general educational priorities that should inform teaching. Authenticity is perceived in procedural terms and the pedagogic tempering of genuine materials is considered not only acceptable but highly recommendable. As Hawkes' puts it: "Target utterances in a Primary course must sound natural to the native ear, but must also be understandable in the learning situation, at the expense (if necessary) of being replicas

of native utterances.” (Hawkes 1981:34)

In a similar vein, the classroom is seen as a natural context for language use where pedagogic considerations make the mimic of real-life communication unsuitable and unnecessary: “There is no functionally valid alternative to building L2 learning on his (*pupil's*) experience. Rather than asking if every classroom activity is a rehearsal for the children's lives, the overriding aim should be motivation and maximum clarity in relation to what they already know.” (Hawkes 1981:35)

Whether with young or older learners, the classroom does provide a suitable setting for natural communication. In the procedural paradigm, the responsibility of finding effective means towards this desired end falls on the teacher who has to be prepared both professionally and linguistically.

#### 6.3.4 Task-based Instruction (TBI)

As the definitions in **Appendix 4** indicate, not everything that has been included as task conforms to the specifics of the procedural perception of context. Like elsewhere in the thesis, the terminological confusion needs to be clarified before particular practices can be analysed in relation to the categories established by the present inquiry.

First of all, the layperson's delineation of task as basically any piece of work (def.3) has to be disregarded, given the pedagogic orientation of this investigation. Since *meaning* is the principal concern of TBI, any language practice activity that focuses on form is also discounted. Examples include “Use the question form ‘Did you ever ...’ to ask your partner about their childhood.” (Willis 1998:3), and, in fact, most question and answer activities with the teacher or completing a transformation exercise etc. (Skehan 1998:96).

Another key feature of tasks is *goal-orientedness*, i.e. the fact that they are undertaken with a specified objective in order to achieve an outcome. With regard to this parameter, tasks can be divided into two groups. Tasks termed as communicative constitute the real-world target activities learners are preparing to undertake, e.g. buying a train ticket, reading a manual, leaving a message on someone's answer machine etc. (Nunan 1993b, Skehan 1998). They are identified via needs analysis and result in a methodology predicated on learning as rehearsal (Nunan 1993b:57; Long & Crookes 1992:44). All these characteristics point to the fact that real-world communicative tasks belong to the analytical paradigm.

The pedagogic type of communicative tasks (Nunan 1993b) which share a psycholinguistic rationale and are selected according to some theory or model of second language acquisition should also be excluded. The reason for this lies in the fact that they are designed in reference to psycholinguistic processes of *acquisition* which are as yet little understood (Nunan 1993b:57) and which fall outside the scope of this inquiry where the procedural model of context is defined in relation to *actual language use*.

The tasks which subscribe to the procedural paradigm are then those problem posing activities which include 'some process of thought' (def.6) where, through the engagement of cognitive and communicative procedures (i.e. capacity) and as a result of collective effort (i.e. cooperation), existing and new knowledge form a novel schematic constellation which is the pedagogic outcome (def. 6,7).

Since TLC tasks promote natural language use and learning, completing a task through the LT gives rise to a situation whereby learners are engaged on their own terms, drawing on their own schemata in the achievement of meaning motivated by an immediate purpose. As in settings outside the classroom, the main preoccupation here is not solving language problems but solving problems by means of language (see 6.2.7).

To reflect the nature of TLC, solutions offered to questions related to tasks e.g. typology, selection, sequencing etc. should, yet again, be limited to the kind of programmatic and issue-raising paper Candlin offers on the subject (Candlin 1987).

Although giving students a problem to solve with the help of the LT involves natural communication, concern has been voiced that TBI does not necessarily provide effective means for language learning. The reason for this is that problem solving presents a situation in which the conditions of use prevail where the focus on meaning renders the attention to form secondary. This then may result in language which is fully comprehensible but also ungrammatical, like the utterance 'Me going yesterday' (see 5.2.4.3). The danger is that in the long term it may translate into fossilised language as "the lexical devices which have been pressed into communicative service will become proceduralised, and used to solve immediate communication problems, but at the expense of longer term development" (Skehan 1993:18).

Creating conditions for natural communication therefore is a necessary but not sufficient requisite for bringing about changes in both the learners' schematic and systemic knowledge. What task-based teaching needs to take into account is the fact that one of the relevant features of the participant is inadequate LT competence, the development of which is the primary objective of language teaching. Given the overriding goal of language learning,

task-based teaching cannot and should not be implemented without *pedagogic interference* which ensures that alongside task-completion and engagement in meaning the development and expansion of the learner's systemic knowledge takes place as well. In other words, tasks also need to be authenticated to suit the learners' particular needs.

This undertaking, however, is rather complex as the requirements of the two settings pull in opposite directions: while the situation created by the task pushes the learner to meaning orientation and fluency, the need to improve linguistic competence brought about by the context of instruction stresses a concern for structure and accuracy. In Skehan's words: "Task-based learning is an attempt to confront one of the dilemmas of language teaching: how, on the one hand, to confront the need to engage naturalistic learning processes, while, on the other, allowing the pedagogic process to be managed in a systematic manner." (Skehan 1993:24)

In order to resolve this difficulty, Skehan (1993, 1996) proposes to structure learners' freedom by manipulating their attention systematically to ensure a balance of fluency, accuracy and language development. As with authentic materials (see 6.2.6), pedagogic doctoring has to affect both the selection and implementation of tasks. Tasks that need to be done in writing, for instance, will automatically require increased attention to form. Also, pre-tasks can give an opportunity to provide learners with the language they need. The public performance of the task, on the other hand, will inevitably force learners to use the LT with more precision. An analysis in the form of group discussion following the task has a beneficial effect on accuracy and represents what Breen (see 6.2.2) has referred to as 'explicitly exploiting the actual social potential of the learning group' whereby learners share the problems of language learning and the strategies of how to overcome them. Interestingly, the ability to focus on both what is being said and how it is being said, a strategy often used by language learners, never gets mentioned - maybe because of the absence of the non-native speaker's perspective.

Although in the literature the distinct approaches which have emerged within task-based instruction (Foster 1999) or the types of task identified by Willis (1996) offer possible bases for classification, the present study will employ categories which fit the definition and the line of argument presented in this thesis. As a result, tasks will be grouped according to the domain through which language development is achieved. The three types - cognitive, interpersonal and language - coincide with Halliday's functions (see 2.3.2) and reflect Widdowson's description of discourse modelling and definition of context in particular

(Widdowson 1984a:105).

#### 6.3.4.1 Cognitive Tasks

One of the best-known pedagogic realisations of task-based instruction is the Bangalore/Madras Communicational Teaching Project which has aimed to develop pedagogic procedures that bring about a preoccupation with meaning and an effort to cope with communication rather than focus on form. Tasks including activities with maps, timetables, diagrams and formations require learners to act as themselves and activate their schemata (both schematic and systemic) in order “to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thinking” (Prahbu 1987:27). As in other school subjects, teaching is geared towards the cognitive development of learners and comprises *rational* activity leaving the affective domains unengaged. The tasks have been designed to fill gaps in the students’ knowledge of the world and to satisfy specific cognitive needs. Cognitive and linguistic development thus occurs simultaneously as in L1 circumstances.

The tasks in the project are selected to be intellectually challenging enough to maintain the students’ interest and sustain the learners’ efforts at completion (Long & Crookes 1992:35). The focus of work is on task outcome whilst allowing the relevant language to come into play incidentally.

The emphasis throughout is on developing a methodology that suits local conditions (e.g. class sizes, lack of resources, non-native teachers) rather than suggesting global application. Similarly, Prahbu’s account of the project aims to stimulate thought and lead to the development of other, inevitably different teaching programmes instead of being prescriptive.

#### 6.3.4.2 Language Tasks

The activities deployed in the Bangalore Project could be part of a task-based language course for many of immigrant students in England with similar cognitive needs but would be less adequate for learners who come from cultures where skills like reading maps or diagrams are acquired through other subjects in the curriculum.

These students, however, could benefit from activities whereby the basic principle of task-based learning - that problems are not language problems but problems which require a

use of language for their solution - is maintained but applied by means of different types of problem solving tasks. Widdowson's (1986) 'detective stories', where students supplied with all the necessary information requiring a specific language structure have to find out who has caused an accident or stolen a box of watches, present an entertaining but equally challenging cognitive task.

The natural activity of disambiguating language play, puzzles (Cook 1997b) or texts entails intellectual challenges similar to those outlined above by Prabhu or Widdowson. A well-known example illustrates the point: "There is an old woman, a wolf, a goat, and a cabbage on one side of the river. On the bank there is a boat, but the boat can only take two people or things across at one time. BUT: if left alone together, the wolf will eat the goat, and the goat will eat the cabbage. How does the woman take wolf, goat, and cabbage successfully to the other side?" (Skehan 1993:21)

Chosen with a pedagogic purpose, language tasks can engage students' interest as well as provide problems which force them to look at a specific aspect of the language in a systematic way. In the following short extract, for example, the question can only be answered if the learners understand the difference in meaning that the definite and indefinite articles represent:

Q: Who did the policeman's son kill? a) ..... b) .....

a) A policeman's 14-year-old son, apparently enraged after being disciplined for a bad grade, opened fire from his house, killing a policeman and wounding three other people before he was shot dead.

b) A policeman's 14-year-old son, apparently enraged after being disciplined for a bad grade, opened fire from his house, killing the policeman and wounding three other people before he was shot dead.

(Pinker 1994:80)

#### 6.3.4.3 Interpersonal Tasks

Di Pietro's (1987) scenarios represent the third type of task: interpersonal problem solving. Students are given a real-life social situation with a complication that arises from the different agendas the participants have e.g. a customer who wants to return a toaster but has



lost the receipt and a sales assistant who has been instructed to be careful in accepting returns. Unlike role-plays or simulations, scenarios are open-ended with uncertainties and ambiguities whereby learners are not given a solution or a course of action but, rather, are expected to work it out for themselves through strategic interaction. As in real-life situations, they have to negotiate their way through in order to arrive at some kind of socially acceptable consensus. In so doing, students play themselves - they act on their past experiences and are allowed to react in their own ways.

Scenarios are pedagogically well exploitable exemplifications of real-life interactions in that they entail constraints and freedom, predictability and fortuitousness. When engaging in strategic interaction, students are forced to work out in flight how to move between these ends of the contextual continuum in the LT. Throughout the negotiating process, it is the participating learners who determine how best they can achieve the personally desirable outcome and comply with the conventions of the LT speech community at the same time.

Teachers using scenarios must keep in mind, however, that the emphasis is on individual ways of coping with problematic communicative situations and not on casting moral judgement which should be avoided at all times. Consequently, teachers need to tread cautiously when selecting scenarios. They should take the relevant features of the learners into consideration and choose topics that suit their students' age, cultural background and interest. Mercy killing may not interest adolescents, the same way as the problem of teenage pregnancy is unlikely to interest pupils in a highly academic Hungarian grammar school where from the age of 16 students concentrate on their university entrance.

### 6.3.5 Literature

Literature, where the phenomenon and the substance, the particular and the general, the actualisation and the concept form an indivisible unity, is by nature engaging (Lukács 1948). It concocts an alternative reality, a world of its own of which it is impossible to make sense by connecting it to conventionalised patterns of experience. The advantage of literature is that readers are not given ready-made contextual connections. Rather, they are provided with prompts which allow a wide variety of individual contexts to be brought about. As a result, literature necessarily implies deploying interpretative procedures, the engagement of which has been the primary concern of teaching language as communication.

Like tasks, literary pieces often set problems the solutions of which require the

readers to continuously adjust their schemata to satisfy the constraints the text supplies and settle into a good of fit (see text in 1.3.4.2). The unsolved mysteries, the suspense created by the writer - as in Roald Dahl's short story, *The Wish*, where the little boy imagines the carpet he has to walk across is a river full of snakes – pushes the learners to read on in order to discover what the 'outcome' is. In fact, the story is so gripping that LT students often forget how demanding the language is.

As Widdowson (1984a) observes, pedagogic presentations of reality, such as textbook texts, cannot engage problem solving procedures as they present language use as scripted routine with fixed contextual connections between the stereotypes of the text and the stereotypes of the social schemata. "There is no problem to solve by negotiation, because meanings are made explicit within the text and carefully prepared for easy assimilation." (Widdowson 1984a:170) As a consequence, learners cannot, and in fact are not supposed to, create their own context and pragmatic meaning.

It would therefore largely facilitate learning and the engagement of students at the discourse level in particular if classroom texts displayed qualities of literary work. Examples show that this can, in fact, be achieved even at a beginners level. One illustration is Widdowson's turning a mundane passage into a schema engaging activity at the LATEFL Hungary conference in 1999: "This is a man. He is John Brown; he is Mr Brown. He is sitting in a chair. This is a woman. She is not Mrs Brown. She has a book in her hand. She is Mrs Smith. Mr Brown has a look in his eye."

Although few and far between, there are examples in ELT materials which succeed in engaging learners the same way literary texts do. The reason for the long-standing success of the *Access to English* series (Coles & Lord 1974), for example, can be sought in the fact that the content of the books revolves around a piece of fiction presenting the trials and tribulations in the life of Arthur Newton.

The story in the pre-intermediate writing book of the Longman series (**Appendix 5** Hopkins & Tribble 1989) is a motivating and compelling read because it exploits the well-known devices of suspense and surprise (a woman chasing a man and not vice versa as one would expect when drawing on the 'chase' schemata), as well as uses the otherwise tedious short and simple sentences to give a vivid, staccato description of the scene. The text naturally lends itself to a number of stimulating tasks such as rewriting the story through the eyes of the man.

Teaching literature seems to be the only application which is not, of its nature, limited

to a particular teaching context. It can be used at all levels with students from different backgrounds as long as its selection and implementation undergoes the kind of pedagogic doctoring that has been proposed by this approach throughout.

### 6.3.6 Implications of TLC Application

The various designs have confirmed that the decisive role with regard to pedagogic decisions in TLC is assigned to the rank and file of teachers. However, this opportunity is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it warrants teacher autonomy and the freedom to choose what the teacher judges as best for a particular situation. On the other, it implies responsibility, on which the success of the whole enterprise of teaching hinges. Making informed decisions and bearing the consequences requires that the teachers not only have the necessary knowledge in terms of theory, pedagogy and language but can apply and alter it in view of the new experience every lesson presents. This ongoing learning consumes time and energy, of which an average teacher in an average state school in many parts of the world is desperately short. In the real world where teachers 'are so poorly paid that they have to hold down two even three jobs simply in order to earn a living' (Bolitho 2000:381), to have the opportunity to explore and select materials and methods that suit a particular group is a luxury few can afford.

Furthermore, it is paramount for the application of TLC that both teacher training and research understand the nature of teacher autonomy and recognise its importance. Due to the dominance of the principles of the NFA in language teaching, the question of teacher autonomy has not yet been addressed appropriately (Murray 1998). As a consequence, a substantial part of teacher training in Britain and elsewhere is still reduced to the teaching of the manipulation of a set of techniques or to conformity to a fixed method. Rockwell (1998), for instance, laments that while the RSA Certificate is a pre-requisite to employment in hundreds of language teaching institutions throughout the world, it promotes one definite style which is touted as the best and indeed only approach to teaching an EFL class. This state of affairs then inevitably results in a situation whereby a great number of teachers are 'disabled' rather than enabled when it comes to taking on the responsibility TLC demands.

Another obstacle in the way of teacher autonomy is the alarming tendency towards a growing gap between researchers and teachers (Vanegas 1998:21). As long as research is detached from the reality of teaching and is carried out by professionals whose interests and

circumstances are so different from those of the teachers in the frontline, the findings of such investigations may either be viewed with awe or lack credibility. In both cases, teachers might become alienated from what should be an integral part of their work.

Moreover, the assistance provided by outside experts often fails to meet local educational needs. INSET courses organised for non-native teachers, for example, frequently fall short of providing what the participants need most, i.e. language development (Medgyes 1996). Also, in a country where teachers fight desperate battles to have the number of lessons increased from three to four or five per week, a study by a distinguished native speaker expert claiming that the number of hours within this scale does not significantly improve students' proficiency can seriously hamper local efforts (Alderson 2000).

It seems that an alternative, procedural conception of context in language teaching cannot be applied without some fundamental changes in language and teacher education. Since language teaching these days has ceased to be a solely professional matter and often represents various financial and ideological interests, establishing a classroom-oriented and intellectually demanding approach which advocates teacher autonomy is not and will not for a long time be without difficulties.

#### 6.4 Summary

The application of a procedural perception of context has created an approach which is fundamentally different from what is generally understood by Communicative Language Teaching.

As a result of the dialectic participant-oriented concept of context, parameters and key notions in TLC pedagogy have taken on entirely new meaning and nature. The overall concern with the learner/teacher and their immediate needs and reality has reinstated the classroom as the setting for the creative activity of making pragmatic meaning. Authenticity and learner-centredness have also become relevant and relative to the classroom participants who decide what pertains, i.e. what features of the context prevail.

The objectives of language teaching, too, have been realigned in a more participant friendly way. In TLC they are defined in reference to the attainable target of proficient user competence which enables the speaker/hearer to work out what constitutes appropriateness in a number of speech communities.

With no inhibiting norms set by a distinguished group of native speakers and with the

attention to the learning process rather than language use, the learner and the teacher have finally come of age and are expected to take language learning/teaching into their own hands. Their apparent reluctance to assume responsibility stems partly from the harsh reality that everyday language teaching in many parts of the world presents and partly from the unwillingness of native speaker centres to relinquish control. This then necessarily implies that the widespread adoption of an approach which creates highly favourable conditions for learning is contingent on a fundamental change in the ideological and financial scene.

## CHAPTER 7

### Recent Developments: Teaching Culture

#### 7.1 Introduction

The rationale for the teaching of culture is the tenet that since language and culture are inextricably interwoven (e.g. Kelly 1998; Holló and Lázár 2000), language cannot be taught independently of culture (Rogers 1997). It is therefore claimed that students should not be considered to have mastered the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which language occurs (Byram 1997).

The revival of the culture-language link has resulted in novel interpretations of culture for language pedagogy and a wide range of classroom applications. Within the array, however, the various attempts can be categorised according to the framework proposed by this thesis. As with Communicative Language Teaching, an analysis along the analytical and procedural line will make it possible to reveal what kind of teaching is, in effect, promoted by the advocates of this new and forceful movement.

#### 7.2. Teaching Culture in the Analytical Mode

##### 7.2.1 General Features

The teaching practices in this group bear the hallmarks other approaches and methods adopting an analytical perception of context display (see Chapter 5). Context in the teaching of culture, too, gravitates towards the socially more constrained end of the contextual continuum with the emphasis on *knowledge* rather than capacity. In the teaching situation two sets of schemata prevail, that of the participants (teachers, learners) and the outside expert's. Like elsewhere within the paradigm, the context of the latter takes precedence and determines relevance as well as the nature of such related facets of culture teaching as appropriateness, authenticity and motivation.

Similarly, the target schematic constructs make up the *content* of the course and are thought to be best acquired through the replication of real-life international exchanges with which learners will have to cope after the language course.

As in Chapter 5, the trends within the analytical paradigm can be distinguished according to the knowledge they require the students to accumulate. Since there appears to be a consensus that culture in language pedagogy should entail not only norms of conduct (speech and behaviour patterns) but *information about the target culture* as well as *values and beliefs* (Byram 1997, Puente 1997, Holló and Lázár 2000), the difference in terms of knowledge between the subgroups will be less palpable than in Chapter 5.

It should be noted that the movements outlined in the following sections represent a selection of trends and not the entirety of culture teaching.

### 7.2.2 British Studies (BS)

The starting point of BS is that language use does not exist in a vacuum but forms part and appears as the manifestation of a *specific* culture. As the title indicates, the assumption is that since it is British English that is predominantly taught at least in Europe, the particular culture language teaching should be linked to must be that of Britain. The reasons that justify the study of Britain in Hungary, for instance, include the tendency in Eastern and Central Europe to relate English to Britain, the fact that the textbooks used in schools are predominantly British and that teachers' pre-service training includes courses on the language and literature of Britain. Furthermore, the geographical proximity makes it easier for teachers to visit Britain than any other English speaking country (Andrews 1999).

The definition of BS demarcates scope of the discipline:

"British studies can be regarded as the multidisciplinary study of contemporary Britain calling on history, literature and the social sciences to explore the distinctive features of British culture and society. Overseas the teaching of British Studies implies the opportunity to draw on resources (specialists, courses and materials) that allow for the comparative study of British and other countries" (Wadham-Smith 1995:12).

In its primary form, BS focuses on the first part of the definition, i.e. on cultural information comprising statistical information (on institutional structures, facts of civilisation etc.), highbrow information (e.g. the classics of literature) and lowbrow information (facts of everyday life etc.) (Kramsch 1993). The British Council core list of BS materials (1991), for example, encompasses a huge variety of subject areas ranging from philosophy to religion, the women's movement and the party system among many others. Apart from these topics, learners are also required to be well-versed in the ways of present day Britain (e.g. they need

to be familiar with supermarket chains, charities, education etc.) as well as “the things that concern people living in Britain today” (McLean 1993:9, 1995).

British Study’s strong version goes beyond this factual dimension, and ensures that the information on Britain is put to some pedagogic use. BS here represents a subject which integrates the cultural content with the necessary materials as well as the language and methodology that facilitates the development of sociocultural competence (Dick 1995:17; Puente 1997). The objective here is to develop cultural awareness and competence, which enable the learner to display appropriate behaviour in international communication. In this respect, BS aims not only to teach the language and change language behaviour but to extend students’ awareness of different cultures and help them to appreciate cultural diversity as a positive factor (Gibson 1995:55-6).

All this is achieved through the contrastive analysis of British and L1 culture. The point of reference, however, is always the target culture the understanding of which, it is claimed, implies a great deal of learning about the students’ own culture (Todorova 1998:27). In other words, the target culture serves as a catalyst: it is assumed that the bearings proposed for its analysis can serve as a basis for the description of the non-native language users’ own culture. It is understood that the comparative study of Britain and the other country bring about those schematic changes that will enable the learner to acquire culturally appropriate language use. In BS, being appropriate thus entails adopting native speaker schemata which include not only LT communication experience but the life experience of an educated native speaker living in Britain.

For language teaching this set-up has several consequences. With native speaker schemata pervading, the interpretation of the cultural context and meaning making is carried out in reference to a framework devised by outside experts which comprises the rules of native speaker behaviour, meanings, values and beliefs. Since such an extensive body of target culture knowledge and experience is required, the native - non-native gap grows even wider. The native speaker who has lived or is living in Britain inevitably becomes the sole credible source of knowledge and the ultimate authority in teaching, while the non-native teacher, who more often than not has no first-hand experience of life in Britain, has to concede inferiority. The profession becomes thus divided into ‘we (insiders) and you (outsiders)’, which also finds its way into the discourse of language pedagogy. The following statement issued by a native speaker is a point in case: “we are generally less tolerant of socio-cultural infringements by any type of non-native speaker than we are of their grammatical errors or lexical misuse.”



(Greenall 1995:8, my emphasis).

Given the comparison of cultures pursued by BS, teachers not only have to attempt to adopt the mindset of the owners of dominant schemata but also be familiar with their own culture on the same terms as the foreign one. As a result, “a teacher using this approach seems to need to know and understand what is habitual and what is problematic not to one but two cultures.” (Whittaker 1995:60, my emphasis).

For the learners, too, the acquisition of appropriateness entails a schematic swap: at the end of the course not only do they have to communicate like native-speakers but have to possess similar beliefs and values as well. In other words, they need to achieve native speaker representation of the target as well as their own world.

In order to assist learners and enable them to identify similarities and differences between L1 and LT cultures, students are taught ethnographic skills, such as observation, data gathering, organising and selecting data etc. (Petkova 1998). They are also assisted in how ‘to detect and understand the cultural implications in authentic British materials’ (Todorova 1998:27). As with other approaches in the analytical mode, *authentic* here implies materials which are aimed at the native speaker living in Britain (Todorova 1998). This is, in fact, the objective-oriented type of authenticity that pervades in other analytical approaches (see Chapter 5), and which has been termed as ‘product’ authenticity earlier (see 5.2.4.3).

Consequently, authentication here necessarily means arriving at the same interpretation as the native speaker audience. When discussing supermarkets, for instance, learners must take the insider’s perspective and perceive the difference between chains the same way as a native does: “Tesco being, you are to understand, rather low-class in comparison with the more upmarket Sainsbury’s.” (McLean 1995:7). Similarly, the problem of homelessness can be addressed in class first by exploring the attitudes and views the British have of the problem and, with the help of those bearings, relating the issue to the students’ own culture (Tarasheva 1998).

It appears that there are also practical reasons why it is the LT learner who needs to accept British norms and adopt LT schemata almost unchanged. Holló and Lázár argue as follows: “With the world-wide spread of English, native speakers of the language – and perhaps of some other major languages – often do not have the experience of mastering other languages and cultural norms, and they may not realise that problems in communication are not necessarily due to the unpleasant personality traits of their non-native partners, but to cultural differences. What also follows from this is, that in order to behave appropriately and

to avoid awkward situations of being misinterpreted, it is vitally important to accept that as speakers of a minor language, Hungarians have to adapt as much as possible to the cultural expectations of the native speakers of the target language (Holló and Lázár 2000:85)

Despite the difficult position occupied by LT learners in BS, research suggests that the teaching of culture is highly motivating. Filipova (1998) reports that her students are most keen to work on language in its relation to culture, society and arts and their favourite topic areas include British society today, British customs and festivals, the British economy, the Celtic fringe etc. In BS, motivation also seems to key in with the future benefits of not only being able to speak the LT but behave and think in the desired native-like manner.

Like in all analytical approaches, the knowledge to be accumulated by the learner defines the syllabus content. Since the undoubted authorities on the required stock of knowledge are those living on the British Isles, the task of identifying what should be included in the syllabus is also carried out by native speaker experts. The criteria for selection then necessarily reflect the objectives of BS. Those topics are considered most salient which best reflect what it is like to live in Britain today, and which are most fruitful for generating understanding of British life, customs, and institutions (McLean 1995)

### 7.2.3 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

ICC has partly come about as the result of Byram's (1997) dissatisfaction with the prevalence of the native speaker as a model. He argues that native speaker competence sets an impossible target which dooms LT learners to failure. The native speaker model also implies that learners are, in a sense, schizophrenic since the acquisition of LT sociocultural competence necessarily separates them from their own language and culture, and requires them to take on an alien identity. Furthermore, English as an international language, used by speakers from many countries, cannot be associated with one arbitrarily chosen culture. As a result, foreign language teaching should not introduce learners to a culture which normally presents a particular combination of beliefs, behaviours and meanings that are dominant in a specific society and represent the interests of a powerful minority (Byram 1997:18).

Rather than adhering to the norms of one culture, Byram suggests that language learners should relate to their interlocutor's mindset. He proposes that learners be prepared for international interactions through the development of *critical cultural awareness* of their own country and others. The change in the objective to be achieved alters the target schemata

that will comprise an extended version of communicative competence. The new notion of intercultural communicative competence will thus entail knowledge and attitude factors as well as two sets of skills (interpreting/relating and discovering/interaction - Byram 1997:34) that make it possible for the learner to engage in international interaction in an appropriate way.

In Byram's view, as opposed to native-speaker norms, such a notion presents an attainable ideal for language learners. This achievable end comprises, for instance, the knowledge of historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries, the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries, the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins etc. (Byram 1997:59). The required attitude objectives include willingness to seek out and take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, the willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment, interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices (Byram 1997:57-8). Skills entail the ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives, areas of misunderstanding and malfunction in an interaction as well as the capability to note significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations.

Apart from factual information, intercultural competence has a strong evaluative orientation coupled with 'appropriate unprejudiced attitudes' which should mean judging cultures, often through comparison with one's own, without imposing a particular perspective or set of values (Byram 1997:4). But since it is impossible to carry out comparison and evaluation without a reference point to which interpretations can relate, Byram proposes the general international standpoint of human rights as the baseline in an educational setting. This moral stance, suggested by the outside expert is, in fact, then the reference point or relevance learners are given to interpret phenomena in the cultures they come across (Kramsch 1993).

In sum, the objective of language teaching in terms of schemata can be defined here as the acquisition of knowledge about the learner's own and the interlocutor's cultures and of skills which make it possible for the students to engage in communication without bias and with the ability to evaluate practices and products of their own and other cultures and countries.

As with other analytical approaches, one of the problems of classroom

implementation is that the target situation of international interaction represents a real-life, out-of-class event. A major obstacle to the replication of it in class is the predicament that the other relevant participant of the target interaction, the speaker/hearer from another culture, is not present in the classroom where the LT is taught as a foreign language. As with other approaches adopting an analytical model of context, the suggested solution is the creation of opportunities for rehearsal and the simulation of 'real communication and performance' as closely as possible (Byram 1997:68). The few occasions when learners can find themselves in real-life, real-time intercultural communication is fieldwork comprising events and schemes such as study trips, exchanges or immersion programmes.

### 7.3. Procedural Perception of Culture in Teaching

The advocates of a procedural perception of context reject the notion of culture as a relatively harmonious and stable pool of significations and maintain that culture emerges as the result of the 'struggle' between the LT learner's meanings and those of the native speaker (Kramsch 1993:24). According to this approach, context is a dynamic concept which changes constantly before settling into a state that represents a synthesis of the cultural representations of the two interlocutors. Context thus bears a close resemblance to Sperber and Wilson's contextual implication (cf. 3.3.1), except that here it explicitly refers to the outcome of the interplay of the two participants' schemata rather than just to the alterations brought about within the schematic set-up of one participant.

In second language teaching conditions, for example, where the learners have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the communication between students and between teacher and students gives rise to a situation where there is no dominant culture but a multiplicity of cultures interacting and creating the new culture of the classroom (Kramsch 1993:47).

One important corollary of this conception of culture as the outcome of a dialogue is the emphasis on *reciprocity* (H. Kontra 1999), which implies that *both* interactants need to make efforts for a successful contact. In other words, rather than having a context-giver and a context-recipient, interlocutors, regardless of their mother tongues, are expected to be mutually cooperative and ready to adjust their respective schemata.

The different interpretation of 'family' in various cultures (e.g. in England people normally mean the nuclear family of parents and children, while someone growing up in Argentina or in Africa naturally includes aunts, uncles, cousins etc., and means an extended family), for instance, can trigger off negotiation of meaning learners are deprived of in the Holló and Lázár scheme. While in the analytical paradigm learners of the LT are expected to know and comply with native speaker interpretation, here they are allowed to draw on their own schema and present their own signification which often involves both parties in a learning process leading to the recognition that the same word can refer to differing mental representations in different speech communities.

In such circumstances, native speakers of a language are not prisoners of the cultural meanings offered to them by their language, but can enrich them in their pragmatic interactions with other language users (Kramsch 1998:14). Intercultural communication thus

benefits the language and culture of both interactants.

In the procedural paradigm, the goal of instruction is not to get the students to adopt preformulated contexts and take on an alien persona. It is, rather, to expose learners' existing schemata to constant modification and expansion while allowing the students to preserve their individual and cultural identity.

The emphasis on learner contexts will result in the kind of *authenticity* whereby meaning is made by the students through their linguistic and schematic engagement with the text. It follows from this then that authentic materials will not necessarily coincide with texts written for or produced by native speakers.

Similarly, *appropriateness* in terms of culture is not simply a matter of conforming to native speaker norms. Instead, it constitutes an informed decision on the part of the learners who determine what position they need to take up on the contextual continuum in order to obey rules of LT communication. The task of the teacher is therefore to provide assistance in this second socialising process by making the students aware of the implications and consequences of their choices. Thomas makes a similar point when she writes:

"It is not the responsibility of the language teacher *qua* linguist to enforce Anglo-Saxon standards of behaviour, linguistic or otherwise. Rather, it is the teacher's job to equip the student to express her/himself in exactly the way s/he chooses to do so – rudely, tactfully, or in an elaborately polite manner. What we want to prevent is her/his being unintentionally rude or subservient." (Thomas 1983:96).

Thus, the desired outcome of the classroom participants' co-operation is to find their voice and style in the LT, i.e. appropriate the LT 'without becoming hostage to a specific English discourse' (Kramsch 2001:18). In other words, students need to learn to take the language into their possession and turn it to their advantage through the development of an idiolect which enables them to express their own reality in the LT.

## 7.4. Critique and Evaluation

### 7.4.1 Analytical Paradigm

Since context is defined mainly in terms of the knowledge that comprises both the content and the objective of teaching, the question arises whether the domain demarcated by BS or ICC is relevant to language teaching and learning. It is unclear, for example, how “having a clear idea of the dynamics of modern Britain “ (Whittaker 1995:21) or of Britain’s or other countries’ institutions or welfare system etc. can contribute to the development of appropriate communicative behaviour in LT learners. Knowing these facts will not, for example, help the student to decide when to interpret the question “How are you?” as an act of genuine inquiry or just a form of greeting. It seems that neither BS nor ICC engages the kind of schemata that enable learners to identify the pertinent features of situation types or speech acts.

Broadening the notion of context by including values and beliefs poses further problems. Requiring such a hugely extended body of knowledge, for instance, puts an unbearable burden on both teachers and learners. With the inclusion of culture, the objectives turn doubly unattainable: not only will teachers/learners never be able to achieve native speaker communicative competence but will fail dismally on the accounts of real life experience and intercultural competence as well. The gap between native and non-native speakers thus becomes truly unbridgeable. Even if non-native learners manage to reach near native competence in language use, they will never be able to compensate for the lack of the experience of living for long periods in Britain.

Such a set-up then gives rise to views expressed by the two Hungarians (Holló and Lázár 2000), who feel that it is the task of non-natives to adapt to native speaker expectations in intercultural exchanges. In fact, such a stance legitimises the native speaker’s unwillingness to co-operate both in linguistic and schematic terms, and it also endows native speakers with the moral power to dictate what social values and beliefs their non-native counterparts should have in order to behave appropriately in intercultural communication. Even if Byram tends to think that his scheme is less prescriptive, the fact remains that it is he, in his capacity as the expert user, who defines the universally applicable moral standard and determines what knowledge and skills make up intercultural competence. In fact, in the latter regard ICC appears as daunting and unachievable an objective as BS targets.

On the whole, in both realisations of the analytical mode of culture teaching the dominance of the native speaker implies ideological supremacy and imposition. Setting LT values and beliefs as reference points when comparing cultures necessarily favours the moral and spiritual qualities of the LT culture, particularly in that they are normally defined and promoted by the native speaker expert. One paradox of the situation is that it seems that non-native speakers are willing to put themselves into a position which further disenfranchises them (see Holló and Lázár 2000). The other paradox is that the introduction of the teaching of culture, particularly in the analytical mode which predominantly reaches teachers through IATEFL SIG and branch newsletters as well as British Council projects, coincides with the emergence of the notion of English as an international language which, in fact, pulls in the opposite direction by attempting to devise models of non-native use of English.

The relevance of singling out one culture as the most significant one for the teaching of English is also highly questionable. The arguments Andrews lists reflect the status quo which has come about as the result of geography and the efforts of the British to establish the use of their version of English in Eastern and Central Europe. With no mention of any pedagogic rationale, the question arises as to why not learn about the other cultures where English is also the native language.

Enyedi (2000) claims that apart from the arbitrariness of the choice of one specific LT culture, there are several other facets which render the explicit teaching of culture in a foreign language learning environment irrelevant. She notes, for example, that since English and American literature, geography and history are taught in other lessons at schools in Hungary, there is no need to include them in an ELT syllabus. Moreover, the rate at which information about everyday life in a country goes out of date and the fact that it is extremely difficult to design a course that covers all aspects of the target culture suggest that teaching culture raises more questions and puts more burden on the teacher than the whole effort is worth.

Also, there is an element of pretentiousness in the assumption that all students are equally interested in matters of everyday life in Britain, or in any other LT society. As has already been argued with regard to trends in the analytical paradigm, it is highly doubtful whether it is at all possible to identify something (e.g. culture) that can provide the universally appealing content that motivates learners in all types of language education without exception. When and how students take to various topics regarding LT society and life depends on many variables which are not elaborated in the analytical mode of the teaching of culture where motivation is taken for granted.



Accepting foreign norms and values presents an even knottier problem. Cem and Margaret Alptekin (1984) report that in many countries students reject the cultural/ideological norms and values imposed on them and want to acquire a culturally less loaded international variety of English.

In fact, it seems that language pedagogy can do without culture teaching in the analytical mode altogether if it applies a procedural model of context whereby the attitudes of curiosity and openness, the acceptance of diversity as well as the need to continuously adapt schemata to new situations and avoid stereotyping are integral features of TLC. In addition, the adoption of TLC would guarantee that the objectives of a course meet the requirement language pedagogy seeks to satisfy in the first place, i.e. the teaching of language.

#### 7.4.2 Procedural Paradigm

Like all methods which adopt a procedural conception of concept, the teaching of culture in this mode also seems to be limited in its application. As Enyedi (2000) points out, cultural issues are more obviously present if the language is learnt as a second language in a multilingual, multicultural setting. For immigrants in England being familiar with the culture of the host country is a necessity which affects their very existence (e.g. they, for instance, have to find out immediately how the system of social security works). Furthermore, it is only ESL classes where the interaction of a multiplicity of languages and cultures can create a novel culture in the classroom and the questions of L1 and LT identities gain importance. With EFL groups where the teacher and the students share a common L1 and culture, such interplay of language and culture can only be replicated.

In addition, Enyedi demonstrates how the stages of acculturation, which begins with the ethnocentric tourist status and ends with citizens having a near-native competence, can be traced in the process of language learning as well. It seems that the phases language learners go through are very similar to the ones that await the traveller. Entering into contact with the foreign language is thus in itself an intercultural experience, for which the students do not even have to leave the classroom. Her conclusion is that if culture learning can take place through a process which is naturally part of language education, then there appears to be no reason why the target of (inter)cultural competence should be pursued within the foreign language classroom.

Widdowson (1992), too, argues that it is not the business of language teaching to

bridge cultural gaps. He maintains that the first priority of pedagogy should be to develop general capacity so that learners can make sense of new phenomena as and when the occasion requires. In this way, cultural learning will be a corollary and not a condition of language learning.

TLC, the approach advocated by Widdowson, also takes care of the important reciprocity aspect of the procedural paradigm as it stresses the negotiation of meaning whereby *both* participants are expected to make an effort to arrive at a mutually acceptable interpretation.

With all the arguments taken into account, it seems reasonable to conclude that the inclusion of culture as a separate entity in the foreign language curriculum is not a necessary prerequisite for language learning since the schemata it involves entail far more than appropriate language behaviour. As has been demonstrated, there exist more effective ways of developing intercultural awareness and understanding within language pedagogy which are not only less burdensome but are more relevant to the participants in the classroom as well.

## Conclusions

The present thesis set out to clarify and propose the definition of a notion which has loomed large in language study and become one of the buzzwords in language pedagogy over the past twenty years.

Despite the confusion that has surrounded context and the consequent elusiveness of the concept, it has proven possible to identify its main features and arrive at a description which can be applied to the analysis of both linguistic theories and language teaching movements. First, from the myriad of cursory definitions provided by linguists, the contours of two principal interpretations of context have emerged. Firth's delineation of the notion has not only supported the hypothesis about the existence of a dual perspective but supplied the key notions of *schema* and *relevance* as well. Venturing into a discipline other than linguistics, i.e. cognitive psychology, and the brief reference to the philosophy of science have confirmed the legitimacy of the analytical and procedural perception of context. Interestingly, the explicit division of perspectives with regard to which various phenomena can be examined could only be found in hard sciences where the reductionist and holistic (e.g. chaos theory) paradigms have already been separated.

The scrutiny of major linguistic theories within this new framework has then supplied detail about the nature of the two kinds of contextual model. As has been demonstrated, theories adopting an analytical model focus on the different ways the knowledge of appropriateness can manifest itself, and the categories of situation types, genres and speech acts have been established. Characteristically, the other, procedural model of context has evolved rather than presented a compartmentalised unit.

The findings of the scrutiny of context in language study have made it possible to draw up a novel, comprehensive definition of context, which is, in effect, the main contribution of the thesis. The view of context as a continuum with varying emphasis on the knowledge of appropriateness and the capacity to exploit it does not only amalgamate the results of linguistic research but is suitable for the analysis of trends both in language study and language pedagogy.

The implementation of the framework has resulted in a fresh classification of major linguistic theories. In language education, the definition has allowed the re-categorisation of the most common language teaching approaches and their description in terms of context.

One of the significant outcomes in this respect has been the finding that what is generally seen as Communicative Language Teaching does, in fact, constitute two qualitatively divergent movements.

The definition of context has also made it possible to reveal and explain several of the ambiguities and inaccuracies that have marred the use of terminology in linguistic theory and language teaching. The investigation has also succeeded in identifying the main causes that have given rise to forces that seem to pull in different directions in language pedagogy. It has been demonstrated, for instance, how the concepts of authenticity and learner-centredness gain fundamentally different interpretations depending on the contextual model to which the language teaching movement they belong to subscribes. Within a wider perspective, the coexistence of the two new forceful trends, the teaching of culture and the notion of English as an international language, is laden with a similar contradiction. While the former adopts an analytical view of context and endeavours to impose outsiders' schemata on the classroom participants, the latter adopts a procedural perception and attempts to introduce and legitimise learner (i.e. participant) standards.

On the whole, the definition of context proposed by this work has brought with it the clarity and transparency that makes it easier for the teacher/researcher to discover what lies behind the façade of the popular rhetoric of current language teaching movements or the often intimidating technical jargon of linguistics.

The thesis has been designed to carry out exploratory research. Thus, the data that has been subjected to scrutiny in the pedagogic sections is made up of a selection of authoritative and influential works on mainstream language teaching practices. The analysis of data has, first of all, comprised the examination of the contextual set-up of these trends in two main respects, the ownership of the dominant schema and the objectives set. Once the basic co-ordinates have been established, participants of the teaching situation (i.e. teacher/learner) and fundamental notions, such as authenticity and learner-centredness, have been investigated in relation to context.

The pedagogic exploration has brought to light a striking paradox. TLC, which follows the procedural paradigm and adopts a participant-oriented approach that enhances efficiency in learning and teacher/learner autonomy by promoting independent and critical thinking, still struggles to find its way into the everyday practice of language teaching. It appears that, despite the obvious advantages of teaching language as communication, there exist considerations, interests and forces on the wider scene of ELT which effectively prevent

the advancement of this contextually and intellectually stimulating movement.

It follows from the nature of the inquiry that rather than concentrating on a narrow field of study, broad issues encompassing a vast area of both linguistics and language pedagogy have been investigated. As a consequence, linguistic theories and language teaching approaches and methods have been examined at a highly general level and only so far as they pertain to the main line of argument, i.e. the notion of context. Relevance with regard to the present work has therefore necessarily implied the impossibility of an all-round, in-depth analysis of the selected topic areas.

Similarly, not all linguistic theories or language teaching movements have been included, e.g. Conversation Analysis and the Lexical Approach have been left out. On the one hand, the exploration of pedagogy has necessarily been limited to those approaches and methods which seem to represent the most influential and common developments in the field of ELT. On the other, the choice of linguistic theories has also been carried out according to their pedagogic relevance: only those inquiries have been dealt with that have been directly carried over to language teaching.

The attempt to sustain a link between language study and pedagogy has led to the inclusion of H. G. Widdowson at both levels – a decision that may make his presence seem slightly more accentuated. In contrast, lack of space and, more importantly, the finding that the foreign language classroom can do without the teaching of culture have resulted in only a general outline which by no means reflects the keen interest and the amount of research this new trend has generated.

The broad and comprehensive scope has also entailed constraints on the size of the bibliography. The intention throughout has been to choose from the vast number of possible sources and references works with the strongest emphasis on context. Apart from this main criterion, availability, needless to say, has also played a part in deciding what is to be included.

In spite of the difficulties that selection and keeping to the main line of argument have presented, the wide span of the research has allowed the author to gain insight into a variety of linguistic and pedagogic theories and practices and obtain a comprehensive overview of the profession. Interestingly, the process of writing has resembled what has been described as learning how to move along the contextual continuum. Throughout, when formulating ideas, thoughts and arguments, it has been essential to observe the conventions that pertain to the genre of thesis in our specific academic culture as well as realise the extent of freedom one can enjoy and find the opportunities for individual manoeuvre. The result, it is hoped, is what

Kramsch (2001) calls 'acquiring a voice', i.e. the development of an idiolect and an individual style which, within the given constraints, makes it possible for the writer to express her own meanings and reality. As a corollary of these efforts, special attempts have been made to present the views and main concerns of colleagues and fellow researchers in the Eastern and Central European region.

The examples and references to actual language teaching have drawn heavily on the author's extensive experience as a teacher of English as a Second and Foreign Language both in Hungary and England. Being a theoretician and a practitioner at the same time has proved to be extremely beneficial in that it has effectively facilitated the linking of theory with practice and the investigation of the pedagogic issues in particular. However, this state of affairs has also imposed limitations on the analysis of pedagogic data with regard to the amount of evidence that could be supplied.

It is very likely that other teachers working under disparate conditions, or even with differing groups of students, will perceive their teaching and position within the professional community differently. It is, in fact, these inevitable shortcomings of the inquiry that create opportunities for future work. The implementation of the framework by others could not only furnish further proof of the applicability of the definition but would probably raise fresh issues as well as refine existing arguments. It would also be of interest to see how teachers can relate the findings presented here to their particular circumstances, including the question of whether the thesis has indeed succeeded in offering a definition of context which allows them to assess and evaluate the kind of teaching practice they choose to pursue or are required to follow.

From a classroom teacher's point of view it is paramount that the practical realisation of the language teaching approach adopting a procedural contextual view (TLC) be expanded and elaborated. There is a pressing need to further develop its methodology and improve its classroom applicability. As a corollary, such exciting areas of enormous pedagogic potential as the teaching of literature or task-based instruction should be given more, context sensitive consideration and refinement. Despite the conspicuous abundance of teaching materials, those devised in the procedural contextual mode are in short supply. There is, for instance, a lamentable lack of intelligent and engaging texts which require students to create rather than adopt contexts.

Future research could also investigate whether and how the delineation offered here can supply more information about the layers of institutional and societal contexts in which

language teaching, particularly in the state sector, is wrapped. Examining the authorities in control (e.g. school department, school management; Ministry of Education etc.) could, for instance, shed light on the kind of context they promote, and would make it possible to examine how the particular contextual models, the unity or clash between them, influence the work of the teacher.

It is hoped that there will be follow-up on the present thesis by other teachers and researchers and that the investigation will provide them with the challenge of independent and systematic thinking the author has enjoyed. If what ensues is a wealth of well thought-out and informed pedagogic decisions and a desire and readiness to change, another step towards the betterment of our profession will have been taken.

## APPENDIX 1

Theoretical Restaurant Script (Adapted from Schank & Abelson, 1977)

TABLE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



(Rumelhart & Norman 1985:40)



## APPENDIX 2

### Definitions of Genre

1) "In essence, genre theory is a theory of language use. ... Martin defines genre as a staged, goal oriented social process." (Martin, Christie & Rothery 1988:59)

2) "A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation." (Swales 1990:58)

3) "For all the authors of this book, genre is a category that describes the relation of the social purpose of text to language structure. It follows that in learning literacy, students need to analyse critically the different social purposes that inform patterns of regularity in language - the whys and hows of textual conventionality, in other words." (Cope & Kalantzis 1993:2)

4) "In my approach, genre is one of several categories needed to provide an account of what text is, or of what social factors go into the linguistic formation of the text. Other categories are, at the very least, questions of the social/linguistic organisation of content: discourse; the modes of speech and writing and their relative intermingling; the question of fundamental cultural textual types, such as narrative, report, dialogue, or perhaps even more fundamental distinctions of text types organised either temporally/sequentially or

spatially/hierarchically.”

“For Martin/Rothery, ‘genre’ is the term which describes, in the end, significantly differing register types. For me, ‘genre’ is one term which, together with others, forms the complex which constitutes significantly different types of text. ... The Martin/Rothery account necessarily tends towards a firmer view of generic structure, a greater tendency towards the reification of types, and an emphasis on the linguistic system as an inventory of types. ... My approach tends towards a more historical/fluid view of generic form, depending on the prior contingencies of social structurings; an emphasis on the generative force of social categories.”

(Kress 1993:34-5)

5) “A type of discourse in written or spoken mode with particular characteristics established by convention, e.g. a cooking recipe, a letter of application, a sermon.”

(Widdowson 1996b:127)

6) “A socially-sanctioned type of communicative event, either spoken, like an interview, or printed, like a novel.” (Kramsch 1998:128)

## APPENDIX 3

### Definitions of Ethnomethodology

(1) "Ethnomethodological studies of formal structures are directed to the study of such phenomena, seeking to describe members' accounts of formal structures wherever and by whomever they are done, while abstaining from all judgments of their adequacy, value, importance, necessity, practicality, success, or consequentiality." (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970:345)

(2) "I use the term 'ethnomethodology' to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life." (Garfinkel 1967:11)

(3) "Ethnomethodologists, then take as their aim (in their various ways) the description and analysis of members' resources for finding what they find and doing what others will find them to have done." (Turner 1974:11)

"The focus on practical reasoning emphasizes that the talk *accomplishes* scenes and their contained activities; it emphasizes that members are - as a condition of their competence - rendering scenes intelligible, reasonable and accountable, that their world is constant *doing* and *achieving*." (Turner 1974:10)

(4) "Ethnomethodology emphasizes the interpretive work required to recognize that an abstract rule exists which could fit a particular occasion, ... " (Cicourel 1973:100)

## APPENDIX 4

### Definitions of Task

(1) "... a goal oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome. In other words, learners use whatever target language resources they have in order to solve a problem, make a list, do a puzzle, play a game, or share and compare experiences." (Willis 1998:3)

(2) "In this book tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome." (Willis 1996:23)

(3) "... a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book ... In other words, by 'task' is meant the hundred and one things people *do* in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. Tasks are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists." (Long and Crookes 1992:44)

(4) "... a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, or at work." (Long and Crookes 1992:44)

(5) "I shall define the communicative task as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form." (Nunan:1993b:59)

(6) "An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was regarded as a 'task'." (Prabhu 1987:24)

(7) "... one of a set of differentiated, sequenceable, problem-posing activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective

exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu.”(Candlin quoted in Long and Crookes 1992:38)

(8) “... a task is an activity in which:

- meaning is primary;
- there is some communication problem to solve;
- there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities;
- task completion has some priority;
- the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.” (Skehan 1998:95)

## APPENDIX 5

TEXT REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Hopkins & Tribble 1989:52

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