

Lecture3 : Context

Introduction

The idea of discourse thus emphasizes that language is a social and communal practice, never external to or prior to society (as some conceptualizations of linguistics, such as Saussure's, may seem to assume). According to linguist Michael Halliday, discourse is "a unit of language larger than a sentence and which is firmly rooted in a specific context¹. This definition of discourse emphasizes the way in which social context—who is speaking, who is listening, and when and where the instance of language occurs—determines the nature of enunciations (It is clear how legal discourse and media discourse, will demonstrate fundamentally different conventions of style, wording, and other "linguistic features.").

1. Definition of Context

Context is just a form of knowledge of the world and the term can be used in a broad and narrow sense. In the narrow sense, it refers to (knowledge of) factors outside the text under consideration. In the broad sense, it refers to (knowledge of) these factors and to (knowledge of) other parts of the text under consideration, sometimes referred to as « co-text » (Guy Cook, 1999, p. 24). When studying reference and inference, George Yule also took "context" into account. He provided us with a somewhat general definition, "Context is the physical environment in which a word is used." (George Yule, 2000, 128) Although they are viewed from different perspectives for different purposes, these definitions have an important point in common: one main point of the context is the environment (circumstances or factors by some other scholars) in which a discourse occurs.

2. Aspects of Context

2.1. Halliday's Framework

The concept of context has been extensively studied by different linguists from different perspectives, such as pragmatics and systemic-functional linguistics. Among them, Halliday's framework. He proposed that the concept of context consists of three strata: context of culture, context of situation and co-text. Context of culture and context of situation are outside of language itself. Co-text, also known as linguistic context, is certainly inside of language itself. There is a close interdependent relationship between language and context. Context determines and is constructed by the choice of language. On the one hand, language, when considered as a system—its lexical items and grammatical categories—is related to its context of culture. While on the other hand, the specific text and its component parts are related to its context of situation.

To be specific, **context of culture is related to genre, context of situation is related to register, and co-text to the discourse itself. Context of situation consists of three aspects: field, tenor and mode (mode implies register here). Field** refers to what is happening, to the nature of social action that is taking place. It answers such questions as what it is that the participant is engaged in. **Tenor** refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their status and roles: what kind of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships

¹ There are many different types of discourse under this heading, such as academic discourse, legal discourse, media discourse, etc. Each discourse type possesses its own characteristic linguistic features" (Martin and Ringham, 51).

of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved. **Mode** refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic and the like. Collectively the three aspects of situational context are called register. Context of situation is closely related to various texts. Certain situational context asks for certain text and in return, certain text creates certain context. In the process of communication, the meaning system is largely determined by the three aspects of situational context: ideational meaning by field, interpersonal meaning by tenor and textual meaning by mode (Baker, 2000: 9).

Studies in register analysis are of significance to translators. In the translation process, first, through the analysis of the linguistic feature of the SLT, its register can be identified and thus the determination of its context of situation is possible. Second, in the production of the TLT, the proper words and expressions in the TL should be chosen so that the corresponding context of situation can be reestablished in the TLT.

2. 2. Okada's Framework

The context has a vital role in the construction of discourse.

“The context relevant for a given act of utterance is a composite of the surrounding co-text, the domain of discourse at issue, the genre of speech event in progress, the situation of utterance, the discourse already constructed upstream and, more generally, the socio-cultural environment which the text presupposes—including mutual personal knowledge on the part of the speech participants as well as more general encyclopædic and cultural knowledge.³ The various aspects of this context are in constant development: the discourse derived via the text both depends on them and at the same time changes them as this is constructed on line (cf. also Roberts 2004; Unger 2006; Connolly 2007).” (Cornish, 2009).

Okada (2007:186) presents a compilation of various authors' conceptions of context:

- **Physical context** comprises the actual setting or environment in which the interaction takes place, such as a house-warming party or a hospital.
- **Personal context** comprises the social and personal relationships amongst the interactants, for instance the relationships between intimate friends or between employer and employees.
- **Cognitive context** comprises the shared and background knowledge held by participants in the interaction, including social and cultural knowledge. It is sometimes referred to [as] schemata. For example, knowledge about how an interview, a wedding or a lecture is conducted.
- **Textual context** comprises the world which the text constructs, that is the textual world (...) (Okada 2007:186).” (Okada, 2009).