

Alive to Language

*Perspectives on language awareness
for English language teachers*

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Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Key terms and transcription conventions	x
Introduction	11
1 Language-in-use	18
1.1 Overview	18
1.2 A basic framework for awareness of language-in-use	19
1.3 Features of language-in-use	21
1.3.1 Knowledge of the world	21
1.3.2 Context	27
1.3.3 Variety	33
1.3.4 Medium	37
1.3.5 Attitude	41
1.3.6 Effectiveness	43
1.3.7 Structure	47
1.3.8 Flexibility	50
2 Discourse	54
2.1 Overview	54
2.2 Some definitions and key concepts	54
2.3 Aspects of discourse	58
2.3.1 Relevance and choice	59
2.3.2 Structures of spoken interaction	66
2.3.3 Meanings	74
2.3.4 Shared knowledge	78
2.3.5 Organisation	84
2.3.6 Purposes	91
2.4 Discourse studies and their relevance to ELT	94
3 Grammar	98
3.1 Overview	98
3.2 What is grammar?	98
3.2.1 Some different interpretations	99
3.2.2 Some different viewpoints	101
3.3 Grammar in action	103
3.3.1 Children	104

Contents

3.3.2	Adult EL1 users	108
3.3.3	Learner (EL2) English	111
3.4	Factors in teaching grammar	113
3.4.1	Decisions and judgements	113
3.4.2	Explanations and terminology	115
3.5	Pedagogic approaches to grammar	117
3.5.1	Traditional grammar	117
3.5.2	ELT approaches	118
3.5.3	A 'reduced model' of grammar	125
3.6	Some alternative approaches	125
4	Variety	131
4.1	Overview	131
4.2	Terminology	131
4.2.1	Some common confusions over definitions	132
4.2.2	Code-switching	135
4.3	Attitudes towards varieties of English	136
4.3.1	Evaluating varieties	136
4.3.2	Evaluating quality of language use	138
4.3.3	'New' Englishes	140
4.4	The notion of appropriacy	142
4.4.1	Appropriacy in ELT materials	144
4.4.2	Teaching appropriacy	149
5	Change	152
5.1	Overview	152
5.2	Some background to language change	152
5.3	Reasons for change	154
5.3.1	History	155
5.3.2	Borrowings	159
5.3.3	Creativity	160
5.3.4	The media	162
5.3.5	Technology	164
5.4	Language systems and examples of change	167
5.4.1	Vocabulary	168
5.4.2	Grammar	169
5.4.3	Pronunciation	174
5.5	Socio-cultural influences on language change	177
5.5.1	Gender	178
5.5.2	Taboo language	179
5.5.3	Politically correct language	180
5.5.4	Attitudes and acceptability	181
6	Power	183
6.1	Overview	183
6.2	Approaches to language and power	183
6.3	Some language and power issues	184

6.3.1	Language choice: manipulation and accessibility	185
6.3.2	Knowledge about language	193
6.3.3	The power of standard varieties	195
6.3.4	English as a 'sexist' language	198
6.4	Asymmetrical discourses	200
6.4.1	Some settings and contexts	201
6.4.2	Gender-based discourse	209
6.5	English as an international language (EIL)	211
6.5.1	The spread of English	212
6.5.2	Attitudes towards EIL	214
6.5.3	Ownership of the language	216
6.6	Empowerment of learners	217
	Commentaries	222
	References	275
	Index	285

1 Language-in-use

1.1 Overview

The main aim of this opening chapter is to suggest a general framework for considering language from the socio-cultural perspective of *language-in-use* outlined below:

- *Language is dynamic and powerful*: it reflects and is reflected by the changing ways human societies order themselves; it influences and is influenced by people's relationships, activities and communications. Structured, but flexible, it is a vital human tool for getting things done in the world and the ways in which people actually use language to accomplish their various ends are subtle and complex.
- *Language is rarely either straightforward or value-free*: it always springs from the linguistic choices made by participants in any 'language event'. In order for any instance of 'real world' language to be fully understood, its context – including what has gone before it and what is likely to come after – has to be taken into account. This context is the key to decoding the meanings carried in the choices people make. These choices depend partly on the fact that language is flexible, and partly on what people consider to be the most effective way of using language to convey their message. The effectiveness of any communication depends, in turn, upon a whole range of extra-linguistic factors, including the response, interpretation and attitude of the receiver of the message.

The perspective on language outlined above may not necessarily be one which is familiar to language teachers, whose day-to-day work may have much more to do with the linguistic systems that make up a language: grammar, vocabulary, phonology and possibly discourse. In our framework for awareness of language-in-use, therefore, we will introduce eight features of language in general which we hope will, first, support the broader perspective, and second, provide a basis for understanding the discussion in subsequent chapters of the book. A brief summary of these features and their basic characteristics is provided first, and then we look at each feature in greater detail, with examples to illustrate it from a variety of sources.

1.2 A basic framework for awareness of language-in-use

Just as language is both complex and complicated, so is its study. It would be very difficult to decide upon a definitive list of language features comprehensive enough to include everything and please everyone. The basic features we list below, each with a short gloss, are among those we consider to be useful starting points for enhancing our awareness of language-in-use. Figure 1 shows how these features can be seen to relate to each other: working out from the centre, we can say that the language people use – the ‘what’ – depends on their *choices* of words and structures, which in turn are allowed by the *flexibility* of the language; ‘how’ they put across their message will depend on their choice of form from the huge *variety* available to them, and their choice of *medium*, which will in turn be dictated by the *attitude* and *effect* they wish their message to convey. The recipients of these messages will, consciously or unconsciously, likewise have an attitude towards, and judge the effectiveness of, the chosen words and structures. Finally, at the outer edge of the Figure, all choices and reactions to choices are governed by the specific *context* within which the language is used, and by the ‘knowledge of the world’ brought to bear upon the interaction by the initiator(s) and recipient(s).

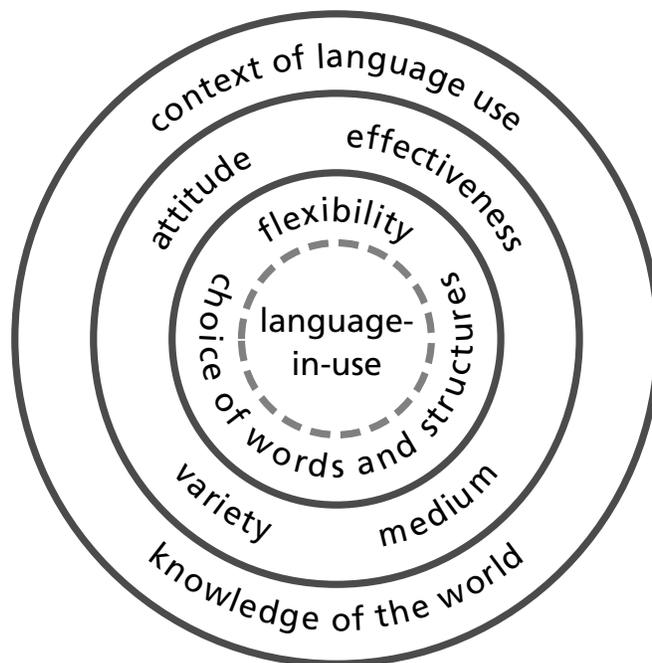


Figure 1

The basic language awareness features in the framework above, and briefly described below, are *all* important: it would be hard to say that some are more important than others. Also, we can see that the categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e. things in one category can also quite easily be in another) and that there is often considerable overlap between them.

knowledge of the world: the way our use and understanding of language is affected by our specific cultural backgrounds, our learning experience, and the way we view the world

If we did not have this knowledge it would be difficult for us to understand each other; things like railway timetables and phone books would be unintelligible. *Knowledge of the world* helps us in one type of context to interpret correctly what someone is saying to us, or in another, to identify a specific newspaper from its format and typeface.

context: the importance of the situation and environment – including the relationship between initiator and recipient – in which people use language, and their purpose in using it

A lecture on thermo-nuclear physics has an identifiable context, as does a family argument or a newspaper sports report. Thus, the language used in each context is likely to be very different.

variety: the different forms in which language may appear

One major set of factors here relates to the obvious differences between spoken and written language but there are other equally powerful factors contributing to variety, such as style, source, situation, dialect and accent.

medium: the modes or channels through which language is manifested

This not only extends the spoken/written distinction, but is also concerned with the form and style in which meanings and messages are transmitted. For example, the language used in a teenage comic, or in a conversation between friends is very different from the language of a legal document, or that of a telephone enquiry. E-mail is an example of a relatively new medium which is evolving a distinctive form and style of its own.

attitude: the fact that people use language to *convey different attitudes* as well as the fact that they *have different attitudes* towards the language they encounter

Letters to newspapers and radio phone-ins are two examples of contexts where the former dimension of attitude can be seen, i.e. people convey opinions through the linguistic choices they make when they write or speak, as the case may be. The judgements we make about other people's use of language illustrates the latter dimension.

effectiveness: the degree to which users of language successfully achieve their purpose

Warnings, prohibitions, advertising and advice are examples of areas where effectiveness can be relatively easily judged. In other areas, such as political propaganda or literary criticism, judgement is much less straightforward, and possibly controversial.

structure: the basic ways in which language is organised and structured

This feature enables us to understand how a language works and how the various components interact with each other. The systems and rules of grammar,

vocabulary and pronunciation are all important aspects of structure, as are other less obvious ones such as regional variations, or discourse (interwoven stretches of language or sequences of utterances beyond discrete sentence level).

flexibility: the way language is dynamic and able to adapt to changing circumstances

In English, technology contexts provide a wide range of instances where new words have appeared (*interface, internet*) and existing words have taken on new meanings (*mouse, web*). Changes in social attitudes and mores influence usage, e.g. in Britain, the increasing acceptance of the word *partner* in preference to *wife/husband, spouse* or *girl/boyfriend* in the context of a personal relationship.

1.3 Features of language-in-use

We now look in closer detail at the eight features in the framework, starting with the broadest constraints on language use – *knowledge of the world* and context of communication.

1.3.1 Knowledge of the world

The way each of us views the world is dictated by our socio-cultural background(s) and our learning experiences. The more similar our backgrounds and experience, the more likely it is that we will have similar interpretations of what is going on when we encounter any instance of language-in-use. These interpretations will be both linguistic (such that we understand the language) and socio-cultural (such that we recognise the significance of the language behaviours which are part of the society and culture we inhabit). This interrelation in interpretation is inevitable, and as language teachers, we are constantly aware of it.

When a language is an international property, as in a sense English is, the interface between linguistic and cultural interpretations becomes an extremely sensitive issue. This is perhaps why ELT coursebooks often attempt to go for the culturally ‘lowest common denominator’ approach by producing materials that hopefully will offend nobody and appeal to a wide (world-wide) audience. The truth is, though, that nothing is value-free. Even something as apparently straightforward as greetings and leavings (which often appear in the introductory units of coursebooks), may be more complicated – and even treacherous – than they seem. Is it possible, for example, to learn from an English language textbook when or whether you should shake someone by the hand as you greet or leave them? What is the assumed cultural context in which this greeting or leaving takes place and are there in fact any norms which govern this particular behaviour? If there are, do they depend more upon the cultural context within which the language is being used than upon the language itself? What right has the original cultural context of the language to impose its norms (if indeed they exist) upon anyone else using the language in a different cultural context?

1 Language-in-use

It is, of course, certainly possible for learners of a second language to produce the forms of the language accurately without ever having had any first-hand contact with the culture(s) or societies in which it is spoken as a first language. At the same time, though, any claim to be able to operate effectively in a language involves much more than just manipulating the forms successfully. An important pedagogical question, therefore, is: *How and to what extent should language teachers attempt to include the socio-cultural dimension and teach the 'knowledge of the world' associated with the target language?* We could expand upon this basic question with others such as:

- Whose version of this 'knowledge' might be taught?
- Why should it be taught?
- What use do learners wish to make of the target language, and thus what knowledge do they need?
- What cultural context is the language being taught in?
- Can we expect coursebooks to cater for the huge diversity of student backgrounds, needs and expectations?

Another important question is: *To what extent do people wish to participate in the culture of the language they are learning?* This in turn raises yet more questions:

- What are the goals of people learning the language? (commercial? scientific? academic? political? diplomatic? educational? personal?)
- Are there reasons – political, social or religious – why association with the culture of the language may not be attractive or appropriate?
- To what extent can the learner's own culture mesh with the L2 culture without a conflict developing?
- Might it be easier for certain learners (e.g. children, who are generally less inhibited than adults about cultural niceties) to integrate cultural knowledge than others?

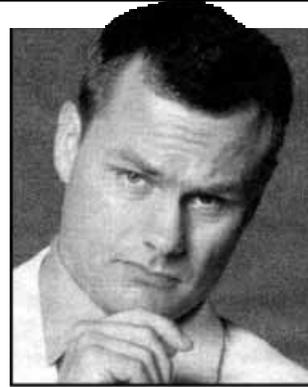
Our first four examples illustrate the extent to which all texts (including spoken 'texts') are grounded in the culture which produced them. These particular examples happen to have originated in the culture of late 20th century Britain, and understanding of these texts, both linguistic and cultural, is based to a large degree on shared experience of that culture.

Activity 1

- ▶ Look at Examples 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 on pages 23–26. What 'knowledge of the world' do you need to bring to bear on these texts in order to be able to understand them? Does your 'knowledge of the world' allow you to identify or place these texts easily in their cultural context?
- ▶ Would you say there are aspects of this 'knowledge' which are reasonably 'teachable'? How far do 'textual' features (i.e. layout, typeface, graphics and so on) of the texts in Examples 1.1, 1.3 and 1.4 help in this respect?

Example 1.1

SMACK DEE



Comic Jack ...
street brawl

Raging comic flattens TV critic over 'Cockney' taunt

EXCLUSIVE

By ANDY COULSON and JANE ATKINSON

FURIOUS comic Jack Dee flattened a TV critic in an amazing street brawl yesterday.

The star – famous for his deadpan expression – was getting into a taxi when university-educated Victor Lewis-Smith yelled: “You Cockney commoner.”

Jack, 34, **LEAPT** from the cab, **THREW** several punches at the dreadlocked critic – and had to be **PULLED AWAY** by his own manager.

The manager was left nursing a

bruised face after one of the comic’s blows missed and landed on him. Two passing policemen intervened in the 1am punch-up outside a London club.

Teetotal Jack, and Lewis-Smith – who is five inches taller at 5ft 11in – were both spoken to but no action was taken.

Sulky loudmouth Lewis-Smith is consulting lawyers over the incident – but defiant Jack has vowed to fight any action. He fumed last night: “Victor is a very poor heckler.”

Before the bust-up the pair were spotted angrily shouting at each other in the bar of the trendy Groucho Club in Soho.

Lewis-Smith, who has often savaged

Continued on Page Seven

Example 1.2

D is a senior house officer in a hospital; P is a patient. Turns in the interaction are numbered.

- 1 **D** Hello, Mr X?
- 2 **P** Yes, that's right.
- 3 **D** I'm Dr Y. Now I'd like to check a few of the details of your problem.
- 4 **P** Right, doctor.
- 5 **D** This is Mr N from the University. He's looking at doing some of the things we get up to in hospitals.
- 6 **P** Oh yes.
- 7 **D** Now, what's the main thing that's been worrying you lately?
- 8 **P** Well, I've had a bit of shortness of breath.
- 9 **D** Does this happen at any particular time?
- 10 **P** Well, after walking a fair way I get a bit ...
- 11 **D** How about at night?
- 12 **P** Well yes I wake up feeling a bit ...
- 13 **D** Yeah any other problems?
- 14 **P** No, I've been fine in myself.
- 15 **D** No headaches?
- 16 **P** No.
- 17 **D** Now when you wake up is it because of shortness of breath, or is there something to bring up?
- 18 **P** Well it's the shortness of breath mainly I think.
- 19 **D** D'you feel very short of breath?
- 20 **P** It's difficult to say really, sometimes it's quite severe.
- 21 **D** How many pillows do you use? D'you feel uncomfortable if you lie flat?
- 22 **P** Well not really, if I wake up feeling this ... I usually get up then and ...
- 23 **D** Yeah OK, now you were being treated by Dr A for blood pressure, weren't you? What happened? Did it clear up?
- 24 **P** Well, he as good as told me to stop taking the tablets.
- 25 **D** I see. D'you look after yourself at home? Do you do your own cooking?
- 26 **P** Oh yes, that's fine.
- 27 **D** Appetite OK?
- 28 **P** Well, you know ...
- 29 **D** Well, we're just going to take some blood off you. Just sit back and the Sister'll be along to see you in a minute OK?
- 30 **P** Yes, thank you doctor.
- 31 **D** Right.

(Authors' data)

Example 1.3

Mondays to Fridays					MX WW	B SO TT	
London Paddington	d	2245	2335	2345	0045	0045	A Service continues to Taunton.
Slough	d	2229	2329	2329	0052	0052	B Does not run 17 January to 21 February.
Heathrow Terminal 	d	2145	2215	2215	2315	2315	C Service continues to Carmarthen. Table 4
Gatwick Airport	d	2124	—	2224	2317	2317	D Refreshments are not available.
Reading	d	2309	0008	0017	0123	0124	b Change at Redhill and Reading.
Didcot Parkway	d	2323	0024	0032	0141	0140	c Change at Maidenhead and Reading.
Swindon	d	2341	0046	0055	0208	0202	e Arrival time. Change at Bath Spa.
Chippenham	d	2354	0058	—	—	—	f Service travels via Bristol Temple Meads before Bristol Parkway.
Bath Spa	d	0009	0111	—	—	—	g Arrives 0830.
Bristol Parkway	d	0037v	—	0122	—	—	k Change at Oxford.
Bristol Temple Meads	a	0022	0125	—	—	—	v Arrival time. Via Bristol Temple Meads.
Weston-super-Mare	a	—	—	—	—	—	MX Monday mornings excepted.
Newport	d	—	—	0142s	0313	—	SO Saturday mornings only.
Hereford	a	—	—	—	—	—	
Cardiff Central	a	—	—	0203	0332	—	
Bridgend	a	—	—	—	—	—	
Port Talbot Parkway	a	—	—	—	—	—	
Neath	a	—	—	—	—	—	
Swansea	a	—	—	—	—	—	

For standard notes see inside back cover.

Light printed timings indicate a connecting service. See page 5

(Great Western timetable)

Example 1.4



STARS

By Marjorie Orr *Britain's top astrologer*

IF IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY TODAY: Then your year ahead will be very focussed with a strong sense of mission, hard working, extravagant and rather romantic. You will feel you have turned a corner. Keeping fit is a priority in a fast moving, rather challenging year. DOES YOUR BIRTHDAY FALL UNDER THE CURRENT STAR SIGN? PHONE 0894 707 319 TO HEAR MARJORIE'S SPECIAL FORECAST.

Sagittarius (November 23–December 22)

The New Moon in your sign only comes round once a year and this is definitely your day to make resolutions for the next 12 months. What kind of image do you want to project? Does this mean clearing out the wardrobe? Or will you be mixing and matching the old with the new. Whether it is clothes or a deeper aspect of your personality you are determined on a makeover.

More details: ☎0894 707 342

Capricorn (December 23–January 20)

Shining light on hidden places is not always easy for a practical rather ambitious sign like yourself. You much prefer flying ahead producing solid results and ambitiously scaling the heights. But try to find the time when you can. After Tuesday, when the Sun moves into your own sign, there will no chance for calm reflection since a busy schedule lies ahead.

More details: ☎0894 707 343

Aquarius (January 21–February 19)

Keep an eye around for any encounters with new acquaintances. They could become firm friends in the days ahead if you make the effort to pull them into your circle. You are sifting and sorting through different options at the moment and may need different company to travel with. What is important, for whatever begins now, is that you are committed, no ifs and buts.

More details: ☎0894 707 344

Pisces (February 20–March 20)

The seed of a project, plan, idea or new venture is planting itself firmly in your head now at work. It will take time to flourish, but it is good to have a dream which you can follow over the next year. Now you can begin to see where you can rally the support behind you. The more hands on deck and shoulders to the wheel the less effort it will take to get it all rolling.

More details: ☎0894 707 345

Aries (March 21–April 20)

Whatever you want to do in terms of travelling further afield, or maybe just painting your life on a broader canvas, now is the time to get cracking. Being fiery and highly imaginative, you are never short of grand visions of what you would like. Make sure that at least one of them gets pushed slightly further down the road to reality now. Do not hold back. Fortune favours the brave.

More details: ☎0894 707 334

Taurus (April 21–May 20)

By next Tuesday you will be out of this rather intense, slightly confrontational phase but do not think that all your pushing has been in vain. Your perseverance of the past weeks will pay off over the next few months in ways you cannot imagine. But one more building block needs to be put in place now to get new financial ventures or agreements off on a good footing.

More details: ☎0894 707 335

Gemini (May 21–June 21)

You can decide to wipe the slate clean in long running relationships and see whether you can get off to a new start. Or maybe you just want to start afresh altogether by making new connections that you feel can bring you much fulfilment. Whichever way you lean, you know you need to take the initiative and be clear about what your renewed commitment means.

More details: ☎0894 707 336

Cancer (June 22–July 23)

Never was there a better day to start a new health regime. Get out the diet sheets and choose whichever suits your mood. This is about feeling more energised, not getting slimmer. You need to start treating your body like a racing machine, that needs good fuel, sensible maintenance and pit stops every so often. If you keep running without recharging your batteries you will feel flat.

More details: ☎0894 707 337

(The Express 18.12.98)

1.3.2 Context

In the ‘real world’, as distinct from the often controlled and constricted world of many language teaching materials, language always occurs in specific contexts, involving *people* (their personalities, relationships, socio-economic status) and *situations* (the purpose(s) and importance of the communication, social and cultural expectations about it, what came before it and what is likely to come after). These contextual factors, especially when several participants are involved, give rise to language which is often much more complex than controlled teaching materials would suggest, not only because of its unpredictability, but also its inevitable link with situational and personal circumstances. Our notion of context is represented graphically in Figure 2.

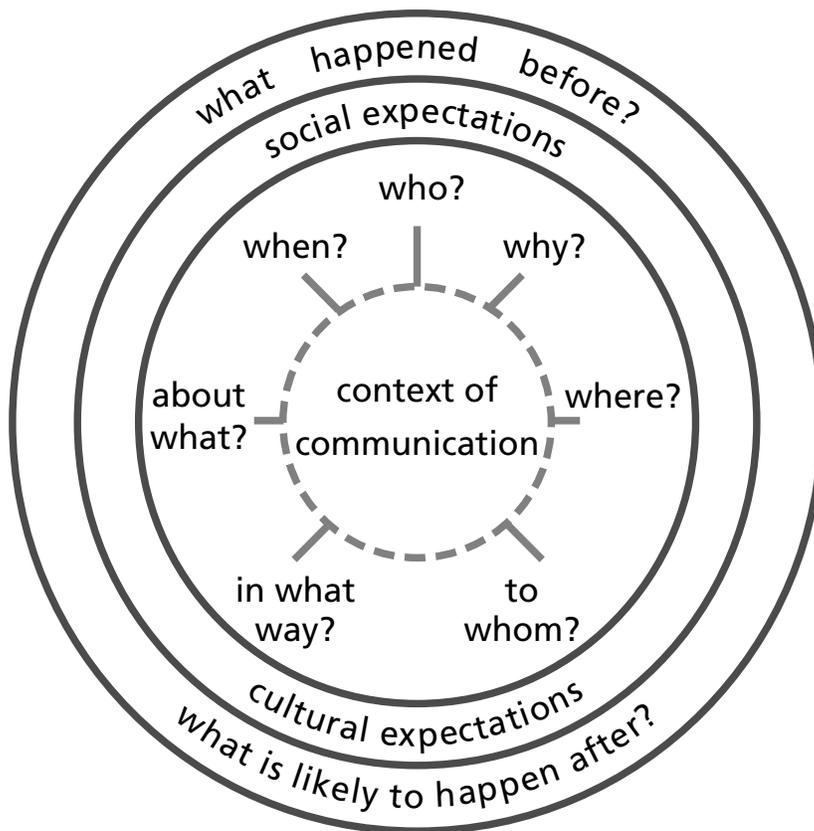


Figure 2

Contextual factors (constraints on context)

People speaking a language as their first or mother-tongue language do not always need to think consciously about the contexts of their language use, unless these contexts demand a particular effort for successful or effective communication (preparing for an important interview, for instance, or writing a book). However, for second language learners, context may present a number of difficulties:

- different conventions govern use of language in different cultural contexts

1 Language-in-use

- contexts may be misinterpreted by learners, and thus communication may break down
- conventions associated with a context may be deliberately flouted (e.g. for humour) or manipulated (e.g. for asserting or maintaining power) – learners may not easily recognise this
- many language coursebooks pay lip service to context, but in fact find it difficult, if not impossible, to present language in truly meaningful contexts – except of course the context of language learning itself
- the natural language of many real-world contexts is too difficult for a language learning context

Nonetheless, learning about contexts is an essential part of any language learning process, be it first or second language, and part of this learning involves developing a sense of what we need to do, socially and linguistically, in a variety of situations. This is often what linguists mean when they talk about language being appropriate rather than language being right or wrong.

Although it is hard to see how learners can learn what they need to know about a language without developing a sense of context, actually providing a real sense of context in most teaching situations is very difficult. Thus, learners who have not had much – or indeed any – opportunity to experience language in contexts other than the language learning classroom, and who have perhaps spent a lot of time studying ‘decontextualised’ language, will find the ‘real thing’ very daunting. It is not surprising that learners often find informal conversation between groups of L1 speakers hard to understand. We shall take this point up in more detail in Chapter 2 when we examine some discourse features which relate closely to the question of context, and their implications for teaching and learning.

Activity 2

- ▶ Look at the two spoken texts transcribed in Examples 1.5 and 1.6 on pages 29–30 and the two written texts reproduced in Examples 1.7 and 1.8 on pages 31–32.
- ▶ Describe and compare the different contexts in which you think the language used in these four examples might have occurred. Can you specify any language features (e.g. degree of formality, degree of explicitness, topic, layout, format, etc.) which help you to identify the contexts? (You could make a grid, along the lines indicated below, to help you do this).

Example #	Context	Language Features
	e.g. who? to whom? where? when? why? how? about what?	e.g. formality? explicitness? topic? layout?

- ▶ Do you think these four examples could be used for language teaching purposes? If so, what kinds of purpose might they serve? If not, why not?

Follow-up: Think of some ways in which language teachers can provide their students with opportunities for experiencing language in ‘real-world’ contexts.

Example 1.5

Characters as follows: A is mother; B is father; C is houseguest; D is small daughter of A and B (*For transcription conventions, see page x.*)

- A: ↓isn't her ↑CHOP done yet
 B: well I don't ↑KNOW have a ↑LOOK at it +
 C: ↑you know we + ↑you know how we + discovered
 5 we had the same caSETTE player we've got that one TOO +
 (phone rings) [THAT's the one that nearly set us on ↑FIRE
 B: [oh GOD that's the TELE + ↓can you ↑GET it
 D: yes
 C: OURS had a PROblem + the wire went RIGHT THROUGH
 10 HERE and it started ↑SMOKing
 B: oh god
 C: so I've got to buy a new ↑WIRE ↓but it's ↓STILL GOing
 B: hang on ↑who's that on the PHONE
 D: can you tell ↑DAD it's JACKie
 A: oh it's ↑JACKie
 15 C: did you ↑KNOW your tape was reCORDing
 B: ↑yeh
 C: oh that's ok then++
 B: ↓erm ++++
 A: Liz + when did you put this ↓CHOP ON
 20 B: oh god I don't know + erm it ↑SHOULD be done what
 ↑TIME is it
 C: quite a long [↑TIME ago
 B: [have a ↑LOOK at it
 C: ↑WOH + ↑CRUNCHing [aWAY + it's a BIG one though
 25 [mum dad + it's ↑COLin
 B: oh god + look it's ↑COLin ↓can you go and TALK to him
 C: it's ↑VERY ↑BIG though + it might [take a bit more to cook
 ↑THROUGH I think
 B: [YEH + hang ON a
 30 MINute
 A: erm
 B: you'd better go Carolyn
 C: [this might be
 A: [can you + ↓can you put HER + it's ↑REAdy I think + ↓can
 35 you put the ↑SWEETcorn on
 B: ↑YEH can you send her ↑IN here + ↓can I put the ↑WHAT
 C: do you think it ↑IS ready + I wonder if [it's a very ↑THICK
 chop if it ↑WAS ready
 A: [sweetcorn on
 40 B: what did she ↓SAY
 C: can [you put the ↑SWEETcorn on she said
 A: [helLO + how are ↓YOU

(Authors' data)

Example 1.6

(For transcription conventions, see page x.)

...what we're going to DO is to try and ↓LOOK at ↑↑ what do we mean by this idea of myth. OLOGY what is myth: OLOGY ++ um is it any ↓DIFFerent + to + some of the things that we see going on in the media these ↓DAYS or is it in ↓FACT + the very ↓BASis on which + er the media ↓WORKS ++ ↑I'm going to ↑START by looking at some kind of er theORETical ideas a↓BOUT + myth: OLOGY + what do we actually ↓MEAN by this ↓TERM what ↓COULD it mean + um ↑ IN this lecture I'm ↓NOT trying to put across to you the ideas that you'll go a↓WAY from here and think to yourself well + I ↓NOW know ex↓ACTly what mythology ↓S I know how it works in the MEDIat+ um + I have ↓ LEARNT all this + I'm not trying to ↓DO that ++ ↑what I'm trying to ↓DO is to↑ sugGEST some i↓DEAS to you a↓BOUT how you might start to think ↓DIFFerently + about the ↓MEDIa + and the way that it interacts in ↓YOUR ↓LIFE + um because we're for all of us the media is an important + ASpect + um of our LIVES ++ OK ↑so let's START with some of the more theor:ETical stuff +++ um↑ the first thing about myth: OLOGY is is that is A ↓STRUCTured ↓SYSTem ++ ↑you can look at ↓MYTHS ++ and UM +++ find that in ↓ALL of them there is a kind of ↓STRUCTure going on ++ now what do we mean by ↓MYTH + let me give you an ex↓AMple + um↑ in ↓BUDDHism there's a story of um + a um a teacher who ++ finds + a + an + en↓LIGHTenment ++ if you like ++ and ↑spends + and deCIDES to spend the next THREE months + um + in the ↓LOTus position looking at a ↓WALL + FINDS enlightenment and decides to look at a ↓WALL for three months now st↑ a number of students ↓COME to him + and ↓ASK him + all kinds of ↓QUESTions about + en↓LIGHTenment + and er↑ the TEACHER + says + ↓Nothing +++ er↑ and then ↓FINally ONE student comes to him who is ↓ DESperate to um + find+an answer to his ↓QUESTion + and ASKS the TEACHER who is still looking at the WALL↑ ++ um the question ++ um + how do I find my ↓SOUL +++ and the teacher doesn't ↓ANSwer so he ↑asked him the question aGAIN↑ and again the teacher doesn't ↓ANSwer ++and then ↓FINally + in + fru↓STRATION the student↑ + CUTS +OFF + his +LEFT+ARM ++ and pre↓SENTS it to the ↓TEACHER in order + for him to try and get some kind of re↓SPONSE Im not suggesting that's something ↓YOU might like to do (laughter) +++ and the teacher ↑THEN says + um + what is your ↓ QUESTion ++ and he says um + the student says ++ the question IS↑ um + how do I↑ ++ REConcile my ↓SOUL I am in ↑TOR I am in ↑TURmoil trying to ↓FIND my ↓SOUL + um + the teacher says↑ +++ if you ↓SHOW me your soul↑ + I will reconcile it ↓FOR you +++ er that's a kind of + er + straightforward STORy↑ and if you ↓LISTen to the STORy↑ you ↓MIGHT think that that what the story is about is ++ teacher looking at a ↑WALL and + student cutting off his ↑ARM and + trying to find an answer to the ↓ QUESTion but of course +++ the under↓LYing MEANing of the ↓STORY ++ is that as far as the ↓TEACHER is concerned↑ ++ the ↓SOUL +++ may not e↓XIST +++ this this this i↓DEA of preSENTing the ↓SOUL to the teacher to be reconCILED in some way ++ can't HAPPen because the soul can't be i↓DENTified so↑ with↓IN the story there is a kind of MORal ↓TALE if you like there's something under↓LYing the story which is ↑MUCH MORE im↓PORTant ++ than the PEOPLE in it + or the actual STRUCTure of the story it:SELF +++ um↑ + so ↓MYTHS all MYTHS have this kind of structured SYSTem ↓IN them they work on TWO ↓LEVELs one level is ++ the very sim↓PLISTIC level of let's see who's IN it + let's see what ↓HAPPens to them ++ and then the ↓ OTHER level is↑ what is this ↓ACTUally a↓BOUT + what's the + um + what is the ↓ MESSAGE that is in ++ enCAPsulated in ↓MYTH +++ so↑ + firstly it's a STRUCTured SYSTem and ↓SECondly ++ it has an e↓FECT + on its ↓AUDience +++.

(Authors' data)

Example 1.7

Are Judges beyond Criticism under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights?

I. Introduction

On the premise that democratic government is founded *inter alia* on the accountability of public bodies and their officials, as well as on the popular participation and collective decision-making by the governed at all levels of government, there is merit in the proposition that it is improper to curb open debate, especially in matters which are of public interest. The European Court of Human Rights (the Court)¹ has endorsed the importance of this principle of open debate and the unrestrained exchange of views on matters of public interest² in its decisions relating to Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention)³ which guarantees freedom of expression. The Court has been particularly unyielding in upholding this freedom when it rejects requests to support restrictions on critical comment about public affairs⁴ other than judges, about whom there is evidence to suggest that the Court is unwilling to apply its rigorous standard of supervision.

This article assesses the standard of supervision relating to the criticism of public officials generally and of judges in particular. It is argued that the differences in the Court's case-law relating to judges are not inconsistent with the policy of upholding democratic ideals which underlies the interpretation of Article 10.

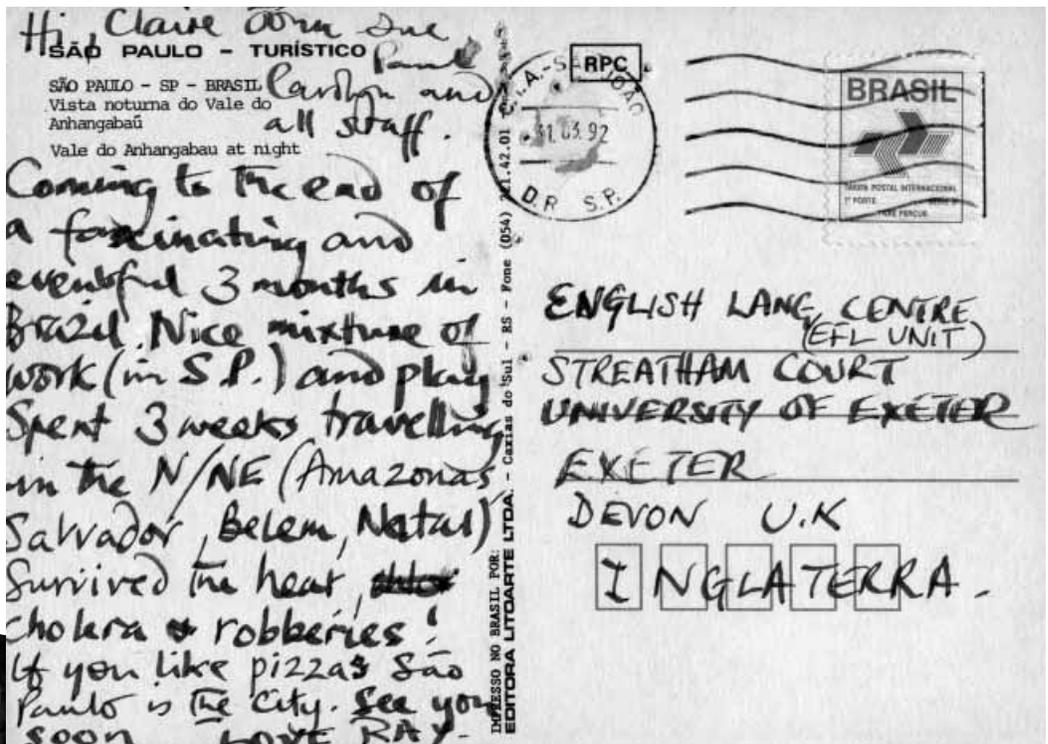
¹ The supervision of Contracting States' compliance with the Convention is presently undertaken by the European Commission of Human Rights (Articles 19–37 of the Convention), the European Court of Human Rights (Articles 38–56 of the Convention) and the Committee of Ministers (Articles 31, 32 and 54 of the Convention), although in practice the Court's responsibilities are the most important (see Article 45 of the Convention). In any case, with the recent adoption of Protocol No. 11 to the Convention (text reprinted in Vol. 15 (1994) *Human Rights Law Journal*, p. 86) the Court and the Commission are expected to be merged into a single Court with the coming into force of the Protocol. On Protocol No. 11 see, A. Drzemczewski and J. Meyer-Ladewig, "Principal characteristics of the new ECHR control mechanism as established by Protocol 11, signed on 11 May 1994", vol. 15 (1994) *Human Rights Law Journal*, p. 81; H.G. Schermers, "The Eleventh Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights", Vol. 19 (1994) *E.L. Rev.* p. 367; A.R. Mowbray, "A new European Court of Human Rights", 1994 *PL.*, p. 540.

² *Handyside v. United Kingdom*, Eur. Ct. H.R., Series A.24 (1976), 1 E.H.R.R. p. 737; *Sunday Times v. United Kingdom No. 1*, Eur. Ct. H.R. Series A.30 (1979), 2 E.H.R.R. p. 245; *Lingens v. Austria*, Eur. Ct. H.R. Series A.103 (1986), 8 (1986) E.H.R.R. p. 103; *Oberschlick v. Austria*, Eur. Ct. H.R., Series A.204 (1991), 19 E.H.R.R., p. 389

³ Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Rome 1950), text reprinted in Brownlie, *Basic Documents on Human Rights*, (Oxford, 1992) p. 326

⁴ See *Lingens v. Austria*, *loc. cit.*; *Swabe v Austria*, Eur. Ct. H.R. Series A.242-B (1993), (politicians); *Thorgeir Thorgeison v. Iceland*, Eur. Ct. H.R., Series A.239 (1992), 18 (1994) E.H.R.R. p. 843 (police); *Castels v. Spain*, Eur. Ct. H.R. Series A.236 (1992), 14 (1992) E.H.R.R. p. 445 (government policy)

Example 1.8



1.3.3 Variety

Two major questions for language teachers and writers of language teaching materials are:

- Which language items from the huge diversity available should be selected for learners to learn?
- How can one reduce the endless options to a manageable and accessible framework?

These questions stem from the enormous variety any language is capable of generating. Within the space of any given timeframe (a day, an afternoon, an hour, or an even shorter unit) we may call upon many different sorts of language, depending on who we are talking to, the subject we are dealing with and a whole host of other contextual factors. Among the kaleidoscope of influences on this range and richness, some of the most conspicuous and fundamental are the following:

- *form* (e.g. written/spoken)
- *style* (e.g. formal/informal, assertive/tentative)
- *source* (e.g. newspaper, novel, TV chatshow, telephone conversation)
- *purpose* (e.g. to advise, inform, warn, amuse)
- *context* (e.g. courtroom, classroom, home, company boardroom, factory floor)
- *speaker/writer origin* (e.g. speaker using Scots dialect or Liverpool accent; 19th-century American novelist)
- *social factors* (e.g. age, gender, social group)
- *personal usage* (e.g. the varieties we use at different times to different people)

One problem in describing these parameters is that some of them are hard to define. If we take style, for example, what some people might regard as merely informal might be considered rude by others. Another problem is that we can identify different levels of variety: *broad differences*, as for example between spoken and written language categories; or more *specific differences* within categories, such as those between the pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary of someone from Glasgow and someone from New York, or, at an even finer level of distinction, people from different parts of a large metropolitan area.

In some senses, dealing with the variety of language-in-use is becoming ever more complex because boundaries between categories are becoming increasingly fluid, partly as a result of the changing nature of some communication channels and the widespread influence of the media. For instance, we can see that some (though not all) features often associated with the *form* distinction are not as straightforward as might first appear and each is inevitably affected by the context of use:

Spoken language

- *less formal* than written language (though not always – what about public lectures?)
- *not permanent* (but what about when it's recorded spoken language?)

Written language

- often used for *formal* purposes (but what about a scribbled telephone message?)
- *relatively permanent* (but only if preserved – what about e-mail messages?)

1 Language-in-use

Spoken language

- often *less clearly structured*, with hesitations, false starts, etc. (but what about the TV news?)
- spoken interactions often conducted *face to face* (though not if via the telephone)
- speakers have *identifiable accents* (but they can change them, if they want)
- spoken interactions are *usually synchronous*, where speaker and listener interact within the same immediate timeframe (e.g. telephone conversations)

Written language

- often *more structured* with clear segmentation conventions (but what about a ‘stream-of-consciousness’ novel?)
- written interactions usually conducted *at a distance* (but how ‘distant’ is e-mail?)
- writers have *no accents* (but often clearly recognisable styles)
- written interactions are *usually asynchronous*, where writer and reader interact over a period of different, non-immediate timeframes (e.g. a correspondence by letter)

Activity 3

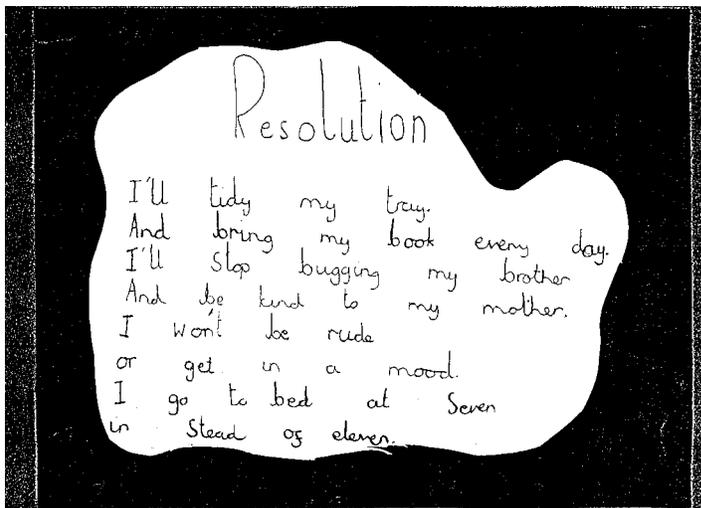
Look at Examples 1.9–1.12 on pages 34–36.

- Use the list of contextual and formal factors at the beginning of this section to help you characterise each of these examples as a variety of language. What features of the examples enable you to guess their source and identify them as a variety of language-in-use? (The actual sources of the four examples are noted in the commentary.)

Follow-up: Try keeping a record of the various kinds of language you come into contact with within the course of a specified period – say a working day, or a weekend. Note the diversity, and try to account for it, using the categories in the contextual and formal factors list at the beginning of this section.

If you are a teacher, think of the varieties of language-in-use you consider to be useful for your students, and justify your decisions.

Example 1.9



Example 1.10

Mrs. Todgers laughed immensely at the dear love's humour, and declared she was quite afraid of her, that she was. She was so very severe.

5 'Who is severe?' cried a voice at the door. 'There is no such thing as severity in our family, I hope!' And then Mr. Pecksniff peeped smilingly into the room, and said, 'May I come in, Mrs. Todgers?'

Mrs. Todgers almost screamed, for the little door of communication between that room and the inner one being wide open, there was a full disclosure of the sofa bedstead in all its monstrous impropriety. But she had the presence of mind to close this portal in the twinkling of an eye; and having done so, said, though not without confusion, 'Oh yes, Mr. Pecksniff, you can come in, if you please.'

10 'How are we to-day,' said Mr. Pecksniff, jocosely, 'and what are our plans? Are we ready to go and see Tom Pinch's sister? Ha, ha, ha! Poor Thomas Pinch!'

15 'Are we ready,' returned Mrs. Todgers, nodding her head with mysterious intelligence, 'to send a favourable reply to Mr. Jinkins's round-robin? That's the first question, Mr. Pecksniff.'

20 'Why Mr. Jinkins's robin, my dear madam?' asked Mr. Pecksniff, putting one arm round Mercy, and the other round Mrs. Todgers: whom he seemed, in the abstraction of the moment, to mistake for Charity. 'Why Mr. Jinkins's?'

'Because he began to get it up, and indeed always takes the lead in the house,' said Mrs. Todgers, playfully. 'That's why, sir.'

25 'Jinkins is a man of superior talents,' observed Mr. Pecksniff. 'I have conceived a great regard for Jinkins. I take Jinkins's desire to pay polite attention to my daughters, as an additional proof of the friendly feeling of Jinkins, Mrs. Todgers.'

30 'Well now,' returned that lady, 'having said so much, you must say the rest, Mr. Pecksniff: so tell the dear young ladies all about it.'

Example 1.11

(For transcription conventions, see page x.)

Martin: (referring to previous report from India) ↓no sub-continental weather
HERE ↓Isobel Lang can tell us what's going to happen + ↓good MORNING
Isobel

Isobel: ↓good morning to YOU + ↑well NO not really because things ARE
looking a bit ↓COOLer over the coming weekend although it will end
on a rather WARM note today + in southern parts + ↑of course in EUROpe's
+ ↓REALLY unsettled weather through the Mediterranean heavy showers
there + in fact if we take a look at the EUROpean summary for THIS
weekend + ↓well some really HEAVy showers through IBERia and the
WESTern Mediterranean + some rather HAZy conditions for the ↓eastern
MED as well as the WINDS strengthen up ++↑for the British Isles well a
rather ↓CLOUDy start to the day + ↑even here in WEST London a good
deal of rather MISTy HIGH cloud but + SOME ↓SUNshine nonetheless and
I think MANY southern parts of Britain will actually have quite a NICE and
warm DAY + ↑some rain to the northeast once again that'll gradually weaken
as it slips SOUTH + a little bit of rain around ↑eastern parts of ENGLand
TOO but that'll WEAKen + ↑so I think the ↓PROspects really are for a
somewhat ↓BRIGHTer week end to the DAY for the far northWEST of
Scotland SHOWERS there but still ↓QUITE a lot of rain for these WESTern
areas + ↑but down to the SOUTH + it should remain ↓DRY and BRIGHT +
↓that's IT ++

Martin: ↓thank you very MUCH Isobel

Example 1.12

A hi it's ↓ME again

B ↓mm

A forgot to ask you take the dogs' ↓MEAT out of the freezer

B ↓OK ↑anything ELSE ↓THREE EGGS today

A ↓GOOD++ [↑OK

B [↓what time'll you be HOME?

A don't ↓KNOW+ ↓USual probably

B ↓OK

A ↓OK+ ↓CIAO

B ↓CIAO

1.3.4 Medium

Using language always entails making choices of structure, vocabulary, pronunciation (in spoken language) and format, and these choices are, to a large extent, dictated by the *medium* we use to convey the message. Hymes (cited in Coulthard 1985:50) argued that ‘*how* something is said is part of *what* is said’, an observation which extends to written language too. Thus, the language we might choose for the following two sample pairs of spoken and written mediums is likely to be different in each case:

- face-to-face communication/communication via the telephone
- e-mail/a hand-written letter

And choices dictated by medium are, of course, further constrained by the specific type of text and context – whether we are writing an important business letter or a shopping list, whether we are being interviewed on television or chatting to an old acquaintance at a party.

For any given *medium* context we have conventional ideas about how language is used and organised. But some medium contexts present us with interesting challenges. One such challenge is the difficulty we encounter when we examine spoken forms of language. Not only is it very hard to represent spoken language in a written form (evidence of the basic differences between the two mediums) but the closer we get to the phonetics (i.e. the aural details in transcribed symbolic form) of what is actually said, the harder it becomes for unskilled users without specialised training to understand the message (see the 3rd version of the utterance in Example 1.14).

Another challenge is that technological developments may require us to question and adjust our ideas about conventions associated with certain mediums. E-mail for example, while it is obviously a written medium, looks as though it may have some of the typical features of spoken language. Because e-mail could be said to straddle the spoken/written divide, we might at first find ourselves confused over which linguistic choices we should make when we use this medium. However, e-mail has rapidly become widely accepted as a new medium of communication, with its own distinctive style and format, largely on account of the convenience, speed and efficacy with which it conveys messages and facilitates a written dialogue or discussion.

Activity 4

- ▶ Which types of medium are represented in Examples 1.13, 1.14 and 1.15 on pages 38–40?
- ▶ Look at the list of mediums at the beginning of this section and add any more you can think of. What kinds of effects might these mediums have on the kind of language people use when they communicate through them?