Society and Discourse

How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk

Teun A. van Dijk

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Van Dijk presents a new theory of context that explains how text and talk are adapted to their social environment. He argues that instead of the usual direct relationship being established between society and discourse, this influence is indirect and depends on how language users themselves define the communicative situation. The new concept van Dijk introduces for such definitions is that of context models. These models control all language production and understanding and explain how discourse is made appropriate in each situation. They are the missing link between language and society so far ignored in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. In this interdisciplinary book, the new theory of context is developed by examining the analysis of the structure of social situations in social psychology and sociology and their cultural variation in anthropology. The theory is applied to the domain of politics, including the debate about the war in Iraq, where political leaders' speeches serve as a case study for detailed contextual analysis. In another book published by Cambridge University Press, *Discourse and Context*, Teun A. van Dijk presents the (socio)linguistic and cognitive foundations of this multidisciplinary theory of context and the way context influences language use and discourse.

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Preface

Together with my other book published by Cambridge University Press, *Discourse and Context* (2008), this monograph offers a new theory of context. Whereas that other book focuses on the linguistic, sociolinguistic and cognitive aspects of the theory, the present study systematically explores the social psychological, sociological and anthropological contributions to such a multidisciplinary theory. These social sciences have analyzed, each in their own theoretical frameworks, many of the properties of interactional episodes, social situations and cultures that are classically assumed to be the "contexts" of language use.

If contexts of such *situated* text and talk are informally defined as the *set of relevant properties of the communicative situations* of verbal interaction, then it seems obvious that a systematic analysis of these situations is crucial for the development of an explicit theory of context and of how contexts control language use. However, it is a widespread misconception, for instance in traditional sociolinguistics, that social situations and their properties (such as class, gender or age of language users) exercise *direct* and unmediated influence on language use. In such correlational studies the very nature of contextual influence usually remains theoretically unexplored.

Against such a conception of the relation between discourse and society this book continues to argue in great detail that *there is no direct link between situational or social structures and discourse structures* – which are structures of very different kinds. Moreover, if such a link were causal, and hence explanatory and not just superficially correlational, all language users in the same social situation would say or write the same things and in the same way.

The new theory of context further explored in this book emphasizes that the relation between society and discourse is indirect, and mediated by the *socially based but subjective definitions of the communicative situation as they are construed and dynamically updated by the participants*. These

definitions are made explicit in sociocognitive terms, namely as *context models* stored in the episodic ("autobiographical") memory of the participants, just like any other social experience. The mediating interface constituted by these context models – construing and ongoingly monitoring the relevant properties of communicative situations – accounts for a vast number of properties of discourse.

Context models explain how and why language use is socially, personally and situationally variable. They offer an explicit framework for the theory of pragmatics by accounting for the ability of language users to adapt their text and talk to the for-them-now-relevant properties of each moment of the communicative situation. In other words, context models define the *dynamic appropriateness conditions* of text and talk.

We shall see in this book that such a "mental" interface between discourse and society is not very popular in much of the social sciences today. The contemporary focus on mindless interaction seems to forget that a long and respectable phenomenological tradition in sociology had no quarrel at all with such fundamental cognitive and subjective notions as "defining the situation," and with the old insight that social actors can only act in social situations as they understand them.

The contemporary gap between the cognitive and social sciences is the result of a regrettable reductionist ideology: interactionism (as we shall call it). This ideology shares with behaviorism the positivist fallacy of "observability" according to which talk or action are observable or socially available, but not the allegedly "individualistic" minds of language users. However, if we agree that we use and analyze discourse in terms of structures and meanings – which are obviously non-observable, but known, construed or handled by the minds of language users – then there is no reason to reject that, very fundamentally, talk or text without "thought" is literally meaningless.

In other words, discourse and actions are not immediately observable at all, but interpreted conduct attributed to social actors, for instance in terms of meanings, intentions and goals. New developments in the cognitive and neurosciences have shown that such interpretations of conduct as social action are part of our ability to "read" other minds as a mirror of our own.

A detailed analysis of interaction has significantly contributed to our insights into discourse and language use. However, what is observably done or said is only the tip of the iceberg of a communicative event. Language users do not mindlessly participate in such events as if they were blank slates. They come with vast amounts of socioculturally shared knowledge, with

personal experiences, with plans, goals, opinions and emotions, all of which may influence what they say and how they say it. They not only interpret what is observably said or shown, but by "reading" the minds of interlocutors they are able to understand subtleties of text and talk far beyond the socially based implications or implicatures. Hence, eliminating the mind from talk-in-interaction necessarily under-analyzes the data at hand. And there are many other methods to study what is going on in discourse and communication than mere interaction analysis of "observable" talk.

Critical approaches to discourse have emphasized that the same is obviously true when we take participants as mere talkers and not as social actors that bring social identities, roles or power relations with them to the communicative event. The theory of context developed in this book agrees with this criticism of socially context-free interactionism. However, it stresses that social structure, properties of social situations and hence the social properties of participants do not objectively or causally influence text and talk, but that such influence is mediated by the subjective models of the participants. Even those scholars who reject cognitivist theorizing in terms of mental models will agree that social properties of situations and participants need to be analyzed only when they are ongoingly "made relevant" by the participants themselves.

The theory of context models accounts for the representations and processes involved in this "making relevant" of the cognitive and social properties of social situations. In this sense, the theory is not incompatible with the interactional approaches in much of the social sciences today. It integrates them by making explicit what is usually being taken for granted or formulated in vague descriptions. At the same time it extends current context-free approaches to text and talk by articulating a multidisciplinary framework that provides the much needed missing link between discourse, cognition and society.

In order to be able to do so, we have selectively explored *social psychology* and its studies of the structures of social episodes and situations, as well as the socially shared representations, such as knowledge and ideologies, that language users apply in the construction of their context models. One of the recurrent questions we'll try to answer in these literature reviews and the formation of new theory is which of the potentially vast number of properties of social situations are systematically construed as relevant for discourse. Indeed, why is the gender or status of participants often construed as *discursively* relevant and therefore indexed, and not their height or the color of their eyes, although the latter may be *socially* relevant.

Similarly, we also review the concept of situation in the history of *sociology* in order to highlight which insights remain relevant today in a sociologically based theory of context models. It is also here that we critically examine conversation analysis and its context-free tendencies in analyzing talk-in-interaction. At the same time, we need to account for the fact that participants model not only face-to-face "micro" situations, but also more complex, social "macro" structures, such as groups, organizations or abstract social structures such as social inequality. Such an analysis will need us to examine the well-known structure–agency relationship, for which again a sociocognitive model theory offers the missing interface.

Such a social theory of "local" situations and "global" social structures as modeled by language users during the production and understanding of text and talk also needs to account for the important cultural variations in the construction and uses of context models. What may be defined a relevant situational property in one society or subculture need not be so in another. Hence we need to examine the study of communicative events in the tradition of the ethnography of speaking and contemporary approaches in linguistic *anthropology* that have a long tradition of accounting for the specific cultural conditions of discourse.

Finally, after first analyses in *Discourse and Context,* this book continues the contextual study of the Iraq debate in the British House of Commons, and of Tony Blair's speech that opens this debate. We hope to show that a *critical analysis* of such political discourse must go beyond the usual accounts of grammatical, argumentative or rhetorical structures, among many others, and be based on an explicit theory of context that is able to relate such discourse to the political situation, as construed by the participants.

Obviously, a fully fledged review of all studies and developments in the social sciences that may contribute to the theory of context is far beyond the scope of a single book. But I hope that even our very selective discussion of some possible contributions of the social sciences may stimulate further research into the nature of context as the interface between language and discourse, on the one hand, and social situations, society, politics and culture on the other hand.

July, 2008

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1 Introduction

Towards a sociocognitive theory of context

In my book *Discourse and Context* it is shown that the concept of "context" is fundamental in the study of language, discourse and cognition. In the present volume my multidisciplinary theory of context is extended to include the social sciences: *social psychology*, *sociology* and *anthropology*. And at the end of the present book I apply the theory in the domain of *politics*, namely the Iraq debate in the British House of Commons, whose first speech, by Tony Blair, serves as example throughout both books.

In order to fully understand the broader, social scientific, framework of the general theory of context developed in the present monograph, it is useful to begin this chapter with a summary of the major results of *Discourse and Context.*[1]

The importance of context

It is generally agreed that in order to fully understand discourse we need to understand it in its "context." Yet, whereas linguistics, discourse studies, conversation analysis, psychology and the social sciences have for decades paid detailed attention to the properties of talk or text (Van Dijk, 1985, 1997), the contexts of language use have usually been ignored, taken for granted or studied as isolated "variables" of the social situation. It is therefore the main aim of this book – as well as of *Discourse and Context* (Van Dijk, 2008a) – to develop a multidisciplinary theory of context as a basis for the theory of discourse, interaction and communication.

The first problem we face in such a theory is that the notion of "context" is notoriously vague and ambiguous. First of all, as used in everyday,

[1] To avoid repetition of a vast number of references in this summarizing chapter, the reader is referred to *Discourse and Context* (Van Dijk, 2008a) for further references. Also for details about the linguistic, sociolinguistic and cognitive aspects of the theory of context, the reader is referred to that book. Although the present volume, as well as *Discourse and Context*, form one comprehensive investigation of context, both books are independent studies and can be read separately.

non-technical discourse, "context" often means geographical, historical or political "situation," "environment" or "background," for instance in the media or in such book titles as *Hunger in the African Context*.

In the study of language and discourse, the concept of "context" is ambiguous in the following way: On the one hand, it may refer to "verbal context," also called "co-text," such as preceding or following words, sentences, speech acts or turns within a discourse or conversation. Such use is typical in those approaches to language that do not take discourse or conversation as the primary unit of their analysis, as is the case, for instance, in much of traditional linguistics. In discourse-based approaches to language use and communication, such a "verbal context" is simply part of the sequential or global structures of text or talk itself.

On the other hand, the term "context" is used to refer to the "social situation" of language use in general, or to the specific situation of a given (fragment of) text or talk. This book is concerned only with this second meaning of the notion of "context": the non-verbal, social and situational aspects of communicative events.

Whereas such a social-situational concept of "context" may seem more or less unproblematic, such contexts are much harder to define and analyze than one would think. Thus, *Discourse and Context* began with the first fragment of a speech by Tony Blair in the British House of Commons in the debate about Iraq in March 2003, just before the beginning of the war in Iraq (I shall come back to that speech below). What exactly is the "context" of that fragment or of that speech? The whole Iraq debate in the Commons? British parliament? The debate about the war in Iraq in Britain? British foreign policy? The international political situation in 2003? No doubt knowledge of all these "contexts" may contribute to a better understanding of Blair's speech. No doubt knowledge by Blair of these different "contexts" may have influenced (the production of) his speech. And if we just take the smallest of these "contextual concentric circles," namely the current session of parliament, what do we include in that immediate context? Obviously, Tony Blair himself, as current speaker and as Prime Minister (and other relevant identities), the Speaker (president) of the House, the other MPs (and their various relevant social and political identities or memberships), and maybe the current spatiotemporal Setting: when and where the debate took place. But what about the further properties of the Setting? Also the benches in parliament? In most studies of language and discourse we usually do not include furniture as part of the context of speech (for instance because such situational or environmental properties do not systematically influence discourse), but then in the British House of Commons we speak of "backbenchers," so these benches and their placement may have a role after all. Next, the knowledge of the MPs needs to be taken into account – Blair does so when presupposing a

massive amount of knowledge about Iraq, wars, troops, dictators, and so on. What about the ideologies of the MPs? Most likely these also should be included, because they obviously play a role in the political stances MPs display in agreeing or disagreeing with Blair, or with armed intervention in Iraq. After all, not all MPs of the Labour Party are pacifists.

One may thus go on and ask the same question about many other properties of the setting, the participants, the political actions engaged in, as well as their social and political conditions and consequences. In a more or less loose sense all this may be taken as the "context" of Blair's speech. Many of these situational characteristics may influence both Blair and his audience, that is, both the production and the understanding of his speech. If such properties have an influence on the speaker, this will often become manifest in talk itself, as we shall see in more detail below. However, such influence may well exist but remain implicit in the discourse, and hence it may not be noticeable to the analyst, although it may very well be noticed by the recipients and how they understand what Blair says. Indeed, because of some contextual influence (say a phone call from US President George W. Bush) Tony Blair may decide *not* to talk on specific topics, and as analysts we may have no idea about such an obvious form of relevant political influence on Blair's speech.

On the other hand, there may be personal, social and political influences that do influence Blair's speech, but he may not currently be aware of them, such as his class and regional background and their influence on his pronunciation or other aspects of discursive variation and style – easily detectable by his recipients and sociolinguistic observers alike.

In sum, contexts classically defined as "the relevant environment of language use" may feature many types of properties of social situations, at various levels, which may influence the production, the structures and the comprehension of discourse, whether or not the participants are always aware of them, or we as analysts are able to observe or detect them.

The definition (delimitation) of "context"

From these brief comments on the example of Tony Blair's speech it becomes obvious that in order to develop a more or less explicit theory we need to define (delimit) the notion of "context," lest the theory becomes a Theory of Everything. This is also why so far there have been so few explicit studies, and no monographs, on this specific notion of context. The term "context" is being used in the titles and contents of many thousands of books and articles in the social sciences when referring to different kinds of conditions of some focal event or phenomenon. Also in studies of language and discourse it is either taken for granted, or taken into account in a more or less commonsense way, namely as those properties of the communicative situation that have an

influence on discourse production and comprehension. In that more restricted sense, context is a selection of the discursively *relevant* properties of the communicative situation. Thus, that Tony Blair is Prime Minister and that some MPs are members of the Conservative Party would typically be relevant for at least some parts of his speech and its understanding.

On the other hand, whereas political group membership will typically be relevant for most of the parliamentary debate, the color of a participant's shirt or skirt is hardly a relevant part of the communicative context, in the sense that it would control the selection and variation of, for instance, topics, lexicon, syntax or pronouns. That is, usually our clothes are seldom *discursively* relevant, although they may often be *socially* relevant, for instance in order to "flag" aspects of our current social identity ("doing feminine"), or to adapt (as does our discourse) to formal vs. informal social events. Politicians are very conscious about their "image" and no doubt their clothes (ties, etc.) are consciously selected and adapted to the occasion in which politicians are going to speak. This also suggests that besides discourse there are other (semiotic) aspects of interaction and communication that may have their own contextual constraints. These, however, shall not be the main focus in this book.

Thus, as a first step, we limit the concept of "context" to those properties of the *communicative* situation that are *relevant* for discourse, and we further stipulate that this is so either for speakers, and hence for the *production* of discourse, and/or for recipients, and hence for the *understanding* of discourse.

The second step is crucial and forms the basis of the theory of this book. I have shown in *Discourse and Context*, and shall further detail in this book, that *contexts – defined as the relevant properties of social situations – do not influence discourse at all*. There is no *direct* relationship between aspects of the social situation (such as Blair's role as Prime Minister, etc.) and discourse. This is a widespread determinist fallacy, also prevalent in sociolinguistics when it assumes that gender, race, age or status influence the way we speak. *There is no such direct influence, simply because* ***social*** *properties of the situation are not directly involved in the* ***cognitive*** *processes of discourse production and understanding*. These are phenomena of a different kind, of different levels of analysis and description. Only cognitive phenomena can directly influence cognitive processes. Moreover, if such a direct influence between social situations and discourse were to exist, all people in the same social situation would probably speak in the same way, which they obviously don't. Whatever the social influence of the "context," there are always (also) personal differences: each discourse is always unique.

How then do we relate social situations and discourse? How do we account for the uniqueness and the personal variation of text and talk? How do we escape the determinism of social or political forces, but at the same time

combine the undoubted influence of social and political conditions on Blair's speech with the fact that this *specific* speech is personal and unique?

To answer these and other questions, I have taken a rather obvious theoretical decision: contexts are not "objective," but "subjective." They are not a relevant selection of "objective" social properties of the situation, but a *subjective definition* of such a situation. This is perfectly compatible with the notion of *relevance*, because this notion is also inherently *relative*: something is (ir)relevant *for* someone. In other words, *a context is what is defined to be relevant in the social situation by the participants themselves*.

This is exactly how we want to have it. Undoubtedly, in the parliamentary debate his current identity of Prime Minister is relevant to Tony Blair as well as to his recipients, and such a situational property will hence be part of their "definition of the situation." Most likely, this is also the case for his being British, and maybe even, at least for some recipients, that he is male. Once such dimensions of the social situation become part of the context-as-defined they may influence the way people act, speak or understand. In this book, I shall examine in detail how participants engage in such *definitions of the situation* – a notion well known in the history of phenomenological sociology – as the crucial mediating interface between a society and situations, on the one hand, and discourse production and comprehension, on the other hand.

The fundamental theoretical and empirical advantage of this approach is that participants' subjective "definitions of the situation" are *cognitive* objects, for instance a mental representation. It is *this* representation, and *not* the "objective" social situation, that influences the cognitive process of discourse production and comprehension. That is, traditional conceptions of context fail to account for a crucial missing link: the way participants *understand* and *represent* the social situation. We shall see in this book that non-mentalist or even antimentalist conceptions of interaction, discourse and context remain dominant in the social sciences to the present day. On the other hand, that social situations are able to influence discourse only indirectly, namely through their subjective interpretations of the participants, is trivial for most psychologists and cognitive scientists as it was for phenomenological sociologists, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

Mental models

If contexts are subjective definitions, we still need to be more specific as to the nature of such mental representations. Fortunately, since the 1980s we have had a powerful theoretical notion in psychology that meets the requirement of such a concept, namely that of a *mental model* (Johnson-Laird, 1983; called "situation model" by Van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983).

A model is a subjective representation of an episode, and as such it is stored in episodic memory (part of long-term memory) where people's autobiographical personal experiences are accumulated. Living an experience or being aware of a situation means that we are construing or updating a mental model of such an episode.

Since there are many scholarly notions of model, mental models as subjective representations of *specific* episodes should not be confused with the notion of a "cultural model" as a form of *general*, socially shared knowledge, for instance as it is used in cognitive anthropology (Holland and Quinn, 1987; Shore, 1996).

Subjective mental models of episodes account for the fact that people form their own personal representations of an event, with their own perspective, interests, evaluation, emotions, and other elements based on their unique personal history or their current subjective experience. This is not only – pragmatically – true for the communicative situations in which people are ongoingly participating, but also – semantically – for the events they observe and talk *about*. This explains why people (e.g., journalists, witnesses in court) who participated in, or witnessed, the "same" event, each produce a different "version" of the event. In other words, *models subjectively represent or construct situations, both those we talk* ***about*** *as well as those* ***in which*** *we talk*.

It is important to stress that even unique, subjective models of specific events are not *entirely* personal. They also have important *social*, *intersubjective* dimensions. Because of earlier interaction and communication, and more generally due to their socialization, language users have acquired various kinds of shared *knowledge and other beliefs*. After generalization and abstraction, such shared *general* and *social* beliefs influence the construction of new models whose intersubjective dimensions enable interaction and mutual understanding in the first place. This link between personal and social cognition in model building and language use is crucial, also, in order to reject the common misrepresentation that a cognitive approach to discourse and context implies individualist reductionism in a theory of discourse. Hence, models constitute the unique interface that combines the personal and the unique, on the one hand, with the social and the shared, on the other hand. And what is true for mental models is also true for the discourses that are controlled by them: both are unique and personal, as well as social and intersubjective.

Context models

This notion of mental model perfectly fits the requirements of the theory of context: contexts are also mental models. They are subjective, they represent personal experiences, namely the experience of the current communicative

episode, and they also feature instantiations of sociocultural knowledge we share about social and communicative situations and their participants. Models are the mental representations we call the *definition of the situation*. I call such mental models of communicative episodes *context models*, or simply *contexts*.

It is within the framework of such a sociocognitive model theory that we are now able to confirm that *contexts are not some (part of a) social situation, but a subjective mental model of such a situation*. It is this context model that plays a central role in the mental processes involved in the production and reception of discourse. Models explain why discourses in the "same" social situation not only show similarities based on shared sociocultural knowledge, but also are personal and unique. For each communicative situation, participant models precisely define what of the situation is now *relevant* for each participant. Thus, context models are the missing link between situational and social structures, on the one hand, and discourse structures and their production and understanding, on the other hand. If we find that traditional social "variables" such as class, gender, ethnicity or age influence language use this takes place (and hence should be analyzed) by means of their – more or less conscious, and more or less subjective – representation of social identities in context models.

The crucial function of context models is to produce discourse in such a way that it is optimally *appropriate* in the social situation. This also means that this theory of context provides the basis for an *empirical pragmatics* of discourse (Van Dijk, 1981), accounting for the way discourse adapts its structures to communicative situations. At the same time the theory accounts for the conditions of discourse variation, that is, for discourse style defined as the variable and unique way text and talk adapt to its context.

Context models must be designed so as to be able to fulfill this important function in a reliable way, dozens or hundreds of times a day. This means, first of all, that they cannot be too complex, because otherwise they are too unwieldy in the daily task of ongoing discourse monitoring. A definition of the situation with hundreds of categories, each with their variable contents, would hardly be a viable context model. So, context models, like other mental models, consist of a relatively small number of relevant schematic categories, such as spatiotemporal Setting, the ongoing social Activity, Participants in different roles and mutual relationships, as well as the goals, intentions and the knowledge of the participants. Such context model *schemas* need to be applicable to the majority of routine interaction and communication situations in our everyday lives, but may be adapted to new situations – for instance when Tony Blair had to address the Commons for the first time at the beginning of his parliamentary career.

Members of a culture learn from their parents, caregivers, peers, teachers, the mass media and the internet how to understand the world they live in. In the same way, they learn, informally as well as by explicit instruction, how to understand communicative situations, and how such "definitions" influence how to speak. For instance, what pronouns of address or politeness formulas to use when speaking to whom, what style to use when writing an official letter, giving a public address, or when telling a story to friends, among a host of other communicative practices or "genres."

Cultural members thus learn that categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, status, kinship, intimacy or power are often relevant for the appropriate production or understanding of text or talk – more often so than, for instance, hair color, height, ear size or shirt color of the participants, the material of the wall in a communicative setting, the presence of trees or whether a bird is flying overhead, among a vast number of other, socially possibly relevant but communicatively less relevant or irrelevant, aspects of social situation in which people communicate.

Crucial for interaction and discourse is not only that people form mental models of the communicative situation, but that as part of these models they also represent the other participants and the relevant parts of *their* models. That is, context models embody naïve theories of Other Minds. They need to be partly mutual and feature the Common Ground of relevant sociocultural, situational and interpersonal *knowledge*, as well as other relevant beliefs, such as the ideologies of the recipients – as is obviously the case for Tony Blair in the House of Commons.

Fundamental for such mutual understanding is also that the language users understand each other's *intentions* – and thus are able to infer from observed conduct what the others are "doing," thus making their conduct meaningful. We need to know what our co-participants want to obtain with their ongoing talk and other actions, and thus need to make strategic, practical hypotheses about their goals.

In sum, discourse and interaction presuppose that language users have learned how to build situationally relevant context models that are mutually tuned to each other. It is only in this way that language users are able to express their knowledge and opinions about their experiences, and also know how to do so appropriately by adapting their talk and their non-verbal conduct (gestures, body position, etc.) to the (assumed) knowledge, interests, intentions, goals and social properties of the recipients.

As representations of communicative experiences, context models are not static, but *dynamic*. They ongoingly adapt themselves to (perceived, interpreted) changes in the communicative situation, primarily those changes that are due to what has been said before – if only the knowledge inferred from previous talk – and of course the inherent change of time: All that precedes

each *Now* of the dynamic context model is defined as the Past (and the Known), and each following moment as the Future (and the partly still Unknown).

Dynamic context models as ongoing communicative experiences are mentally *discrete* – and hence define different discourses – by a *change* of time, place, participants, participant roles, goals and/or intentions/actions. We thus practically distinguish between a conversation with a friend, and the following consultation with a doctor, or giving a lecture or reading the newspaper, among a vast number of other daily discourse practices. Note though that our everyday experience is a continuous *durée*, between the moment we wake up until we fall asleep or lose consciousness. Models of everyday experience divide this stream of consciousness into separate, meaningful episodes that we may plan in advance and remember as such afterwards. The same is true for context models, which only differ from other models of experience because the focal event is a communicative action.

Context models are not construed from scratch at each moment we interact with others. First of all, we already have culturally acquired their conventional, schematic structures. Secondly, also, their contents are largely derived from sociocultural knowledge. Tony Blair already knows a lot about parliament, political parties, MPs, and speeches, when he starts to address parliament. All this general cultural and more specific social group knowledge will be used to design context models as far ahead as necessary. Obviously, Tony Blair did not improvise this crucial speech on the spur of the moment in parliament, but planned it, that is, designed a provisional, fragmentary context model for it. Depending on the situation, context models are partly prefabricated and new relevant information about the context will be added ongoingly to construe each fragment of the dynamic model – most typically the knowledge of what has just been said and done by the other participants. Again we see that contexts uniquely combine old and new information, social and personal knowledge, expected and unexpected moments, planned and spontaneous dimensions – and it is thus that it also influences talk and text.

The converse is also true. If we say that discourse influences the social situation, for instance the relations between the participants, then this is only true indirectly, that is, through the context models of the recipients. In the same way speakers model the mind of the recipients, the latter ongoingly model the mind (intentions, goals, knowledge, opinions, ideologies, etc.) of the speaker. They do so by strategic understanding and inferences from previous and current talk and other conduct, as well as from previous knowledge of the speaker or similar communicative situations and more general sociocultural knowledge.

It is in this way that communicative interaction is controlled by the mutually tuned context models of the participants, which on the one hand

adapt text and talk to the recipients (and their models) as well as other aspects of the communicative situation, and on the other hand shape the relevant understandings of the recipients – which in turn condition the next actions of recipients as next speakers.

From this sociocognitive approach to discourse we must conclude that the usual account of conversation and interaction analysis – according to which turns at talk influence next turns – is a theoretical shortcut ignoring the mental interface of participants' semantic and pragmatic mental models. There is no such "objective" influence among turns in a sequence, but only an indirect relationship based on the subjective mental models of recipients as next speakers. If speakers adapt what they say and do to what they expect recipients will think, do and say next, as we know from the principles of "recipient design," then such design should be made explicit as part of the context model of speakers. We shall see later in this book how many aspects of social accounts of talk-in-interaction have crucial but ignored cognitive interfaces.

Context models of recipients are based not only on shared sociocultural knowledge (about language and interaction) but also on ad hoc situational, personal properties of participants, such as goals, interests, beliefs and inferences. This means that they account not only for the very possibility of social interaction, but also for misunderstandings and other "problems," and how these are dealt with ongoingly. Similarly, each false start, repair or other typical aspect of spontaneous talk thus signals – and should also be accounted for – in terms of fast changes of context models and the ways these control actual talk. In short, nothing is being said, done and understood without previous and parallel mental control in terms of the current "state" of the dynamic models of the ongoing communicative situation.

This is, in short, the theory that will be presupposed in the rest of this book, and that needs to be complemented by social psychological, sociological and anthropological accounts of contexts and their dimensions.

An example: Tony Blair's Iraq speech in the UK parliament

Discourse and Context started with the following fragment of a speech made by Tony Blair in the UK House of Commons on March 18, 2003:

1. At the outset, I say that it is right that the House debate this issue and
2. pass judgment. That is the democracy that is our right, but that others
3. struggle for in vain. Again, I say that I do not disrespect the views in
4. opposition to mine. This is a tough choice indeed, but it is also a stark
5. one: to stand British troops down now and turn back, or to hold firm to
6. the course that we have set. I believe passionately that we must hold
7. firm to that course. The question most often posed is not "Why does it

8. matter?" but "Why does it matter so much?" Here we are, the
9. Government, with their most serious test, their majority at risk, the
10. first Cabinet resignation over an issue of policy, the main parties
11. internally divided, people who agree on everything else?
12. [Hon. Members: "The main parties?"]
13. Ah, yes, of course. The Liberal Democrats – unified, as ever, in
14. opportunism and error.
15. [Interruption.]

Unfortunately, we only have the very imprecise official transcript as printed in Hansard, which means that any false starts, hesitations, pauses, speed, intonation and stress variation, etc. are not transcribed, thus losing much of the actual performance of the speech, as is partly even the case in detailed, professional transcripts.

Below and in the next chapters we shall regularly refer to this fragment to illustrate theoretical notions. In the final chapter we'll then analyze the rest of the debate. Relevant here is that in *Discourse and Context* it was shown that a fully fledged, adequate account of this speech fragment involves not only detailed syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and interactional analyses, but also a *contextual* analysis that describes how, and explains why, this speech and its local structures and moves are *politically* appropriate in the communicative situation of the parliamentary debate. For instance, that what some MPs say in line 12 is not only interactionally an interruption and the first part of an adjacency pair, and pragmatically a question, and not only socially a move of criticism, but also, politically, a move of opposition.

Without such a broader, richer analysis of talk-in-interaction, we would miss the very point of speeches and other verbal interactions in parliament. Without such an account, we are also unable to fully describe and explain Tony Blair's reaction in line 13, namely not only as a reply to a question, as a response to a critical interruption, as an apparent admission of an error or even, rhetorically as "doing irony," at various levels of interactional analysis, but ultimately and most crucially also as a *political move* of Blair, as the leader of the Labour Party and as head of the government, attacking and marginalizing the Liberal Democrats for opposing his policy to send troops to Iraq.

An explicit theory of context defined as mental models adds a fundamental dimension to our accounts of text and talk, ignored even in sophisticated formal approaches of discourse and conversation analyses. Whereas in the last decades discourse and conversation analysts have argued for, and effectively accomplished, the extension of formal sentence grammars to empirically more adequate accounts of language use in terms of the complex structures of text and talk, we should now take seriously the oft repeated claim that such discourse is also *situated*. Without accounting for the many ways Tony Blair's speech is at the same time politically relevant in the

current debate, we have done only half the job of situated discourse and conversation analysis. It is such an account that also explains why Blair states that he does not "disrespect the views in opposition" to him and to "hold firm" to the course "we" have set, obvious moves of positive self-presentation, among others, according to a socially relevant interactional account. Especially relevant in this situation is that such expressions are *political* moves of the democratic leader who respects opposition, and the strong and responsible leader who knows what policy is best for the country, among other political functions of such expressions.

Context in systemic-functional linguistics

Within the general theory of context one of the partial theories we need is a linguistic theory accounting for the ways language use and its variation is being controlled by context. One of the linguistic theories that paid much attention to the theory of context is systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), as developed by Michael Halliday and his followers. *Discourse and Context* (Van Dijk, 2008a) first of all presents a critical account of the way SFL deals with context, precisely because such a theory of context has been very influential for decades not only in SFL itself, but also in other fields of linguistics and discourse studies, such as critical discourse analysis (CDA).

SFL relates grammatical structures to three dimensions of context, called Field, Tenor and Mode. Field is defined in terms of ongoing activity or topic, Tenor in terms of interaction, and Mode in terms of textuality. Although these notions have been used in many SF studies, and there has been much research on the relation between grammar and context in the SF paradigm, I showed that the SFL concept of context is inadequate, while much too vague and confused, and without a systematic and explicit analysis of the relevant structures of communicative situations.

Related to this failure to explicitly account for context, and hence for register, genre, language variation and other ways language use is related to communicative situations, is the problem that SF grammar was originally a sentence (or rather clause) grammar, so that text and discourse structures are not well integrated in them. For instance, as is the case for many contemporary grammars, SF grammar does not have overall semantic structures, and hence cannot account for such fundamental discourse notions as topics and global coherence. Similarly, it does not account for sequential coherence in terms of intensional (meaning) between propositions or extensional (referential) relations between the states of affairs (events, facts) denoted by such propositions, but rather in terms of surface structure manifestations (cohesion) of such underlying coherence, for instance by pronouns. SF grammars

initially also did not integrate notions such as actions or speech acts, and so they did not have a pragmatic component – despite their aim to account for the role of grammar in interaction, communication and semiosis. And finally, SFL was developed in the tradition of British empiricism, exemplified especially by Malinowski and Firth, and consequently rejected any form of mentalism and hence cognitive accounts of discourse. This also means that notions such as knowledge, and hence the basics of shared knowledge and "Common Ground" that are crucial in context and the definition of presupposition, coherence and much of semantics, cannot be defined in the SF framework. In other words, despite its functional and social semiotic aims, SFL not only fails to provide an explicit theory of the relevant properties of communicative situations, but also as a theory of language use it does not offer the necessary levels and structures of discourse needed to be related to such communicative situations – as we briefly showed above for the interruption in Tony Blair's speech. Yet, unlike many other linguistic approaches, SFL has always insisted on the need for an account of linguistic (clause) structures and their choice and variation in terms of the relevant parameters of the situational context.

Pragmatics

One of the fields of linguistics and discourse studies that has most systematically studied the relations between context and language is pragmatics. Hardly a well-integrated field of research (the Israeli philosopher Yehoshua Bar-Hillel called it the "wastepaper basket" of linguistics), pragmatics deals with language *use* and *action* rather than with formal grammar or abstract discourse structures. But whereas this is also true for psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and conversation analysis, among other directions of research into language use (see below), pragmatics rather focuses on more philosophical issues. Thus, it has become the common label for studies as diverse as the analysis of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), conversational maxims (Grice, 1989), politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987), presuppositions and indexicals (Stalnaker, 1999), among many other approaches.

Thus, the study of *speech acts* focused on the "action" dimension of utterances, thus going beyond the study of syntactic form and semantic meaning by adding "illocutionary meaning." Utterances, when made in *specific situations*, are thus defined not merely as expressions of sentences or propositions but also as social acts such as assertions, promises or threats. For instance, in his speech Tony Blair makes various assertions, poses a (rhetorical) question, and at the end some MPs interrupt him to ask a question. A pragmatic account of discourse makes explicit how and why such speech acts are *appropriate* in the current situation, and hence in principle may contribute

to a more general theory of the contextual appropriateness of discourse and its structures.

According to philosophical speech act theory, for speech acts to be appropriate they need to satisfy a number of conditions, formulated in terms of the knowledge, wishes or goals of the participants. For instance, in order to promise appropriately, the Speaker needs to intend to do something in the future that is in the interest of the Hearer.

Such conditions are formulated as abstract rules of appropriateness, based on our linguistic and interactional knowledge and intuitions, and were initially not derived from empirical social and cognitive research into what are actually appropriate speech acts in real situations. Also, as was the case for traditional sentence grammars, the rules of appropriateness for speech acts were usually limited to one-sentence utterances, and hence ignored the pragmatic structures of discourse locally defined as sequences of speech acts and globally in terms of macro (speech) acts, as would be the case for the global (speech or communicative) act accomplished by the whole speech of Tony Blair.

Important for the theory of context, however, is that in speech act theory for the first time *situational conditions* enter the systematic description of language use, such as the intention, knowledge and social position of the participants. For Tony Blair to be able to present a motion in parliament he should be an MP and/or member of government. Hence, although initial studies on speech acts were rather formal and philosophical, the focus on utterances as (social) acts and their situational conditions was an important step in the direction of a broader concept of language use.

The philosophical approach of Grice to conversation added further dimensions to the study of language use by introducing the notion of *implicature*. Whereas traditional approaches in semantics, philosophy and logic were limited to an analysis of semantic implications (or entailments) of sentences, implicatures are less strict inferences based on contextual conditions. Thus, when Tony Blair says in his Iraq speech that "it is right that the House debate this issue and pass judgment" such a statement may be *politically* interpreted to implicate that he is a democratic Prime Minister. That such an inference is correct is confirmed when he then says: "That is the democracy that is our right" and by the statement "I do not disrespect the views in opposition to mine." In order to be able to make such inferences, language users need not only knowledge of the world or the issue at hand (war, troops, Iraq), but also more specific knowledge about democracy, politics, the House of Commons and Tony Blair. This is also why such implicatures may also be called "contextual meanings" of discourses.

Grice also formulated what he called *maxims* as principles of conversation and cooperation, such as telling the truth, saying no more and no less than

necessary, being relevant and being clear. Most of these norms pertain to text and talk itself (such as avoiding ambiguity or speaking relevantly – and hence coherently), but again with a strong *contextual* dimension of speaking *appropriately*. Indeed, there are no formal linguistic or discourse *rules* that require utterances to be truthful, or not to engage in lengthy, irrelevant digressions. That is, these are rather *social norms* of interaction – following them makes it easier for the addressees to understand what the speaker is saying, to avoid getting bored by digressions, and to know what the speaker's intentions are. Again, although such an approach was initially more philosophical than based on the detailed empirical study of actual talk, it contributed to further, normative, accounts of the appropriateness of discourse. At the same time, this philosophical approach articulated some relations between normative social appropriateness (e.g., to speak the truth), on the one hand, and more psychological aspects of appropriateness and acceptability (such as being clear and relevant), on the other hand.

Another prominent pragmatic topic dealing with contextual aspects of language use is the analysis of politeness and deference. Speakers adapt the style of their utterances to the perceived social position (status, age, etc.) of the addressees as well as to the social relationship (friendship, familiarity, power, etc.) between themselves and the recipients. They may do so by choosing different pronouns of address (*vous* vs. *tu*, in French), using various combinations of title, first name and last name (like *Mary* vs. *Ms. Jones* vs. *Dr. Jones*), many different kinds of (modal and other) expressions to request something ("Bring me the book back tomorrow" vs. "Would you mind returning the book tomorrow?", etc.), special politeness morphology in many languages (such as Japanese), but also by not starting a conversation with its intended main topic, but rather with some polite "small talk," and so on.

After Goffman (1956), Brown and Levinson (1987) analyzed various forms of politeness in terms of what they call the positive or negative "face" (or public image) of the participants – a general strategy not to impose oneself on the addressee, not to say or imply negative things but on the contrary to establish a positive relationship. Although again such a study may focus on the linguistic forms of politeness or deference, the general conditions are contextual: face is a social property of the participants, and the strategy is an interactional one.

Obviously, there is considerable cultural variation in the use of such forms of deference and politeness. Also within societies there are vast differences in politeness (e.g., among adolescents or among the elderly, or in formal vs. informal situations, between people who know each other or are strangers, and especially when there is a difference of social position between the participants). In the speech by Tony Blair we see that he engages in various forms of paying respect to parliament, e.g., by emphasizing that it is

parliament that must pass judgment, and that Blair does not disrespect views in opposition to his.

Note again, though, that besides the social conditions of politeness usually accounted for in pragmatics, such expressions in Blair's speech and within this parliamentary debate also have crucial *political implicatures*, for instance as part of Blair's strategy of positive self-presentation as a democratic leader, which is part of his overall strategy to persuade parliament to vote for his motion. This means that a theory of context must also go beyond the standard pragmatics of politeness (for instance in terms of "face") and formulate the precise conditions under which such political implicatures are relevant in the communicative situation. A theory of context as mental models of participants offers such a broader account of discourse and its contextual implicatures, describing and explaining how, in this case, the MPs will interpret Blair's apparent politeness moves.

Knowledge and context

Besides these more interactional and cultural approaches to pragmatics, there are directions of research, especially in formal linguistics and philosophy (Kamp and Reyle, 1993), that study (abstract) contextual conditions in order to be able to formulate a more explicit semantics (Stalnaker, 1999). The basic idea here is that "meaning depends on context," and the overall definition of context is formulated in terms of the shared knowledge of the participants (a set of propositions) (Stalnaker, 1999: 98). Thus, a *presupposition* is a proposition implied by a sentence and is part of the context defined as shared knowledge. Thus, in his speech Blair presupposes that the MPs know what *the House* refers to, that there are views in opposition to his own, that deciding to go to war is a tough choice (which he confirms with *indeed*), etc.

Whereas these formal approaches deal with abstract definitions of knowledge and contexts, the notion of Common Ground has been given a much more psychological definition in psycholinguistics by Clark (1996). The study of *relevance* combines these formal and cognitive approaches, and also identifies context in terms of a set of (known) propositions (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). In the fragment of Blair's speech there is of course a vast amount of shared political knowledge that the MPs must have so as to understand what Blair is saying and implying, knowledge about parliament and what parliament decides, about the fact that democracy is not universal (and specifically not in Iraq), what a government is, that it has ministers, and so on.

Again, many of the more philosophical approaches are not based on systematic studies of actual language use, and tend to use invented examples as in formal linguistics. However, they try to capture fundamental dimensions

of context, such as shared knowledge and the incremental nature of knowledge change in discourse. They are thus able to provide a more explicit account of such important phenomena of meaning as presuppositions and indexical expressions or the conditions of speech acts.

Sociolinguistics and social discourse analysis

Whereas much of pragmatics, at least initially, had a more abstract, philosophical or logical orientation, and then focused more on interaction and conversation, sociolinguistics has always had a more empirical basis. Again, the focus here is on language use, and not on social situations or contexts per se, but the main idea is that specific aspects of language use, such as pronunciation and lexical choice, *vary* as a function of independent social variables such as the class, age, gender, ethnicity or origin of the language users (Labov, 1972a, 1972b). Thus, no doubt a recording of Blair's speech would show how his pronunciation identifies him as a member of a specific region or social class, or maybe even as a member of a community or group such as politicians or parliamentarians, for instance as signaled by such expressions as "my honourable friend."

We see that *contexts* are defined here in terms of specific categories of speakers and as members of different speech communities. However, sociolinguistics largely took such social categories for granted, without much further *social* analysis, and did not systematically examine the much more complex nature of communicative situations. Although dealing with contextual influence as defined in terms of social group membership of speakers, the crucial difference with the theory of context presented in this book is that first of all such social "variables" were considered objective properties of communicative situations, and secondly that they were assumed to have a direct impact on language use and variation, whereas in a mental model theory of context such social categories are subjective and their relationship to language use mediated by participant representations. That is, unlike more deterministic and probabilistic sociolinguistic accounts of language variation, the theory of context developed in this book crucially construes social group membership and identities of language users in terms of how they ongoingly and variably construe themselves in their subjective experiences, that is, in their mental models. In that sense our approach contributes to a more explicit, sociocognitive, foundation of the current constructionist perspective in the humanities and social sciences, and hence also to a new orientation in sociolinguistics itself.

Moreover, traditional sociolinguistics limited the study of language variation to local and superficial aspects of language use such as phonological, morphological, lexical and (some) syntactic variation of words and

sentences, instead of paying attention to the many other levels and dimensions of text and talk that may vary with context. Thus, the style of Tony Blair, as adapted to the formal situation of a parliamentary session, is not limited to his more formal pronunciation or the use of lexical items such as "pass judgment" or doubly negated expressions such as "I do not disrespect . . . " but is exhibited also in the carefully constructed argument, the persuasive rhetoric, and other typical properties of (prepared) parliamentary speeches – as different from a spontaneous conversation on the same topic (UK intervention in Iraq) among friends. Some of these dimensions of context-controlled discourse variation have been extensively reviewed in *Discourse and Context*.

Many discourse studies in sociolinguistics examine the role of *gender*, and in general do so within the broader framework of (feminist) gender studies. Whereas the first of these studies focused on the consequences of the dominated position of women for their language use (such as the use of hedges) (Lakoff, 1975), another influential perspective of research defined gender differences in conversation especially in terms of the assumed cultural differences between men and women, given their different personal experiences in everyday life (Tannen, 1990, 1994).

Today, most work on gender and discourse emphasizes the broader situational or contextual dimension of language use and variation (of a vast number of studies, see, e.g., Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003; Wodak, 1997). Gender generalizations tend to be avoided because there may be more differences between upper and lower class women than between middle class women and middle class men, or women and men of a specific profession, or those belonging to the same community of practice. This means that instead of isolated "social variables" and broad generalizations, much current work on gender tends to focus on more complex context structures, and the interdependence of context dimensions. It is precisely for this reason that sociolinguistics also needs a more sophisticated context theory, and a theory of how contexts influence text and talk – and its variations.

Other social conditions of discourse studied are age groups, for instance studies of adolescents (e.g., Eckert, 2000), and ethnicity, for instance in my own work on racism and discourse (Van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993a, 2005b; Wodak and Van Dijk, 2000), or intercultural communication (among hundreds of books, see, e.g., Carbaugh, 2005; Cheng, 2003; Gudykunst, 2003, 2005). In Blair's speech there are undoubtedly formulations that are quite prototypical of parliament, MPs, and hence for a specific sociopolitical *domain* and profession: "Here, we are, the government . . . " In this book we shall come back to cultural differences of discourse in Chapter 4.

On variation

It is important to stress that contextual influence on discourse only affects those properties that in principle can *vary* in the first place. Trivially, no context condition will affect many grammatical structures, such as the order of article–noun phrases in English, except maybe in some forms of poetry, advertising or language disorders. But, on many other levels, discourse variation is rife, for instance in the choice of topics, in turn taking and interruptions, lexical choice, intonation, metaphors, greetings and politeness, and so on, for all levels of text and talk. The theoretical problem is that such variation usually presupposes that something is held constant. Thus, we have different (regional or class-based) pronunciations of the "same" vowel or the "same" word, or syntactic or lexical variation of the "same" meaning, and so on. But not all levels of discourse have such more general, or abstract, underlying levels or units. Indeed, topics of discourse may vary, but what in that case is held constant, what remains "the same"? The same for speech acts or turn taking.

We have resolved this important theoretical dilemma by having recourse again to mental model theory. Discourses may vary contextually if their "underlying" event models remain the same – or in more traditional formulation if they say "the same thing" in other words (or a different intonation, etc.). And at the same time such variation is functional in some communicative situations, and not free or arbitrary, if for any participant each variant is associated with a different context model. For instance, the choice of second person pronouns *tu* vs. *vous* in French conversation is a functional variant (for a participant) if it is based on different context models, e.g., involving different social relations between the participants *as construed by the participants*.

Style, register and genre

Discourse variation also is related to the vast field of the study of *style*, *register and genre*, which also needs an explicit contextual basis. One concept of style (there are many!), for instance in sociolinguistics, is traditionally defined as specific variations of expressions with more or less the same meaning. Such variation is usually explained in terms of contextual conditions, such as the type of situation (formal vs. informal), type of genre or social practice (a parliamentary debate vs. a discussion in a conversation), the current role or the personality of the speaker or writer, and in general to mark the uniqueness, originality, or the contextual appropriateness of the utterance or the speaker. We already saw that throughout his speech Blair maintains a very formal style, quite different from what he would say to friends in the pub, as we see in his choice of such more formal lexical items as *pass judgment*, *disrespect*, *stark*, etc. (for detail, see, e.g., Eckert and Rickford, 2001).

Although often overlapping (and hence confused) with related notions, such as style, text type or genre, *register* is also typically defined in terms of context-based linguistic variation. However, in this case, the variation is typically accounted for in terms of the grammatical aspects of genres. For instance, stories typically have more imperfect past tenses because they are about past events (which is a semantic condition of the genre), and conversations have more second person pronouns (like *you*) than scholarly or news articles because speakers in conversations typically address recipients directly, whereas this is less common in scholarly articles and quite rare in news reports (which are pragmatic, context-based conditions of the genre). A register, then, is a cluster of such grammatical properties, typically (but not exclusively) associated with a natural discourse genre, such as an everyday conversational story, a scholarly article, or indeed a parliamentary speech like that of Tony Blair. Note though that such clusters are defined only in formal (grammatical, linguistic) terms, and hence may also define patterns that, at present, do not correspond to any known genre (for detail, see Biber and Finegan, 1994).

We see that notions of style and register tend to be associated with context, and they typically do so through *genres*, such as a news report in the press, or a speech in parliament (see, e.g., Bhatia, 1993). Unlike traditional approaches to genres that tend to focus on formal characteristics, contemporary approaches emphasize a more contextual approach. Indeed, what defines the parliamentary debate is not so much its topics (which can be debated anywhere), its rhetoric, its arguments and fallacies, or its formal style – with the exception of a few ritual formulas – but rather that this is a discourse taking place in parliament, among MPs, and as part of the political process, and so on, that is, contextual aspects of the communicative situation. A broad theory of genre, thus, has a contextual basis, defining genres as types of communicative or discursive practices in specific communicative situations, prototypically (but seldom exclusively) associated with some global meaning aspects (preferred or typical topics) and formal aspects (a preferred register).

Contextual analysis

We have seen above that Tony Blair's speech may be analyzed at many levels and from many perspectives. We also have seen that much of its interpretation depends on the knowledge of the participants, that is, on one crucial dimension of the context. This is not only the case for the meanings of expressions, but also for their specific reference: "the House" means "the House of Commons," and refers to the current British House of Commons. The same is true for spelling out the many semantic presuppositions and implications of this fragment. Thus, if Blair says "democracy (. . .) that others struggle for in vain"

this implies and presupposes that other nations do not have democracy. And we need knowledge of politics to understand that if he says that the "majority is at risk" this may imply that the government may fall. In sum, to be able to make explicit the relevant meanings, referents, implications and implicatures of this fragment, we need much general political knowledge as well as knowledge about the current situation in the UK, the imminent war in Iraq, the national debate on this war, the Labour minister who resigned, and so on.

There is one specific aspect of such contextual analyses that deserves special attention, also because it is in this fragment the only – explicitly – interactional property: the interruption in line 12, and Blair's response to it. Let us summarize a possibly very complex analysis by some major points in order to emphasize again that, also in the analysis of institutional conversation, one needs a contextual approach to interaction in order to understand what is going on:

a. Without being invited or permitted to do so by the Speaker of the House, MPs begin to speak when Blair is (still) speaking: **Interruption**. (Marked in the Hansard transcript by square brackets.)
b. The intervention repeats the words just used by Blair, "The main parties," and hence makes those words relevant for **comment**.
c. The transcript marks the intervention as a **question**.
d. Repeating the same words with a question intonation usually means either that the *meaning* or *reference* of the word is not understood, or that the expression is found **inappropriate** in this situation.
e. Explicit or implicit **assessments** of previous discourse fragments may be intended and/or interpreted as a **critique**.
f. In the situation of a political debate in parliament, a critique from specific MPs may be interpreted as a form of political **opposition** – in this case of the Liberal Democrats against the Labour government in general, and against Tony Blair in particular.
g. MPs (and analysts) infer from the critical use of the interruption "main parties" that apparently one party is *not* internally divided, and hence "forgotten" by Blair: the Liberal Democrats – who are also likely to be those who made the interruption.
h. Tony Blair responds, first by **apparently agreeing** ("Ah yes, of course") with the possibly inappropriate use of "main parties" – thereby excluding the Liberal Democrats, and seemingly marking it as an **admission** of an obvious oversight ("of course").
i. He thus **confirms** having understood whom the MPs refer to ("The Liberal Democrats"), and also confirms, seemingly positively, that they are indeed "unified," and hence not internally divided, as are Labour and the Conservatives, adding "as ever" to affirm the regularity of such unity.

j. But then such a seemingly positive agreement is turned around by adding the negative nouns "opportunism" and "error," which express a very negative stance and political evaluation. That is, there is no admission of an oversight, but rather taking advantage of the interruption to provide his negative opinion of the Liberal Democrats. In this context, expressing such a negative opinion about other politicians may be interpreted as an **accusation**.
k. An accusation following a critical interruption that may be interpreted as a form of opposition may itself be interpreted as a proactive **defense** against the opposition, that is, at the same time a government **attack** on the opposition.

This is approximately how a contextually based analysis of this interruption may be formulated. Such an analysis of course takes into account what we know from discourse and conversation analysis, for instance about interruptions, questions, repeating words of the speaker in the form of a question, and the interpretation of such a question as a form of disagreement or criticism. Such would be the *general* analysis of interaction, as it may apply in many situations. However, leaving the analysis at this point would seriously under-analyze the data if we were not to continue with the application of the undoubted *political knowledge* of the participants, namely whom Blair is talking about, and what the *political function* is of the interruption, namely not just a question or comment, or even a possible criticism of the previous speaker, but – in this parliamentary context – as a manifestation of political opposition. It is also against such an opposition – and not just the question or reminder –- that Blair is reacting by attacking the Liberal Democrats, which is also consistent with his role of Prime Minister, and the current political situation. In other words, without the political knowledge in the context models of the participants (and the observing analyst) there is no way such an interruption can be understood as a form of political opposition – and such a traditional discourse or conversation analysis would miss the fundamental *political point* of the interruption and the response. The goal of a theory of context is to provide a more explicit basis for these more relevant, context-sensitive descriptions and interpretations of discourse – also as a more explicit basis for critical discourse studies.

Social situations and social beliefs

Against the background of these cognitive, linguistic and discourse analytical studies of context, the present volume focuses on the study of context in the social sciences. Whether or not as context-of-language, in the social sciences we also face the general problem of the contextualization of conduct: the

same perceived conduct may mean something very different in different situations. As a general "social" basis of the theory of context, we thus need to examine in more detail the very notion of (social) situation in several disciplines, because this notion may not only be used to define contexts-of-discourse, but more generally be taken as a basic unit of interaction on the one hand, and of social structure on the other hand.

Beyond the cognitive approach to contexts defined as mental models, thus, we first need to extend our cognitive psychological perspective towards the *social psychological study of social situations*. Because of its topics of research, social psychology is (or should be) the discipline that can serve as the disciplinary interface between the study of cognition and the study of society, and especially the study of the "micro" constitution of society through everyday *situated* interaction. We already have seen above that various context approaches are replete with concepts that are typically studied in social psychology: impression management, social identity, social categorization, roles, accommodation, beliefs, conformity, intergroup relations, and so on. In particular, the (social) identity of participants is a topic that is central in the theory of context, and the ways contexts control talk and text.

Since in one chapter I can only deal with a few of these issues, I shall first of all focus on the interesting social psychological approaches to the notions of *social situation* or *social episode*, because we defined contexts as mental models of communicative situations and text-context units in terms of communicative episodes. A social psychological account of situations and episodes may yield ideas for component categories for a theory of context, namely in terms of how participants understand situations more generally.

Then we examine the nature of some of these situation categories. I do so also in light of various approaches in environmental psychology, because social situations of actions may also be seen as some kind of social "environment" of talk and text. Whereas in a theory of context the choice of categories may be obvious for Time and Place (forming part of the Setting category), as well as the Role or Identity of Participants, not all aspects of social situations or environments need to become part of the context. For instance, there is little doubt that temperature, crowding, colors of rooms, noise and so on influence our "behavior." However, such properties of the "environment" need not be part of the discourse context as defined. We may be aware of them, but they need not be systematically related to discourse structures. We may use different pronouns when talking to different kinds of people, or for different kinds of relations between speakers and addressees, but few (if any) cultures have different pronouns, a different register, a different style or a different genre for talking during different temperatures. These issues will also be dealt with in Chapters 3 and 4 when we deal with context in society and culture, because obviously social situations and

how they are construed in different cultures is a topic that has much broader significance.

Shared beliefs

Another fundamental dimension of contexts that needs to be dealt with in the chapter on social cognition is precisely that: social cognition, that is, socially and culturally shared beliefs such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values. Rather than studying these only in cognitive terms (as is often the case in cognitively oriented social cognition research, especially in the USA), we are here interested in their social and cultural aspects, namely as being shared by groups and communities. In *Discourse and Context* we already examined how knowledge is being presupposed and managed in conversation, and these strategies are based on the shared membership of participants in various epistemic communities. The same is true for the use of social attitudes or ideologies. Tony Blair in his speech may be expected to defend positions that are consistent with his political beliefs, and the MPs may (dis)agree with him on the basis of the ideologies they share with their own party members, but also with others, e.g., pacifists.

Contexts not only feature personal knowledge and opinions derived from personal experiences defining unique models controlling unique discourses, *but are based on socially shared knowledge and beliefs*. It is also in this way that we are able to relate both discourse and its situational context to the broader context of social structure, for instance Tony Blair's speech to British foreign policy and its norms, goals and ideologies, or the whole debate to the pacifist or anti-war movement. The next chapter will detail these relations between personal mental models of context, on the one hand, and the socially shared representations of groups and communities, on the other hand.

Context and society

In sociology too the notion of "situation" has played a role in the analysis of social structure, beginning with the famous notion of the "definition of the situation" developed by W. I. Thomas in the early twentieth century. Ervin Goffman, however, lamented about the "neglected situation." True, although social situations may well be taken as meaningful building blocks of society, and despite frequent references to the relevance of a "situated" approach to social conduct, the analysis of social situations has not received the attention it deserves in sociology. Rather, it was action, interaction and later conversation that took this prominent position, undoubtedly also because they form the core of social situations. In Chapter 4 it will be shown, first of all, that in phenomenological sociology social situations were not analyzed in terms of

their "objective" structures, as is the case in traditional approaches to context, but rather as (inter) subjective definitions or interpretations. That is, the notion of context as a social construct of participants in that respect has a long tradition in sociology.

Perhaps not very centrally and explicitly, also after World War II social situations received attention from sociologists. Arguably the most prominent of these analysts was Ervin Goffman, who rather informally but systematically explored many of the notions that later became standard in the sociology of everyday life: encounters, public places, participant structure, footing, frames, and so on.

Continuing the phenomenological tradition initiated by Alfred Schutz, Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists examined the details of implicit rules ("methods") underlying everyday interaction and situations, and how people "make sense" of them. More specifically, conversation analysis (CA), initiated in 1974 by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson in their ground-breaking article on turn-taking in conversation, took interaction analysis to high levels of sophisticated, detailed analysis by attending to the minute details of talk-in-interaction.

Because of this specific attention to the properties of sequences of interaction, CA paid less attention to the participants themselves, as well as other aspects of the social situations of talk. Challenged by critical (and other) discourse analysts because of CA's programmatic neglect of social and political contexts of talk, Schegloff defined his criteria for admitting contextual dimensions in the formal analysis of talk, namely when the participants themselves "orient to" such contextual conditions (e.g., gender or power), and when context dimensions are "procedurally relevant" in conversation. In other words, in order to avoid the proliferation of endless contextual "explanations" instead of focusing on talk itself, context in classical CA is admitted only as relevant when it *shows*. Generally speaking, though, standard CA is quite reluctant to admit any kind of contextual considerations, and recommends focusing, first of all, on the interactional properties of conversation itself. However, both within CA itself, as well as from the perspective of more critical, social and political approaches to discourse, such a context-free approach has often been criticized. Chapter 3 will examine this debate in more detail.

Then, in the same chapter, we continue the systematic analysis of the notion of context by examining what sociological insights into the nature of social situations might be applied in such a context theory. After all, contexts as mental models of relevant communicative situations are not just personal interpretations of situations, but are also based on socially shared understandings of time, place, participants and their roles and identities, relations of power, and so on.

This approach to situations and actions forms part of the fundamental discussions in sociology about the relation between social microstructures and macrostructures, or between "agency" and "structure," e.g., as treated by Giddens. I shall examine some aspects of this debate in view of the argument that contexts should not be limited to face-to-face situations, but should also account for "macro-contexts," as we have seen for Tony Blair's speech and the influence of British foreign policy, institutions such as the Prime Minister and parliament, and so on.

Following a sociocognitive approach, I am thus able to construe the necessary bridge between interaction, discourse and situational contexts, on the one hand, and societal and political contexts on the other hand. If these dimensions or levels are explicitly related in sociology at all, this happens (for instance by Giddens) with the traditional notion of "consciousness." Cognitive science today of course has much more explicit notions to offer as the necessary interface, as I also have proposed with the notion of context model. Trivially: social (macro) structures can be linked to talk and text because language users, as social members, *know* them and can *think* of them while speaking, writing, listening or reading. That is, social actors can participate in talk at all levels of social structure, because they are able to model such structures. The problem of the macro–micro link becomes a pseudo-problem as soon as one introduces the minds of social actors as the obvious level of mediation.

In Chapter 4 we shall see that for many contemporary conversation analysts the mind remains an irrelevant, uninteresting or temporarily excluded notion of social analysis – despite the fact that many elements in the analysis of interaction and conversation are in fact mental notions, such as the very abstract structure or organization of talk itself, and a fortiori such notions as meaning, inference, knowledge, and goals and intentions. I have shown in *Discourse and Context* and shall further demonstrate in this book that without such cognitive notions, contexts and hence situated talk and text cannot be properly defined.

Context and culture

Not only grammars and rules of discourse, but also contexts are culturally variable. We may adapt our speech to a powerful addressee, e.g., by using forms of politeness or deference, and such is the case in many cultures. However, not many cultures will develop, say, a different vocabulary to talk to someone in the presence of the mother-in-law of the speaker. In the tradition of the ethnography of speaking initiated by Dell Hymes in the 1960s, also with a first analysis of the components of contexts, Chapter 4 will examine first how the notion of "context" is used in different cultures, and

then review ethnographic studies for the kind of context conditions that have been found in communicative practices: who can/must (not) say what to whom in what setting? Such a review on the one hand shows that many context conditions are the same or similar in many cultures, as is the case for instance for the status or the power of speakers, addressees or other participants – and of course for knowledge, because without the management of knowledge no conversation and interaction is possible in the first place.

Next, we examine more contemporary studies, mostly in linguistic anthropology, on communicative practices, also beyond the ethnographic study of speech situations. Though still focusing primarily (though not exclusively) on "non-Western" societies, new developments in anthropological research also deal with topics we know from other domains of social studies of discourse, such as the role of gender and power, language ideologies, social identity, intercultural communication, and so on. One of the more specific context studies in this field is the investigation by Levinson of the way different cultures conceptualize space and orientation and thus also configure contexts in different (relative or absolute) ways. Similarly, Hanks also accounts for the details of context properties for the study of deictic expressions in different cultures. In other words, what is often taken for granted in "our" (increasingly hybrid) "Western" culture, such as the ego-relative orientation of our space and context (distinguishing, e.g., between *here* – with me – and *there* – with you or someone else), is not at all universal. In sum, an interdisciplinary study of context also needs to account for the cultural specificity and variability of the ways cultural members define communicative situations as contexts.

Closing the cultural approach to context, we finally summarize some of our own work on discourse and racism, this time focusing not so much on the features of racist text and talk, but on their "ethnic" and other social contexts.

Context and politics: the Iraq debate in the UK parliament

Finally, we deal in detail with the discourse and context with which I opened this two-volume study in *Discourse and Context* and which was also commented on above: the Iraq speech of Tony Blair in the debate on Iraq on March 18, 2003, just a few days before the invasion of Iraq by the US and UK armies and their allies. In the final chapter we not only continue and detail our analysis of Blair's speech, but also examine the contextual properties of some of the speeches by other MPs. It will be shown, as I started out to claim in the first chapter of *Discourse and Context*, that in linguistics and discourse analysis, it is not enough to know and apply grammar and rules of discourse, but that to understand the social and political meaning and functions of

language use, one also needs to examine the relations between discourse and the contexts as defined by the participants.

Only thus are we able to demonstrate that an interaction shows not only the general properties of conversation, and more specifically the kind of institutional talk in such debates, but specifically also the very political *points* of such debates: political decision making, legislation, manipulation, populism, power play, and so on.

Besides the many implications and implicatures based on our sociocultural knowledge of the world, thus, we are able to show what *political implicatures* may be inferred from the detailed analysis of the social-political situation as also the participants analyze, understand and represent these in their models. It is this fundamental process of social, political and critical discourse studies that should be the aim of the interdisciplinary study of context. It is in this sense, then, that this book, together with *Discourse and Context* (Van Dijk, 2008a), is also intended as a contribution to the foundation of critical discourse studies, crucially interested in the study of the relations between discourse and its social-political contexts.

2 Context and social cognition

Introduction: social psychological dimensions of context

Contexts defined as mental models of social situations of communication are in many ways interfaces between discourse and society. If there is one discipline that studies the relations between people, their conduct and society it is social psychology. I shall therefore explore in this chapter some of the contributions that social psychology has made, or could make, to the study of context. For instance, social psychology has for decades studied the ways various properties of the social situation influence people's "behavior," and has proposed several taxonomies for the structure of such situations that may be relevant for our theory of context.

As is the case for many other disciplines, social psychology is hardly a systematic, well-organized body of knowledge about the relations between people and society, but rather a loose community of many different research groups interested in topics such as those summarized by the following keywords:

accommodation, action, affect, affiliation, aggression, altruism, attitudes, attraction, attribution, authoritarianism, behavior, beliefs, categorization, cognitive dissonance, collective behavior, communication, compliance, conflict, conformity, consensus, cooperation, crime, crowds, deviance, discrimination, emotions, frustration, gender, groups, identity, impressions, influence, ingroups, interaction, intergroup relations, interpersonal relations, judgments, labeling, language, leadership, love, norms, obedience, outgroups, personality, persuasion, power, prejudice, propaganda, roles, self, self-categorization, self-esteem, social cognition, social movements, social representations, socialization, speech, status, stereotypes, values.

Although this list is of course not exhaustive, social psychologists will recognize the main topics that have filled their journals and books for decades, with varying degrees of popularity (see, e.g., the introduction by Hewstone and Stroebe, 2001).

Behind the seemingly haphazard choice of topics, we recognize a permanent concern to understand people and their "behavior" in relation to other people, groups, situations and society at large.

As the still common use of such notions as "behavior" and "stimulus" in much of social psychology suggests, and despite a rich cognitive tradition, there is still a strong behaviorist perspective in social psychological theorizing. Only in the last decades do we find a more explicit and systematic attention to details of cognitive representations and processing, usually summarized, especially in the USA, under the label of "social cognition" (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Hamilton, 2005).

Though the perspective in "social cognition" seems to be social in the sense of the way people are influenced by (the perception of) others, theoretically the cognitive focus of much of this research remains rather individualist, even in the study of "attitudes" and their assumed influence on "behavior" (see the criticism in, e.g., Resnick, Levine and Teasley, 1991). Also, social cognition in this paradigm is largely studied outside of real social and political contexts (but mostly in the laboratory), and is more interested in information processing than in the contents of social beliefs such as knowledge and ideologies.

In Europe, on the other hand, we have seen the development of more socially oriented approaches in social psychology, for instance in the study of social representations (see, e.g., Farr and Moscovici, 1984; Moscovici, 2000), intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1981), and social identity theory (Abrams and Hogg, 1999), although many of these studies, for instance on self-categorization, also have important cognitive dimensions (Turner et al., 1987). Not surprisingly, lately there have been proposals for the integration of different perspectives on social cognition and representation (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995; Operario and Fiske, 1999).

With the exception of the subdisciplines of the social psychology of language (Giles, 1979, 1991; Scherer and Giles, 1979) and discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992), and despite the occurrence of the topics of "communication," "language" and "speech" in the list of social psychological topics just mentioned, interest in such an eminently social psychological phenomenon as discourse has always been rare in social psychology. Experiments frequently featured all kinds of "messages," but these were seldom studied in their own right. The influence of discourse analysis in mainstream social psychology has so far been minimal. The subject index of the third edition of the introductory book by Hewstone and Stroebe (2001) does not even feature the keyword "discourse."

Discursive psychology has systematically criticized this lack of attention to discourse in social psychology. However, the more radical views especially in this line of research ignore the crucial cognitive dimensions of discourse and interaction, and thus it also has reductionist tendencies (Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996).

In other words, an integrated approach of social cognition, social representations and discourse analysis, as I have been advocating for years (see, e.g., Van Dijk, 1990), is still on the agenda.

Within the framework of a theory of context, however, the list of typical research topics in social psychology offers suggestions for an approach to the study of the social situations in which people communicate, and whose relevant properties they construe as contexts. Thus, speech participants obviously have various kinds of social identities and roles, may feel attracted to one another, try to make a good impression on other participants, might become aggressive about what the other says, show affect or altruism, categorize interlocutors, follow norms of communication, act in conformity with their group, say prejudiced things they share with their ingroup, presuppose knowledge of recipients, accommodate to their interlocutors, and so on. Even this brief enumeration suggests how fruitful social psychological research may be for a more explicit and detailed theory of context, its categories and the ways these may influence the production and comprehension of text and talk.

On the other hand, the vast majority of the phenomena typically studied in social psychology are unthinkable without a prominent discursive dimension, and it is therefore more than remarkable that discourse analysis has played such a marginal role in traditional and even much of modern social psychology.

Since a single chapter cannot possibly review and apply the many thousands of studies of more than half a century of social psychology, I shall focus only on some of the phenomena often studied in social psychology that may shed light on the multidisciplinary theory of context:

- Understanding (structures and categories of) social situations
- Social variations of speech (style, register, etc.)
- Group membership and social identity of discourse participants
- Social cognition and social representations shared by participants
- Strategies of social interaction
- Relations between social groups (power, etc.).

Summarizing even further, the social psychological notions that are relevant for a theory of context are: social situations, social actors, social beliefs, social interactions and social groups, and of course language, discourse and communication. That is, we select those aspects of the study of social situations that have a combined cognitive and social dimension, and that will allow us to relate the cognitive approach presented in *Discourse and Context* to the social and cultural analyses developed in the next chapters.

In this chapter, then, we no longer deal with language users or discourse participants as individuals, but rather with social actors as members of groups

and with groups themselves, as well as their social interactions and socially *shared* cognitions (Resnick, 1991). Thus, we are more interested in social interaction than in individual "behavior," and more in shared beliefs and representations of communities than in individual beliefs, emotions, aggression, frustration, self-esteem or personality, among a host of other typical phenomena studied in traditional social psychology – whatever their undoubted personal effects on text and talk, which need to be taken care of in separate context studies.

This means that if contexts are defined as mental models this chapter and the following ones need to show that these are not only forms of personal experience, or subjective interpretations of communicative situations, but are also constituted in ongoing interaction with other participants, embodying many aspects shared with other language users, such as their social identities or group memberships.

One of these socially shared dimensions has been dealt with in *Discourse and Context*: various kinds of social *knowledge* defined as shared "Common Ground" (Clark, 1996; Krauss and Fussell, 1991). But since by definition knowledge is socially shared by the members of epistemic communities, it obviously also needs a social psychological account (as well as a sociological and an ethnographic analysis).

Several topics will be dealt with as part of one of the broader categories of the lists given above. Thus, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, norms, values and ideologies will all be dealt with as shared "social cognition" or "social representations" of groups, thus using these terms in a broader sense than how they are often used in social psychology. And impression management, attribution, compliance, conformity, consensus and persuasion, among others, will be studied as so many strategies of (discursive) social interaction.

Some of the phenomena that are relevant here, such as interaction, group relations and power, will (also) be studied from a different perspective in the next chapters. Also, this chapter will ignore the important (cross) cultural dimensions of social situations and their definitions as contexts, which shall be dealt with in Chapter 4.

More generally, social psychology is interested in specific dimensions of the study of the micro level of society, that is, in social interaction of social actors in social situations. Note though that the emphasis on social microstructures does not mean that we reduce social psychology to microsociology. That is, unlike most microsociology, social psychology also accounts (or should account) for the sociocognitive aspects of interaction, such as shared social beliefs, knowledge and ideologies, and the ways these are represented, used and reproduced by individual social actors as group members. In this way, social psychology contributes to our insight into micro–macro relations in society by studying actors as members of groups, interactions as properties

and processes of groups or relations between groups and individual beliefs as instantiations or applications of socially shared beliefs.

As suggested, many of our concerns in a theory of context are specific formulations of "old" problems in various branches of social psychology, studied in thousands of articles and books. Contexts as ongoing mental models of communicative situations are obviously the result of many processes of social understanding, involving such things as:

- The role of Self in the perception of the communicative situation and in interaction
- The categorization and understanding of social actors as group members and as individual co-participants in discursive interaction
- Judgment and formation of impressions about co-participants
- The attribution of social identities, roles, intentions, purposes and goals to co-participants, e.g., as explanations or expectations of their discourse
- The reduction of complex information about social actors through stereotyping, schema-formation, heuristics, biases, etc.
- The understanding and judgment of the ongoing action(s) of the participants, e.g., in terms of personal or social attributes of participants or environmental circumstances
- Inferences about the knowledge or other beliefs of the participants.

All this is (also) going on in contexts of text and talk. The list may be further detailed, but it may have become clear in this introduction that different directions in social psychology have a bearing on the theory of context. Being able to appropriately participate and speak in all possible social situations to which we have access requires ongoing understanding, analysis and judgment of such – complex – situations. Cognitive and social psychology offer us theoretical notions, empirical findings and methodological instruments to investigate such processes of understanding of our "social environment," that is, situations. In the past, and for practical and methodological reasons (such as laboratory experiments), the main focus of this endeavor has been the many properties of the perception and explanation of individual actions and actors, whether or not as members of groups. It is the task of this chapter to examine some of the processes and concepts involved in such "situation analysis" and see which ones are relevant for the construction of context models. In that sense, context theory is a specific but crucial application of social psychology, and applicable to the discourse of social psychology itself, beginning with the contexts and discourses of the experimental laboratory.

Since social situations are very complex and there are many ways to study it, also in social psychology, I shall select a few central notions, and briefly treat each of them as candidates for a theory of context, beginning

with the very notion of "situation" itself, and then focus on Settings, Participants, Action and Social Cognition as relevant elements of communicative events.

The study of these notions has a long history in social psychology, as is also the case for our own perspective on communicative situations: Already G. H. Mead and symbolic interactionism emphasized that the objects of environments should not be defined in absolute terms, but as situationally constituted from the perspective of the participants in ongoing activity (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; see also *Discourse and Context*, Chapter 2). It is, however, beyond the scope of this book to trace the theoretical history of all notions discussed, and I shall therefore focus only on some contemporary studies of situational parameters.

Social situations

Since contexts in this book are defined as subjective definitions of communicative situations, let us begin with a review of the social psychological study of social situations and how these are understood by social actors and influence their activities.[1] In this chapter this analysis will focus on the contributions from social psychology itself, and I shall not repeat the review provided in *Discourse and Context* of studies in cognitive psychology about events and situations that also have had a very profound influence on social psychology, such as schema theory and script theory.

It is sometimes claimed that one of the major objects of research in social psychology has been the social situation (Ross and Nisbett, 1991). Nothing is less true, however. Although the notion appears in the titles of many articles, there is only one monograph and one edited book entirely dedicated to the study of social situations, both published more than 20 years ago (Argyle, Furnham and Graham, 1981; Furnham and Argyle, 1981). Moreover, both books are not limited to social psychology, but also deal with sociology and anthropology. Compared to the many books on, say, attitudes, attribution and the other main topics listed above, the explicit study of social situations has been rather scanty in social psychology, even though the dominant perspective is sometimes claimed to be one of "situationism"

[1] Instead of the traditional notion of "behavior," I shall variously use other notions, such as "conduct," "action," "interaction," "activities" and "social practice," each with a different conceptual meaning, and with an increasingly personal, interpersonal, social, societal and cultural dimension, respectively. Of these notions "conduct" comes closest to the notion of "behavior" when defined as the observable bodily manifestation of social action. As we shall see later, action, interaction and related notions are to be defined as *intended* or *interpreted* conduct, that is, as also involving a mental dimension.

(Furnham and Argyle, 1981: xxii). In fact, since studying phenomena in their "contexts" is deemed to be generally more adequate than the investigation of "isolated" phenomena, we find such general claims also in linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociology and anthropology, but until quite recently these claims were more like lip service to a general norm than based on extensive research.

What we *do* find in social psychology, however, are studies of the way various aspects of the social situation impinge on "behavior," for instance in "interaction" with assumed personality "traits" of people. This approach in social psychology is sometimes even called "interactional" (Ekehammar, 1974; Magnusson, 1981; Magnusson and Endler, 1977) – not because it has anything to do with interaction, but because of the *statistical* interaction of situation and personality "variables" in the influence on "behavior" (for critique of this use of the notion of "interaction," see, e.g., Buss, 1981). Special studies of the nature of social situations as such, as well as its structures, are relatively rare. It is generally concluded from many empirical studies, however, that the influence of situations on people's actions are generally very strong, and often better predict what people will do than such "predispositions" as character traits (Ross and Nisbett, 1991).

Although sometimes reference is made to the definition of situations in microsociology and other neighboring disciplines, the traditional social psychology of situations has its strongest roots in the study of personality. Magnusson (1978) distinguishes several levels of analysis, such as stimuli, episodes, situations, settings and environments, where the latter are more general frameworks for the former (see also Pervin, 1978). Situations are here assumed to provide meaning to the acts that are the concrete stimuli and the episodes constituted by such acts, whereas settings and environments provide more general frameworks for situations.

Relevant for our analysis is that already in these early conceptualizations a distinction is made between "objective" (observer) characteristics of situations and *the subjective ways situations are perceived by the actors themselves*. Indeed, it is assumed that situations are mentally represented in terms of such categories. For instance, Pervin (1978: 376) summarizes the structure of situations in terms of the following categories:

- Place
- Time
- People
- Activities.

We have encountered these basic categories several times, and they are obviously fundamental characteristics of situations as contexts represented in context models.

Argyle (1978), comparing situations with games, proposes a more complex list of *situation categories* (for detail, see Argyle, Furnham and Graham, 1981):

- elements of behavior
- goals or motivations
- rules of behavior
- social or formal roles
- physical setting and equipment
- salient cognitive concepts
- relevant skills.

Compared to the basic components distinguished by Pervin, we see that in this list several cognitive notions appear, such as "cognitive concepts" as well as "rules." In *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3) we have seen that goals are also cognitive, namely the ways actors represent what they want to obtain. Argyle, however, emphasizes that *situations* have goals, and that they are not properties of the actors, as would be the case for motivations. Note also that the list mentions behavior, skills and roles of actors, but not the actors themselves. And finally, where Pervin has place and time, Argyle focuses on the physical setting.

The categories used by Argyle et al., are close to those found by Avedon (1981) in his analysis of games. Bennett and Bennett (1981) propose some other elements in their analysis of "scenes," such as the "container" (the physical space of the activity) and its props, the duration of the interaction, and especially also the modifiers of the scene that might also be called physical properties of the environment, such as light, sound, colors, odors, temperature and humidity.

Probably the most detailed contribution to the study of the structure of social situations in social psychology has been provided in an influential paper by Brown and Fraser (1979). Their schema is inspired by the situational factors that explain sociolinguistic variation, and they provide not only a theoretical sketch, but also a selective review of the sociolinguistic literature in which such factors have been observed (we have discussed these relations in *Discourse and Context*, Chapter 4). They correctly argue that a complete review of all relevant situation characteristics would be a summary of most of sociolinguistics, although most of the earlier studies deal with social properties of participants rather than with other characteristics of the situation.

Their schema of situation structure (see Figure 2.1) combines a major Scene category with that of Participants, where a Setting (locale, time, bystanders) is part of the Scene, more or less as in other approaches. They see Purpose as the "motor" of social situations, but place it under Scene, and define it in terms of activity type (goals, activated roles) and subject matter (task, topic).

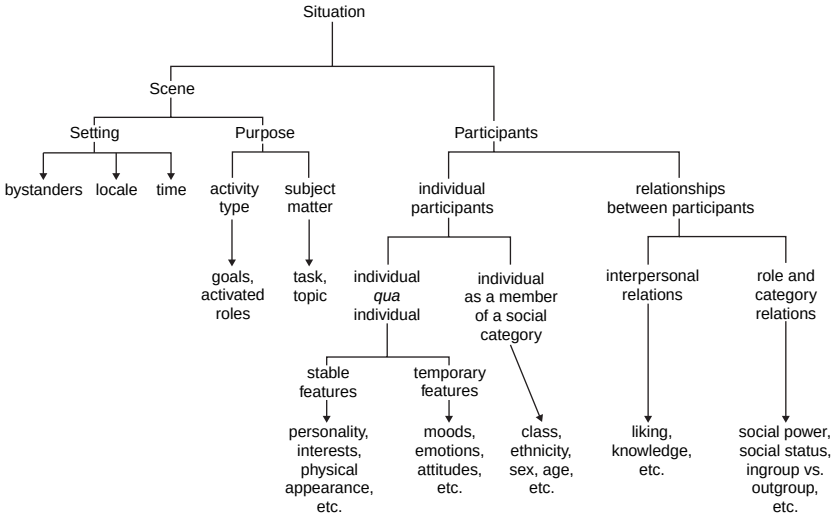

Figure 2.1. Components of a situation (Brown and Fraser, 1979)

Despite its detail, this is a confusing theoretical framework. Thus, one might formulate the following critical points:

- Purposes (or goals) are representations of what participants *want to obtain with their actions*, that is, as some form of personal or shared cognition, and hence should depend on the Participant category and not on a Setting category.
- The category of Purpose not only has Goals (which again would be a mental property of the participants), but also (a) activated roles, which would be a (social) property of the participants, and (b) subject matter (further defined as task and topic), which is rather a property of discourse, even when they may be planned by the participants.
- Task is conceptually and cognitively closer to goals, which is a property of participants, or at least a kind of external goal imposed on, or assumed by, the participants – and which therefore may be defined as part of some Activity node.
- The Participant node correctly distinguishes between (individual) participants and relations between participants – also for the stable and temporary features of participants – but one wonders why participants can only be individual ones. After all, governments, parliaments, political parties, social movements, universities and business corporations also engage in all kinds of activities, collectively, and it is thus not sufficient to introduce individuals in various social roles, especially since one of the relationships

involved, such as power and ingroup–outgroup relations, requires that participants are groups and not individuals.

- Bystanders may not be actively contributing to the ongoing activity, but they are a type of participant, and actors or speakers take them into account in their activities or discourse, as they do with (silent) recipients.
- Most conspicuously missing (or misplaced under Setting) in this schema, thus, is the overall Activity category if we summarize social situations as social participants doing something in some social setting.
- Activity type and Subject matter are categorized under the Purpose of the Setting, instead of having a separate Activity category, which might include Purposes as the mental basis of the activity.
- A fundamental category, namely knowledge of the participants, is placed under relations between participants, whereas another "mental" category (attitudes) is defined as a temporary property of individuals, together with moods and emotions, despite the fact that social attitudes, unlike personal opinions, are typically socially shared by groups and rather stable.
- Missing is a subcategory for socially shared representations, such as attitudes and ideologies.
- Knowledge is not defined as part of the stable or temporary features of the individual participants.
- Since groups are not mentioned, no shared knowledge or beliefs can be handled.
- There is no category for variable circumstances, institutional setting, norms and rules.

We may thus conclude that despite the number of situational characteristics mentioned in this research, their schematic organization seems quite arbitrary, whereas also some fundamental categories of social situations are missing.

Combining these different approaches, although appearing in different types of schematic organization, we may summarize the categories of social situations as analyzed in the 1970s as follows:

- Setting/Scene: time, space/place, physical characteristics, props
- Social actors: skills, motivations, personality, appearance; social roles
- Social activities and their rules and norms
- Cognitive concepts: purposes/goals, knowledge, attitudes.

We as yet do not have independent (e.g., psychological) criteria for the best organization of such categories in a schematic representation of situations, for instance as understood and modeled in episodic memory, or as talked about in social situations, e.g., of storytelling. However, on the basis of several other approaches, we may devise a somewhat more systematic social psychological schema of situations.

As is the case for most approaches, such a schema would first of all have a Setting/Scene category, featuring location, time and various kinds of physical and social circumstances, and then a main category for what "happens" in such a scene (an event, an action, etc.) consisting of Actors (on the scene, in the setting) engaging in some kind of Activity. These actors have basically three kinds of properties, namely personal ones (personal identity, age, etc.) social ones (social identities, categories, such as gender, roles, relations with others, etc.) and mental ones (beliefs, goals), when engaging in the activity, more or less as shown in Schema 2.1.

- Situation
  - Setting
    - Time
    - Location
    - Circumstances, props
  - Happening
    - Actors (individuals or groups)
      - Personal: Personality, interests, appearance
      - Social: Age, gender, "race"; social roles, social relations
      - Mental: Knowledge, rules, opinions, intentions, goals
    - Activity/Conduct

Schema 2.1. Simplified schematic structure of social situations

In this schema, goals could be placed under Activity, since goals, plans, intentions and purposes are usually defined as the mental basis of actions. However, in our opinion goals, plans, etc. are not properties of the activities or conduct themselves, but of the actors who engage in them. Indeed, people may have purposes, intentions or plans *without* executing them, that is, without actually engaging in action. It therefore seems more logical to have them together with the other indispensable properties of the actors of some situation: beliefs of various kinds (knowledge, opinion, etc.). Although there may be reasons to include a Rules category, as several authors proposed, we are not sure whether such a category is part of the structure of the social situation. If so, they should properly be categorized as part of the (shared) knowledge of the participants. Indeed, including "rules" in social situations is like including "grammar" in the structure of sentences or discourse, and cognitively to mix personal (episodic) mental models and social representations. Hence, if socially shared knowledge of the participants of a social situation is included as a property of Participants, then Rules should indeed be included in the (complex) category of knowledge, together with Grammar, and rules of discourse.

Below – and in the next chapters – we shall discuss these situation characteristics in more detail. Before we do so more systematically and in more

detail, we briefly need to consider some other notions and issues related to situations as studied in social psychology.

Environment

Earlier I informally used the notion of "environment" as one of the synonyms of situation: in some sense, social situations are the "environment" of text and talk. However, especially in environmental psychology or eco-psychology, the characterization of the environment of human "behavior" is more detailed and pays attention to the role of physical properties of spaces and places, such as doors, illumination, temperature, noise, proximity of other people, and so on (Barker, 1963, 1968; Barker et al., 1978). That is, in this perspective, the concept of environment is closer to a property of the Setting as main category of Situation, rather than as a more general category for the (whole) situations themselves.

However, the theoretical problem we need to deal with in this case is whether or not such "environmental" properties of social situations are actually represented and interpreted as such by social actors in their experiences, and whether and how they influence their activities in general, and their communicative conduct in particular.

This is especially relevant for a study of discourse situations and their representations as contexts, namely whether these "objective" characteristics of situations are always relevant, and if they are relevant, how language users manage them in the production or comprehension of discourse. For instance, roles of actors influence activities and discourse in a way that seems quite different from the influence of such environmental factors as heat or noise. In the first case, there are *social* rules, norms or conventions involved, whereas in the latter case the influence may be more directly physiological, for instance on phonetic properties of speech or other bodily aspects of conduct. It is highly unlikely that there are languages that have, say, different pronouns for discourses produced in high or low temperatures. In other words, when language users ignore context constraints such as actor roles, they may produce inappropriate text or talk, which, however, is not the case for the role of objective (or even the subjectively perceived) temperature of the air.

It follows, here and elsewhere in this study, that we should carefully distinguish between characteristics of situations that may directly and "objectively" cause specific – e.g., phonetic – properties of language use (say, slower talk at high temperatures), and the role of mental models that subjectively and conventionally construct the relevant properties of social situations, and which therefore are a controlling interface between social situations and discourse and not a deterministic physical or biological "cause." Thus, the general relevance principle for context formation requires

that "environmental" properties are only construed as context properties when they have *systematic* and *rule-governed* influence on variable discourse structures.

Dimensions

Another important problem are the methods by which situations are analyzed in some directions of social psychology, for instance in terms of "dimensions" defined as the evaluations people make of situations, for instance whether they are (in)formal, (un)pleasant, intimate, stressful, relaxed, and so on (Forgas, 1979; Magnusson, 1981; Pervin, 1978).

Although it is certainly relevant – and consistent with a mental model approach – to relate situations to the way participants experience them, merely representing them in terms of subjective evaluations does not tell us much about the nature of such situations: the context of a pleasant dinner-party is obviously quite different from that of a pleasant job-interview, and hence as a source of discourse variation.

This suggests that, where relevant, people probably represent a situation together with its subjective evaluation, as we also have assumed for mental models, and not only as evaluative dimensions. We shall come back to such a "dimensional" analysis of communicative situations. Maybe evaluative dimensions of situations are easy to study in (laboratory) experiments and statistical treatment (e.g., factor analysis), but they tell us very little about how people define, represent and act upon the structures of the situation in which they are involved.

Goals

Other methods in the social psychology of situations are closer to structuralist approaches of linguistics, and focus on the components or categories of a situation, as we have already seen above. The problem in this case is to find out which components are necessary and sufficient, and why.

Thus, Argyle, Furnham and Graham (1981), like many other analysts of social situations and actions, stress that *goals* and their structures are the central component of social situations. This may be so, but we need explicit criteria to make such theoretical judgments. If the goal of a situation is "to have fun," or "to get something," this says very little about the activities themselves, and it may apply to large numbers of very different situations: to go for a walk, to go to a party, to play chess, to take a bath, and so on – activities that could all be described in terms of the overall goal of enjoying oneself.

Thus, also for these examples, it seems relevant to know *what activities* we engage in and not only what their goals are. Indeed, some activities may not

have clear or conscious goals at all and are only engaged in for their own sake, or would need to be described with the vague goal of having fun. In *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3) I define goals as mental representations of the desired consequences of an intended (planned) activity. This suggests that a useful situation analysis, and hence context models, should feature both goals (or purposes) as well as intentions, namely as mental models for social conduct and its consequences.

Also for this discussion about the possible context category of Goals we see that we need more explicit criteria when analyzing the structures of social situations or when we want to establish a taxonomy or typology of situations (see, e.g., Frederiksen, 1972; Belk, 1975). We already have suggested that physical characteristics of environments (such as temperature or noise) are not good candidates as Setting (sub)categories of context model schemas, and we shall come back to this issue below. We also have assumed that evaluative "dimensions" cannot be substituted for activities they evaluate. We now also see that the category of Goal is probably relevant, but only when combined with Intentions, because otherwise the central category of Activity cannot be mentally controlled.

In *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3) I formulated various processing constraints that require that (the schema and macrostructure of) context models are relatively simple, and hence cannot feature hundreds of relevant situational characteristics. This does not mean that people are unable to perceive or distinguish a large number of different environmental properties, such as temperature, noise, shapes, sizes, colors, and so on, but only that these are not always *socially* relevant categories for the definition of social situations, let alone *discursively* relevant for the appropriateness conditions represented in context models. One of the ways one might envisage a cognitively more realistic approach to complex situation structures and endless variability would thus be to assume that social actors develop and apply situation *prototypes* (Cantor and Mischel, 1979).

Motivations and decision making

Despite their personal and subjective nature, one of the key notions of traditional social psychology is that of "motivations," so we need to briefly consider whether or not, or how, to include them in context models. Indeed, do we need them when context models already have intentions and goals or purposes for action?

Motivations can be analyzed in several ways. First of all, within the same cognitive perspective as intentions and plans, motivations can be analyzed as more or less conscious *reasons* for action. As such they are part of the cognitive process of *decision making* that precedes action, and that would also

be represented in episodic memory (among a vast literature on these topics, see, e.g., Bullock, 1991; Forgas, Williams and Wheeler, 2001; Gollwitzer and Bargh, 1996; Hamilton, Bower and Frijda, 1988; Ranyard, Crozier and Svenson, 1997; Schank and Langer, 1994; Weiner, 2006).

Depending on the stretch of experience we want to include in context models, this process of decision making, including reasons for action, could be a regular part of the context model, as is the case for plans. We have argued before that context models are not suddenly designed from scratch when people start to speak or write, but tend to be globally and approximately prepared, sometimes long in advance, especially for complex or important, institutional discourse, as is the case for Tony Blair's speech on Iraq in the House of Commons. No doubt, the preparation of such a context model also features Blair's decision making, and hence his reasons, for asking parliament to legitimate his decision to go to war.

The empirical question we need to answer in this case is whether and how much of this decision making, including reasons, remains "active" in the currently developing context model of a discourse. Obviously, the sometimes long-term and complex thought processes that are involved in decision making cannot possibly be included, as such, in the relatively lean mental model that controls the current discourse. At most, its major conclusions or macrostructures would in this case remain relevant. In general, people need to remain aware *why* they are acting. This is an essential part of their reflexivity and the accountability of social action, as it is typically expressed interactively in explanations (Antaki, 1988; Buttny, 1993; Tetlock, 1999). Some of this has been captured by the notions of goals and purpose: to reach a specific, desired state, such as the parliamentary legitimation of a policy in the case of Tony Blair's speech, or a number of sub-goals, such as persuading the MPs, explaining the necessity of the war, and so on.

But reasons and decision making are not fully accounted for in terms of goals to realize a desired state of affairs. Thus, if we were to ask the more complex question why Blair wants to go to war in Iraq, the structure of his reasons is much more complex. Some of them he provides in his speech, and these are the more public and responsible ones that contribute to his positive self-presentation, and hence are more strategic than necessarily the more important ones: To remove a dictator, to bring democracy to the Iraqis, to fight terrorism, and so on. Less prominent but hardly secret is the reason to show solidarity with the USA in its fight against terrorism after September 11. And even less explicit, all the reasons being attributed to him by his opponents, both within and outside the British parliament: gaining political control in a major oil-producing country and in the Middle East in general, and so on. Evidence for such implicit reasons usually cannot be inferred directly from current talk, but may have to be culled from less public

discourses as revealed in later revelations (for detail on the discourses of legitimation on the Iraq war, see Chouliaraki, 2005).

Motivations may not only be "rational" such as the reasons and decision making described above, but also involve emotions such as fears, desires, and so on, some of which also may be signaled in talk. And again, these emotions may also play a role in the long-term preparation of context models of discourse. And as is the case for reasons, they may be more or less conscious.

In sum, if we want context models to feature the information language users need in order to reflexively account for their ongoing text or talk, it is likely that their context model needs to represent at least some (major) reasons or motives *why* they engage in the current discourse or the social or political act(s) being accomplished by them (such as to "defend a policy" or "to seek legitimation" by a speech in parliament). Part of these, such as goals, must remain active all the time so as to be able to monitor the very direction of (inter)action. Others may become relevant as soon as it is locally necessary to account for other reasons than the realization of one's major goals, such as emotions (e.g., "fear of terrorism") or previous actions ("pressure by Bush"), and so on. For complex decision making processes it is unlikely that all this "previous" thought is currently represented during speaking, and it may therefore be assumed that this is so only at more global levels of representation ("main reasons"), as is the case for all macro level representations in discourse and cognition.

In everyday conversations planning and decision making may be much more reduced, and besides concrete goals context models in that case may feature ongoing emotions, for instance during a quarrel, shown at many levels of discourse (volume, pitch, intonation, lexical selection, topics, speech acts and conversational moves, such as interruptions) – and inferred by recipients on the basis of such expressions. Whereas such emotions may be more or less personal, or more socially shared as attitudes, many of the reasons being used in context models of discourse may in turn be based on social knowledge and ideologies. Thus, if Blair wants to remove a dictator and does so for the (explicit) reason to bring democracy to the Iraqis, such a motivation obviously is not merely subjective, but based on a number of ideologies. Hence also the "subjective" motivations of talk, as represented in context models, may again be based on socially shared beliefs – as we have seen for other social dimensions of context models.

Besides social motivations or reasons, we have of course purely personal motivations of talk and action, again more or less conscious or unconscious, as would be made explicit in psychoanalytical or other "dynamic" forms of psychology, for instance explaining Blair's policies in terms of his personality, and or his personal experiences. Only some of these may transpire in formal public discourse, unlike in the less controlled conversations with

friends, family members, or one's analyst (see, e.g., some classical studies on the individual psychopathology of politicians, such as Lasswell, 1977).

Related concepts

What has been said here for situations, in many other studies is being dealt with in other terms, such as *environments*, *places* and *spaces* in environmental psychology (Bell, Greene, Fisher and Baum, 2001), or in terms of *episodes* in social psychology (Forgas, 1979; Harré and Secord, 1972; Harré, 1979). Depending on the theory of the structures of situation, one might analyze situations as featuring episodes, that is, sequences of activities. For instance, in the complex "situation" of a children's birthday party, we might distinguish several episodes, such as games, eating, and so on, as is also the case for prototypical situations or "activity types" such as lessons at school, a visit to the doctor, or going on vacation, at various levels of (macro) generality or (micro) specificity. In *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3) we have considered some of the cognitive aspects of understanding complex events and situations (see, e.g., Zacks, Tversky and Iyer, 2001).

We need to come back later to these aspects of the overall structure of situations, and now attend in some more detail to some of the individual context categories considered above, focusing especially on their social psychological aspects. Societal and cultural aspects of social situations and their modeling in mental models will be dealt with in the next chapters.

Setting

Virtually all definitions of situations we have examined above feature a category such as *Setting* or *Scene*, organizing the information about spatio-temporal, circumstantial or environmental properties of interaction. Let us therefore first examine some subcategories of this main category.

Location: space and place

One of the most obvious subcategories of the category of Setting is undoubtedly a *location* category that organizes information about participants' interpretation of the space or place in which they are acting. Intuitively, the relevance of such a category seems to be shown by the need to know *Where am I?* after people have been unconscious for a moment or waking up after a deep sleep (Damasio, 2000). It is assumed, thus, that according to the theory of everyday experience models discussed in *Discourse and Context*, people are aware of their current location, and monitoring ongoing changes when they are moving. They thus build and continuously update a mental model of their

location, including of their relation to the place or space in which they are now (see also Tversky, 1991).

As is the case for the understanding of complex discourses, the understanding of the spatial environment also requires selective attention and the reduction of complexity, for instance by the application of schemas, prototypes and macrostructures. That is, our mental models of spaces or places are schematic constructs that are relevant to our current goals and activities, combining information from previous experiences (old models), from general sociocultural knowledge about the environment, as well as from ongoing new information. In other words, social actors in general, and language users in particular, do not need to perceive, understand and represent all aspects of spaces and places, but only need to select some relevant dimensions (see also Glenberg, 1997; Rinck, Williams, Bower and Becker, 1996; Tversky, 2004).

It is beyond the scope of this book to review the vast literature on "place" and "space" in several disciplines, and I shall limit myself to a few remarks and suggestions that may be useful for a theory of context (for details on the theory of places, see, e.g., Agnew, 1987, 1989; Altman and Low, 1992; Bell et al., 2001; Canter, 1977; Casey, 1993; Tuan, 2001).

Relevant for this chapter is to examine how spatial cognition can be made *socially* relevant and can be transformed into relevant categories of contexts for communication and interaction. For instance, the interpretation and the representation of the space I am in now is no longer merely a room but a classroom where I am interacting with students or a shop where I am buying a book, each associated with its own prototypical participants, actions, goals and props, as represented in scripts or other shared sociocultural knowledge.

The question we need to attend to here, however, is not merely the social understanding and construction of place, and the ways such understanding also depends on socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies. Such understanding will be relevant for many of our actions, for finding our way in everyday life as well as for the description of places, for instance in everyday storytelling or the news. For discourse analysis, such models of places provide a basis for the *semantics* of place descriptions or the interpretation of deictic expressions. We may refer to, or speak about, many places during the discourses in one communicative situation as well as about many of its properties. We do not need to keep in mind all the details of places and spaces talked *about* in text or talk, as represented in event models. What we *do* need to keep track of, however, is where we are now, and where we are now speaking, that is, the Setting. In other words, we are now rather interested in the pragmatics of place, rather than in its semantics.

We have argued that as part of the Setting of context models, language users only need to attend to specific dimensions of places. Thus it may be relevant, also for interaction, that this classroom has a door (and many other properties), and hence can be closed as a temporary territory for those who use it, but it is not obvious that such a spatial property would be relevant in a model of context: it is not likely that we speak and teach systematically differently in classrooms with or without doors. For adequate discourse and communication it might be sufficient that the current room (or other space) be socially defined as a classroom, and as such functions as the institutional setting for the ongoing educational interaction. Indeed, the same "room" may later be defined in a different way when used for a staff meeting or a day care center. In other words, communicative and other social events are defined relative to such socially defined places and vice versa. And what is true for classrooms also applies to bedrooms, courtrooms, newsrooms and boardrooms, among many other "rooms" and places. The question then is how such places, or rather the social interpretation or construction of such places, influence our discourse and interaction, and vice versa.

Types of places

We have seen that context models must be relatively simple if they need to be construed and ongoingly updated within fractions of seconds. This means that as part of the representation of Setting in such models, place representations must be relatively simple, and only contain what is necessary to adequately conduct our discourse. Of the vast number of possible places, we shall therefore only consider three basic types: (a) personal and interpersonal places/spaces, (b) social places/spaces and (c) geographical places/spaces.

Personal and interpersonal space and place *Personal* and *interpersonal* place and space define where I am now (where my body is now), as well as my interlocutors, that is, a space that organizes our interaction, perspective and discourse in direct, face-to-face interaction (Hall, 1959; Hayduk, 1994). The size of personal and interpersonal space depends on the kind of (intimate, personal, social or public) distance of the relationship, and may range from a viewing and hearing distance of dozens of meters (as between teacher and students in a big classroom), between 50 and 100 cm for a normal or formal conversation down to zero meters when interlocutors touch each other (as would be the case for close friends or lovers, on the one hand, and aggression on the other hand). When maintaining a short distance, e.g., when walking on the street, people are interpreted as dyads even when they do not interact in other ways (Goffman, 1967). Preferred personal and interpersonal

space may vary in size between cultures, and may be limited in special situations of crowding, such as a crowded train or a pop concert. For various reasons (e.g., maintaining privacy, avoid crowding, etc.) people may protect their personal spaces in several ways, e.g., by taking more distance or by establishing barriers that make intrusion more difficult.

Personal and interpersonal space is contextually relevant for the interpretation of deictic expressions in discourse, which may depend, e.g., on what is "close to the speaker" (*here*) or "close to the hearer" (*there*), or on whose perspective is used (such as *behind, to the left of*, etc.), at least in cultures that have relative deictic expressions and not absolute ones (Levinson, 2003). We might say that semantics and pragmatics overlap in this case, because in such cases the referents of such expressions are part of the communicative situation. Similarly, the contextual relevance of personal space and place is relevant for the interpretation of verbs (such as *bring*, *take, come, go*, etc.) as well as for storytelling (Orientations), news discourse (datelines, etc.), and the management of politeness strategies (including greetings, handshakes, etc.). It has been found that also for such forms of orientation in space, there are cultural differences between languages (for details, see Levinson, 1996; Kataoka and Kusumoto, 1991).

Finally, discourse may be linearly shaped by the places, spaces or objects it describes, thus giving rise to a "natural" order of descriptions (Levelt, 1982). This order may also be constrained by the combined distance and size of objects described: We typically first describe a room, then a table in the room, and then a vase of flowers on the table, and not in another order. In other words, space and place perception has effects on local discourse coherence (Van Dijk, 1977). Note though that the relation between space referred to and discourse properties such as natural ordering is a semantic property of discourse, and not a pragmatic one, which deals with spatial aspects of communicative situations, such as the location of the participants and the distances between each of them, as indexed by deictic expressions such as *here* and *there*.

Since these aspects of deixis and context have been extensively dealt with in the literature, I shall not deal further with them here, also because they are more relevant for discourse semantics (reference) than for the "pragmatic" approach to appropriateness.

Social places *Social* places locate our joint and collective activities in everyday life, at home, at work, and during times of leisure, and hence tend to be defined in terms of what people do in such places. Many social places are institutional, and their social definition is barely distinguishable from institutions, as is the case for schools and post offices. Such places may be variously categorized, as follows (see also Bell et al., 2001; Sundstrom, 1987):

- outdoor places and spaces: streets, squares, parks, lakes, rivers and beaches
- residential places: houses, apartment buildings, homes
- commercial places: shops, department stores, shopping malls
- commercial service places: hotels and restaurants
- community service places: city halls, police stations and post offices; government agencies; hospitals, stations and airports
- educational places: schools and universities
- leisure places: movie houses, theatres and gyms
- workplaces: offices, workshops and factories
- correctional institutions such as prisons.

Although there are dozens of such social place types, many of which are also associated with their own building, they can be organized by a few (usually scalar) attributes, such as open vs. closed, public vs. private, leisure vs. work, free or paid admission, etc., and several types of categories defined by their uses or functions (living, education, health, lodging, eating, etc.), as shown above. Such categorization also helps with the necessary reduction of the complexity of situational information, especially because such categories also say something about their uses and functions, and hence about the goals of the interactions performed at such places. People need to know where to go when they need goods, services or help.

Social places are also defined by the social categories of the people who work there (the professionals), those who visit such places (the users or clients), as well as the typical transactions they engage in. And conversely, social places thus seem to be involved in the assignment of social identities to members, especially to the professionals who work there (as is the case for teachers and schools, MPs and parliaments, shop assistants and shops, etc.). Members of the British House of Commons refer to the House of Lords as *the other place* and thus also define their own identity and power (for detail of the identities of the MPs in the Iraq debate, see Chapter 5). In other words, because obviously social places are not merely defined in terms of types of building or other "physical" properties of the environment, the definition of places as locations of interactions comes close to the definition of social situations in general. Indeed, our location in some places may be significantly related to our ideologies and hence to our political discourse, as is the case for those on the Right or on the Left, first of all in parliament, and by metaphorical extension in the political arena in general.

Social places are relevant for a theory of context since they are part of the definition of the kinds of norms, rules and constraints of the interactions and discourses that "take place" there. In some places (like at home with family members, or in a café with friends), there are few restrictions on who may speak

to whom, when or about what, but in (more or less) public places the constraints are much stricter – such as service provision encounters between professionals and clients, or professional and informal conversations among professionals and informal conversations among clients. In some places, only the professionals are supposed speak and the clients should listen, as is the case in the theatre. In other places professionals speak most of the time, as in schools and universities. Prisons, military barracks, as well as other "total institutions" have their own rules of speech: who may address whom, when, how and how much. Thus, places as settings of social institutions are also associated with specific, socially conditioned, norms of language and discourse, e.g., rules of address, politeness, and so on (Christie and Martin, 1997; Dias, Freedman, Medway and Pare, 1999; Firth, 1995; Olson and Olson, 1993).

In order to be able to follow these and other norms and rules, thus, language users need to know, and hence represent in their context models, that they are now in the specific setting that requires such rules. The rules and norms associated with social places control what people say or write as a teacher at school, a student at the university, a journalist in the newsroom, a sales clerk in a shop or, as we saw, for the speech of Blair in parliament.

Perhaps most important, while controlling many of the other properties of language use, is the fact that types of places are associated with their own discourse genres, such as lessons and exams at schools, sermons in church, parliamentary debates in parliament, sales talk in shops and markets, and so on. We shall explore some more of this in the next chapter, when we deal with the social dimensions of contexts.

It is theoretically difficult to make a clear distinction between these different types of place and the social interactions taking place "in" them. We have assumed that places are not just defined as physical environments or spaces, but also require definition in terms of their "occupants" and the interactions accomplished by them. Yet, if we want to examine the relations between places as settings for discourse and other forms of interaction, we need to single out at least the way participants define, interpret and evaluate such settings as "schools," "shops" and "offices," defined as place-settings where they "go," where they "are" or where they "work."

Apart from the social norms and rules associated with the interactions in such settings, which define appropriateness, properties of place-settings as such may also have a systematic influence on people's discourse and interaction. For instance, if in an office or shop there is a desk or counter between a professional and a client such a property of the setting alone may preclude close interaction and also be interpreted as social distance (Morrow and McElroy, 1981; McElroy, Morrow and Wall, 1983).

Many studies have shown that these and other properties of workplaces as well as many other places have many influences on our activities, but this is

not the same as applying place-dependent norms and rules of appropriateness or acceptability as a criterion for social interaction and discourse. Thus, offices may be too small, too hot, too crowded and so on, and of course this will affect the conduct of people who work in them, but we need to see which of these properties are represented in context models – and why – and how these then *systematically* and *conventionally* influence discourse.

At this point we again meet our familiar problem of how to separate social (and physical) environments from contexts. For instance, in a small shop client and salesperson may be relatively close together and such a distance would in principle be related to a more intimate social relation, which in turn is systematically related to a more familiar use of language. However, "physical" closeness as such is not a necessary or sufficient condition for intimacy (as we know from the interaction in busy streets or subways), and hence also the size of places has no direct bearing on the contextual control of discourse – again except for the physical–physiological link, we tend to speak less loud in smaller places and at shorter distances. However, that does not happen by conventional rule, but because of acoustic constraints of communication (although speaking too loud at a close distance may be considered inappropriate, and hence some norm seems to be broken in that case).

Geographical places A third kind of place may be called *geographical*, but actually embodies and combines social, political and cultural dimensions. They may be represented by their scope, range, size or level, and are progressively inclusive, for instance as follows:

- Home
- Street/Neighborhood
- City
- State, Province
- Country
- Region/Continent
- World.

Although this seems a trivial list, it is probably not a coincidence that again we find that there are about seven "levels" or "scopes" of these geographical places, and that they are widely used in discourse to organize important spaces or places in our life, and in order to organize our "knowledge of the world."

As part of the representation of place in context models, these categories not only tell us where we (and others) are, and what happens where, but also provide a sociocultural dimension and identity (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000; Light and Smith, 1998; Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983), a social

territory we may want to call "our own" and might defend against intrusion or attack. These are the kind of more or less stable places where we "feel at home," where we have a "sense of place" (Bronte, 1972; Jackson, 1994; Tuan, 2001), and which we share with "our" community. These are the places – at various levels – we feel more or less attached to. Much current research on "place" precisely focuses on the modalities of place attachment of different kinds of people (Altman and Low, 1992).

The concentric circles that metaphorically define these increasingly large places may also be interpreted in terms of social, political and cultural distance. We typically are more interested in and know more about events and people that are closer, and hence may presuppose more in discourse that is directed at people of our own community, as we also have seen in the epistemic strategies analyzed in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3; see also Clark, 1996; Van Dijk, 2005a). That is, "Common Ground" is both literally as well as metaphorically related to discourse when shared knowledge is defined in terms of the epistemic communities occupying each kind of place. Also our newspaper sections typically are organized by these categories.

Each of these socio-geographical levels – beyond the home – is organized by political-social institutions and administrations. These are the places where we want to be autonomous, where we are critical of interference "from above" or from invasion from "outside," where we want to elect "our own" leaders, and where we speak our own idiolect, sociolect, dialect or language – among many other social, political and cultural functions.

Many of these geographical places have boundaries or borders, and often outsiders (strangers, foreigners, etc.) are not allowed to enter without permission, an invitation, a visa, a passport or a similar formal permission of access.

The borders of these places are often boundaries between ingroups and outgroups, between Us and Them, and hence at the same time the markers for exclusion, ethnocentrism, racism and nationalism.

These and many other dimensions of "our own place" are frequently expressed or presupposed in text and talk, and it therefore makes sense to include this kind of place information in the context model. Locally, the pronouns *Us* and *Them* are the most characteristic discourse manifestations of the social, political and cultural dimensions of such geographical places (Wilson, 1990), whereas globally places such as countries or regions may be the home of the very language we speak.

We see that the sociocultural and political implications of these kinds of "geographical" places that define our "place in the world" as well as part of our identity, may be contextual conditions of appropriate discourse. Deictic expressions not only refer to personal and interpersonal space of the current face-to-face situation, but also to geographical space: *here* may mean, here at

home, in this neighborhood, in this city, in this country, etc. In our discussion of culture (see Chapter 4), we shall come back to these spatial aspects of the Setting category of context models.

Although context models just like all experience models are by definition personal and unique, we have seen that they also have important social dimensions: they instantiate shared knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values. The same is true for the current "topological" definition of the situation. How I define or interpret my current personal space may be personal and depend on the situation, but there are social and cultural differences, which I share with groups and communities. That is, places such as cities and neighborhoods are shared social representations (Milgram, 1984) that influence the formation of personal context models of situations. We literally allow more distance in formal encounters in public buildings than at a pop concert or in close encounters with loved ones. The same is true for the way we define social places and their associated activities: apart from personal differences, people of the same group and the same culture in general know what to do, and how to use such places/institutions as stations, police stations or post offices, among other places. People as a group typically have stereotypes and prejudices about "other" places, both within the city, within the country or within the world. In other words, this Place subcategory of the Setting of context models is at the same time controlled by social representations of various kinds, and we see that various kinds of places are used by language users as members of groups, communities and cultures for the ways they conduct their interactions and speak to and about others.

Attitudes, opinions and feelings about places

We now have a simple conceptual framework that allows language users to self-represent the "topical" part of their Setting in terms of such propositions as "I am now standing in front of salesperson X, in a shop, in my own neighborhood," or "I am now reading the international news, in a newspaper, in Italy." Each of these dimensions has its own properties, rules and norms that make discourses appropriate and understandable.

We already briefly indicated that places (and their typical activities) may be categorized as (more or less) private or public, open or closed, and we may add such scalar properties as intimate vs. distant, free vs. paying, nature vs. built, warm vs. cold, big vs. small, and so on. Indeed, in order to be able to organize our interactions, places need to be visible, known and accessible (for at least some users). That is, people not only define *where* they are in the three ways indicated above, but also how they feel about such places. They may like or dislike their school, library, swimming pool, or their home, neighborhood or city, and associate a host of other attributes to these places.

If we identify with "our" places, such as our home, neighborhood, city or country, such identification is often associated with positive evaluations and feelings, as we have seen for the concept of place attachment above. That is, apart from evaluations, places may trigger emotions in ongoing activities. In fact, many studies of places and spaces focus precisely on the ways these places affect the opinions and emotions of people.

Evaluations and emotions affect our activities, and hence our discourse. Thus, whereas the categories above define the location of Self/body, social actors and communities, their attributed properties may affect the current context model, and thus, indirectly discourse processing: If we feel relaxed or stressed, secure or threatened, happy or unhappy, patient or impatient because of the properties of the current setting, this will also show in talk or text, for instance in our intonation, speed, lexical selection, and so on. And once such evaluations (opinions) or emotions have affected our mental models of situations, their retrieval may also be positively or negatively affected.

Important for a social psychology of context settings is that these evaluations (opinions) are not only personal, but may also be based on group attitudes, such as stereotypes and prejudices. These are quite typical of our "own" and "other" geographical places, but may also affect social places, such as malls, concert halls, stadiums, police stations, plants or prisons, and so on, especially also because of the activities that take place there, or the typical behavior of the "professionals" that control such places. These attitudes may in turn be based on various social and environmental ideologies about places and the ways these need to be built and used.

In sum, the place categories and associated actions and identities discussed above provide the relevant, contextual basis for many of the properties of our discourse, signaling where we are (from), and where our interlocutors or readers are, who we are and as what social actors we are engaged in such actions, with whom and in what way. The assignment of opinions, which may be personal, or based on shared group attitudes, will, however, not only control where we are, but also "where we stand" in discourse, and thus control such varied properties as intonation, lexical selection, argumentation and a host of rhetorical features, such as euphemisms and hyperboles, among many others.

The structures of places

So far we have conceptualized the three types of places as wholes. Many of them, however, are structured, organized, ordered in many ways, and such structures are important for interaction. Teachers traditionally stand in front of a classroom so that they can see and control the students, and a judge usually sits in front of a courtroom, and on a higher bench, both to symbolize her power, and as a location where interaction with suspects, lawyers and

juries is possible. Movie theaters, concert halls, and many other places of leisure are built such that people need to pass by a cashier to pay for a ticket, and are all situated facing a screen or stage. Factories, labs and offices are organized in such a way that they facilitate professional action and interaction (or in some cases precisely prevent it). On the other hand, one is expected to easily enter shops, but one must stand in line and pay to leave in supermarkets. Many places have some kind of "front desk" where one is supposed to report first, and then maybe one can go on and enter for real, as is the case in hotels, police stations and fancy offices.

Almost all built social places are organized in sections and parts, usually having their own functions, as is the case for living rooms, sleeping rooms, bathrooms and kitchens in homes, and offices and bathrooms for personnel in many work places.

Again, our point is not to detail or review the vast literature on the structures, design and other properties of places (for detail see Bell et al., 2001), but to ask whether such a structural account provides further elements to a theory of context.

We have seen that properties of places in many ways control or facilitate people's actions, both as visitors or as workers in such places. In some ways this will also be true for discourse: the layout of a lecture hall may force a teacher to shout or use a microphone because of increased distance. Because of poor eye contact with many students, telling jokes or measuring the feedback of her lecture cannot easily be assessed by a professor. In shops and many other social places, customers or clients may be separated from salespersons by a counter, which not only is handy to display products, but also means a barrier and hence more distance between client and salesperson.

Now the question is whether these and many other structural properties of places systematically control the structures of discourse. We know what we must (or may) say in a shop, classroom or courtroom, because such settings are associated with the social events and interactions taking place there, including the discursive ones. But, do we speak differently to a sales clerk whether standing in front of a sales counter or without such a barrier? In the latter case we may stand closer to her, and the encounter may be slightly less formal and distant, but this is not a question of a systematic condition or constraint, of a norm or a rule (such as "When in front of a counter, say X") in the same way as we know what kind of things one says when buying things in a shop. If shop design has some effect, it is rather on the evaluations and emotions of shop workers and clients, but not on the conditions for the appropriateness of their discourse. If there is an influence, it will be non-systematic, e.g., on the ways the workers or customers express such opinions and emotions in variable aspects of style, such as volume,

intonation, lexical selection, and so on. But these are stylistic expressions of opinions and emotions, and not conditions of appropriateness.

Other aspects of the environment

The study of place, as briefly discussed above, has become part of a vast field of studies in the humanities and social sciences: environmental psychology (Bell et al., 2001). Decades of studies in this new area hardly leave any doubt about the influence of various kinds of environments on people's "behavior," emphasizing that also the reverse is true: people's presence and activities similarly act on the environment, as we know from the fundamental problem of pollution. Intuitively, thus, as is the case for places, there seems to be little doubt that more generally our "environment" is an important characteristic of social situations.

Yet, the interdependence of environment and human activities is different from the interdependence of action and specific kinds of place, as we have seen above, or actor characteristics such as age and gender or actor relations such as power. We argued that the latter are usually a kind of relationship defined by rules and norms, defining discourse and other activities as more or less *appropriate* in a situation.

However, if we were to say that for instance the weather, temperature, lighting or the size of a room have an impact on people's speech, then such an influence is not typically rule governed, and does not make people's activities more or less socially appropriate. That is, the level of interdependence is rather that of the physical characteristics of speech, and hence to be accounted for in terms of causation, largely beyond the ongoing conscious control of the participants. This does not mean that participants do not represent such environmental features, as indeed they often do (as the daily comments on the weather also suggest), but not as part of the *social* situation and not as conditions for more or less appropriate social conduct. Going lightly dressed in the heat of the summer, thus, is a different sort of interdependence than going formally dressed to a wedding or another formal social event, although both behaviors are socially and culturally controlled: It is just odd but not inappropriate to go warmly dressed on a hot day, but going to a formal wedding in torn old work clothes will in many situations (and classes) be found inappropriate. Let us therefore examine this role of environmental features in somewhat more detail.

Taking the literature in environmental psychology as a backdrop (Bell et al. 2001), we shall simply summarize some well-known types of "interactions" between people and environments in Table 2.1, where we distinguish between social actors and their properties, their (overt) activities with respect to the environment or the ways the environment influences these activities, the

Table 2.1. *Summary of relationships between social actors and environments*

Social actors	Mind	Mood	Activity	Environment Place, space, surroundings,
Individuals/ group members	See		Are, sit, walk, etc. in	Personal space/territory
Personality	Observe		Work in	
Social identity	Understand		Travel in, commute	
Age	Remember		Find way in	Privacy
Gender	Plan		Defend	Rooms
Ethnicity	Design			Furniture
Profession	Map		Spoil	Lighting
	Have opinion about		Pollute	Walls
	Have attitude about			Color
	Have ideology about		Protect	Curtains
	Enjoy			Interpersonal space
	Love			Building
	Hate			Form
Groups				Size
			Are crowded by	
			Ventilation	
			Feel stressed by	
			Degradation	
				Decay
				Graffiti
Communities				Public spaces
				Streets
				Squares
				Parks
				Playgrounds
				Neighborhoods
				Cities
				Noise
				Traffic
				Landscapes
				Rivers
				Mountains
				Beaches, etc.

mental activities with respect to the environment, and finally various properties of the environment conditioning or influenced by what people do.

Recall that much of the literature in environmental psychology is (still) rather behavioristically flavored, as is also clear from the consistent use of the concept of "behavior" instead of "action," "activity" or "interaction," and the

absence of a detailed cognitive interface between the environment and people's action. It is usually recognized that the environment influences people's behavior as a function of how people interpret and represent the environment, but such a theoretical recognition seldom organizes the empirical studies – which therefore generally only concern typical surface "interaction," that is, covariation, and causal relationships.

The table can be read from left to right as Person/group thinks and/or does something to the environment, or vice versa from right to left as the environment causes such and such thoughts or activities in people.

From this table we may infer a vast number of possible "interactions" between people, groups and their environments. Obviously, people's actions in relationship to their environments depend on how they see, understand, interpret and evaluate them, and such variations may be personal, social and cultural. Indeed, some people are bothered by graffiti, and others less so, or not at all, depending on one's norms and values – shared by other members of one's group, community or social category.

Instead of examining all the possible relationships between people, their personal and social characteristics, their minds and actions on the one hand, and properties of environments on the other hand, and instead of reviewing a vast amount of literature, we must get back to our more general question about the relevance of this conceptual exercise for a theory of context.

Since contexts are mental models, the first question we must ask is purely cognitive: how do social actors manage to understand the vast complexity of their environment, ongoingly and sometimes within second or fractions of seconds? Obviously they can only act competently or appropriately in such an environment if they have some basic understanding of it, so that they know what they may or must do in their own rooms, but not on the street, and what can be done on the street but not in a park, and vice versa, among a host of other possibilities.

It seems plausible therefore that people assign some basic *structures* to their environments, so as to reduce their complexity and in order to be able to formulate some general norms and rules. Thus, it is likely that people distinguish between personal, interpersonal and public spaces and places, between nature and human-made environments, and that for each of such fundamental categories there are also limited cognitive and social distinctions being made between types or levels, so that they can be cognitively managed. Thus, we already proposed that social places are probably organized in a reduced set, defined mainly by their social functions ("what they do/mean for me"). Such knowledge may be combined with general knowledge of buildings and their social uses, and allow further, detailed analysis, e.g., down to the level of different kinds of rooms, etc. Geographical places or spaces also appear to be limited to about seven levels or ranges.

Now what about the aspects of the environment that have not been treated above as part of the account of places and spaces, such as temperature, noise or silence, odors, cleanliness, pollution, colors, design, decorations, furniture, props, billboards, and so on, as well as other aspects of social interaction such as crowding and aggression?

Apart from the basic principles of categorization of the environment discussed earlier, we now must assume that social actors also know about normal, desirable or otherwise socially shared attributes of these spaces and places. And again, as also observed above, they will use evaluative and emotional categories to categorize the places and spaces of their environment (and especially of their "own" neighborhood and city), for instance, in terms of well-kept vs. run-down, rich vs. poor, beautiful vs. ugly, elegant vs. plain, clean vs. polluted, noisy vs. silent, hot vs. cold, clean vs. dirty, and – increasingly – safe vs. unsafe. Since social members need to make such evaluations routinely and rapidly in their everyday lives, so as to be able to adapt their interactions to such properties of (the places of) the environment, we again assume that such evaluations are schematic and prototypical. We would typically not expect that there are hundreds of such evaluation categories. Personal evaluations are of course largely socially based: what counts as "ugly" or "unsafe" is based on social attitudes, as well as on more fundamental ideologies, e.g., of class. Acquired ecological knowledge and awareness of many citizens also should have an influence on such evaluations.

Given these elementary remarks about environments and their properties, we should ask the same question again: if people are able to notice and evaluate such properties of their environments, does this also mean that they are, or could be, part of their definition of the context?

As we have seen before, and as a vast literature of environmental psychology shows, there is no doubt that these many properties of the environment influence "behavior" and hence also text and talk, in many ways. Thus, rather trivially, a noisy street or room will make it harder to make oneself understood, and hence typically cause us to speak louder or to shout. If we can – and if we do not live there – we avoid unsafe, dirty, polluted, or otherwise unattractive places, and/or complain about them in everyday conversations. Unattractive places cause stress, and such stress will affect action and discourse in many ways, e.g., an irritated style. And no doubt a bare room with walls of gray concrete, with metal furniture, without curtains, and with a glaring light bulb, as one would expect of a typical interrogation room in a police precinct, for instance, has a different impact on participants than a warmly furnished room with subdued, indirect light.

Participants of course (may) register and interpret such environmental properties, and again we may assume that if the pleasant setting makes

people feel more relaxed, then this probably also shows in their discourse. But again, as far as we know from Western European languages, there are no different conditions for the use of, e.g., politeness forms, pronouns, or other properties of discourse in these different settings. That is, they are part of the physical, physiological or social situation, but not – according to the criterion of systematic discursive relevance – part of context. They may control evaluations, moods or emotion, which in turn may influence language use, but they are not systematic constraints on the *appropriateness* of text or talk, as is the case for the social relationship between the participants. They are *causes* of conduct, not *rules* of conduct. It is communicatively and interactionally relevant for a space to be contextually defined as a shop or office, but not whether the shop is small or big, dirty or clean, dark or light, and so on.

In sum, the environment in many ways may influence our perceptions, opinions and emotions and the actions based on them, but only some aspects of the environment, such as the social definition of spaces and places, have an influence on the properties of discourse that define their appropriateness with respect to the context. In *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 4) we examined in some more detail how contextual categories of Space and Place, as part of Setting, influence properties of text and talk.

Time

As is obvious from the systematic use of verb tenses, temporal adverbs and narrative sequences, among many other structures, time is an important dimension in language and discourse (Auer, Couper-Kühlen and Müller, 1999; Bartsch, 1995; Chafe, 1994; Van Benthem, 1991). The same is true for all human activities, and it is therefore plausible that time is a prominent property in social situations and the ways social actors interpret or construct these. Indeed, the very discourses and other actions in which they participate are ordered temporally, such that all events before the current point of time, such as the time of speaking, are automatically becoming things of the past, including the previous part of ongoing activities. We have seen that one of the important consequences of such a structure is that "previous" parts of discourse and the knowledge presupposed and implied by them may *now* be considered "given" or "old" knowledge that can henceforth be presupposed in various ways. The same is true for the social actions that have been carried out in the previous discourse part: they now belong to what has been done, and may hence be conditions for current and future social acts.

Whereas the awareness and representation of time is a topic for a cognitive analysis of context and situation, the social psychological approach in this

chapter needs to account for time in terms of socially shared representations and social interactions based on them or aiming to influence them. That is, sociocognitive time is time that participants jointly "produce" – in the sense of sharing it during a conversation, negotiating as something one would like to have more or less of, as something that may be slow or fast, usefully employed or "wasted," and so on (McGrath and Kelly, 1986; McGrath and Tschan, 2003).

There are many forms of discourse and communicative events that are organized by time, with fixed beginnings and endings, as is the case for most meetings, broadcast programs, lectures, parliamentary debates, doctors' visits, and so on. This is the case for most institutional discourse, but also in informal everyday conversations people do not have limitless time, and organize part of their discourse, and especially ending it, by negotiating termination with reference to time (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Communicative events may take place between fixed time points, or have a maximum duration: as we shall see in Chapter 5, speakers in parliament may be awarded just a few minutes to make their speech.

All this shows that participants in many communicative events, at least in many modern cultures, must be aware of time, and keep monitoring it – starting with the obligatory presence at a certain place at a certain time (that is, being "on time" for work, a class, a meeting, a train ride or a concert). In other words, most social activities are temporally organized and it is therefore crucial that people represent time as an important dimension of their model of the situation in which they are interacting or communicating. We also know that concepts of time and their role in interaction are culturally different (see, e.g., Philips, 1974).

As we have seen before, time is not just a temporal (before–after) measure of the sequential organization of ongoing events and activities, and hence for discourse, that is, a sequence of current moments, but also socially and culturally segmented in conventional units: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries and millennia. Note that this list has nine members, which again fit the formula seven plus or minus two that seems to control many schemas of representation and comprehension, and of which only the first seven organize everyday life, as we have seen above (Miller, 1956).

More than places, spaces and actors, time is typically an abstract notion, and hence needs to be made more concrete by many kinds of metaphors. Thus, time is routinely represented as "flowing" like water, "spent" like money, as a scarce resource, or a course when we are "running out of time," (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). And like money and its social and cultural values, time will thus be counted, as so many seconds, minutes, hours or days it "costs" us to accomplish something.

Situations, thus, are represented as defined by temporal beginning and end points, and a dynamic "running time," a clock, during the event. It is this combination of place, time and activities that form a unit with a complex structure: whereas Self and other participants are located in place or space, their activity is situated not only with respect to a location, but also in time.

As is the case for place and space, time exercises *constraints* on people's affordances, especially in formal, institutional or professional situations. Thus a parliamentary speech, an exam, a lecture, a court session, a meeting, and a host of other such communicative events, will be more or less strictly regulated as to their time management. A PhD defense in the Netherlands, which is a very formal, public event, taking place in the aula of the university, lasts exactly 45 minutes of questions and answers, after which a university official will enter and shout in Latin *Hora est*, after which the current speaker may briefly finish her or his question or answer.

How does situation time affect discourse in other ways than in its beginning, ending and duration – or in the way that people tend to accelerate their speech (and looking nervously at their watch or at the clock on the wall) when they think they are "running out of time"?

One of the most obvious expressions of time or periods in activity and discourse is the actual reference to it, e.g., by deictic expressions such as *now*, *today*, *next week* or *Thursday*, in which situation time is used as a point of measurement to temporally locate events talked about. That is, it is here that "pragmatic" context models and "semantic" mental models of events overlap in the discourse expression of their contents – as is the case for all deictic expressions.

Secondly, temporal sequencing of discourse may "naturally" run parallel with the temporal sequence of the events or acts talked *about* – as is the case for chronological storytelling (Sternberg, 1990; Wiemer, 1997), but not for instance in news reports, which are not organized primarily by time, but by importance, relevance or interestingness, although the whole report may be based on news events that have been selected also because of their recency (Van Dijk, 1988a).

From these examples, and those mentioned previously, we see that the situational category of time especially serves as an interface between pragmatics and semantics, as a device that links current speaking time or time period with the time of events or actions talked about, as is the case for storytelling about past events, concurrent sports reports for radio and television, or predictions, warnings and menaces about what may or will happen in the future. Hence time (Past, Present and Future) is also a contextual condition for certain speech acts. Time also controls *order* of interventions in

debates and in many other institutional settings, as we have seen for Tony Blair speaking first in the parliamentary debate analyzed in Chapter 5.

The social psychological relevance of this organization of pragmatic and semantic time is that such organization is a sociocognitive accomplishment, carried out in cooperation with interlocutors, and defining the temporal organization of communicative and other social events. More generally, the management of interaction, turn taking, interruptions, and opening and closing conversations are organized (also) by participants' definition of time as points, periods or a running clock. The "No Gap, No Overlap" principle of conversation presupposes a combined coordination of action and time: people are not supposed to speak *at the same time*.

From the few examples mentioned here we may assume that speakers are not only aware of (changing) time, but also use such temporal concepts as constraints in their context models, and as part of the larger Setting category. In the next chapters we shall further examine the social and cultural dimensions of such temporal framing of events, actions and discourse, including the important institutional aspects of time for the organization of social events in different communities.

Circumstances

No doubt Place/Space and Time are the central categories of Settings, but we might want to consider other situational elements that could be categorized as influencing activities, such as Circumstances. If Time and Place typically are expressed in the temporal adverbs (or tenses) and location adverbs of sentences or in discourse segments that have the same function, Circumstances have their corresponding discourse expressions in circumstantial connectives and adverbs (such as "while" in English). Some of these circumstances have been considered above when we were examining environmental factors, for instance temperature or noise, but we have provisionally eliminated them as viable context factors, at least for European languages.

There do not seem to be specific speech acts, pronouns, or textual categories whose conditions or variations depend on natural events such as rain or shine, perhaps with the exception of some very specific magical speech genres that might need to be performed by a full moon. Similarly, we may have songs exclusively sung at Christmas, the Queen's speech pronounced during the opening of the parliamentary New Year and similar ritual genres. Prayers to be pronounced at specific moments of the day can be accounted for in terms of the Time category of the Setting, as is the case for determining the beginning or end of the Sabbath or moments when one can (not) eat during Ramadan – both also associated with specific religious discourses, such as prayers or ritual formulas.

More generally, Circumstances point at actions and events that partly coincide with others, such as demonstrations *during* the visit of the US president. Schemas of news reports have special categories for such a circumstantial relationship in which a news event focused upon is situated – and hence partly explained – against a *background* of another news event (Van Dijk, 1988a). In that sense, Circumstances plays a role for events and actions similar to the more complex context or situation whose structures we are examining for the control of discourse. Note though that grammatical or discursive categories of circumstantials are filled by expressions that denote events or situations we speak or write *about*, and hence define semantic rather than pragmatic models. Hence, although specific genres may require contextual definitions with a Circumstances category as part of the Setting, there does not seem to be much evidence for the general relevance of such a category in context schemas.

Concluding remark on Settings

We have seen that Settings are a fundamental aspect of the structure of situations in general, and of contexts in particular. Actors have their "place" and their activities "take place" in some physical space, within boundaries, at specific moments or periods of time, and under variable circumstances. Although place and time seem simple enough as basic coordinates, we have seen that spatial and temporal perception, awareness and interactional organization may need to reduce a vast amount of spatiotemporal data in order to manage one's activity in relation to others. Thus, the multiplicity of possible spatial or local units in which actions take place might well be reduced to just over a handful of fundamental personal, interpersonal and public space-units, ranging from personal body-space via rooms and buildings to neighborhoods, and from cities via countries and continents to the world scene. The same may be true for the sociocognitive organization and interactional accomplishment of the vast amount of (attributed) location or spatial properties, ranging between different kinds of proximity, privacy, size, safety and so on. Similar remarks hold for the organization of time, its joint social definition and accomplishment and the ways it controls interaction and discourse.

Overall, thus, the Setting provides the scene of action, sets temporal and spatial constraints that allow social coordination of social interaction in the first place (how else to know when and where to meet?), helps organize the placement and development of the current action and provides a pragmatic time frame for the relative semantics of the events and actions talked or written about as well as the conditions of speech acts.

Although all of the spatial, temporal and environmental properties of situations mentioned above have an obvious influence on people's awareness and social (inter) actions, we do not yet know how many of them need to enter a theory of context. Various aspects of time and place, as discussed, obviously do. Others, such as (say) speaking in a room, street, park or landscape, or writing on Thursday, or with a high or low outside temperature, or surrounded by white or gray walls, among many other setting characteristics, might have incidental effects on phonetics, contents or the emotions of language users, but do not seem obvious candidates for more general rules and structures of text and talk: we do not use different intonation, syntax, pronouns, coherence conditions, presuppositions, speech acts, rhetorical devices or interactional strategies as a consequence of such environmental variation.

It is in this sense that it is crucial to distinguish between physical and social situations, as well as the many other environmental characteristics people may be aware of, on the one hand, and context – what is systematically and socially construed as relevant for discourse – on the other hand. The first are causes or reasons that influence discourse, whereas contexts feature the rule-governed conditions that make discourses more or less adequate. For instance, environmental noise may be a valid reason to shout, anywhere, but there are contextual norms that control when and where and with whom we may "raise our voice," for instance as an expression of emotion or as a manifestation of power. We shall come back several times to this same point below.

Social actors

Obviously, social actors are among the defining "components" of social situations. Indeed, we would probably not define situations as social without social actors (and social actions or interactions) in the first place. Again, an analysis of social actors as "participants" in social situations as well as their many social properties would require us to review most research in social psychology, sociology and anthropology, so we need to focus on the crucial dimensions or characteristics of social actors as situational and contextual participants.

Thus, it is quite likely that in general gender, ethnicity, age, occupation (profession), position or status of social actors have a systematic impact on activities, text and talk, and not, or less, for instance the color of their clothes, the length of their arms or hair, whether they are bald or have an allergy – among thousands of other physical, biological, psychological or social properties they may have. In other words, as we have seen for Settings above, some properties of social actors define appropriateness of activities and

discourse and others do not. For instance, only participants in their role as MPs can speak in parliament, and only the Speaker of the House of Commons can regulate turn-taking in parliament. Such appropriateness is defined not only by the current context, but also by the application of rules and general sociocultural beliefs (schema, prototypes, stereotypes, etc.) we have about categories of participants as well as personal opinions about current participants.

Indeed, since people can be categorized in many ways, there is probably a general strategy in social categorization to focus on specific categories or identities – thus, we appear to categorize people first of all in terms of gender, age and ethnicity (Fiske, 1998). Of course, as always, it all depends on the context. Thus, MPs in the Iraq debate listening to Tony Blair are not likely to categorize him first as male, white and middle-aged, but more likely as PM, Labour Party leader, as a friend of Bush and so on – although the general social categorizations (gender, age, etc.) may form a background and may be activated any time.

A study of social actors in communicative situations takes place at the borderline of social psychology and microsociology, because obviously it is not merely the sociocognitive nature of the understanding and the interaction involved here, but also various kinds of social and institutional roles and identities that need further definition in sociological terms.

In this chapter we focus on sociocognitive aspects such as identity, group membership, interpersonal and intergroup relations and strategies, and (below) on shared beliefs such as stereotypes and prejudices, among other phenomena that need both a cognitive and a social type of analysis. In other words, we here talk about actors and language users as members of various kinds of social groups, and the ways they cognitively (evaluatively and emotionally) manage such membership. Although actors and actions are hard to separate, we shall then focus on actions and interactions themselves in the next section.

In social psychology, studies of the properties of social actors are usually described in the literature on person perception, social categorization and stereotyping – a vast literature of which we are able to review only some relevant fragments. One of the aims and criteria of our discussion here is again to find out how social actors as language users are able to manage the vast amounts of information they have about themselves and others in the ongoing construction and updating of social situations in general, and communicative contexts in particular. That is, as we have argued before, since contexts are sometimes constructed, managed and changed in (fractions of) seconds, they need to be fairly lean representations of social situations, and this also applies to the ongoing construction of the relevant characteristics of the social actors that participate in them.

Thus, actors or speakers may attend to age, gender or position of interlocutors, as well as some further characteristics, but simply have no time to attend *at the same time* to thousands of other "observables" – although they may focus on some of these characteristics when situationally relevant, or as part of a strategy of interpretation. For instance the quality of people's clothes may be used to categorize them as belonging to a specific social class, but it will be the assigned category of class, and not the details of the clothes that may influence the rest of a conversation. Thus, the category "social class" may function both cognitively as well as socially as a shorthand of many other properties of social actors, and hence be a candidate for a participant subcategory of context structures. The same is obviously true for gender: we need several cognitive and social strategies to establish whether we speak to a man or a woman (or otherwise gender-categorized people), but the context model will only register the socially relevant category that is the "result" of such an analysis of the social situation. Again, people may see and understand many socially relevant properties of other people (Fiske and Taylor, 1991), but only some of these will be relevant for the systematic organization of discourse, and hence take their place in context models.

Person perception and social categorization

Before examining some more specific properties of actors in communicative situations, we need to make some more general remarks on how people perceive and categorize themselves and others in interaction. Obviously, they do not do so from scratch. Through their daily experiences as well as through various forms of pedagogical or media discourse, people have acquired general *prototypes* and *schemas* of people as persons and as members of social collectivities (Cantor and Mischel, 1979; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Schneider, Hastorf and Ellsworth, 1979).

One of the functions of such schematic representations is to facilitate perception, memory and reproduction, for instance through the organization and reduction of complex information. Moreover, also because of their frequent and repeated application, schemas tend to be applied more or less automatically (Bargh, 1984, 1994; Wegner and Bargh, 1998), so that scarce cognitive resources can be reserved for other tasks – such as understanding unique and salient characteristics of the situation. It is this fundamental characteristic of social information processing that tends to lead to overgeneralization and the formation and application of stereotypes and prejudices. To avoid these, people need to engage in much more conscious, self-reflexive control of social understanding and interaction (Devine, 1989). Indeed, in that respect it is "easier" to be sexist or racist than anti-sexist or antiracist, not only for social reasons, but also for cognitive reasons.

Since context models must be relatively simple, they are thus able to take advantage of the schematic representations of people that are part of people's general sociocultural knowledge, as well as of fast, automatized processing strategies. That is, part of the knowledge and opinions about a current participant can simply be inferred from socially shared schemas of people, actors or social roles and projected (instantiated) into the current model – together with the currently unique information about that person. In other words, the constructing of a context model is in this case just a special case of the more general sociocognitive competence of social members to understand and categorize human being in general, and current situational participants in particular. Thus, MPs listening to Tony Blair in the Iraq debate first categorize Blair as PM, politician, Labour leader, etc. and then strategically activate and instantiate the contextually relevant schematic knowledge they have about such political roles. Since MPs see Blair and other MPs very frequently, much of this activation and schema instantiation is very much automatized, so that they can focus on the new situational and discursive information at hand. At the same time they combine such general knowledge with their socially shared as well as personal knowledge and opinions gradually developed about Tony Blair as a person. These schemas are finally applied to the current "model" of Tony Blair as inferred from his current policies and actions (e.g., for instance as an ally of the USA in the war in Iraq) and as it is now being inserted, and ongoingly updated, into the current context model, in which Blair, as defined, plays a central role.

Incidentally, to avoid a well-known confusion (due to the ambiguity of the everyday uses of the notion of "model"), we should carefully distinguish between our collective or subjective person **schema** about Tony Blair, on the one hand, and the current, unique, subjective **model** some MP has of Blair at each moment in the debate, on the other hand. Schemas are general, abstract and decontextualized: (a) what is generally, socially known and presupposed in public discourse about Tony Blair (e.g., that he is the Prime Minister of the UK, leader of Labour, and so on), and (b) my general personal beliefs about Tony Blair as accumulated and abstracted over the years, a personal schema or "impression" which I may activate – and adapt – each time I hear or read about him; this personal schema of mine about Blair is of course influenced by general, socially shared schemas, combined by generalizations from my earlier personal experiences (mental models) in which Blair appears. These social and personal *schemas* about Blair are then applied in the construction of my unique, personal and current *model* I am *now* constructing and updating when I am listening to him today or at this moment in the current debate.

That is, although person models are by definition unique because they apply our subjective opinions and emotions (Fiske, 1982) and embody equally subjective inferences of ongoing perception and understanding of a person (appearance, action, discourse), a more or less large portion of the model may simply be an instantiation of sociocultural knowledge of social roles or categories and of schemas of a specific person.

As we have stressed before, context models are not construed from scratch in each communicative situation. We already saw that participants strategically *anticipate* many properties of the communicative situation in which they will participate, and may even plan part of their intervention, as is obviously the case for Tony Blair and the MPs in the Iraq debate. At the same time, both in their plans as well as in the currently ongoing dynamic model that monitors their discourse production and comprehension, a large part of the context model is an instantiation of what they already knew: the MPs already knew Tony Blair, and had already activated and applied what they knew and expected from him as a person, as well as from a Prime Minister, leader of Labour, and so on. We see that there are many ways in which the complexity – and the resources of their management – of current context models can be reduced:

- The previous and ongoing application (instantiation) of general sociocultural knowledge (schemas, etc.) about social roles.
- The previous and ongoing application of *socially shared* person schemas about a given person.
- The previous and ongoing application of individual, subjective schemas about a given person.
- The previous and ongoing selection of currently relevant characteristics of a participant in the ongoing communicative event.
- The current ideologies, interests, goals, etc. of the participant.

Note that the application of schematic knowledge takes place both before and during the actual interaction and the construction of schemas: to wit, no MP in the Iraq debate is surprised to see Tony Blair opening the debate, nor about what he does (present and defend a motion), etc. Note that besides the general knowledge about Prime Ministers and about Tony Blair, there is also the currently relevant knowledge of Blair as an ally of the USA in the Iraq war.

Finally, these instantiations are of course different for members of Labour, the Conservative Party or the Liberal Democrats, on the one hand, or for more or less pacifist MPs, on the other hand. And all this *general* knowledge and beliefs will finally be applied in the unique, ongoing – but dynamically changing "impression" each MP forms of Tony Blair in the current debate: He or she may dislike him as a PM, or as person, but have respect for his current arguments, or vice versa, generally agree with his policies but very

much oppose the current Iraq policy and the arguments provided. Obviously, the same takes place in the previous construction and ongoing adaptation of Tony Blair's context model of the MPs he is currently addressing.

Although people generally are inclined to automatically activate and apply general schemas (stereotypes, prejudices) to understand social situations, we should stress – especially in a book on context – that these processes always depend on context (Fiske, Lin and Neuberg, 1999; Lawrence and Leather, 1999). British Conservatives (and not only they) may generally be inclined to activate and apply a negative schema (stereotype) of Tony Blair, if only because he is the leader of a party that is ideologically opposed to them, and because he is leading the government party and they are in the opposition. However, in the case of the debate about the war in Iraq the Conservatives agree with Blair (and with the conservative US government) that the UK should take military action against Iraq, so that their current evaluation of Blair in the debate may be more positive than it usually is. In other words, general knowledge and belief schemas generally facilitate social and political understanding, but the special circumstances of current situations will always reinforce or weaken the application of such schemas in unique, specific models of a situation.

These then are among the processes and representations involved in a social psychological approach to the construction of participants in context models. The actual cognitive processes involved here are rather the task of cognitive psychology, and need not be examined here. The social psychological dimensions relevant here are the kind of social processes involved in social categorization, person perception, impression formation, the formation and use of sociocultural knowledge about people, and the way such beliefs are activated, applied, adapted and modified in ongoing discourse and interaction. Although for each MP during the speech of Tony Blair the current knowledge and opinions of Blair (the "Blair-model" of the context model) at each moment in the speech is of course subjective and hence unique, a social psychological approach is specifically interested in those aspects of that "Blair-model" that are instantiations of more general personal and especially sociocultural and sociopolitical schemas, prototypes, stereotypes, prejudices and ideologies. Let us examine some of these participant dimensions in somewhat more detail.

Social identity

People participate in social situations not only as individuals, with their own personal experiences, life histories, autobiographical memories, intentions and goals, but also as social actors and as members of social groups. Whereas many of the social properties of social actors and groups will be dealt with

in the next chapter, what interests us here is how interaction and group membership also affect, and are affected by, sociocognitive aspects of people, such as their beliefs, knowledge, impressions, evaluations, emotions, and so on. One crucial dimension of this sociocognitive interface is people's *social identities*.

"Social identity" is not exactly a well-defined concept. However, it is beyond the scope of this book to offer a detailed alternative theory (for various classical and contemporary approaches, see, e.g., Abrams and Hogg, 1999; Brown, 2000; Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b; Tajfel, 1981, 1982). Also, I shall not be concerned with the detailed sociocognitive processes, such as self- and other-categorization, in the formation of social identities and groups. Crucial for our own theorizing in this chapter is that people construct not only a personal Self, but also a social Self as member of – various – groups, and that intra- and intergroup perception and interaction depend on these socially shared identities of people who categorize themselves as group members.

Many forms of group perception, judgment and interaction, such as conformity, polarization, solidarity, stereotyping and racism, also take place through discourse and hence also are relevant for a theory of discourse and context. Indeed, when talking as group members people tend to emphasize the positive things of their own group, and the negative things of outgroups, processes of group stereotyping, prejudice formation and polarization that may be observed at many levels of text and talk (Van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993a). Obviously, this is the case not only when talking and writing *about* ingroup and outgroup members, but also when talking *with* them, that is, in intergroup interaction. That is, during the construction of context models we find an ongoing process of Self and Other perception, categorization and judgment of all participants which influences interaction in general, and discourse in particular.

Whereas studies in the traditional paradigms of social psychology tend to construct social identity rather in more or less structuralist, static, functional terms – as something people construct or "have" – some current approaches, for instance in the constructionist paradigm, prefer to approach social identity in more flexible, dynamic and situational terms, as something that is ongoingly being constructed or "performed" and not as something already "given" (Burr, 1995; Butler, 1990; De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg, 2006; Gergen and Gergen, 1981; Harré, 1979). Also in social categorization theory, social identities are not treated as fixed representations, but as interactionally produced in a specific context, and in relation to the other aspects of the context (see, e.g., Abrams, 1999; Oakes, Haslam and Reynolds, 1999).

As occurs more often in scholarly developments, criticism of a theory sometimes leads to the effect that the baby is thrown away with the bathwater. One does not throw away all earlier psychological approaches to identity,

especially not when such a decision is often based on misinterpretations, and when the alternative so far is only a very vague set of ideas and hardly an explicit theory. A theoretically sound account of social identity needs to have both stable and dynamic dimensions.

For instance, being a journalist is not a social identity that is ephemerally and only ongoingly being "constructed" by social actors when they are on the beat or writing a news article, and which they need to "reinvent" each time they do so. The same is true for relational social identities such as father or sister.

That is, social roles and identities, just like personal identities, also have some more or less stable characteristics. They may be associated with specific knowledge and abilities, a specific job, specific tasks and duties, overall goals, norms and values, feelings of belonging to a group or social category, and so on.

Many of these socially shared properties of group members are long in the making, rather stable and hard to change. Perhaps even more importantly, people are being categorized, hired or otherwise treated in terms of such more or less stable, "attributed identities," that is, roles or occupations. When acting or speaking as group members, social actors may (or need to) activate many of these properties associated with a social identity, such as specific abilities, knowledge and other social representations shared by the group.

Without at least some stable properties, the very notion of "identity" is meaningless, because it presupposes that someone, or some aspect of someone, is "identical" across time, place or situation. In fact, one may ask, how are social actors capable of "positioning themselves" or "performing" as woman, journalist or friend – among a host of other identities – if they have no idea what such an identity is. An identity is not merely something one gradually adopts, grows into, etc., but also something one must "learn," that is, social knowledge. Such knowledge may be acquired by personal experiences and interaction, but also by discourse *about* social identities (e.g., normative discourse of parents telling their daughter to behave like a "girl"). So, it is true that social identities are gradually constructed by social actors, namely through interaction and discourse, but once such an identity has been acquired, as knowledge, then a competent actor may henceforth *apply* or *use* such an identity – of course with all possible adaptation, changes, modifications that are contextually necessary. But it is absolutely crucial to remember that actors are unable to locally or contextually construct or perform an identity without any social knowledge about such an identity, and most of the time such knowledge is based on what may be called previous *identity practice*.

That is, identities are (also) decontextualized abstractions, but they may be ongoingly specified, concretized, applied, used, or "performed" – and hence changed – in unique ways in specific situations, as is the case for all general knowledge. That is, as we also have language and language use, we have

abstract identities as "given" (known) constructs, and dynamic "uses" of such identities. The first (identity as known, abstract construct) are typically stored in semantic-social memory (e.g., as some kind of schema, although we barely know more than that; see Abrams and Hogg, 1999; Fiske and Taylor, 1991), whereas the second (identity as dynamic realization) is represented in ongoing, episodic models, for instance in contexts (see also Oakes, Haslam and Reynolds, 1999). The specific (unique combination of) identities instantiated in mental models influence how we produce and understand discourse, but the mental models themselves are formed under the influence of the more general social resource of the shared social representation of social identities.

Since people may be members of many groups, one person may have many social identities. The unique nature of the dynamic identity performed in specific situations typically combines elements of various (given) social identities – a combination that may not be without contradiction and conflict – depending on the current goals and other characteristics of the social actors and the social situation. This may lead to the ongoing construction of various kinds of "hybrid" identities, to a change of stable identities, as well as to a manifestation of the creation of a new social identity. It is this unique, combined, situational and dynamic identity that controls discourse, but on the basis of shared, known, social identities. The theory of context accounts for both the "static" and the "dynamic" aspects of the social identities of social actors as participants in communicative situations. Hence, language users may at the same time speak as individual persons with their unique personal histories of experiences, on the one hand, and as members of (various) social groups, on the other hand. An adequate theory of context should of course account for the discursive consequences of both. Although without a detailed theory of its cognitive and discursive underpinnings, this apparent duality had already been resolved in social psychology several decades ago (see, e.g., Tajfel, 1981).

Social Self

In experience models and context models *Self* literally plays a central role in the way persons represent and organize the communicative events in which they participate (see also: Bakhurst, 1995; Baumeister, 1999; Goffman, 1956; Harré, 1998; Hewitt, 1991; Neisser and Jopling, 1997).

Episodic memories of their experiences are organized around the ways individuals also represent their Self as a decontextualized representation, organized in a specific Self-schema (Markus, 1977): the Self that is experienced as the "same identity" across different situations, and labeled with a unique combination of name, date of birth, personal history, and so on.

Besides subjective, autobiographical dimensions, the Self, however, also has important social dimensions, and hence also needs a social psychological analysis: the way people form, express or enact their personal identity also depends on the way others see, define, describe and interact with them (Brewer, 1991). Crucial in this case is that this social construction of Self is an instantiation of the way *we* construct our Selves, also mutually, as group members.

Thus, the Self is a personal but socially based construct. As we have seen for social identities above, this means that there is something more or less stable and continuous about my social Self-concept, on the one hand, as well as a variable and dynamic dimension, which accounts for the unique, contextually specific "me" of each situation, which depends on many other aspects of the current situation, and especially on the (also ongoingly activated) identities of other participants and the interaction (Abrams, 1999). Because each context model is also unique the Self-model that forms its center will on the one hand be a constant (the "same" person, with the same name, the same attributes, etc.), and on the other hand more or less unique, because of the uniqueness of the ongoing interaction, setting, participant relations, goals, knowledge and so on. Since the general-abstract Self is construed on the basis of personal experiences (mostly social interactions with others) represented in episodic memory, it may be assumed that this generalized Self is also represented in episodic memory, namely as the general schema that organizes all personal experiences.

To summarize: context models as subjective representations of communicative situations in episodic memory are organized with Current-Self as the center of the model and its participant structure. Current-Self is the unique, ongoing representation of speakers at this moment of speaking. This self is construed on the basis of a generalized Self-schema that is relatively stable, but may gradually change over time – precisely as a result of new experiences, that is, mental models.

Communicative roles: speakers

What has been argued above also holds for the construction of Self in communicative situations, and hence for the role of Self in context models. Characteristic in that case, however, is that besides all the other social identities I may have, display or construct, I am at least also a Speaker or another discourse participant (reader, overhearer, etc.). That is, my social identity in that case is being combined with the enactment of a type of *communicative social role*.

Although there are close relationships between social identities or social Selves on the one hand, and social roles, on the other, it makes analytical and

empirical sense to distinguish them (see, e.g., Ashforth, 2001; Coser, 1991). Thus, unlike other identities, communicative roles are strictly defined for a specific situation (and even a specific time stretch during this situation) that is, defined as the participant who now "has" the turn at talk.

This means that it hardly makes sense to use a concept such as "speaker-identity," because it is not likely that there is some general social representation of speakers: speakers do not form a group or community. Speakers of course have general role knowledge, what they may or should do when playing such a role, for instance how to start or stop such a role, as in beginning, ending or interrupting a conversation. People have played the role of speaker many (hundreds of) thousands of times in their lives, so they in many ways have become experts at this role and generally have no problem performing it.

Among the relevant social identities and roles of participants, the Speaker role is of course a necessary context category for participants who take/get turns: I must represent myself not only as a Participant during the entire conversation, but also as current Speaker, and this self-definition controls not only the use of deictic expressions such as "I," "my," "mine" or "myself," but also the general management of "my" turn at talk: how to acquire that role, how and when to keep speaking, when to let other participants interrupt me, or when to relinquish the Speaker role to others (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974).

Only in parliament is the role of the Speaker institutionalized as a position, namely as Chair of the sessions of parliament, and it is this Speaker-Chair who controls (allocates, etc.) the turns of a debate. Once an MP is allocated such a turn and assumes her role as (current) speaker, this will be her (dynamic, contextual) identity for so many minutes (see Chapter 5 for examples).

Other communicative roles

Similar remarks apply to other communicative roles, such as writers, readers and hearers, each with their specific social and cultural role knowledge and ways of "applying" or "performing" them. Note that such role definitions also control the corresponding cognitive processing. Whereas the Speaker role controls production processes, various kinds of recipients primarily engage in processes of understanding, even when they may show that they are listening, and thus actively participating in a conversation.

Specific genres and forms of (mass) communication may require many types of (professional) roles in the production of discourse, and different kinds of recipients, addressees or audiences. Thus, news in the press or on television is produced by many different professionals, such as reporters, editors, producers, camera people, and so on. Some of these gather and write

a version of a news report, others rewrite and correct it, and again others print it, broadcast, distribute or read it. That is, news production, much like many other forms of institutional or organizational discourse, is jointly produced, and each participant has a specific organizational or institutional role related to specific activities that are part of the production process.

It is obvious that such participants each need their own context models with the relevant communicative role represented – and the corresponding professional knowledge activated – in order to be able to do their job adequately and appropriately. Since these roles are social, professional and institutional, they need to be examined in the next chapter on the societal aspects of context. Relevant here is that these roles are also associated with various forms of social cognition, such as professional attitudes, ideologies, norms and values, shared by groups (see below), and that they uniquely combine with personal selves and other participant-identities in specific context models.

Managing social identities

From what has been stated above, we may infer that the representation of social identities is not only a central and crucial feature of context models, but also involves many types of identity and roles, such as:

- **Categories**: gender (women, men, etc.), age (young, old, etc.), appearance (black, white, etc.), etc.
- **Ethnicity:** European, Asian-American, Mapuche, etc.
- **Nationality:** Dutch, Spanish, etc.
- **Profession/Occupation:** baker, dentist, journalist, etc.
- **Social positions:** boss, employee, etc.
- **Ideological identities:** socialist, feminist, pacifist, etc.
- **Social roles/relations:** mother, friend, patient, client, etc.
- **Communicative roles:** speakers, producers, listeners, readers, etc.

Our task in this chapter and this book cannot be to provide a general theory of social roles and identities (although I shall have more to say about them in the next chapter). Interesting, however, is that this list also has about seven types of identities, and we might wonder whether the permanent, ongoing analysis of our experiences and social situations more generally requires an economy that can be handled by about seven basic categories. Indeed, it would be cognitively and interactionally improbable that speakers manage dozens, let alone, hundreds of identities at the same time.

At each moment, one or a few of these social identities will be selected/performed, and even when several identities are being managed, it is likely that one or two will at each moment be exercising dominance and control

over talk or text. In other words, speaker identities in context models are themselves sub-models that may exhibit a hierarchical organization.

These models are ongoingly constructed (and pre-constructed at an earlier moment of planning – as we argued for the roles assumed by Tony Blair in parliament) by means of flexible strategies that activate fragments of (known) models, combine such fragments, and adapt them to each situation of text or talk. Obviously, as is emphasized by conversation analysis and related directions of research, such contextual identity constructions are a social accomplishment.

By way of example, we can only speculate on the precise nature of how Tony Blair manages his social and political identities during his speech, but we may make inferences about them on the basis of the way he presupposes, expresses or performs them in the debate, probably in the following hierarchical order:

- Current speaker
- Prime Minister/Head of government/cabinet
- Member of Parliament
- Leader of Labour Party
- Social democrat (Third Way)
- British citizen
- Democrat.

These identities are more or less explicitly signaled in his speech. Note that apart from his communicative role he only makes use of a few of the seven basic identity categories mentioned above, communicative role, occupation, position and sociopolitical ideologies. Other identities may be presupposed and backgrounded and occasionally become relevant, such as those of gender, age, ethnicity, husband, father, friend, and so on, which become more relevant in other communicative situations, such as conversations at home, a discussion with friends or when participating in international meetings. Note also that the various identities influence each other: His way of being a PM is also influenced by his position as leader of Labour, by his political ideologies, by being British, and by his current Iraq policy. We can only speculate on the precise details of such influences – and we would need many discourse data to make inferences about at least some of these complex relations between underlying identities.

Relations between participants

Important in a social psychological account of context models is not only the social identity of participants in communicative situations, but also their *relationships*, some of which have been briefly dealt with above in terms of

social roles. Again, relevant here is not the unique relationship between two individuals, but the relationship defined in terms of group membership, that is, intra- and intergroup relations. Similarly, we are not so much interested in the "objective" relations between social groups, but how participants ongoingly define them in their context models – that is, again within the socio-cognitive interface between social actors and social groups.

Since there are many kinds of social relations between groups, and context models cannot possibly accommodate all of them, participants again need to focus on and establish which ones are relevant for adequate discourse production and comprehension. As we see in more detail in other chapters, forms of address and other politeness phenomena in many languages depend on relationships of power, familiarity, solidarity, age, or status among participants.

These relationships are defined in terms of group and category membership, and it is thus crucial in context model formation that participants categorize themselves and other participants correctly as to their group membership and position in social relationships. As suggested above, the actual discursive performance of such relationships is situationally unique, but also depends on socially shared and culturally variable knowledge about social relations. We shall later (Chapter 4) also see which of these relations in context models are relatively general or even universal, and which ones are specific for a given (sub) culture. Thus, it is likely that kinship, age and power (or status) relations between participants have more general influence on discourse than for instance the social relationship of being someone's neighbor.

In order to reach the necessary reduction of vastly variable information about possible social relations, participants need to generalize and abstract. Thus, they may have only one or two categories (e.g., of Power or Status) or simply any hierarchical (vertical, unequal) relation to summarize such different relations as being a boss, authority, control, command, domination, leadership, hegemony, supremacy, tyranny, aristocracy, direction, guidance, and their counterparts: submission, serfdom, obedience, devotion, assistance, admiration, fidelity, on the one hand, and opposition, dissidence and disobedience, on the other hand. Horizontal relations (among friends, brothers, colleagues, etc.) would then define a participant relation category that controls "egalitarian" discourse forms, such as pronouns of familiarity (e.g., *tu* in French), familiarity and intimacy. The same would be true for the kinds of Distant–Intimate dimensions of social relations.

In the example of Tony Blair's speech in parliament, as well as in the examples of the same debate we analyze in Chapter 5, we also see how Blair and the MPs differently address members of the same party, opponents in the same party, members of the official opposition, and so on. They are able to do so appropriately only when in their context models they have the

relevant categories (member vs. non-member, friend vs. foe, etc.) to represent themselves as well as the other participants.

Action and interaction

Under the control of the other dimensions of the model described above, people represent and control the current actions and interactions they engage in: they usually "know" – are aware of – what they are now doing/saying. For context models this means that the representation of the current discourse is also by definition part of the context model – which is obvious when context models represent the current communicative event. Besides the categories mentioned above, participants thus need to keep track of what has been done and said so far in the current situation, and hence they also need to represent the very action or text the context model is assumed to control. More precisely, thus, a dynamic context model represents the previous parts of the ongoing action so as to be able to sequentially control the current and future parts.

Also, the Action category of context models provides the necessary information and control over what else is now being done when speaking or writing, that is, the well-known hierarchy of social action. A journalist writing an editorial – an institutional genre formulating the opinion of the newspaper about a recent news event – at the same time may engage in criticizing the government and persuading the public. These different "layers" of action, and their intentions and goals, may each be more or less conscious, depending on the situation. If they are conscious they need to be represented in the context model so as to be able to control the accomplishment of writing the editorial. In other words, text and talk can only be interactional accomplishments (beyond uttering sounds or inscribing symbols) if they are ongoingly represented as specific actions or interactions in the context models of the participants.

This may mean that specific partial actions (such as uttering a word or using a specific accent) as well as very global actions or functions of discourse (such as educating students) may well not be permanently conscious when a mid-level action, such as giving a lecture, is being performed. Since context models are dynamic, we thus also should account for the fact that there are variable levels or stages of awareness – foregrounding and backgrounding – during the development of the model at different moments. Sometimes we think explicitly of a specific word to be selected, and sometimes about the overall functions of a discourse, but such awareness levels are not constant, but strategically adapted to each moment of interaction. Indeed, as is the case for all interaction, discourse and hence context analysis is also, and must be, largely automatized, so that scarce cognitive resources can be used to explicitly attend to the most important, intentional, topical and functional dimensions of (inter)action (see, e.g., Bargh, 1984, 1994).

The social psychological relevance of the presence of Action as a context category is not limited to the contextual account of discourse as social interaction at various levels of intention or interpretation. As is the case for all categories considered above, the modeling of ongoing actions also requires socially shared beliefs: knowledge, attitudes, ideologies and norms. The journalist writing an editorial at the same time may engage in institutional and political action, and does so as member of a media organization, as member of a professional group, and probably as a member of one or more ideological groups. When writing the editorial she thus not only instantiates a general activity of newspaper editors but also the social representations shared by the organization or groups she currently "identifies" with. This means that she knows, professionally as well as ideologically, what kind of action may be expected of her, how to perform it, and how to combine shared social beliefs with her current personal goals and opinions. In sum, context models need an Action category that combines personal with socially shared beliefs about action so as to allow group members to adequately engage in discourse as a type of "group action."

Since social interaction is complex and layered, language users at each moment may focus or foreground one (level or element of) social action. Again, this means that the constraints of strategic processing require that the participants are able to reduce types of currently performed social interactions to those that are relevant in the control of ongoing discourse. This is not only the case for the well-known typology of speech acts (e.g., as commissives or directives), but probably also for other types and groups of discursive and other social interaction. Thus, the various actions of journalists (investigate, inform), professors (investigate, teach), and other social occupations might also be generalizable to a relatively small number of more basic ones, such as "imparting new knowledge," etc.

Social cognition

We have seen many times that communicative events feature not only social actors and actions, but also social beliefs and the ways these are combined with personal beliefs. That is, context models also need a "cognitive" component. Earlier, we showed that this cognitive category of context models features various kinds of personal and socially shared *knowledge*, as well as more specific intentions and goals for the current interaction, as a fundamental aspect of "Common Ground" in interaction (Clark, 1996; Krauss and Fussell, 1991).

At this point we also need to attend to what are traditionally considered concerns of a social psychological approach to beliefs, such as *attitudes* and *ideologies*. Of course, the same is true for socially shared knowledge, which,

however, is traditionally – and arbitrarily – studied more often in cognitive psychology (see *Discourse and Context*). Therefore, we close this chapter with the question whether context models should also feature specific beliefs, namely *opinions*, that are instantiations of socially shared attitudes and ideologies. The answer to this question is hardly controversial in the sense that many of the properties of discourse – both during production as well as during comprehension – are controlled by opinions based on the socially shared evaluative beliefs of groups, specifically when language users participate as group members. When Tony Blair in the Iraq debate derides the Liberal Democrats he does so by applying an opinion that is based on his political ideologies. And the MPs understand – but may not all accept – this opinion discourse in terms of their own context models controlled by their respective social and political attitudes and ideologies.

It cannot be the task of this brief section to include a detailed account of attitudes and ideologies, including a criticism of the classical social psychological approach to attitudes (among a vast literature, see, e.g., Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; for critique, see, e.g., Potter, 1996, 1998), and for a discussion of ideology I refer to a previous monograph (Van Dijk, 1998). More generally, this discussion is part of contemporary approaches to shared and widespread social beliefs (Fraser and Gaskell, 1990; Resnick, Levine and Teasley, 1991).

Relevant for our discussion here is that both attitudes and ideologies are general mental representations shared by the members of social groups. Ideologies are the basic beliefs underlying the more specific social attitudes of groups, such as a racist ideology underlying racist attitudes about immigration or the competition of immigrants in the labor market. Unlike many traditional approaches in social psychology, attitudes are only defined in terms of the socially shared beliefs of groups, and not as specific personal opinions about specific events, which by definition are stored in mental models (see also Jaspars and Fraser, 1984).

That is, conversely, context models feature personal opinions, and not attitudes or ideologies, although these obviously control the formation of personal opinions. Attitudes and ideologies are, however, not deterministic: a feminist may have a personal opinion about a specific event that is at variance with a feminist ideology; this may depend on personal experiences, specific features of the current situation, or the influence of other attitudes and ideologies.

In order to be able to gauge the precise influence of attitudes and ideologies on specific personal opinions about the communicative event or parts or it, as represented in mental models, we would need to know more about their organization and contents. However, as is the case for knowledge, we have only very vague ideas about the structures of these general, abstract social representations. Probably they are also organized by some kind of

schema, such as a group self-schema for ideologies defining the identity of a group, such as typical actions, aims, norms, referent groups and resources (Van Dijk, 1998).

Attitudes are also general and abstract but apply to specific issues in specific social fields, such as abortion, immigration or nuclear energy. They instantiate general ideological norms and values, such as applying the value of "liberty" in attitudes about the freedom of the market, or the value "right to life" to embryos in attitudes about abortion (but not to human beings on death row in attitudes about capital punishment, or to soldiers obliged to kill and be killed in attitudes about military service). Because attitudes and ideologies are by definition general and abstract, they can be applied to special cases and hence be instantiated in specific, personal mental models, in which they combine with other personal beliefs to form personal opinions.

We see that beside the "social" properties of situations, such as settings, participants (and their social identities) and actions, language users also need to activate attitudes and ideologies and represent their socially based opinions when they participate as group members.

As we shall see in more detail later, such ideological opinions control many of the aspects of discourse, such as topic selection, lexical choice, many semantic moves as well as style and rhetoric. It is important though to carefully maintain the distinction between semantics and pragmatics, between meaning and context: ideologies first of all control the formation of the mental models of the events we talk *about*, that is, the semantics of text and talk. Thus, Tony Blair's opinion about Iraq in his speech is controlled by his political ideologies, quite explicitly so by his democratic ideology. We must assume that he also has these opinions before speaking or when being silent, and that he did not form them at the moment of his speech. He only *formulates* them in a unique and specific way during this speech.

Ideologies not only control what we talk *about*, but also our representation of the current communicative event itself, that is, our model of ourselves as speakers, as well as of other participants and of what we are now doing. Thus, Blair's spontaneous, ongoing critique of the Liberal Democrats, now being addressed, is based on an opinion about participants, in turn based on Blair's political ideologies. In other words, the ideological control of the pragmatics of discourse applies to the elements of the communicative situation itself – including for instance the goals of the current interaction.

One may even find that semantic and pragmatic ideological controls are contradictory: One may have an ideologically based negative opinion on a dictator, as Tony Blair exhibits in his speech on Saddam Hussein and Iraq. In the same way, however, as not all knowledge of speakers needs to be expressed in discourse, e.g., because it is presupposed to be shared by the recipients, we need not necessarily express our ideological opinions, for

instance because we know they are shared by the audience. This may be more relevant in communicative events, such as in parliament, where there is an ideological opposition that needs to be persuaded. Also, other ideologies may be at work and be applied in context models and prevent the expression of some ideology, e.g., when for political reasons feminists refrain in a specific situation from expressing feminist opinions, for instance when they agree to appoint a leftist male official rather than a conservative woman.

In other words, ideologies control not only our opinions in our mental models about social or political events, but also the context model of the communicative situation itself. And this ideologically biased context model controls whether or not, and how, ideologically based event models as well as more general attitudes are actually expressed in discourse. For instance, most politicians, journalists or academics may agree on a very negative opinion about dictator Saddam Hussein. But whether and how such an opinion is actually expressed in a public debate depends on the ad hoc context model of the debate, and on the other ideologies (e.g., of pacifism) that control that context model.

Conclusions

Social psychology is, in principle, the ideal discipline to account for context models, because it studies the combination of personal and social beliefs as we also see them manifested in context models. Extending the cognitive theory of mental models presented in *Discourse and Context*, this chapter adds a fundamental social dimension to cognition. This means that context models are described as featuring not only personal histories and experiences, as well as individual intentions, goals and knowledge, but also categories and beliefs that instantiate or "apply" the social cognitions of groups and communities. Personal opinions (e.g., about our addressees) may instantiate attitudes or ideologies of groups, and how these may influence the way participants model other participants as well as control the expression of ideologies in discourse.

Social psychology, however, is not only about socially shared beliefs, but also about social interaction and its many (psychological) properties – overlapping with the microsociology of interaction, and in this chapter we therefore also discussed the relevance of an Action category in context models, as well as the complex combination of social identities in social actors as participants, including the central category of Self. Although context models by definition feature unique manifestations or performances of social identities, we have insisted that such identities also need to be defined in terms of socially shared, and more or less stable, representations that cannot be reduced to ad hoc, situated, constructs.

Other important contributions of social psychology have been the various attempts to define social situations. We critically examined some of these earlier studies, and formulated our own views about the ways people understand and represent situations, and which of the relevant categories should be included in the schemas that organize context models. One of the relevant categories we examined in more detail is that of Setting, featuring relevant information about Place/Space and Time, for instance in the framework of ecological psychology. In that case we had to conclude that of course not all environmental properties of situations can be included in context models.

With this social psychological focus on social beliefs, social identities, social actors, social interaction and social situations we now have made a next step in the construction of a theory of context models. Obviously, most of these notions have, as such, been treated in vast numbers of books and articles, only some of which could be cited here. This also means that each of the theory fragments dealt with in this chapter can and should be amplified with specific results of research in these domains in social psychology. Also the empirical – experimental, analytical – foundation of the ideas formulated in this chapter will need extensive attention in later work, beyond the few examples of discourse analysis in this book.

Theoretically, this chapter combines – but also refutes – various directions in social psychology. The sociocognitive approach to context and context models, as well as the definition of social situations, social identities and social representations, is obviously inspired by several directions of cognitive social psychology.

Unfortunately, however, much of this social cognition research has little interest in discourse and interaction. It thus ignores the fundamental ways many phenomena studied in traditional social psychology, such as persuasion, attitudes, impression formation, and so on, are actually carried out by social actors as forms of talk and text.

I have assumed that contexts are dynamic, situated constructs of participants, and in that way my definition is close to those of social constructionist approaches. However, unlike antimentalist social constructionism, I define these constructs as mental models, that is, as representations in episodic memory, thereby following the prevalent view in cognitive science. That is, I do not reduce contexts as constructs to "observable" discourse or interaction, precisely because they are not: as constructs they are not visible, and they become "observable" only indirectly when they control discourse and interaction.

Also unlike social constructionism, I define socially shared beliefs, such as knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, in terms of mental representations, and do not reduce them to the ways they may (or may not) be expressed in discourse – or influence other interaction. On the contrary, in the same way as

I take discourse and interaction seriously as social phenomena, I also take mental models and social representations seriously as *both* social *and* mental phenomena that need an account in their own right. Thus, only social representations such as knowledge and other beliefs can be shared, learned, changed and applied in many situations, and this is only possible when group members represent them mentally.

More than in traditional social psychology, however, it is emphasized that these social representations are acquired, used, applied and changed through social interactions of group members in general, and through discourse in particular.

In addition to this widely shared view, this book further shows that such discourse does not emerge miraculously in social situations, but that language users are only able to do so by ongoingly constructing and updating mental models of the communicative situation in such a way that the discourse they produce is adequate and appropriate in the communicative situation. That is, we want to be able to account not only for discourse and interaction, as also conversation analysts do, but more specifically also for *situated* text and talk, and not only in an ad hoc way, but in a theoretically founded general way. Thus, we may agree with the aim of conversation analysts to focus on the *procedural ways* participants show their shared knowledge in talk (Schegloff, 1991b; see also Schegloff, 1991a, on social cognition) and thus display their interpretations of the relevant aspects of the situation, but an integrated theory of discourse must also spell out *how* participants are able to do so, not only interactionally, but also cognitively.

A social psychology that takes both the social and the cognitive dimensions of discourse and interaction seriously does so by providing the details of how language users ongoingly observe, analyze and understand the relevant properties of communicative situations and represent these in personal mental models that are at the same time controlled by socially shared representations such as knowledge, attitudes and ideologies about the participants and the actions of the communicative situation.

After this look at the social psychological dimension of the theory of context, playing the important role of the theory of the interface between social groups and social actors, we are now ready to focus on the sociological dimensions of the theory.

3 Context, situation and society

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that context models are not merely subjective mental representations of discourse participants, but also have many social dimensions such as "applications" of shared knowledge and ideologies. In this chapter we continue this social analysis of contexts by examining the societal basis of the way language users understand social situations when they engage in talk and text. We already stressed that they do so not only as individuals, but also as participants in interaction and as members of groups or communities, for instance by acquiring and using the social representations of such collectivities.

There are more social dimensions to context than this application of socially shared representations of groups. For instance, by engaging in discourse participants accomplish social actions that may be analyzed as instantiations of collective action, institutional actions or social and political processes and relations, such as those of power, and at the same time contribute to the production of collective action. Thus, Tony Blair addressing the British House of Commons on the occasion of the impending war against Iraq does so not only as Tony Blair, but also as Prime Minister and as leader of the Labour Party, and the other MPs understand his speech especially as a function of these attributed identities – which also Blair himself explicitly signals in his speech. In *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 1) we argued that analyzing his speech without taking such social or political roles into account under-analyzes the data, not only by ignoring the relevant role of Blair's social identities for production and understanding of the speech, but also by disregarding the crucial functions of his speech in the political process. Similarly, Blair not only applies general categories of social structure in his speech, but at the same time (re)produces them. His speech interactionally also contributes to UK foreign policy, to the roles of Prime Minister and of the House of Commons and to the relation between government and opposition. We thus again find the now familiar bidirectional nature of context–discourse relations: context definitions control both discourse production and understanding,

and – through its understanding by addressees – discourse itself contributes to, changes or otherwise influences the social situation.

In the previous chapter we have shown that speakers construct mental models in which they represent themselves and co-participants as social actors with various social roles and identities. In this chapter we need to examine in more detail the societal basis of such categorizations, as well as their institutional and organizational embedding.

We see at this point that the distinction between social psychology and sociology is quite arbitrary. Both deal with social interaction, social actors, social identity and groups, among many other phenomena. Some directions in sociology, though not exactly mainstream, also deal with social cognition (Cicourel, 1973; Zerubavel, 1997).

Below we shall see that many of the classical sociological definitions of the social situation also have a more or less explicit cognitive dimension. Although today there is unfortunately a rather deep divide between social and cognitive approaches in the social sciences (Van Dijk, 2006b, special issue of *Discourse Studies*), we see that there always have been, and still are, scholars who try to bridge this gap.

This cognitive dimension has at least partly been taken care of in the previous chapter and in *Discourse and Context*, namely in terms of the mental processes and representations of language users as social group members. In this chapter we shall now elaborate on the social dimensions of social situations that have been left unaccounted for in cognitive and social psychology, such as the relations between context and *interaction*, the *institutional* embedding of social actors, interactions and situations, and more generally the influence of *social structure* on the definition of the situation we have called "context models." We thus also participate in the ongoing debates on the relations between social structure and talk-in-interaction, between macro- and microstructures, between "structure" and "agency" in society.

We claim that an explicit theory of context is one of the theoretical and empirical interfaces we need to bridge these well-known gaps, because it is through context models that social actors are able to relate social structure (e.g., domination, groups, institutions, etc.) at the macro level of understanding and analysis to discursive interaction ("agency") at the micro level. Thus, with his speech in parliament Tony Blair at the same time is influenced by British foreign policy and vice versa – with his speech he at the same time "does" such policy.

"Definitions of the situation," in institutions also, are mental constructs of social actors. But this does not mean that we want to reduce the analysis of social situations to a cognitive account, no more than that we reduce them to a linguistic account when we realize that many of these social situations are being experienced and talked about in discourse. Indeed, often such

definitions are also interactional accomplishments, e.g., when they are negotiated, formed and exhibited in informal or institutional talk.

In other words, we are dealing here with different dimensions and levels of social situations, and sociology has its own, autonomous task in the theory of such situations. Ethnomethodology and other directions in microsociology do so specifically for "situated" everyday interaction, and other (more macro) approaches do so for groups, organizations, institutions, social relations such as power, and societal structure in general.

Since this is a vast field, which obviously cannot be summarized in one chapter, I shall again select some relevant notions defining communicative situations, and this time examine some of their properties that tend to be accounted for in the framework of sociological theory.

The "social situation" in sociology

Let us begin, then, with the theoretical account of the "social situation," but this time defined in a more sociological perspective. Since social theory is a vast and heterogeneous field of investigation, we need to focus on the directions that are most congenial to our enterprise of designing a theory of context. Since contexts are defined relative to discourse, that is, as contexts of communicative interaction, our primary focus should on be the theories of social (inter)action in face-to-face situations, that is, rather a micro than a macro perspective on the study of the social order.

The history of the theory of social action in the twentieth century is dominated by phenomenologically inspired approaches that define actors in terms of their awareness and understanding of themselves, other actors and their social environment. As we have stressed for the theory of context, such contexts should not be defined in terms of "objective" social structures, but in terms of the way participants understand and construe the social episodes in which they are communicating. In that respect, our position is consistent with a long tradition in the social sciences.

Actors understanding themselves, their actions and other social actors do so by representing them in their minds. Traditionally such a "mental" account was formulated in terms of the vague notion of "consciousness" in general, and more specifically in terms of intentions, goals or knowledge that were not made explicit in a cognitive theory of action.

One of the reasons why despite its many theoretical approaches social theory has often been said to be unable to formulate a coherent theory of action (Cohen, 1996) is their lack of insight into this cognitive and socio-cognitive dimension of actions. Without such an explicit theory of the mental foundations of action, there was no way to account for the relation between intentions, goals and knowledge on the one hand, and conduct on the other hand, nor between conduct or agency and social (macro) structure. Action

thus became isolated from society as well as from actors as thinking human beings. Despite initial inspiration of social theory by psychologically oriented phenomenologists, at the time cognitive psychology and cognitive science began to be developed in the 1960s and 1970s, the separation between sociology and psychology had become virtually complete, resulting in microsociologies focusing on interaction as autonomous forms of social conduct in which the "minds" of human actors hardly played an explicit – and at most a taken-for-granted – role.

As suggested, this was quite different in the early days of sociology. If we examine the sociological classics and what they have to say about social actions and situations, many of their accounts also appear to have a "mental" dimension.

Thus, according to Simmel the study of society needs to be focused on "individual human beings and their situations and activities," whereas social process ("sociation") is located in the mind, a unit of cognition; each individual shares in a set of knowledge: in interaction we deal with other people as types, that is as a set of abstracted common characteristics (Simmel, 1909). Though stated in very general terms, such statements of a century ago would hardly be misplaced in current theory formation.

More directly relevant for our theory of social situations as a basis for a theory of context, one of the earliest accounts of social situations, namely by W. I. Thomas (1966/1928), is also formulated in the mentalist terms of a *definition* we also used to introduce contexts: social situations are defined to be real for people when they are real in their consequences. We shall see that this perspective will later have a major influence on Schutz and other phenomenological sociologists.

Max Weber

As suggested, no strict separation between sociology and psychology existed a hundred years ago when sociologists influenced by the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl began to develop their theories of social action and the experiences of everyday life. Indeed, the much quoted definition of social action by Max Weber, at the beginning of *Economy and Society* (Weber, 1978/1921: 4), is in terms of the mental notion of the *subjective meanings* that social actors attach to their and others' conduct. The theory of action and interaction in this paradigm thus emphasizes the necessity to make explicit the perspective and the meanings of actions for social actors themselves. Obviously this is true for the whole social situation, which Weber also defines in terms of the notion of *orientation*, a notion used even today in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis: a social situation is a situation "where people orient their actions towards one another," where the "others" could be the other participants in the interaction, but also other members of the same group.

Incidentally, as is the case with many such general notions, one may wonder what the notion of "orientation" implies exactly. I tend to understand it as a mental notion, that is, as a way of (mentally) focusing on other people, and such would be consistent with the Weberian and phenomenological emphasis on subjective understanding. Consistent with its criterion of observability, conversation analysis (CA) seems to understand this notion rather as "orientation display." In my framework I would hold that in order to be able to display one's orientation, one first must orient oneself, and that such an orientation is a mental operation, which needs further analysis, as is the case for related notions such as focus, attention, and so on. Note though that also in CA "observability" cannot possibly mean strict observability in the positivist sense (if such observation by humans is possible at all), but always the observability of meaningful actions, language use and their implications as these are being understood by members of a community.

The same is true for the definition of interaction and social relationships, namely in the sense that in that case social actors mutually orient towards each other and interpret the conduct of the others, and do so from their own perspective, so that also conflicting interpretations may result. Again, we have stipulated the same property for context models of talk.

In his theory of action as a basis of social theory, Weber construes a link between subjective meanings and intersubjective and social meanings of action, namely with the notion of "ideal types" of actions and social relationships, for instance in institutions, as well as the norms and rules that guide concrete conduct. That is, rejecting the behaviorist limitation to observable conduct, the Weberian theory of social action and situations allows for mental abstractions or constructs as the basis of conduct, such as meanings, orientations, norms and rules. Indeed, these are not only the basis of individual conduct, in which personal meanings and definitions are always an important dimension, but also the foundations of the social order in much broader terms, that is, of collectivities, institutions, organizations and complex systems such as the economy and the legitimacy of the conduct of their members, for instance based on moral criteria.

We emphasize the role of Weber and the other phenomenological sociologists both for their focus on individual action as well as for their interest in the subjective and "mental" dimensions of actors, actions, interaction, situations and societies. In our terms, thus, the influence of the social situation on talk and texts presupposes what in classical hermeneutic terms would be the understanding (*Verstehen*) of such situations by the participants.

Other classical sociologists on actions and situations

The phenomenological approach referred to above has traditionally been distinguished from the "structural" sociology of Durkheim, which focuses on

"objective social facts" and collectivities of people – although we have seen in the previous chapter that the cognitive notion of "social representation" in contemporary social psychology is inspired by the Durkheimian account of collectivities. As soon as social actors (also) define their actions and situations as members of such collectivities, they bring to bear the beliefs (knowledge, ideologies) of such collectivities. These beliefs are in turn the basis of *intersubjectivity*, that is, for *mutual* comprehension and interaction. In a sociocognitive approach this means that participants construe mental models of communicative situations including strategic beliefs about the mental models and hence the knowledge of the other participants. Co-membership in a collectivity presupposes and generates shared knowledge, which in turn is needed in the formation of intersubjective ("overlapping" or "mirrored") context models. We shall come back to this intersubjective nature of context models below.

Like Weber, Talcott Parsons in the USA focused on social action, and also recognized that this is shaped by "mental acts," but his major focus is not on these subjective definitions or on the details of the actions but more abstractly on the foundations of the social order, for instance in terms of internalized shared norms. That is, Weber, Parsons and many other sociologists share the recognition of the (still very vague) role of "consciousness" in action, a philosophical notion going back to Descartes, Locke and Kant, but their emphasis on subjective understanding is different.

On the other hand, in the USA, the pragmatism of Dewey and at least some tenets of the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Mead, influenced by Darwin and the role of biology as a basis of human behavior, conceive of action and interaction rather in terms of the adaptation to an environment. Hence they remain much closer to the prevalent behaviorist psychology of the time in which subjective meanings, processes of understanding and mental representations are reduced to a minimum device (such as a Self that is able to initiate new actions) relating external stimuli (including symbols and language) with the external response of (habitual) human behavior (Cohen, 1996: 121ff.).

However, many of the classical approaches overlap. Thus, there are tenets in symbolic interactionism, also in the work of Mead (as represented by his student Blumer), that formulate theories of everyday interactions in terms of the meanings and understandings of the participants, such as the focus on role taking, the self-reflexive nature of the Self, stigma, scripts, and perspectives (Plummer, 1996). Relevant for our perspective, for instance, would be the notion of "awareness context" developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Blumer formulates the first premise of symbolic interactionism as the principle that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them," and they do so in interaction (Plummer,

1996: 231). It is not surprising therefore that the work of Goffman and the ethnomethodologists, to which I shall turn below, is often (also) associated with these tenets of symbolic interactionism.

Alfred Schutz

Alfred Schutz, as one of the founders of the phenomenological sociology that gave rise to contemporary "interpretative" (qualitative, micro) sociologies, also pays tribute to the fundamental "psychological" nature of our experiences. Referring to Henry James and Edmund Husserl, thus, he sets out to emphasize the nature of self-reflexive ("I think," "I feel") and intentional (object-directed) consciousness as the basis of the experiences of our *Lebenswelt* or Life-world (1970: 56ff.). Despite such reflexivity, the "natural attitude" of people is not focused on the psychological processes themselves, but on the intersubjective reality of this world and its practical requirements.

Although Schutz does not focus in detail on the nature of social situations, he does introduce them as the starting point of his discussion of people's (as other sociologists of his time he consistently uses "man's") experiences and actions of everyday life:

> Man finds himself at any moment in his daily life in a biographically determined situation, that is, in a physical and sociocultural environment as defined by him, within which he has his position, not merely his position in terms of physical space and outer time or of his status and role within the social system but also his moral and ideological position. To say that this definition of the situation is biographically determined means to say that it has its history; it is the sedimentation of all of man's previous experiences, organized in the habitual possessions of his stock of knowledge, at hand, and as such his unique possession, given to him and him alone (Schutz, 1970: 73).

We see that following W. I. Thomas Schutz also sees social situations in terms of *definitions* of the participants, and based on their unique personal knowledge derived from previous experiences. We have seen in the previous chapters that such "autobiographically" defined situations correspond to what we have defined as context models in episodic ("autobiographical") memory. In this sense, our "sociocognitive" conception of situations is consistent with the foundations of phenomenologically oriented sociologies.

When comparing Schutz with Parsons in his introduction to the work of Garfinkel and ethnomethodology (see below), Heritage (1984: 66) emphasizes that "the Schutzian actor inhabits a vastly expanded cognitive universe": besides being able to perceive and interpret the "real world," this actor has a rich "inner life," and is able to remember, dream and theorize. We shall see again below that in that sense the phenomenological tradition of Schutz at the same time has a much more cognitive orientation than much of the later

developments of interactionist approaches, and hence a more adequate basis for a theory of context as subjective definitions of the communicative situation.

For Schutz part of the definition of social situations is not only socially transmitted general knowledge (of "types" of things) but also the domain of "relevances" that determine the overriding interests guiding our actions in each situation. We have seen in the previous chapters that this notion of *relevance* is present in most definitions of context.

Finally, when dealing with interactional relationships, Schutz defines face-to-face situations in terms of shared time and space and especially in terms of the orientation to other human beings (the "Thou-orientation," and a "We-orientation" if it is mutual), on the one hand, and a shared "environment" ("that part of the world I can directly apprehend," p. 192n) to which "we" can point, on the other hand. I shall come back to Schutz's concept of situations as part of everyday life below.

Although everyday social reality of lived situations, as analyzed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), following Schutz, is closely related to a social theory of commonsense *knowledge* and hence does have a "mental" dimension, they do not analyze these situations as such, apart from some remarks on the perception of other participants (as subjects or as social types) in face-to-face situations.

In 1950, the president of the American Sociological Society, Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., defined sociology in his Presidential Address in behaviorist terms as the "scientific study of the experience and behavior of individuals in relation to social stimulus situations" (Stebbins, 1967), a definition that hardly distinguishes sociology from social psychology.

Despite the early sociological interest in situations and their "mental" definitions, these were taken for granted as social units of analysis rather than precisely defined, let alone studied systematically. Even the godfather of the concept, W. I. Thomas, barely defines social situations and includes many specific and general aspects of society in a situation.

As is the case in linguistics and social psychology, we see that thus far social situations in sociology are usually introduced only as settings or backgrounds, or metaphorically as a "horizon," for action and interactions or as explanations of "behavior," and not focused on in their own right as a legitimate object of analysis.

Erving Goffman

We see that Goffman (1964) was right when he speaks of the "neglected situation." He proposes as his own – rather convoluted – definition: "an environment of mutual monitoring possibilities, anywhere within which an individual will find himself accessible to the naked senses of all others who

are 'present,' and similarly find them accessible to him."[1] Also Goffman uses the notion of (joint) "orientations" of persons in social situations, and calls these "encounters" or "face engagements." This suggests that there may be persons in a situation that are not ratified participants in an encounter. It is this (social) distinction that also is at the basis of the difference between social situations and contexts as subjective representations of social situations.

Like many other authors writing on situation and context, Goffman emphasizes that it is not the attributes of social structure that constitute a social situation, but rather "the value placed on these attributes as they are acknowledged in the situation current and at hand." In other words, also in Goffman we again find a mental – or subjective – notion as crucial criterion for the social constitution of situations: the *evaluation* of social attributes by the participants. We have earlier seen that such an evaluation often implies a judgment of the *relevance* of social attributes (for a critical analysis of Goffman's frame analysis, and another approach to context in sociology, see also Scheff, 2005).

The "social situation" in contemporary sociology

Ten years later, in a critical review, Perinbanayagam (1974) finds that in the meantime there has been so much written on social situations that Goffman's complaint about the "neglected situation" is no longer valid, although he only cites one book and a few articles to back up that claim.

Indeed, a current bibliographical search in sociology hardly yields many more books that have the notion of "social situation" in their title. *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (Kuper and Kuper, 1986) does not have an entry for (social) situation, nor does *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* (1996). Giddens (1987) also ignores the concept in the index of one of his books on social theory and modern sociology. The detailed index of Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory* (Coleman, 1990) does not feature the notion either – no more than Wright Mills (Mills, 1959) in his *Sociological Imagination*, thirty years earlier.

Google Scholar (August, 2006) produces some 28,000 publications in the social sciences and humanities with "social situation" in the title (many of which are hardly studies of social situations) – but more than 174,000 with "social interaction" in the title. In August 2006 The Library of Congress had only a handful of books with "social situation" in their title. In the same

[1] I shall not repeatedly point out and critically comment on the sexist use of pronouns here and in other quotations of the founding *fathers* of modern sociology. These have been studied extensively in many feminist studies of the history of the social sciences (see, e.g., Zalk, 1992).

month, The Social Science Citation Index (only featuring references to articles in indexed journals), only had 214 articles with "social situation" in their title – and more than 1300 with "social interaction." Hence it is safe to conclude that the social situation is much less studied than notions such as "interaction" in modern sociology.

Stebbins (1967), who purports to offer a theory of social situations, emphasizes that they are "mental constructions" – despite their observable social, physical and physiological characteristics – because they are the result of a selection from a larger whole: people selectively perceive their environment, and thus construct situations. It is this "subjective situation" that is experienced by social actors as impinging on their actions. The social, physical and physiological environment from which this choice is made is the "objective" situation for Stebbins. Again, we see that although not dominant in sociology, there are earlier sociological studies that define situations in cognitive terms.

Perinbanayagam's paper (1974) on the social situation mentions Cooley, Mead, Blumer and Burke and the other founding fathers who had inspired Goffman, but also stresses that many of the classics barely define the notion. Following Mead and Blumer, he criticizes one of the classics, Robert Merton, for assuming that social situations on the one hand have "objective" properties, but that on the other hand, people can only react to the subjectively ascribed meanings of such properties (Merton, 1968). Also when criticizing Stebbins' (1967) theory of the social situation, Perinbanayagam emphasizes that the whole social situation is a construct, and that it therefore does not make sense to distinguish between "objective" and "subjective" properties: people can *only* react to the properties of situations that have (subjective) meaning for them. In other words, there are no such things as "objective" social structures, a point that also has been made in philosophical approaches to the ontology and epistemology of social structure, and by many other authors, also in contemporary constructionism (see, e.g., Searle, 1995).

Interestingly, Perinbanayagam also criticizes the founder of ethnomethodology, Harold Garfinkel (1967), himself inspired by Alfred Schutz, and his "psychologistic epistemology," because of the claim that people "make sense" even of incomprehensible situations. Perinbanayagam, following Goffman, emphasizes that all action in the presence of others is interaction, and that meanings are negotiated and established by all parties, not by single actors.

From this first review of some of the sociological classics, we may conclude again that our definition of contexts as subjective constructs of participants is generally consistent with at least some part of the tradition in sociology.

Another important aspect of the history of the concept of "social situation" in sociology is not only its absence in most studies, but also its vagueness and ambiguity. Thus, the concept may denote the actual situation of the current face-to-face encounter, but also a much broader environment, including elements from social macrostructure, such as groups and group relations, institutions, and so on.

In brief, anything that may influence people's action, whether locally (micro) or globally (macro), is sooner or later called (part of the) situation. I shall later examine the possibility to distinguish between micro- and macro-contexts. For the moment, however, I shall focus on social situations as encounters of social actors in local settings.

Situations of everyday life

I have repeatedly argued in this book, as well as in *Discourse and Context*, that contexts, defined as mental models of participants, are special cases of everyday *experiences*. This means that also in a sociology of context we need to define them as part and parcel of the experiences of *everyday life* as they have been studied in sociology at least since the phenomenological studies of Alfred Schutz on the "Life-world" (see, e.g., Schutz, 1962, 1967), in which people's experiences also play a fundamental role, as we already saw above: "In every moment of conscious life I find myself in a situation" (Schutz, 1967: 100).

For Schutz, this situation is unique, while biographically articulated ("by the insertion of individual existence in the ontological structure of the world," p. 111), and the result of previous situations, which also are the basis of ones personal "stock of knowledge" of which only a part can be shared and socialized. It is also limited, for instance, by ones body, and spatial-temporal coordinates. In this sense, situations are physically and socially prestructured, and participants know this (p. 114).

Relevant for our theory of context models is Schutz's observation that although people's private experiences are unique, and as such inaccessible to others, these experiences are usually rather similar to those of others, and can thus be seen as identical for all practical purposes. This means that although context models, as defined, are strictly unique, their relevant parts can be represented in the context models of other participants. It is the possibility of practical mutual modeling that defines and enables the *intersubjectivity* of discourse and interaction. We have seen in the previous chapter that such intersubjectivity is also based on shared knowledge of the world, and on social cognition (norms, values, ideologies) more generally – in such a way that members of the same collectivity can construe similar models, while interpreting social reality, the current situation and each other's actions in a

similar way. According to Schutz, understanding actions, thus, means to attribute intentions, goals and motivations to other people – properties we also have postulated in a theory of context models, but which tend to be ignored, or even denied in contemporary interactionist approaches. The personal combination of autobiography, experiences and current aims, however, always defines unique models, and hence also the possibility of misunderstanding and conflict. In other words, a mental model theory of context explains *both* how models may overlap and hence allow for practical interaction and discourse, and how discourses at the same time may be unique, and give rise to misunderstanding.

Social episodes as basic units of the social order

Against the background of the classical tradition defined by Schutz, Goffman and others, I shall take *social episodes* – including their reflexive interpretations by participant social actors – rather than *interactions* as the basic units of the social order (for studies of everyday life, a vast field in sociology and related disciplines, see, e.g., De Certeau, 1985; Douglas, 1970, 1980; Goffman, 1956; Highmore, 2002; Lefebvre, 1971; for a formal, game theoretical approach, see Greenberg, 1990).

> For theoretical reasons, I would prefer to use the term social episode instead of the term "social situation" that has been used in much of social psychology, sociology and other disciplines (and so far also in this chapter), so as to be able to use "social situation" as a more specific notion, namely as the dimensions of the whole social episode that condition and are conditioned by social interaction. Social episodes are the complete, lived units or "strips" of "everyday life" as defined and constructed by the participants as experiences. The central elements of such episodes in the everyday lives of people are the (inter)actions that are accomplished – and studied – in relation to the social situation, that is, the social "environment" of the social episode. That is, if we want to study discursive interaction and how it is situated, and if more specifically we want to distinguish between text and context, we need the notion of "social situation" in order to be able to talk about the part of the social episode minus the interaction itself. In sum (but quite roughly): social episodes are defined as social interactions plus social situations. However, so as to avoid terminological confusion, and as happens more often in the choice of one's technical terms, I shall continue to use, outside this section, the widely used term "social situation" to denote (whole) episodes, that is, including the interaction.

Within the continuity of the everyday lives of actors, or of the histories of collectivities, episodes are flexibly defined by time periods and changes in one of their relevant dimensions, such as participating actors, their intentions

or goals, or the constituent action (which may be more or less local or global). Thus, Tony Blair's intervention in the Iraq debate in the British parliament is such an episode (of which his speech is the central element), and so is the whole debate for the individual MPs as well as for parliament as an institution. But participants (and analysts) may well focus on the brief (mini) episode of the interruption made by MPs in the speech of Blair. That is, any situated meaningful action or interaction of an episode may itself be the kernel of another episode – thus making the notion of episode essentially relative and recursive, as it should be.

Episodes may be compound or complex, and may consist not only of several episodes or episode sequences (e.g., a parliamentary debate consisting of various speeches), but also of various "tracks" at various levels of specificity and generality – again both for the participants, as well as for the observers or analysts. Thus, we may analyze the local track of conversational turn taking/allocation, but also non-verbal actions of MPs, the spatiotemporal structures of the setting (e.g., how many minutes MPs are being allocated to speak), and so on. Each of these tracks may then again be related to other aspects of the text or talk or their context.

Also from classical sociological theory we know that episodes may be more or less repetitive and hence *routine* in the lives of social actors. Such accumulated experiences will result in the construction of more or less fixed, socially shared schemas that organize the understanding of the communicative situation that frames the interaction. We have seen in *Discourse and Context* how such context model schemas enable the strategic production of context models needed to appropriately produce and understand talk or text, and to facilitate managing unexpected occurrences or conflicts, as did Tony Blair responding to the interruption.

Unlike most microsociologists, we take whole episodes (situations) rather than interactions as the building blocks and the basis of the social order because interactions without the setting and the actors and their properties are too abstract or ambiguous. The "same" form of talk may have a very different meaning or function in another social situation.

For instance, we are interested not only in the general, abstract properties of interruptions as an interactional device, but also in the current meanings or functions of *this* interaction, in this setting, made by specific MPs and in the speech of Tony Blair as Prime Minister, and with specific political knowledge, purposes and consequences. Only then are we able to define the interruption episode as a form of political opposition – itself again possibly a fragment of a longer sequence of opposition episodes, or finally, at another level, even of a historical-political period of opposition, for instance by the Liberal Democrats. And it is the opposition episode that may be defined by each of the participants as their personal context models for the interruption as an element of talk-in-interaction.

Such a "broader," episodic approach, including the context of talk, not only allows for a socially better "grounded" account of what happens, but also provides a "thicker" or richer description of the very interaction itself. We have seen that without an analysis of the interruption of Blair's speech as a form of political opposition, we can grasp only one dimension of what it means when MPs made this interruption. We need the depth of a situational account and hence a description of the whole episode in order to understand its meaning (place, function, role) in the lives of the participants, the whole institutional communicative episode (the debate, the session of parliament) or the history of the institution – depending what "tracks" of the sociopolitical episodes we want to study.

It is within the framework of this sociological approach of social action, interaction, situations and episodes that we are now able to examine in more detail the notion of context in contemporary sociology, and in particular in conversation and discourse analysis.

Context, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis

The contemporary microsociological approach to notions such as "situation" and "context," for instance in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (CA), is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is emphasized that conversation is *situated* interaction, but on the other hand, there has been much reluctance to introduce contextual dimensions in the description of talk – for fear of contaminating local interactional analysis with traditional sociological notions of social structure. Ethnomethodology and CA initially derived much of their scientific identity by criticizing Parsons' approach and the way "macro" sociologists analyzed aggregate social structure in terms of abstract categories that have little to do with the way social members understand and organize their everyday life through situated interaction (Heritage, 1984: 2; Schegloff, 1991b; Wilson, 1991). That is, whereas in some directions of classical sociology, interaction is described as being determined by internalized norms (Parsons, 1951), or by collective normative values or "social facts" Durkheim (1964/1895), as we saw above, ethnomethodology and CA reverse the direction of influence or perspective, and hold that social structures are produced by interaction.

Harold Garfinkel and ethnomethodology

Heritage (1984) in his introduction to the work of Garfinkel provides a detailed historical background of the development of ethnomethodology. He interestingly summarizes the rupture between Parsons, on the one hand, and

Parsons' former PhD student Garfinkel and the other ethnomethodologists, on the other hand, as:

> a renewed stress on the role of human agency in social life, a novel emphasis on the cognitive bases of action and a focus on the situation of action as a means of resolving previously intractable research dilemmas. (Heritage, 1984: 2)

Rather surprisingly we find here not only the obvious stress on human agency itself, rather neglected by the abstract approach of Parsons, but also the stress on cognition and situations, two notions marginalized in later CA, as we shall see below. That is, in this sense Garfinkel continues the tradition of Schutz – and Heritage's introduction often refers to the cognitive tradition of phenomenological research (Heritage, 1984: 37ff.). It is thus not surprising, as we saw above, that Perinbanayagam criticized Garfinkel for the fundamental psychologism of what social actors do when they "make sense" of each other and each other's talk and other actions. And by focusing on the reflexive *accounts* of social actors about what they are (now) doing, ethnomethodology provides a method to study what so far was a widely accepted principle, but an empirically rather elusive aspect of action: *the actor's definition of the situation* (Heritage, 1984: 3). Accountability and intelligibility thus became two key notions in *ethnomethodology*, a term that presupposes that members share folk "methods" to produce intelligible conduct and to understand each other. Similarly, the crucial concept of *common-sense knowledge* is also one of these "cognitive" notions that have given rise to both phenomenological sociology and ethnomethodology. Indeed, action and interaction cannot be conceived without such shared knowledge.

Incidentally, Garfinkel's criticism of Parsons does not imply that the latter ignored cognition as the basis of action. On the contrary, unlike "social fact" positivists such as Durkheim, Parsons defines his voluntaristic theory of action largely in terms of subjective and cognitive elements such as ends, goals and orientations – although he later rather focuses on internalized social norms as the basis of the social order and as (shared) constraints of the conditions of action. Thus, also between Parsons and Garfinkel there is no real rupture in phenomenological tradition of defining actions and situations in terms of the subjective point of view of the participants, although Parsons' (later) psychology tends to focus on personality and the mechanisms of socialization in very general, extrinsic terms.

The crucial difference between Parsons and the ethnomethodologists (and conversation analysts) is rather that while attempting to devise a general, abstract theory, Parsons is not interested in the details of actions and their analysis – and this also means that he is not really interested in the detailed cognitive work or "methods" actors engage in when understanding others. This also implies that if actors and actions are controlled by institutions, their

rationalizations (as mundane reasons) for actions – such as aspects of the situation as they define it – are not taken seriously, another "cognitive" aspect that has been emphasized by ethnomethodology. In Parsons, thus, intersubjectivity is based on the shared "objective" properties of social situations and guided by institutionalized cognitive standards. Social actors thus become, according to Garfinkel, "judgmental dopes" who cannot see through the social norms according to which they act. Against such passive rule or norm following, Garfinkel emphasizes the reflexivity and morality of actors with respect to their own actions, and their ability to choose – and account for – alternatives. In that respect, Garfinkel's theory of action is much more "voluntaristic," and less deterministic, than that of Parsons.

Interestingly, rejecting Parsons' approach, Garfinkel in his dissertation of 1952 already emphasizes that he is interested in developing a theory of a social system based on "experience structures" (Heritage, 1984: 9). Again, such was also our aim when developing a theory of context (models) as a specific kind of everyday *experience* as defined by the participants themselves. Note that such experiences, as cognitive processes, are hardly observable, so we need methods to infer them from what people "observably" do and say.

Garfinkel's famous field experiments, in which students broke some taken-for-granted rule in interaction (and thus irritated their co-participants), not only show that members indeed use such rules, but also that in conversation participants mobilize a "staggering range of assumptions and contextual features" to sustain a sequence of events (Heritage, 1984: 95).

In one of the examples cited by Heritage about a conversation between husband and wife, it is shown (in what could be called "concurrent thought glosses" as we also know them from think-aloud protocols in psychology) that it is not so much the "face value" of their utterances that serves as the basis of their respective turns but rather a vast amount of "unspoken assumptions and presuppositions each party attributed to the other" (p. 94).

As we have seen before and shall see again below, this shows that conversation is not merely a sequence of actions that are occasioned, as such, by previous actions as the classical account of conversation seems to suggest. Rather, there are at least two tracks, a manifest verbal one and an implicit cognitive one, so that each next turn is occasioned by the previous events in *both* tracks. In other words, a turn is occasioned by previous turns and all its contextually relevant inferences as attributed by the current speaker. Conversation is thus like the proverbial iceberg – most of its meanings remain implicit – and we need a powerful cognitive theory of discourse and interaction to also account for such meanings and show how a conversation makes sense for the participants.

This detailed "cognitive work" is being accomplished by what we have called the knowledge device of the context models of the participants. Since it is impossible for participants to spell out the large amount of implicit assumptions presupposed by each utterance, they need to trust that the recipient will do just that as a matter of course, and nevertheless will make sense of each incomplete utterance. The better participants know each other (and hence the larger their epistemic Common Ground), the more implicit such utterance may be, because the context model will activate a large amount of previous context models and other experiences to fill in the relevant but missing information – one of the many properties of conversation that cannot be accounted for in contemporary CA. Language users are not only highly specialized conversationalists but also experienced cognitive experts. Without their constantly updated context models of the current communicative situation, as well as the relevantly activated situation models of what is being talked *about*, the participants would not be able to understand each other. Most of what goes on in talk is thus invisible, and the well-known ethnomethodological notion of "observability" can thus hardly be taken literally. To fully analyze conversations, we need not only experts in interaction, but also experts in cognition.

Not surprisingly, I emphasize these "cognitive" elements of the sociological tradition, so as to recuperate for a sociological theory of situation and context a dimension that has been largely ignored in the increasingly formalist, antimentalist and context-free tendencies of interactionist approaches to talk in classical conversation analysis.

Conversation analysis

If we now focus on conversation analysis as one of the specializations of ethnomethodology, we first find that neither the notion of "situation" nor that of "context" appear in the subject index of a widely used introduction to CA (Ten Have, 1999) – also because they are so common that they are taken for granted and seldom studied in their own right (Ten Have, 1999). One of the classical collections of CA (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984) has only one reference to "context" in the subject index, but that reference is to the introduction where the editors emphasize the role of the *interactional* "context" of conversation, and not to the situational social features that may influence conversation. In text-linguistic terms one would call this the (verbal) co-text, rather than the context. Also in CA, thus, we should distinguish between sequential "environments" of talk itself, and broader social contexts defined as relevant properties of social structure (Wilson, 1991).

The classical CA view, defended especially by Manny Schegloff in various papers, is to be very cautious with introducing context features in the analysis

of conversation, and to focus on interaction itself. This autonomous approach, he emphasizes, is itself an important contribution to the study of social structure, but of a different kind than the traditional approaches to social structure (Schegloff, 1991b: 46). On this view, social structure in general and context in particular – such as gender or ethnicity of the participants – is only relevant when *made* relevant by the participants themselves, that is, when they "demonstrably" *orient* towards it. In other words, aspects of social structure, social situations or contexts should only be taken into account in conversation analysis when they are "procedurally consequential" for talk (Schegloff, 1987, 1991b, 1992a, 1992b). Here is an excellent summary of this view in his own words:

> Now let us be clear about what is and what is not being said here. The point is not that persons are somehow not male or female, upper or lower class, with or without power, professors and/or students. They may be, on some occasion, demonstrably members of one or another of those categories. Nor is the issue that those aspects of the society do not matter, or did not matter on that occasion. We may share a lively sense that indeed they do matter, and that they mattered on that occasion, and mattered for just that aspect of some interaction on which we are focusing. There is still the problem of *showing from the details of the talk or other conduct in the materials* that we are analyzing that those aspects of the scene are what the parties are oriented to. *For that is to show how the parties are embodying for one another the relevancies of the interaction and are thereby producing the social structure*. (Schegloff, 1991b: 51; italics in the original)

This context-free or autonomous approach of early CA was easier to defend on the basis of data from informal, everyday conversations, in which context constraints are less explicit and systematic. As soon as later work in CA, since about 1980, started to study talk in organizations and institutions, it became obvious that (at least some) contributions to conversations are made by participants in their respective social roles and identities, speaking on organization-related issues with organization-related goals, and controlled by organization-related rules and other constraints (see, e.g., Arminen, 2000; Atkinson and Drew, 1979, Boden, 1994; Boden and Zimmerman, 1991; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Drew and Sorjonen, 1997; for a recent review, see Heritage, 2005). These CA-oriented studies of institutional interactions were more or less loosely related to other approaches of institutional discourse (Erickson and Shultz, 1982; Fisher and Todd, 1983; Mäkitalo and Säljö, 2001; McHoul and Rapley, 2001; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999).

Although most of such "institutional" or "organizational" studies still focus on the details of actual talk, and how organizations are interactionally produced and reproduced, some – undoubtedly relevant – elements of the social situation and social structure are thus being introduced into CA, even when sometimes through the backdoor.

The main aim of "pure" CA, however, remains to scrutinize the mechanisms of talk-in-interaction itself, and the institutional studies often are "specifications" of more general properties of everyday conversation (Drew and Heritage, 1992). The analysis of institutional talk and its specific contexts from the perspective of "pure" CA was thus often also seen as premature: it was typically argued that we *first* need to understand the basic features of everyday conversations before we are able to examine what is specific about institutional talk compared to everyday informal conversation. In order to be able to respond to *why* questions, we first need to attend to the *how* questions of institutional talk (Schegloff, 1991b; Silverman, 1999).

For our examples of Blair's speech this would mean that we first need to analyze and establish what an interruption and a question are, and how such a question may be understood as a critique. Such may be the case in many communicative situations, but when this occurs during a parliamentary debate, the context models of the participants typically construe such an interruption as a form of political opposition.

Heritage (2005) in his review article on institutional talk first of all rejects what he calls the "bucket theory" of context (see also Heritage, 1987), according to which contexts consist of pre-existing institutional circumstances enclosing interaction and unaltered by it (p. 109). He emphasizes that "context is built, invoked and managed by interaction," and that "it is through interaction that institutional imperatives originating from outside the interaction are evidenced and made real and enforceable for the participants" (p. 109).

The question is how to interpret these stances. If contexts are "invoked" by interaction, this presupposes that they exist (and are known) previously, and can be made relevant in the current situation. This is fine, since indeed most institutional structures obviously already exist before the talk of its participants (even when they have been earlier constituted by talk and text).

But if Heritage then adds that participants build contexts through their talk, then this only makes sense in the sociocognitive terms we have proposed, namely as definitions of the (institutional) situation by the participants, and not in any traditional sociological meaning of context in terms of institutional organization, roles, norms, rules, power relations, and so on. Or else context is understood again in the sequential, co-textual sentence of previous and following turns or acts in interaction.

His example of emergency calls to the police as being co-constructed by them as such seems to suggest this latter interpretation: of course such calls are made according to how participants define and execute them as emergency calls. But obviously, when they call the police, they can only do so when they *previously* know the institution of the police, and assume that the person who responds to their call is most likely a police officer, and that such knowledge is being activated and applied in their current context definition.

Such standard context categories are hardly "built" by the interaction itself, and in fact are already made relevant and thus integrated in people's very plan to call the police, that is, the initial design of the context model.

Heritage further emphasizes that also in institutions much talk is informal, non-institutional, and that many forms of institutional talk are much like informal everyday talk. However, he at the same time lists some differences between institutional and non-institutional talk, for instance in various forms of controlled turn taking (as we know from turn distribution in parliament), overall organization (superstructure), sequence organization, turn design and lexical choice.

Few CA studies primarily aim at understanding an institution by systematically studying talk in such institutions, an aim that is often considered "applied" CA (Ten Have, 1999). Indeed, such a sociological study would also need to include an analysis of the pervasive role of written texts and documents in institutions (Psathas, 1995). However, such ethnomethodological or related microsociological studies of institutional "documentation" are much less frequent than studies of talk-in-interaction in institutions.

This is also because in CA theory it is assumed that everyday conversation is the fundamental mode of interaction and communication from which all other forms of talk (and text?) are derived, and also the "conversations" in institutions, such as Tony Blair's Iraq speech in the British House of Commons. Although the "original" or "fundamental" nature of everyday conversation is axiomatic in most social approaches to discourse, most discourse in contemporary information societies is probably written, organizational or institutional (like TV shows), and informal conversation only dominant in the private sphere – where informal computer-mediated communication (chats) are now also largely written – and incidental in the public and institutional sphere. It remains to be seen how the structure of, say, a news report or a textbook can be derived from the structure of everyday conversations. Thus, the primacy of informal conversation, as postulated by CA, may be historically true for simple human societies, but it seems quite tenuous in contemporary society.

More generally, it should be critically examined whether "mere" discourse and conversation analyses of complex institutional sites and encounters are able to capture what is "really" going on during the events and actions that used to be described in the ("informal") field notes of the ethnographer (Hak, 1999). That is, context analysis is not just relevant in order to provide more descriptive and explanatory "depth" to discourse and conversation analyses, but may focus on more relevant, interesting and representative "situations" or "stretches" of everyday life. A "pure" interactional analysis, that is, without an account of meanings and content on the one hand, and institutional structures and constraints on the other, might not be able to adequately

describe the very interactions themselves. As we have seen, "doing opposition" in parliament cannot be studied in pure interactional terms alone – which does not mean that it is not very relevant and interesting to also study opposition in the detailed terms of the interaction and discourse that "produces" such opposition.

Arminen (2000) adds that a contextually sensitive approach to institutional conversation should also address questions of institutional identities and power, and that for a context-sensitive analysis of institutional talk, analysts also must possess sufficient knowledge of such contexts. This is obvious not only in formal institutional talk, for instance in the courtroom, but also in informal institutional talk, such as in doctor–patient interaction, in which on the one hand "generic" interactional patterns obtain, but on the other hand these may be specifically institutionally relevant for the participants. But also for such analyses of informal institutional talk Arminen emphasizes the criterion of procedural consequentiality to avoid overinterpretation of the data and as a methodological check "against arbitrary invocation of a countless number of extrinsic, potential aspects of context" (Arminen, 2000: 435).

Hester and Francis (2001) also comment critically on the dominant CA approach to "institutional talk" (IT). They first of all recall that much of the assumed "special" sequential constraints on IT also occur in other forms of talk, and hence cannot, as such, be defined as constitutive of the specific institutionality of such talk. Indeed, to use our own example of the parliamentary debates, turn allocation in parliament is pre-established by the Speaker in a way that is similar to that of many types of formal meetings where the Chair allocates turns. Similarly, that Tony Blair can speak for a long time (with no or a few brief interruptions) is something we also know in many forms of everyday storytelling. Hester and Francis specifically focus on those contextual aspects of institutions that are usually taken for granted in CA analysis of IT, such as the fact that in interviews it is the interviewer who asks questions. Finally, they show that what makes IT institutional is not so much the sequential nature of the interaction, but rather the knowledge (of the participants – and hence of the analysts) of the institutional identities and goals of the participants. In other words: contexts.

That is, instead of merely extending CA by formulating special interactional constraints in IT, CA approaches are simply not "institutional" enough. This position is consistent with our view, demonstrated in our first observations of the interruption of Tony Blair's speech, namely that a mere CA description of that interruption under-analyzes the institutional, political and parliamentary nature of that interruption and its response by Blair. In other words, whereas there is no doubt, also with Hester and Francis, that CA can contribute to our understanding of the interactional structure of talk in general, and institutional talk in particular, such an analysis is insufficient to

demonstrate the specific institutionality of such talk. Instead of taking the presupposed aspects of institutional constraints (such as institutional identities of participants) for granted, they must be made explicit. Without pleading for an explicit contextual approach, it is obvious that both mundane and institutional talk requires an account of relevant situational features in order to be able to understand such talk and to describe it explicitly.

Having said this, the differences between the approaches of informal and institutional interaction should not be exaggerated, and often are merely gradual or rather a question of "direction" or "orientation." No doubt the forms of interaction in institutions are institutionally specific because of specific institutional (that is, contextual) constraints, such as the specific goals of the interaction. However, many of such specific interactions (say, an interview, a talk show) are based on what participants know from everyday informal interaction (say, asking questions in conversation). As was suggested in the quote by Manny Schegloff above, also in CA there is no doubt that there are various kinds of institutional roles, and that these may well matter in talk-in-interaction. But the "direction of fit" (as John Searle would say about types of speech acts) is different.

Other approaches sometimes take these institutional roles as given and then proceed to analyze (and especially explain) talk in such terms (e.g., Tony Blair says/does so and so because he is Prime Minister).

On the other hand, a CA approach tends to focus first and foremost on talk itself, and shows how institutional roles are thus being "done" on such and other occasions (a Prime Minister is someone who talks first in parliament, who speaks in the name of his government, who legitimates government policies in parliament, and so on). That is, institutions such as parliaments, governments and prime ministers on this view are being constituted (shaped, changed, confirmed, etc.) by the interactions of its members. And instead of pre-analyzing the data by our assumptions about such institutions, CA holds that we should rather focus on the data itself, see how they can be analyzed in generic interactional terms, and then see whether and how their properties actually show the institutional goals, roles, constraints, structures, and so on (see also, e.g., Arminen, 2005; Heath and Luff, 2000; Maynard, 2003).

In our example of the speech of Tony Blair, one would first examine the nature of the interruption and how Blair reacts to it, as we would do for any other interruption, also in everyday conversation, and only then examine whether it has specific properties that need to be accounted for in terms of the institutional (parliamentary, political) setting or roles. Another advantage of this approach is that we need not begin from scratch when analyzing interruptions in other institutions: we already know their generic structure and then may see how in the other institutions interruptions are "done" differently, and within the frame of different institutional constraints. According to

CA, the opposite analytical strategy, that is, starting from our knowledge of the institution and then analyzing the data, might attribute specific (political) properties to interruptions that are in fact properties of all interruptions.

Obviously, a choice between one or the other of the approaches also depends on one's research goals. If one is interested primarily in conversation and its strategies, then the CA approach has obvious advantages. On the other hand, if one takes a critical approach and wants to show how Tony Blair manipulated parliament, one may take both our knowledge of Blair and the institutions for granted, on the one hand, as well as our knowledge of discourse and conversations, on the other hand, and then show whether and how Blair was able to manipulate parliament. This does not mean that one pre-analyzes, let alone pre-judges, the data, but rather that one analyzes the data with a specific question and focus – as do all researchers, although not all of them are very explicit about their goals and preconceptions. In a critical approach – as we shall see below – one still has to *show*, through careful analysis, what Blair does, and how he does it. That is, the focus in that case is on power and power abuse through talk, and one needs to show how such power abuse is actually implemented (or not).

Another important point, also to be discussed below and elsewhere in this book, is that context properties (e.g., goals, roles, identities, power) do not always *show* in talk or text, and hence remain inaccessible for strict conversational analysis following the criteria spelled out above. For instance, *not* saying something may be due to contextual constraints (taboos, prohibitions, roles). Also, context controls not only production but also the understanding of talk by addressees. Although obvious for participants and other members alike, a specific understanding of what has been said in an institution need not be noticeably expressed in next turns of talk. Indeed, one may decide to break off the conversation, change topics, be less friendly and so on because of such understandings, but these may not be observable by a "context-free" analysis of the data. That is, as is the case for the participants themselves, both in production and understanding, *knowing* the institution allows us to "see" more in the data than ignoring it, and hence arrive not only at adequate descriptions, but also at more complete, more detailed, and better grounded analyses. Data in that case are not only what is explicitly said or done, but also what is implicitly said or done or inferred – and as analysts we may and should in that case take into account "what everybody knows" in or about such a situation.

A rupture of the autonomous stance of classical CA became visible in critical approaches to conversation, especially in gender studies, e.g., by Candace West on male interruptions in talk (West, 1979), on the power of (male) doctors in doctor–patient interaction (West, 1984), and later in most other work on gender and conversation, also outside the mainstream CA

paradigm (see, among many other studies, e.g., Kotthoff and Wodak, 1997; Speer, 2005; Tannen, 1993; Wodak, 1997; see also the special issue of *Discourse & Society* on gender and conversation, 13(6), 2002, edited by Liz Stokoe and Ann Weatherall).

Similarly, in a series of papers Celia Kitzinger shows that heterosexuality may be indexed in many ways that are usually taken for granted and usually not analyzed as such in talk, for instance when speakers refer to their wife or husband, to marriage or simply with a pronoun when referring to a husband or wife (Kitzinger, 2005).

Methodologically this implies that some aspects of context (such as the heterosexuality of the speaker) may "casually" be expressed in discourse, but need not be explicitly "oriented to" by the participants, but taken for granted and hence discursively presupposed and not asserted. More generally, contexts may influence talk without participants orienting to some of their properties – typically so for properties of context that are normative and taken for granted. We already observed above that the notion of "orientation" needs to be more explicitly defined, namely in terms of mental processes, or in terms of an "external" display of an orientation.

Important for our discussion, and consistent with my own approach, is that contexts are not studied in CA as "given" structures, but as being locally and interactionally constructed by the participants. The question, however, is what this means exactly in CA. If participants "orient to" aspects of social structure, such as gender, then this suggests on the one hand that gender(ed) identities of the participants already pre-exist the actual interaction, but on the other hand that such identities are currently "made relevant" for ongoing talk. Once oriented to in interaction, the relevant social structures define the context-for-talk until further notice, that is, until the participants interactionally change them (Wilson, 1999: 125).

But in that case the "construction" metaphor is misleading, because it suggests that gender and other social identities are constructed from scratch in each conversation. We have seen in the previous chapter that this currently popular approach is misguided, because such *social* identities by definition presuppose membership of a collectivity and hence similarity with other members across different social situations. Social identities are types, not tokens. Hence they cannot be "locally constructed," but need many local productions, by many people in many situations and a process of sharing and social ratification.

However, we argued before that what *is* unique and always (at least partly) constructed anew is the way such identities are "used," "applied," "manifested," "displayed," "performed," or changed in each situation, by specific persons with specific biographies, because that depends on other properties of the situation, including the contingencies of the interaction, as

described before. Crucial is that only when participants, as members, already know the properties of a social identity are they able to apply such knowledge in the ongoing construction of unique "contextual identities." This is true not only for participant identities, but also for other properties of the social situation, such as settings, actions and social beliefs.

That is, we agree with CA and (other) constructionist approaches that contexts are unique participant constructs, but disagree with approaches that hold that social identities and other social properties only "exist" in such unique contexts. In another – "diachronical" – sense social structures, including gender and other social identities, are of course "constructed," "(re) produced" or changed by repeated and generalized social practices. But once these structures "exist" as shared knowledge, they are used and applied as "given" by members in the conduct of talk-in-interaction. This is similar to the use of language, which also presupposes general knowledge of the language – even when historically this language (as shared grammar, rules, etc.) has developed from actual instances of talk and text. In the same way, unique contexts may interactionally instantiate general, shared social identities (e.g., of class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, profession, nationality) or roles (wife, sister, friend, boss, immigrant, etc.), in unique ways, but such unique identities can only be understood and have influence in talk when participants know their general, shared meanings.

The CDA approach to discourse and social structure

Especially for critical scholars of discourse, a restricted CA approach to context (implying that contexts are relevant for study only when explicitly oriented to by participants) is problematic because many of the structures of social situations, including the social identities and relations between the participants, are relevant for discourse and interaction even when they are not always explicitly signaled or oriented to. We have seen that participants may not always be aware of many aspects of social structure – and hence not orient to these in an explicit way – but that does not mean these have no influence.

Also, the influence may only exist at the level of non-observable, implicit, meanings or inferences. For instance, it is hardly likely that racist or sexist speakers are aware of, or explicitly orient towards racist or sexist identities or domination relations, although this may well be the case for recipients or the critical analyst. Many other properties of context are observable in talk but need not be oriented to by the participants, for instance because they are taken for granted, such as a speaker's heterosexuality (Kitzinger, 2005). Thus, whereas more critically oriented scholars may recognize the relevance of – and actually engage in – detailed conversation analysis, CA has a tradition of methodological distance towards what it sees as premature or superficial

critical approaches (see the debate in *Discourse & Society* initiated by Margaret Wetherell criticizing Schegloff criticizing critical approaches: Schegloff, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Wetherell, 1998; Billig, 1999a, 1999b).

Discourses about "racial" or "ethnic" Others are a prominent example of contextual influences on talk and text, as I have shown in a series of studies (Van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993b, 2005b, 2007; Wodak and Van Dijk, 2000). White (European) speakers often address – and speak or write about – Others in stereotypical, racist terms. But they seldom define themselves as members of an ethnic group, although the categorization of Others as somehow "racially" or "ethnically" different presupposes that they are implicitly comparing them to *Us* by an "ethnic" criterion. In well-known strategies of group polarization (Us vs. Them), they tend to represent themselves in positive terms, and the Others in negative terms, but deictic "we" here refers to an ingroup that may be vaguely characterized as "Dutch" or "European," but usually not as "white." In other words, "being white" is the normative baseline that is being taken for granted for the organization of text and talk, and need not be explicitly oriented to – in focus are those who somehow can be constructed as having a different color or culture, or both.

More generally, and unlike CA, critical discourse analysis is problem-oriented. It does not primarily focus on discourse and its properties, but on social issues and problems, such as racism and sexism or other forms of domination and power abuse, and then examines whether and how text and talk are involved in its reproduction (among many other studies, see, e.g., Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard, 1996; Fairclough, 1995; Lazar, 2005; Van Dijk, 1993b, 2008b; Weiss and Wodak, 2003; Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

Discourse analysis in that case is not primarily engaged in "proving" such power abuse – which is usually presupposed, for instance on the basis of discrimination experienced by minority groups – but rather in examining *how* it also affects text and talk. Unlike CA, such a CDA approach may at the same time focus on the underlying social beliefs shared by speakers or writers, such as prejudices and ideologies, and thus investigate how these in turn are (re)produced by text and talk.

Note that such an investigation is not circular (postulating underlying prejudices on the basis of talk and explaining talk in terms of the same prejudices). As we have explained before, unique discourse is produced on the basis of subjective mental models of events talked about, and controlled by unique context models of participants, and these models may be influenced by (but are not determined by) socially shared underlying prejudices and ideologies. This means that members may or may not be prejudiced, and if they share the prejudices of their ingroup they may or may not express them – depending on context. And *if* they express them, they do so in unique personal ways, again depending on context. That is, since structures of prejudiced

discourse and underlying prejudices are not the same, there is no question of circularity.

We see that unlike other work on racist discourse this approach not only describes how discourse is prejudiced, but also explains why (cognitively) this is possible, and why (socially) this happens. The analytical and explanatory direction thus goes in two directions: Prejudiced talk of individual members is explained (also) in terms of the ethnic beliefs of the ingroup, and at the same time the social relevance of such talk is also described as reproducing (and possibly modifying) such beliefs. In this way, micro- and macro-contexts, as well as interaction and social structure, mutually influence each other. Societal racism influences racist practices of its members through shared social cognitions, mental models and discourse, and these in turn reproduce the system of racism. This is a typical example of how context and discourse mutually influence each other. Unlike in other approaches this mutual influence is examined in detailed and systematic terms that explicitly describe text and talk as well as contexts and the ways participants as social members represent cognitive and societal structures.

In this framework the systematic analysis of text and talk follows the usual methods of analyzing structures and strategies as we know them from other approaches to discourse and conversation analysis. In addition to such an analysis, we explain such structures in terms of societal systems of domination, but not in the traditional and simplistic terms of direct macro–micro influence, but in terms of a multidisciplinary theory of "mediating" participant and member constructs: context models. For our analytical practice, this usually means that (racist, sexist, etc.) power or social prejudices are systematically examined – in their personally and locally unique way – in text and talk at various levels of structure. In general this also means that the context-criteria of CA apply: participants orient towards some aspect of social structure (e.g., perceived cultural differences of immigrants) and thus make it interactionally relevant.

However, we argued that mental models of speakers or recipients may be ethnically "biased," but that such need not be explicitly expressed or displayed in talk – depending on other aspects of the context. This may be the case, first of all, through "coded" language use, such as the well-known reference in the USA to the problems of the "inner city" when speakers actually mean "African Americans." But even in this case there is a form of (indirect) expression, which inferentially allows for the assignment of the (intended) meaning, that is an implicature. But even this indirect or implicit expression is not necessary. For instance, in a parliamentary debate racist and antiracist MPs may say more or less the "same thing" when referring to the "problems of immigration," but given the contextual knowledge about their social beliefs, recipients will "hear" even the "same" discourse in very

different ways, namely in terms of the problems that immigration *causes for the immigrants*, and problems that immigrants *cause for us*. That is, different meanings are assigned to talk or its structures, not because of different structures, but because of different contexts as constructed by the participants.

In this and many other ways social structure may "influence" talk, namely its meaning and inferences – as attributed by recipients – even when these are not expressed or displayed. Speakers may have different "orientations" to social structure, but do not always show them. Indeed, as is the case for all presuppositions, they *need* not show them when they know that the recipients know what they mean anyway. This is typically the case in election slogans of racist parties in Europe: these are seldom explicitly racist, but readers know how to interpret them. This again shows that both the production and the comprehension of discourse is context-controlled in the ways explained above.

It is one of the aims of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology to account for social structure in terms of its local reproduction, e.g., through talk and other forms of interaction. It does a great job examining the first step of that complex process: examining talk and interaction. However, it only partly explains how social structure is able to influence such talk, or how exactly social structure can be (re)produced by interaction. If social structure is founded in interaction, this should not only be asserted as a principle, but also demonstrated: So how does this happen?

A problem-oriented approach such as CDA fundamentally needs to analyze the relation between social structure and discourse, and hence needs to elaborate and integrate theory modules that are ignored in classical (macro) sociology, in current microsociologies, as well as in cognitive, social and discursive psychologies that are more or less reductionist.

The interactional approach to context

After the summary of some sociologically oriented approaches to social situations and context and the relations between social structure and text and talk, we now need to explore the "social" definition of context in a more systematic way.

Contexts, like social situations, are subjective constructs of social actors engaged in discursive interaction. Whereas in a cognitive account such contexts are defined as mental models in episodic memory, that is, as personal experiences, in a sociological perspective such experiences are studied as *interactional accomplishments* of social actors. That is, although they are strictly speaking personal, contexts are *jointly produced* by participants, and based on their respective and mutual understandings of each other, each other's relevant social properties, each other's conduct and relevant further aspects of the communicative environment. Indeed, since context models of

participants may be different at each moment of their development, participants may need to *negotiate* different definitions of the current situation, or accept and manage the possible misunderstandings or conflicts that may result from different context models.

Interaction and ongoing joint production of contexts does not mean that social actors don't do any anticipatory designing on the basis of earlier experiences and interaction. They enter or initiate a communicative encounter with more or less vague (mental models featuring) self-definitions of roles and other social identities, expectations about the social attributes of participants, about the setting (e.g., where and how long they intend to speak), as well as intentions and goals of action. For the sake of simplicity, and in order to stay close to the terminology of social action, we'll use the commonsense term "plan" to refer to this anticipation of an encounter (for detail, see also Suchman, 1987; Schank and Abelson, 1977). Social members are able to form such plans (a) on the basis of their earlier personal experiences with similar encounters or with the same people (part of their biography, that is, old context models), as well as (b) on the basis of instantiated general sociocultural knowledge and other beliefs about such encounters.

Once a verbal encounter is initiated, however, such preparatory plans of participants will be *specified* and *redefined* as contexts by strategic observation and understanding of the relevant dimensions of the current communicative situation. Each verbal or other action of co-participants thus sequentially requires partial *actualization*, by all participants, of their context definition, such as change of time, mutual knowledge, goals and occasionally attributed roles. In this way, each "state-of-context" will influence next actions, and each next action redefines the next state of context of each participant. At the same time each previous part of discourse becomes part of the context, as we have argued before (see also Drew and Heritage, 1992: 18–19). Such context updates may be routine, very fast and partly beyond the awareness of the participants.

Whereas in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3) we examined the cognitive processes involved in the production of such dynamically changing contexts, relevant here are the sometimes subtle strategic moves that interactionally manifest or occasion such ongoing actualization of participant contexts, such as various kinds of "contextualization cues" (Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b). For instance, a change of intonation, the choice of a specific pronoun, or of a form of politeness may redefine the social relations between participants, and a sudden change of topic may be interpreted as a manifestation of a change of interactional goals (see *Discourse and Context*, Chapter 4, for details about such discourse properties).

The interruption by MPs of Tony Blair's Iraq speech in the British House of Commons thus made their role as members of the opposition relevant, and

thereby changed the local context (again, in this chapter I ignore the complex mental inference processes that are involved in this actualization, processes that are usually not described in the study of interaction). Blair acted accordingly by counter-attacking the oppositional Liberal Democrats, not only as Prime Minister but *in that state of context* (occasioned by the interruption and its interpretation) also as leader of the Labour Party. At the same time, the ironical way he responded to the interruption also defined his interactional role as a smart and witty debater. And finally, his displayed scorn for the Liberal Democrats will again change their context models in the sense of reactivating or re-emphasizing Tony Blair's role of political opponent. So, depending on the specific recipient, Blair may thus be variously defined as the militarist, as the tough leader, as someone who does not listen to the opposition, as a friend of George Bush, and so on.

Since Blair has the floor during his speech (by parliamentary rule and by decision of the Speaker of the House) this also means that the characterization of his various roles in the context models of the MPs is more often updated than the way he constructs his audience during his own speech (these roles may be redefined after each interruption or intervention of course).

Apparently, interactional actualizations of contexts need not be symmetrical, and they will not follow the same procedures for different activity types and communicative situations. This will especially be the case for institutional or organizational interaction, for instance between professionals and clients, between speakers and a silent audience, and so on. That is, a theory of genre needs to describe not only the discourse structures and the context structures of such genres, but also how such context structures are interactionally updated. In routine service encounters mutual role definitions of participants will probably be more stable than those of the parliamentary debate we have examined, or those of a trial in court. Obviously, to assess such generalizations requires extensive empirical study of the way context changes are ongoingly displayed in such different genres.

We see that institutions put constraints on the possible actualizations of current contexts. Except in very special circumstances, Tony Blair during his speech cannot possibly abandon his role of Prime Minister, nor his audience their roles of MPs. That is, parts of the initial context of the parliamentary session remain the same during the debate. The norms and rules of parliamentary interaction, which are part of the professional knowledge of the participants, are also projected onto the context models of the participants. As we shall see below, this is one of the ways institutional macro-contexts influence the formation and change of interactional micro-contexts.

Not all communication is interactional in the sense described above. Someone reading a newspaper, a novel or a textbook is not interacting with a

physically present participant (author, etc.) as is the case for mundane conversations or institutional dialogues. Of course, when reading a text, readers do have a mental model of themselves as readers and usually also a more or less detailed or vague model of the writer, and such a model may be ongoingly adapted on the basis of the text being read, as is the case for conversation (for details, see, e.g., Nystrand, 1987; Nystrand, Himley and Doyle, 1986). Different, however, is that there is no real-time, face-to-face interaction and ongoing mutual adaptation of context in this case, except context changes derived from ongoing text interpretation. That is, in printed communication no contextual inferences can be derived from such contextualization cues as intonation, gestures, face work, appearance and so on, although printing styles (such as the difference between the popular tabloids and broadsheets in the UK) may allow contextual inferences. Also in written chat interactions on the internet some visual information (pictures, smileys, etc.) may be exchanged (Cherny, 1999). More in general, thus, interaction-in-context needs to be analyzed separately for the different "tracks" of multimodal communication.

Writers do have a conception of the readers as part of their definition of the context (conceptions that may be very different for different genres and situations), and such a definition may change during writing, but not as a consequence of the actions or discourse of the readers. Online chats and similar written interaction are again an exception, new genres that all require extensive contextual analysis in their own right.

Concluding this first characterization of context in a more interactional perspective we assume that:

a. Contexts are both cognitive and interactional accomplishments.
b. Participants prepare context definitions in their planning of interactional encounters.
c. Participants update their context definitions and adapt them to the inferences made on the basis of sequentially preceding verbal and non-verbal expressions of themselves or the other participants, as well as on the basis of selective observations of relevant aspects of the environment.
d. They apply, confirm and partly change socially shared members' knowledge of their culture about social situations and discourse.

Macro- and micro-contexts

In this first attempt at defining context in more interactional terms we find the familiar divisions of macro–micro levels and interaction–cognition dimensions of society. That is, context definitions are ongoingly constructed and updated by participants as dynamic, local inferences and understandings

(meanings, constructs, etc.) of communicative situations. Such understandings require the application of abstract, socially shared knowledge of a group or community, as we also have seen in the previous chapter when dealing with the role of social cognition.

At the same time, however, such contextualized interactions produce and reproduce the groups, communities or institutions of which the participants are members. At any point in talk and text, thus, also socially, we find a combination of micro (agency)–macro (structure, system) and cognition–interaction aspects of society.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage at length in the well-known micro–macro debate in sociology (see, e.g., Alexander, 1987; Huber, 1991; Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981). Our concern is merely to establish whether participants represent such different levels of society in their definitions of the context.

For instance, does Tony Blair construct a context featuring not only the current communicative situation of his speech and the parliamentary debate, but at the same time also more global or macro information about parliament, government, Britain, and so on? Judging by what he says, he *does* seem to include such "macro" aspects in his context: he explicitly refers to the House of Commons, his government, democracy, and so on. He does so, not merely as institutions talked *about* (which would only mean "semantic" activation of such knowledge), but as relevant dimensions of the current communicative situation itself, for instance as part of his self-presentation as a democratic leader. This means that, at least in such institutional talk-in-interaction, communicative situations at the local level of understanding and analysis are actually related to those at global or macro levels by the participants themselves: the ongoing democratic debate in the House of Commons is taken as an instance, proof or symbol of the institution of democracy. Similarly, it is quite likely, and again their discourse shows it does (see the analyses in Chapter 5), that the MPs construe the ongoing communicative situation not only in terms of current (micro) Settings, participant roles or goals, but also in terms of the role of the House of Commons in British foreign policy, relations with the USA, and so on.

Apart from other kinds of theoretical analysis linking micro and macro structures of society (such as abstract member–group or part–whole relations between local and global actions), we see that such a link may also be a participant construct, for instance in context definitions: Participants may represent themselves and their ongoing actions as contribution to, realization of, or otherwise related to macro categories such as groups, institutions or societal relations and processes.

Several problems of the macro–micro distinction disappear if we accept that macrostructures may influence (and be locally reproduced) through such a multi-level representation of social situations by participants. We have

argued many times that *social structure (whether micro or macro) does not itself influence talk or text, and that we need a cognitive interface.* We now see that such a sociocognitive interface as context models does just that.

Agency and structure: Giddens

Although the micro–macro level distinction in sociology has generated much debate, and many different approaches have been proposed to bridge (or deny the existence of) this gap (see especially Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981), few proposals have taken a sociocognitive perspective. Let us therefore examine in somewhat more detail one approach integrating many others in the social sciences, namely the "structuration theory" by Anthony Giddens, also because it features some more cognitive elements that allow him to (nearly and vaguely) bridge the gap (e.g., Giddens, 1979, 1984).

Giddens sees a "dialectical" relationship between structure and agency: they presuppose one another (Giddens, 1979: 53ff.). Social practices are (temporally and spatially) situated and instantiate, paradigmatically, social structure – much in the way language use does in relation to the language system (Giddens makes many comparisons with structuralist notions in linguistics: the chapter on structure and agency in his 1979 book on social theory follows a chapter on structuralism). Action is not a single action, but a "continuous flow of conduct," reflexively monitored by intentions and purposes, as it is described in terms of "accountability" by Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists (pp. 56–58). Such monitoring, says Giddens, applies not only to conduct itself, but also to the setting of the interaction. Unlike Harré (and the discursive psychologists), he does not reduce such accountability to "discursive capabilities" (being able to explain one's actions), but emphasizes a broader "practical consciousness," which is one of the manifestations of the general rationalization of human action. Part of such practical consciousness is the (often tacit) mutual knowledge employed by social actors in their encounters, but also the (more or less conscious) motivations that may link actions to the conventions of institutions.

Unlike the analysis of action in philosophy, Giddens also emphasizes the unacknowledged conditions as well as the unintended consequences of action – one of the reasons why such a philosophy generally does not account for the role of institutions. Inspired by – but also criticizing (e.g., Lévi-Strauss) – structuralist approaches, Giddens very abstractly defines "structure" as "structuring properties providing the 'binding' of time and space in social systems," as a virtual order consisting of rules and resources (including power), as knowledge of "how things are done," as social practices organized by the recursive mobilization of such knowledge and the capabilities presupposed by such practices (p. 65).

Incidentally, it is strange to see (concrete, syntagmatic?) *social practices* themselves appear in the definition of the *virtual* (paradigmatic) order of the knowledge, rules and resources that condition such social practices, a strange lapsus in the distinction between action and structure as defined by structuration theory.

In these terms, thus, Giddens defines the "duality of structure," namely as the "fundamentally recursive character of social life (...) and the mutual dependence of structure and agency." The structural properties of the system are thus both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute these systems, and hence Giddens rejects the differentiation of synchrony and diachrony and between statics and dynamics. Structure is not just a *constraint* on action (as was the case for norms in Parsonian action sociology) but also *enables* action. Institutions are neither a barrier nor a background to action but actively involved in it – and competent actors have extensive knowledge of such institutions (p. 71). Unlike earlier studies of the role of ideology (e.g., by Althusser), the recognition of the importance of actors' understanding of themselves and their social contexts suggests a much less exaggerated role of dominant ideologies (p. 72 – see also a later chapter on ideology and consciousness in the same book). So far, the micro–macro division of social systems does not make much sense for Giddens, but he recognizes that it may be needed to show how the reciprocity between social actors (social integration) is related to the reciprocity between groups or collectivities (system integration) (pp. 76–77).

Giddens also examines the role of "context" in language use (pp. 83ff.). He emphasizes that context is not merely "environment" or "background" of language use: "*The context of interaction is in some degree shaped and organized as an integral part of that interaction as a communicative encounter*" (p. 83, italics in original). Actors draw upon elements of contexts and "at the same time recreate these elements as contextual relevances," and do so by means of their mutual knowledge (p. 84).

We see that Giddens, as is generally the case for his work, critically integrates many different ideas of macro and microsociologies, ethnomethodology, structural linguistics, Marxism, and so on. Many notions in this book as well as in *Discourse and Context* also appear in this theoretical framework on structuration. We have seen that mental notions, such as "mutual knowledge" are not eschewed. However, when we examine his notions of structure and agency more closely, we discover that these two fundamental concepts do not really meet, or do so in very vague terms, such as structure being "involved" in agency, or the mutual "dependency" of structure and agency, or the relation between paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions of language, as in structuralism. The comparison with the language system on the one hand and actual language use is probably the most

explicit linguistic metaphor for the account of the structure–agency relation, but such would require a much more detailed sociological counterpart of a "psycholinguistic" approach that shows how grammar (as a social resource) is used in actual talk.

The closest Giddens comes to bridging the gap between structure and agency is when he says that social actors know a lot about institutions – and that such knowledge is not "incidental" but necessarily "involved" in the operation of society (p. 71; see also Giddens, 1984: 280) – again using the same vague term. Similarly, he distinguishes between "practical consciousness" and "discursive consciousness," using another vague notion with a long history in social science (as is the case for "false consciousness" in Marx–Engels). In other words, Giddens comes close to relating agency (and discourse) with structure (institutions, etc.) by using cognitive notions such as knowledge and consciousness, but he fails to be more explicit – despite the fact that at the end of the 1970s cognitive science was already well under way. Similarly, in his 1979 book the notion of "context" also seems to collapse with that of social structure that is "involved" in agency through the knowledge of the rules and resources of the actors. Later he briefly defines context more locally in terms of space–time boundaries, co-presence of actors and awareness of the phenomena of co-presence (gestures, face-work, etc.) to influence or control the flow of interaction (Giddens, 1984: 282).

How *exactly* structure, institutions, rules and resources shape concrete interaction or continuous agency – and vice versa – is not explained by Giddens: the gap remains. But at least we know a little better that it exists and where it is, namely in the way social actors bring to bear their *knowledge* of (rules and resources of) social structure in the (reflexive) control of their own conduct. We see that such an approach is not very far removed from the traditional Parsonian idea that action is shaped by internalized societal "norms" that actors have learned. Indeed, both classical and modern sociologies fail to make explicit, for instance in sociocognitive terms, the many notions involved in the theoretical bridge between social structure and social interaction: consciousness, knowledge, rules, resources, norms, and so on. Despite his emphasis on time–space articulation for action, Giddens does not examine the details of interaction situations or contexts.

Levels of context

Several authors – usually briefly – discuss the possibility of several types or levels of context (see also *Discourse and Context*, Chapter 2, for the traditional distinction between "context of situation" and "context of culture"). Similarly, we have seen that the discussion on the influence of context in conversation analysis generally focuses on "social structure" on the

one hand, and ongoing situations on the other hand. Thus, following ideas of Schutz on types and scopes of action and reciprocity, Knoblauch (2001) distinguishes between immediate (face-to-face), mediate (indirect, e.g., through mass media) and societal contexts. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) show how one can account for talk "top down" from "distal" contexts, in order to understand activities, e.g., in terms of institutional knowledge, or "bottom up" how "proximal" contexts for meaning emerge by examining communicative exchanges.

If participants – where relevant – define local communicative situations within a broader societal situation, their contexts must reflect such "double bookkeeping." Also for reasons of cognitive economy, I shall assume that the format of the context representation of societal macrostructures is the same as that for microstructures – as is the case for micro/macrostructures in general (Van Dijk, 1980). That is, also at the macro level we have Settings, Participants (and their roles), Actions, and so on. Thus, besides the here and now of the current Setting, we may have an account in terms of this year (or post-modernity) and in this city or country, as we have also seen for the representation of different time and space levels in the previous chapter. Similarly, as suggested, government, parliaments or nation states may be defined and represented as global actors, and also have different roles (such as Iraq for Tony Blair has the role of enemy). And global actions such as the legitimation of war may be the macro action of which a specific parliamentary speech may be a local enactment, implementation or contribution.

Obviously, such macro level representations are not based on direct observations, but are produced on the basis of general, socially shared knowledge. But they need not only be abstract: In Tony Blair's mental model we find concrete, specific macro actors such as Britain.

Cognitively, all this is rather straightforward: Contexts have the usual schematic structure, but the categories may at each moment have more local or more global level information, depending on the ongoing interactions and other aspects of the participants, e.g., their goals. Interactionally, we basically have the same strategies – participants may attend to, and then display societal categorizations at various levels of understanding. Specific forms of interactions (such as requests for explanation), for instance, may make higher level settings, social identities, interactions and goals more relevant. This macro focus may lead to responses in terms of in-order-to descriptions of ongoing talk and interaction, that is, accounts (Antaki, 1988), as we also see in the ongoing strategic moves of Tony Blair to emphasize the "democratic" nature of his current speech and the policies of his government.

Thus, an institution or group of authors may *cooperate* in the production of one or more discourses, as is the case for a university department planning a class, an organization publishing one or more advertisements, an institution

publishing a handbook, or a parliament deciding to send troops to Iraq. Apart from their own macro self-categorization and self-definition, such production plans would need to feature the (macro) audience and its properties (e.g., students, voters, etc.), as well as the overall goals of the interaction-discourse.

Group minds?

There is one theoretical complication of a more general nature of such a multi-level account of local and global action and the introduction of "macro actors" such as groups, organizations or other collectivities. Contexts are embodied representations, and groups – as groups – have no bodies. Similarly, contexts are mental models, and institutions or groups have no brains and hence no minds or memory that represent such models.

This problem can be resolved in two ways. In an abstract "macro" way, we may admit collectivities or organizations as "virtual" or "abstract" actors who can plan, intend and actually do things, and can do so appropriately only when they have not only intentions or plans but also representations of the communicative situation. That is, we apply the same kind of analysis, but only at a more global, abstract level. As is the case for the processes of metaphor, thus, we have no problem interpreting groups or organizations as "actors" and what they do as "actions."

In an empirically more satisfactory "micro" way, we need to take account of collective action in terms of forms of cooperation of "real" social actors, in which all other theoretical notions hold, but in addition participants need to *coordinate* their interaction in such a way that they *jointly* produce a plan, make a *joint* decision to execute it, and then *jointly* produce a (collective) discourse, as is the case for a parliamentary decision, a news report, or a textbook. Whereas some of the cognitive dimensions of action, such as planning or intentions, may be only mentally accomplished, such acts may need to be "externalized" in special discourse or interaction sessions. In general, as we have assumed elsewhere in this study, social knowledge is assumed to be knowledge shared by the members of groups and communities, and collective or joint action is based on various kinds of such shared general or specific knowledge as well as other shared beliefs, such as plans or ideologies. In the same way as individual action is coordinated to produce joint action or collective discourse, the relevant context models and other mental representations are also coordinated so as to enable such coordinated actions and discourse in the first place. This will typically mean that each member of a group has overlapping mental models (plans) of the ongoing action and that these mental models are ongoingly and mutually adapted to those of the other members as a result of observation and the interpretation of concurrent talk. *In other words, it is precisely because participants of*

interaction form and update ongoing experience and context models that we are able to explain how collective action and discourse is possible in the first place.

Thus, a parliament can decide to send troops to Iraq, but such collective "decision making" is actually the overall result of a vastly complex sequence of communicative episodes, namely the parliamentary debate and its component speeches persuasively expressing the intentions, opinions, arguments and other "mental" conditions of the participants, with the intention that these be adopted or at least known by the other participants.

At the level of various tracks, we thus witness the permanent interplay between details of talk, on the one hand, and their conditions and consequences within the subsequent states (situation definitions) of the partly synchronized context models of the participants, on the other hand. In this case, each participant needs to have complex context models with representations of the intentions and goals of the others, negotiate about goals, and subsequently – according to their respective roles – participate in all the actions that are needed to produce the collective discourse. In complex organizations this may mean that some participants only have local knowledge for local contexts, and do not know, let alone control, the whole global action. Each member of a group, organization or other collectivity organizes his or her own action and discourse by context models that are defined for the role, identities and goals that are relevant for each level and scope of action and discourse. It is in this way that Tony Blair has different context models than the other MPs, but at the same time, both he and the MPs are responsible in different ways for the collective parliamentary decision to go to war in Iraq.

This means that the micro and the macro solutions to the problem of collective action and discourse are not at all incompatible: The micro way is how things really are *done*, locally, by the participants. The macro way is how complex interactions and contexts can be globally understood, planned and controlled – and hence represented by some or all participants, or only by the leaders of a collective project. In other words, in a multidisciplinary, socio-cognitive approach we need not speculate about abstract or virtual macro acts or actors, or societal structures more generally. Instead, we combine a local level of (concretely embodied) individual actions and individual mental representations, but recognize the relevant construction of macro actors and actions as parts of the shared or partly synchronized mental representations of the participants. In other words, the macro level is "part of" – or projected into – the micro level because people are able to *represent* or mentally *construct* the macro level. And in the same way, that is, through mental models of situations, social structure may influence agency, and vice versa.

Such an account is consistent with a microsociological and interactional approach to social structure, empirically plausible from a cognitive point of

view, and at the same time accepts the "existence" of groups, collective actions and representations as social constructs of members and how macrostructures are able to influence (micro) actions of individual actors. We have seen how this happens in Tony Blair's speech and how it locally implements such macro level notions as parliamentary decision making, foreign policy, going to war, on the one hand, and parliament, political parties, the nation states and other macro actors, on the other hand.

We have assumed that macro level information may occasionally be less conscious or less focused upon, and serve only as relevant background information, as is also the case for macro meanings (topics) during semantic discourse production and comprehension. In other words, as is generally the case for mental models, also in context models some local feature may at one time be focused upon (e.g., the institutional role of the current speaker, such as Tony Blair as PM during his talk), whereas the macro level information of the model may only occasionally be focused upon to produce or understand fragments of a discourse (e.g., when Blair orients towards democracy as "our" system).

Structures of social situations

After the general reviews and theoretical preliminaries of the last pages, we should now be more specific about the *social* structure of (local) social situations and how these are represented and used as context models by participants. In *Discourse and Context* we have shown how social situations are analyzed from the perspective of linguistics and psychology, how context models feature categories derived from the way participants understand and represent the discursively relevant aspects of such situations, and in the previous chapter we have seen how personal context models are formed and changed on the basis of socially shared knowledge and ideologies.

In this chapter we are interested in the more detailed societal foundations of these sociocognitive representations of context. Above we saw what some of the founding fathers in sociology have written on social situations but that with the exception of writers such as Goffman there is not much detailed theoretical work in sociology on the *structure* of situations. However, let us try to make some (tentative) general observations that may be relevant for the more detailed sociological account of contexts.

A first step has been made above by assuming that contexts may be represented at various levels of generality and specificity and thus account for how collective and institutional structures may be affecting forms of text and talk, and vice versa. In the same way, Settings (Time, Place), and especially Participants and the Actions themselves are categories that also have structural-societal dimensions, as we have seen for our informal contextualization

of Tony Blair as PM and as speaking, on a specific date and time, in the British House of Commons.

The question is what of all this "societal" information tends to be contextually made relevant by participants (and how such may vary in different cultures, as we'll see in the next chapter). The full structure of social situations and what social actors may occasionally attend to may be very complex, but we have shown that participants cannot possibly manage constructs that feature many dozens or hundreds of relevant levels, categories or subcategories, and hence need to construct in each encounter, and at each moment of the encounter, a relatively simple model of the currently relevant aspects of the social situation and interaction.

For instance, there is little doubt about the relevance, during his speech, of Tony Blair's institutional function and role as Prime Minister, both in his own as well as in the context definitions of Members of Parliament present. But Blair is also British (undoubtedly relevant in the speech), Labour Party leader (relevant in his sneer against the Liberal Democrats), statesman (when talking about his relations with Bush), and politician (in any of his professional actions). But, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Blair may also be defined as male, middle class, white, middle-aged, member of clubs and organizations, a husband, a father and much more – social identities most of which are barely relevant during his speech. Yet, someone (e.g., some MP) may construe Blair critically as a militarist (while going to war without legitimation), as a man (because of his macho rhetoric against Saddam Hussein), as authoritarian (because he ignores the will of the majority not to go to war against Iraq), and so on. Does this mean that all such identities are relevant, whether for him, or for any of the recipients of his speech? Indeed, what are the social (political) conditions of such identity-definitions in context models?

Similar questions may be asked for the account of Space and Place – indeed, how much information about parliament as the Place of the current debate needs to be represented, and does this mean the actual House of Commons, or rather the institution?

We see that the design of context models of participants also depends on members' *social* analysis of events and situations. The criteria of relevance or procedural consequentiality may be a useful constraint on the explosion of possible social categories to be included in context definitions, but also these criteria themselves need further social analysis.

In sum, a social analysis of social situations as a basis for a theory of context may need to attend to, among many other things, participant categories of various types (identities, roles, functions, relations, etc.), relations between these categories and macro level categories such as organizations, institutions, groups, communities, nation states, and so on, as well as the

socially shared beliefs (knowledge, rules, norms, attitudes, ideologies, etc.) that relate members with groups, etc. Since such an analysis presupposes much of contemporary sociology, I shall – again – comment on only a few of these categories. Some of these categories have also been examined in the previous chapters. We should now do so from a sociological point of view, that is, as part of socially defined or interactionally negotiated social categories.

Social Settings

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Time and Place are central subcategories of the Setting category of context models. More generally, in their experiences people orient to where they are, what day or time of day it is (at least approximately), and the same is true when they are speaking, writing, listening or reading. They need such information, for instance, for the adequate production and comprehension of deictic expressions in text and talk, but also for temporal forms of verbs, the orientation of narrative structures in storytelling, the future time frame of predictions and commands, and so on. These are general contextual properties of all discourse.

Place From a social perspective, however, Place and Time are not merely spatiotemporal coordinates of talk that control, e.g., the production and understanding of deictic expressions. As we have seen in the previous chapter, they have social meanings for participants (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Urry, 1996). Being and feeling "at home," for instance, for many people is associated with different meanings, opinions and emotions than being "at work" or "in a hotel" (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Such feelings are not just subjective and personal, but socioculturally learned and shared, and hence presupposed or signaled in interaction and talk, e.g., in the negotiation of boundaries. The same is generally true for public vs. private places (Benn and Gauss, 1983; Rodin and Steinberg, 2003).

Certain discourse genres, structures and interactional strategies may be exclusive or preferred in private places (or more private enclosures of public places), as is the case for declarations of love, quarrels, and so on. Similarly, the home is not (merely) contextually defined as a building (like "our house"), but as a social representation associated with meanings such as everyday living, family life, breakfasts, sleeping, relaxing, and so on, that is, as places that are interactionally constructed by its occupants – differently so by different social actors with different roles (such as the traditional role of housewife, her husband only present in the evening and weekends, the children or – in rich families – a maid). At the same time, the home may be

associated with a neighborhood (as "building"), architecture (as "apartment" or "house"), interior design (as "rooms"), and furniture, and so on.

For participants in talk and interaction such complex Place constructs are a combination of generalized partial personal experiences (autobiographical models), on the one hand, and inferences derived from sociocultural representations presupposed or implied by public discourse, typically in the mass media, on the other hand. Newspapers and magazines have ample sections on the "home," for instance. At any moment in everyday interaction one or more of all these social dimensions of "homes" may become relevant, as is also the case for discourse. Certain conversations or storytelling may be located more specifically at the dinner table (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Ochs and Capps, 2001) and others in the bedroom – and also their speaking style, topics, turn allocation, and so on will in that case be different. We see that Places are not just places or spaces, but complex social constructs that, for different social actors and roles, are associated with complex social representations of personal and social meanings, identity, interactions, types of discourse and ways of speaking (Smith, 2001). A simple multiply deictic expression such as "I am going home" thus may imply many different pragmatic, contextual meanings, which again may be quite different from place indications in slogans such as "Yankees, go home!"

Institutional discourse has specific settings, as we have seen from the start for the example of Tony Blair speaking in the House of Commons. Also in the previous chapter we found that the organization and comprehension of social places and spaces as settings for interaction often appears to coincide with the institution for such interaction. Thus, school may be a type of building and hence part of the Place category, but more often than not, when we use a school as a Setting for interaction, we refer to an institution, associated with specific (educational) communicative events, participants, and so on.

Thus, when we examine the social dimensions of Setting, it is rather the institutional setting we are talking about. Blair on the occasion we examined happened to speak in the House of Commons, but the parliamentary session of the Commons could in principle have been held elsewhere if the building had been undergoing restoration. The same is true for most institutions and organizations. School or class may sometimes be held in a park or a zoo. Thus, speaking "in parliament" does not (only) mean speaking in a parliamentary building, but in an institutional environment, in interaction with MPs, and as an MP. Parliaments, universities, schools, agencies, offices, shops, factories, police stations, and so on, appear to have ambiguous roles, namely as social-physical locations-with-a-function, on the one hand, and as institutions or organizations on the other hand. Deictic expressions in discourse may refer to both: "Here" may refer to this building but also to this institution, as we also saw in Blair's speech. The first will be relevant for

general, geographical orientation (and its discourse), e.g., how to find one's way, and the second for the social embedding of interaction. In that respect, institutions and organizations are global situations rather than location categories of settings, that is, global combinations of Settings, Participants, Activities, etc.

Social actors are unable to continuously orient towards the full complexity of private and public places, such as homes, organizations and institutions, but will do so selectively, at various levels of specificity or generality, and associated with typical other social actors, interactions, goals and other properties – such as the differences implied by such expressions as "wrecking a house" vs. "wrecking a home." In other words, as is the case for contexts in general, Places are also interactionally construed – again on the basis of previous experiences and sociocultural knowledge (for details, specifically on the discursive description of cities, see Mondada, 2000).

This complex social understanding of places also transfers to the kind of everyday experiences we call contexts, namely as selective summaries of what dimension of the current "place" is now relevant – that is, coherent with the other aspects of the context, such as the participants (e.g., family members, or MPs) and the ongoing actions and discourse (family dinner, dinner talk, or a public speech in a parliamentary debate). Also the purely "geographical" aspects of Places may thus be socially and culturally differentiated – as is the case for the location of "home" in a specific street, neighborhood, city or country.

As is the case for discourse processing generally, one may be amazed to see how social actors are able to manage so much and such rich social knowledge about places when engaged in text and talk – and this is only one subcategory of one category of their definition of the context. No wonder they need both cognitive and social interaction strategies in order to be able to focus on what is *now* relevant.

Time Although socially less rich than Places, Times are also socially relevant in the construction of social interaction and discourse (Chafe, 1994; Hassard, 1990). We have seen before that in modern societies, clocks and time organize much of our everyday interaction from the moment we get up in the morning (using an alarm clock, or not), and need to hurry to get in on time to work – which itself is strictly organized by a time schedule.

The same is true for text and talk, and both everyday conversations and especially institutional talk are being conducted (sometimes literally) with an eye on the clock, and multiply signaled in conversation, for instance to open up closings (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Parliamentary debates, as we also have seen in the Hansard transcript of Blair's speech, are meticulously

controlled by time and speaking-time allocations, controlled by the Speaker of the House.

Again, Time is not just chronometric or categorical (seconds, minutes, hours, days, etc.), but also in other ways social, for instance as something one lacks or not, as quality time, and so on. There is no doubt that most context models most of the time (!) have social Time categories and meanings, as we also know from storytelling about the past, live sports commentary on radio or TV, or predictions and stories about the future in the weather forecast and science fiction. That is, social time is not just the organization of time by the members of a culture, but again a social and interactional construct associated with many different meanings (Collett, 1989). Personal history, experience, self and episodic memories are organized by (past) time, and closely related to personal identity (Boden and Bielby, 1986; Jenkins, 2002; Turnbull, 2004). The same is true for organizations, institutions and nation states and their collective identity.

In conversation interaction is temporally monitored, from the moment one does or does not arrive "on time" for an appointment, until breaking off talk because of time constraints, whether or not explicitly signaled in talk as a reason for ending a conversation. Tempo and rhythm of talk are also organized by time (Auer, Couper-Kühlen and Müller, 1999), and temporal coordination in the real time of ongoing conversation is crucial – as also the study of pauses, transition, relevant places and interruption suggests. And since quality time is "good" social time, also in talk, one may typically "forget the time" when talking, which may again be a reason for excuses to "take" so much of recipients' time.

Thus, besides the relevance of a contextual Time category for the interpretation of temporal deictic expressions, verb tenses, temporal adverbs, narrative time, conversational management, and so on, text and talk feature multiple signals that the production of discourse is controlled by various social and cultural concepts of Time: natural time, clock time, social time, and so on. Relevant for this chapter is especially the ongoing interactional and more general sociocultural construction of Time in talk. As is the case for Place, we must conclude that the Time subcategory of the Setting category may also feature complex constructs with different types and dimensions of temporal organization.

Social actors, roles and identities

Few other context categories are as influential for talk and text as the relevant construction of the individual or collective "speaker" or "author" of discourse. Being a woman or a man, young or old, a professor or a plumber, Dutch or Spanish, friend or foe, and so on, is known to be construed as relevant and consequential for many forms of communication, as we also

have suggested already for the various roles or identities of Tony Blair speaking in the House of Commons.

Language users are able to use such categories for identities or roles only when they know them, and in that sense the formation and updating of situation definitions apply more general knowledge on discourse, interaction and communication. Participants are not only individual persons with their own biography, that is, for the representation of Self, but also participating *as* members, e.g., of social categories, institutions, organizations, agencies or nation states. Similarly, such roles are not merely (known) abstractions applied to many situations, but may be locally and interactionally produced and changed in more or less unique ways. Thus, a journalist and editor of a newspaper writing an editorial is thereby instantiating the role of "editorialist," but may at the same time be a "critic" or an "analyst" – apart from other roles and identities (e.g., "conservative," "US citizen," etc.) when critically examining government policy. It is this unique, joint collection of identities and roles that contextually defines the current writer of the editorial. Similar observations hold for the intended (projected, construed) or actual roles of the recipients. In other words, we need to examine some of the details of the *participation structure* of text and talk, as well as the variable *footing* of the participants in such a structure (Goffman, 1981).

Communication participants Participation structure is composed of various kinds of categories of social actors from different realms or social orders. Directly relevant are the specific participant roles of discourse and communication itself, such as Speaker and Hearer in most forms of everyday conversation.

As we know from the work of Goffman (1981) on *footing*, however, different kinds of talk or text have several kinds of speaker–writing or hearer–reading roles, and ways these may be signaled in talk (Fuller, 2003; Goodwin, 1984; Wortham, 1996).

For instance, the anchor person on television may be reading the news, but is seldom the one who actually wrote or composed the news item, that is, the "author," or "principal" of its main ideas, but is only an "animator."

Also in everyday conversations we may thus variably impersonate others, and cite or attribute what we say to others in various forms of quoting and intertextuality (Holt, 1996). For instance, we may tell in story about what someone told us (sometimes using the expression "quote–unquote" or making quote-gestures with our fingers), or summarize a topic from the news we have read in the newspaper.

Similarly, in news reports, news actors may be represented as speakers in many ways, through direct, indirect or mixed forms of "styles" (Bertolet, 1990; Clayman, 1990; Coulmas, 1986).

Recipients or addressees, both in oral and written communication, may be explicitly and directly addressed – e.g., by second person pronouns, pointing or gaze. But they may also be indirectly addressed, as when doctors speak both about and to the patient when addressing other doctors or nursing personnel during their rounds in hospitals. Or recipients may be casual overhearers of a conversation of which they are not ratified participants – with or without the knowledge of the ratified participants.

The many possible combinations of such recipient roles make for a complex participation structure which, besides various communication roles, also involves participant relations (perception, awareness, friendship, etc.), forms of participation, mutual knowledge and other aspects of the situation. As we have seen for the Setting category, it is often hard to abstract situation or context categories from others. Thus, conditions of recipient type also may depend on Space properties, as when obviously people in an elevator are known to be able to listen to a conversation to which they are not parties, and hence function as known overhearers (who, however, may switch to bystander or participant role). In the same way as the participation in the production of discourse may be one of degree or dimension, recipients may also be participating in various *degrees* in a conversation: as active, speaking or listening participants, as ratified participants who are merely listening to a conversation between two other participants in a multi-party encounter, as perceived non-participant overhearers, as more distant onlookers of a conversation (who are, however, able to see gestures, face-work, etc. and hence may infer the tone of the conversation or the more or less intimate relation between participants), as well as passers-by who only catch a word or two, and so on.

A detailed typology and analysis of such recipient roles in many discourse genres or activity types could easily fill a book, but relevant for us is how participants ongoingly analyze and construct such roles in their context definitions (see, e.g., Schober and Clark, 1989). Apart from directly and explicitly addressed participants whose role is signaled in text and talk (e.g., with second-person personal pronouns, politeness forms, and so on), much of the relevance of such definitions is also signaled non-verbally, such as by gaze, body position and orientation, volume, hand movements (such as shielding one's mouth), as well as the space and place dimensions analyzed above.

Sometimes the influence on talk of the recipient-definitions in the context of speakers is merely indirect, for instance when speakers avoid personal and intimate topics when they know there are bystanders, overhearers or similarly non-ratified permanent or temporary onlookers. Such cannot be directly observed in a (recorded and transcribed) conversation, but might be very obvious to ratified participants. This may become explicit as a topic in later

conversation, or by systematic observed topical analysis of conversations in situations with strangers as non-participating recipients.

Since all this information about types of participation and listening is complex, we must again ask ourselves how participants manage such complexity in relatively simple context definitions. In addition to this there are considerable personal and situational differences. Some people are more reluctant than others to share more or less personal information in talk in the presence of bystanders or overhearers, as we know from a large literature in social psychology. Similarly, doing so during a birthday party with friends is again different from doing so on the train with strangers. In the same way, we may need to distinguish between more or less cooperative recipients (Bublitz, 1988). Obviously, as we need to examine in the following chapter, there are likely to be cultural differences in participation structure.

In organizational and institutional situations, participation structures may be even more complex than summarized above for mundane conversations (Drew and Heritage, 1992). For instance, in the mass media there are many different professional roles in the joint production of news and television programs. In a television talk show, a host may interview a guest, and in that case the guest may be the primary recipient of the questions of the host, but there may be a studio audience in front of which the interview is held (and which may be addressed occasionally, and which may participate with applause), as well as a mass media audience (Calsamiglia et al., 1995; Mühlen, 1985; Tolson, 2001). Calling the media audience "overhearers" in such a case would be quite inconsistent with the functions of the mass media, namely to inform and entertain the audience. As is the case for a play on the stage, thus, the interview between host and guest, and the studio public, jointly perform a "show" whose first addressee is the audience (Giles, 2002). It is a matter of terminology whether or not we then call this audience "primary" (first order) or "secondary" (second order) recipients or addressees. However, it is theoretically important to assess that the audience is the main addressee and recipient of the TV show, as a complex communicative event, even when – within that event – there are activities, interactions or talk that take place among the participants "in" the show. At the same time, the show may again be about others, as a form of public gossip, possibly presuming these others as direct or indirect recipients (Thornborrow and Morris, 2004). The same show may be announced before (and "de-announced" afterwards) by an anchor person or "presenter," and of course be partly embedded by various kinds of citation in other TV programs, or by people in everyday conversation, in increasingly complex forms of interdiscursivity.

Whereas much of what has been said here pertains to various kinds of communication roles in institutions and organizations, participants may also be engaged in discourse *production* in various professional roles. The

production of a TV program or of a news report in the newspaper may involve chief editors, section or program editors, directors, reporters, writers, translators, camera people and photographers, and many different kinds of technical staff (as we see in the sometimes endless final credits of movies) (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). They jointly "produce" institutional talk or text, usually through the management of access by daily routines, but in different ways and modes – some only to gather news or ideas, others to write them up, or to correct or translate these first drafts of text, and so on. Thus, besides the visual and sound people, we have topic people (authors, script writers, etc.), style people and drama people, among other professionalized "discursive" roles, who consecutively or concurrently may work on the "same" discourse product. Obviously, in such situations it becomes difficult and hardly enough to distinguish between "principals," "authors" and "animators" as Goffman did in his subtle analysis of participation structure in talk. The host of a talk show on TV may be the one who is enacting and voicing the product, but certainly is not only an "animator" speaking the words prepared by others. And conversely, a news report in the press may be explicitly attributed to a correspondent in the byline, but the actual text we read in the paper may be quite different from the one he or she filed – which may be considerably edited by several other journalists. Indeed, news production in many respects is a form of discourse processing of previous text and talk (Van Dijk, 1988a).

Similar analyses can be made (and be detailed) for the production of a host of other discourse types within or among organizations, or discourses produced for the public at large. Even the relatively simple participation structures for scholarly papers involve not only the "authors" as writers or formulators of ideas – in which a distinction between first or further authors may be made if there are many, especially in science articles with many authors. Authors refer to other authors for concepts or ideas, sometimes literally cite other authors, and may also quote other people as sources of data, e.g., in interviews. Then, the finished paper is sent to one or more editors of a journal, who will ask an opinion of one or more reviewers, who may recommend more or less substantial changes, which may or may not be fully integrated in the paper, making it even less the product of the original authors. Finally, once sent to the publisher, a copy editor may still make final changes of style. In other words, here also there are different kinds of joint production and intertextuality, each of which needs more detailed analysis.

My aim is not the systematic analysis of the complex social systems of communication in society, but how the participants in such more or less complex participation and interaction structures represent themselves and the others in such a way that such a context participant category controls appropriate text or talk in each activity. Thus, authors of scholarly articles know that not citing and crediting others for concepts, ideas, theory or data is

academically unacceptable, and may even incur legal penalties for plagiarism. They also need to accept changes suggested or made by editors, reviewers and copy editors (and sometimes lawyers). Certain forms of participant structure and intertextuality are normatively and legally controlled – thus vertically linking the discursive, interactional and communicational order with the organizational, social, legal and cultural orders.

The joint production of organizational discourse is not controlled by one context model shared by all participants, and not only because by definition context models are personal and unique. The structure of many forms of institutional production of text and talk may be altogether too complex to be managed in the context definitions of all participants. Rather, as theoretically explained above, each participant has her or his own production context model with a representation of the communication role and tasks, as prescribed by the organizations, combined with personal experiences and goals defining different degrees of expertise. Such organizational cooperation and the production of a joint production, however, is impossible without cooperation and collaboration, and such also needs to be controlled by models – this time partly shared among two or more participants.

Thus, journal editors maintain correspondence with authors and the publisher, but not usually with copy editors – who only communicate with the responsible journal desk-editor at the publisher. That is, those who interact and communicate in the production of organizational discourse need to have the respective participant representations in their context definitions, specifying what is expected of them and what can be expected of the other participants. Obviously, such communication roles of editors should also be studied in relation to their broader social (power) roles, for instance as gatekeepers of knowledge (McGinty, 1999).

Obviously, as is typical for dynamic context definitions, such participant representations are not merely static or normative, but have situationally dependent, specific manifestations, expressions, or interpretations, combined with personal goals and experiences. Such unique control mechanisms for unique communicative events also are relevant for the solution of all kinds of troubles due to errors in participant representations, for instance when participants misrepresent their tasks or responsibilities. Organizational interaction conflicts are common and have been studied in detail (see, e.g., Putnam and Poole, 1987). But we need more insight into the detailed ways participants in organizations represent themselves and other participants, more specifically so in communicative events, and how such (mis)representations affect (different aspects or versions of) organizational discourse. Similarly, we also need to investigate how the overall (professional) schematic structures of such context models are acquired on the job, and

whether and how they may be implemented or applied in local interactions and discourse.

Social categories I shall only mention one of the central defining characteristics of participants, namely their categories as members of collectivities defined by gender, age, ethnicity ("race") and so on – discussed in various places in this study, and often seen as central or fundamental to people's identity (see, e.g., Fiske, 1998). Language users often signal such identities, and it is likely that in many if not most communicative situations they actually represent themselves in such a way, even when in the dynamic context model these identities may be foregrounded or backgrounded.

It is likely, for instance, that in "mixed" interactions of women and men, participants will often activate their gender identity as a consequence of previous gender-related contributions to the conversation. Such identities may also be institutionally defined and combined with roles, e.g., in the interaction between gynecologists and their (female) clients.

More generally, then, we need to know how in each context model participants construe the complex participation framework, featuring not only communicative roles (different kinds of speakers or writers), but also social identities as well as institutional roles – as we have asked for identity hierarchy and priorities in the context model of the female, black, young, middle class, leftist, North American, journalist from New York. Even if on the job the professional roles will probably be foregrounded most of the time in most of the organizational interactions, it is not likely that being a woman and black are altogether irrelevant in such interactions. She also would know that such identities in a white-male-dominated society *may* become relevant at any moment (see, e.g., Essed, 1991), and hence her context model will be organized accordingly (see also *Discourse and Context*, Chapter 4).

Societal roles Talk and text are not merely influenced by the (subjective, interactional) construction of communicative roles of participants in the interaction or discourse itself, but also by other social roles, which I shall denote by the generic term "societal roles." These are, among others, professional, institutional and organizational roles and relations, of which we have mentioned many examples above and in previous chapters (for a summary of role theory, see, e.g., Turner, 2002). Note also that societal roles and social identities are hard to distinguish and often confused notions.

We have at several moments referred to the various societal and political roles of Tony Blair, displayed in his speech in the House of Commons: Prime Minister, head of government, member and leader of the Labour Party, politician and British citizen, among others, whereas in other communicative

situations he also is defined by relational roles such as son, father, husband, and so on.

Not only in our concept of context, but also in much other current theory, such roles or identities are analyzed not so much as macro level, organizational elements, but rather as local, interactional constructs (among many publications, see, e.g., Abell and Stokoe, 2001; Seidman, 2003; Shotter, 1993; Shotter and Gergen, 1989). That is, for Blair it is not so much the abstract or formal role or identity of Prime Minister or member of the Labour Party – for instance as formalized by a membership card – that is relevant for social interaction and discourse, but rather more dynamically his ongoing conception, construction, display or performance of these roles in the current situation, and as closely intertwined with other such roles. Thus, in the current situation, Blair not only performs as the Prime Minister – which allows him, formally, to speak first in this parliamentary debate – but as a democratic and understanding PM and leader of the nation, among other more or less ad hoc roles or identities. Similar observations hold, of course, for a vast number of other societal identities and roles, of which gender identities probably have been studied most extensively, also for discourse (see, e.g., Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002). In this sense, roles appear to link social structure (organizations, institutions) with social practices.

We have argued before, though, that one must be quite careful with the kind of theoretical claims one makes when talking about the "local construction" of social roles or identities. The very notion of "identity" presupposes categorization, generalization, abstraction and comparison, whereas "roles" are typically defined in abstract terms, as "types" defined by general properties, duties, obligations, and so on. In that sense "local" role-playing and the performance of identities do not take place from scratch.

In the construction of a unique, local identity, social members obviously use more general, socially shared knowledge and other beliefs about the relevant category of people. In that sense, it may be more appropriate to speak about unique, ad hoc, personal or interactional "uses," "applications" or "manifestations" of roles and identities – as we also do for the use of language. Tony Blair "is" also a Prime Minister or a politician or a member of Labour in many situations in which he does not "do" so – and he knows that.

At least under one definition, roles and identities are trans-contextual, or even a-contextual, because of their abstract, general nature, whether in the lives of individual members, at the level of societal accounts of groups, institutions and organizations or in the analysis of generalized, repeated or distributed interactions – for instance the kinds of things the PM can (or should) do, in general. Hence the classical association of roles with norms: what the incumbents of a role are expected to do under what circumstances. Apart from the obvious relevance of such general, abstract notions for a more

abstract (macro) theory of societal structure, this is also relevant for accounts of interaction and discourse, because group members at each moment not only know about their various societal identities (and the more general, societal implications of their roles), but may also activate and apply them more or less ad hoc in many situations.

For instance, gender does not appear to be much on display in Tony Blair's speech, but in the context of some context models, both of MPs or of critical citizens and analysts, taking a tough, militarist stance on Iraq and going to war may well be attributed to a "male" or "macho" role – as was also the case for Margaret Thatcher as a woman, for instance in the miners' strike or the Falklands war (see also Reicher and Hopkins, 1996). And even in a parliamentary debate, Blair may on occasions activate his, otherwise irrelevant, role as a father, for instance when debating a bill on the family.

That is, in the same way as language users, because of their general linguistic and communicative knowledge, are able to strategically activate different styles or genres, even when not dominant in a situation, social actors may also variously display fragments of "other" identities than the main one now being "used." That is, because of his general, a-contextual and permanent role as a politician or father, Tony Blair can strategically "use" these identities in specific situations. In sum, social actors can only "play" roles they and other social members know about (and hence are able to recognize), although there is much room for local improvisation, combinations of roles, and so on. That is, the actual "play" as token is unique, and so may be the current "played role," but participants are only able to perform or understand such a unique role on the basis of shared knowledge. Again we see how (context) models are based on social representations and not only on situational contingencies.

Theoretically, this sociocognitive analysis provides a more satisfactory account than describing identities *only* in terms of local, interactional construction, even for an inherently local notion such as the situated, ad hoc nature of context. Participants locally, discursively and interactionally construct themselves and others in the unique terms of the currently relevant social situation defined as context, or even more specifically in each "state-of-context," and it is this situated identity that may influence the current state-of-talk. But in the same way as they are also "the same participant" throughout a conversation, they are also "the same person" across contexts, that is, an individually unique composition of more or less stable identities, a person who is a member of various groups just like all other members of the same group.

In the previous chapter we have examined the sociocognitive nature of such identities. In this chapter a parallel analysis applies to the sociological analysis of social roles and identities as acquired, used and changed locally in specific

forms of social interaction and discourse and produced and reproduced, globally, as constitutive of groups or institutions. Obviously, a traditional approach to roles won't do (Thomas, 1979). But a radically ad hoc notion of social roles as identities only locally produced from scratch is sociologically of as little interest as what Mary or John are now saying or doing in this particular conversation. Obviously, we are interested in the mechanisms, the rules, the system of talk-in-interaction, on the one hand, and in the (equally generalizable) ways such mechanisms can be locally acquired, used, applied, changed, performed, and so on.

Each situated identity-use does not just contribute to the construction of individual context definitions of individual participants, and such uses (activation, de-activation, focusing, combination, etc.) are locally occasioned by previous conduct and discourse of co-participants. Thus, Tony Blair's identity as party leader and as opponent of the Liberal Democrats becomes activated, and is applied in his speech, in a particular way (ironically, aggressively, etc.) after being provoked by a critical interruption construed as a form of criticism or opposition. It is probably also in this way that the MPs present construct this fragment of his talk in such terms – and less, as a moment before, as the understanding, democratic leader.

Although in discourse and conversation analysis social structure is usually focused on at more local, micro levels, the previous sections suggest that society is more than interaction, even when one holds that it is based on, or otherwise emerging from, interaction. This is also true for and about participants, who also may perceive, understand and participate in society at several levels. They make abstractions and generalizations, much like analysts – or rather analysts can do so while they have learned to do so in the many interactions and discourses of everyday life. They thus are able not only to apply general societal knowledge in specific interactions and discourse, but also vice versa to abstract from, and *de-contextualize*, the many local interactions in which they take place, at several levels of abstraction.

So, from this speech as well as from many other interactions, Tony Blair gradually acquires his more generalized knowledge and opinions about what it means to "be" a Prime Minister. Similarly, others may also thus acquire a more general idea about the different styles of "being" or "doing" a Prime Minister (party leader, social democrat, and so on). We thus move from a more historical account of Blair as PM to a more general analysis of the role of PMs in political theory – dimensions of social roles that are beyond the scope of this book, although they may well be (construed as) parts of the context models of the participants.

We have seen how "doing" PM is locally being accomplished in a particular speech, and how such a speech (and other relevant conduct) is controlled by the context models of the participants. It is sociologically relevant

to move "up" again, and relate locally situated identities and roles to more general, abstract ones, acquired and then used as a resource by the participants, and to relate these more general roles again to groups, organizations and institutions and their structures – which are also locally implemented, produced as well as reproduced. Tony Blair and the Members of Parliament through their current interaction are both implementing as well as reproducing parliament as an institution – and they are able to do so through their local definitions (contexts) as well as their socially shared knowledge. When Tony Blair addresses the MPs he is not primarily aware of MP John or Mary, but constructs participants more collectively in their parliamentary role of MPs, party members, the opposition, and so on. Again, for social identity theory in social psychology such an observation is trivial, but we also need to take it into account in a more sociological analysis of the contexts of text and talk. That is, sociological theory (e.g., of roles) is relevant for our enterprise because it shows us not only how different levels of the social order may be represented in context models, but also how social members acquire, confirm and practice the general competence (knowledge, beliefs, abilities, etc.) for such a role, and how such a role relates to other roles and institutional structures. Thus, Blair's role as PM is known by him and others not only as an isolated "position" or a set of norms, but also as part of a set of relations with other political roles and structures: government, ministers, and so on.

Social relations: power and dissent This doubly integrated (combined micro–macro and sociocognitive) analysis of participants also applies to the analysis of specific *relations between participants*. That is, in his sneer against the Liberal Democrats, Tony Blair also enacts a *power* relationship, again at several levels of analysis. He has (been given) the floor and as such is allowed to speak (and sneer, and attack) as much as he wants, and thus implements a form of discursive or interactional power. Secondly, as a Prime Minister, head of government, leader of Labour, and so on, his roles also define *power positions* which can be – and are now being – used to locally display power (for power and conversation, see, e.g., Forrester and Ramsden, 2000; Hutchby, 1996; Owsley and Scotton, 1984; Thimm, Rademacher and Kruse, 1995; West, 1979, 1984).

In other words, and as we shall see for the analysis of action and interaction, Blair is now not only "doing" PM (among other identities), but also "doing" power. Again, such an analysis always needs to go both ways: He implements, uses, applies or performs the more general power relations he is a party to, but at the same time he thus produces and reproduces this power relationship by the local interaction of his speech.

Relevant for a *critical analysis* is whether Blair in such a situation is *abusing* such power when he not only tries to persuade the MPs to legitimate

a war in Iraq, but also manipulates them, for instance by strategically emphasizing threats and de-emphasizing risks the MPs may not be fully aware of, for instance because of the lack of information (Van Dijk, 2006a). That is, *domination* (defined as power abuse) as a social relation is both locally accomplished and globally, structurally emerging and operating, as we have shown in our work on the reproduction of racism (e.g., Van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993a).

The more abstract social analysis of power and domination, for instance in terms of control of positions, groups or institutions over others or over individual citizens – both as control of minds as well as control of actions – may then be applied as well as contributed to by analyzing in detail how this is being applied and "done" in a parliamentary speech. It is this kind of analysis that is specifically focused on in critical discourse studies (see, e.g., Van Dijk, 2008b; Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

A similar analysis of course holds for *counter-power*, *resistance* and *dissent*. Blair is aware of – and explicitly signals this – such opposition, and such is also interactionally relevant for his persuasion and counter-opposition in his speech (see, e.g., Hackett and Zhao, 1994; much of this work is about women resisting male domination; see also Fisher and Davis, 1993; Houston and Kramarae, 1991).

The difference is that dissidents lack the mechanisms of social or political control that define power and domination, and hence must have recourse to other resources, such as interruptions (as in Blair's speech), counter-speeches, public protests, organizing various opposition groups, and so on (Rucht, Koopmans, and Neidhardt, 1999). Discursively and interactionally, this may involve the moral or political delegitimation of the PM or a powerful leader, as has been the case in the Iraq debate in the USA, the UK and Spain, both in parliament as well as in the media as well as other public talk and text (see, e.g., Chouliaraki, 2005; Edwards and Martin, 2004). The very notions of legitimation and delegitimation are specific examples of such a relationship between power, domination, consent and dissent – both of relations between social (political) actors, groups or institutions as well as of the specific interactions (speeches, interruptions, protests, etc.) in which they engage (Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997).

Other properties of participants Participants are not only defined by their communicative or societal roles and identities or their membership in groups or institutions. Undoubtedly, in everyday person perception, and hence also in interaction and discourse, it should make a difference for speakers whether recipients are (now or more generally) perceived as smart or dumb, friendly or unfriendly, cooperative or uncooperative, attractive or

unattractive, expert or non-expert, and so on (see, e.g., Wyer, Swan and Gruenfeld, 1995).

This is not just a preferred topic of traditional social psychology of personality and impression formation, but also an interactional and societal issue, as we know from research on strategies of self-presentation since Goffman's early work (Goffman, 1956; see also Malone, 1997). The assignment of such attributes to recipients may be contextual, namely as inferences drawn from ongoing contributions of a participant to the conversation. That is, such evaluations are not merely based on previous personal knowledge of participants, but also interactionally produced. In both cases, discourse is most likely to be adapted to such participant properties. One may go the extra mile in explaining difficult things to a recipient perceived as unintelligent, engage in specific persuasive strategies with participants who appear uncooperative or tend to extend a conversation with someone who is perceived to be attractive, as we also know from much research in social psychology (Cantor and Kihlstrom, 1981; Furnham, 1986; McCroskey, 1987).

These rather obvious observations suggest that the social attributes of participants generally do matter for talk and text. However, this again poses the problem of the limitation of context. If there are hundreds, if not thousands of such attributes, and all may have systematic influence on talk or text, language users obviously are unable to handle such rich context definitions – unless there is a way to select or otherwise reduce the complexity of such "person schemas."

Intuitively, the attributes just mentioned have rather obvious consequences for interaction and hence for talk, but maybe most of the others do not – at least not systematically. Thus, attraction, cooperation and intelligence may be systematic, general conditions for successful conversation, and hence generally participants will focus especially on such attributes where relevant (for instance, giving a lecture or class, the assumed intelligence of the audience is more important than their attractiveness). On the other hand, having blue eyes, being left handed, having been born in Amsterdam, and many other attributes may be sometimes relevant for some participants, but are not generally attributes that influence talk or text beyond the level of a topic of conversation or occasional perception or focus. Among the many other issues to be investigated for the theory of context, this is especially a question of empirical evidence: what personal properties of participants appear to be focused on systematically in talk or text – beyond the societal ones mentioned above? And more specifically, also from a sociocognitive point of view, can these properties be reduced to a relatively simple schema that allows fast analysis, understanding and representation of participants in the model of the context? The most obvious route to search for such properties is a systematic analysis of general conditions of interaction, in which cooperation,

knowledge, expertise, friendliness, etc, usually do play a systematic role, and collecting stamps, or having a big nose, do not.

Recall that even when we limit the interactionally assigned personal attributes of participants to those that are systematically relevant for text and talk, these come on top of the societal ones (categories, roles, relations) mentioned above. This means that the Participant category of context definitions grows exponentially, and that we need either a mechanism to reduce such complexity, for instance by the formation of simple "participant schemas," and/or strategies that at each state-of-the-context are able to select and focus on relevant social and personal attributes.

Also methodologically this is a tough problem, which cannot simply be resolved by interaction and conversation analysis alone. Much of the relevant impressions participants form of other participants may remain interactionally implicit, and hard or impossible to detect in talk. Thus, rather obviously, people adapt their talk to smart recipients, but do so largely only implicitly. It will show in the selection of topics, shorter explanations, and a host of other subtle properties of talk. Much of such contextual control and interactional adaptation probably can only be assessed experimentally, or by the analysis of think-aloud protocols or of stories about previous conversations.

Groups, networks, communities and other human collectivities

Throughout this chapter we have been using notions such as "group" and "community" without much further theoretical analysis. Yet, in order to be able to properly define notions of identity, and how participants represent their identity or membership, it is useful to make these notions more explicit. Much of the time speakers engage in talk as members of a human "collectivity," but these obviously are not all the same.

As with other notions, such as those of space and time, collectivities also come in different sorts, sizes or scope, ranging from all members of the human race (an identity that may become relevant when we confront animals or inanimate objects), associated with the whole world, down to such collectivities of people as the inhabitants of world regions ("we in the West" vs. "them in the East"), continents ("we Europeans"), countries, states or provinces, cities, neighborhoods, streets, buildings, etc. Besides these "spatial" collectivities, we obviously may have any other number of collectivities defined by gender, class, age, occupation, ethnicity, status, income, and so on, in the usual, traditional sense.

In this and earlier studies, I have used the notion of *group* as a social basis for the notion of "ideology." Thus, social *groups* (of people) share ideologies (Van Dijk, 1999), defining identity and relations between groups

(e.g., relations of power or resistance) whereas *communities* typically share cultural properties, such as knowledge, language, religion and customs. In that sense, ethnic groups and nations are rather communities than groups. For instance, the citizens of the USA form one (national) community, but they belong to many different ideological (and other) groups. This shows, for instance, in sharing presupposed general sociocultural knowledge: whatever their ideological or other differences, most members of the (national) community have some basic knowledge they have learned at home from parents, at school, in textbooks, from peers and from the mass media. And most members of the national community share at least one (national) language.

Groups on the other hand are less "natural" than communities and more intentionally and socially constituted by members who more or less explicitly are or become members, e.g., in order to realize shared goals, join in common projects, defend shared interests, and so on. This is typically the case for political parties, unions, NGOs, organizations (as collectivities of people), and so on. Thus, collectivities who share an ideology are usually groups of people: feminists, pacifists, socialists, and so on. These groups may be more or less organized or institutionalized, e.g., through access and membership rituals, inclusion and exclusion procedures, leadership and other role formation, indoctrination, meetings, buildings, and so on (for detail, see Van Dijk, 1999).

Both groups and communities are defined not only by their members, properties of – or relations between – members, interaction, organization, and so on, but also by their shared social representations, such as knowledge for communities, and goals and ideologies for groups. By definition, communities do not have ideologies (as they see it), but only taken-for-granted knowledge and beliefs (which in other communities may be described as ideological), and no overall goals other than to maintain the community. As soon as some members of the collectivity of a community form ideologies and formulate specific goals, they are to be defined as (ideological, interest) groups, as is the case for nationalists in a nation.

Thus, in our example, Tony Blair, whose various social and political identities we already commented upon, is speaking as a member of various more or less organized groups, such as the MPs and Labour Party, and as a member of various national, linguistic or regional communities: the English, English speakers, Europeans, etc.

Complementing the social variables of class, gender, age and ethnicity traditionally used in sociolinguistics, Milroy (1980) introduced the notion of a *social network* to account for (phonological) variation in language. Whereas the other notions account for the influence of groups, communities or social categories, social networks account for the ways individual speakers relate to other individual speakers in everyday life, such as friends, family members, colleagues, teachers, civil servants or shop owners – a collection of

participants in conversations that are not captured by the notion of group, community, or similar notions of collectivity, but that jointly may influence the way people (learn to) speak. Although people talk with the members of their social network in different roles and within different relations, and hence also in different, contextual ways, they may well acquire a local accent, knowledge, norms and values in this way, especially if the others are part of the same (speech) community. If, however, the others belong to different classes or communities, these may also have an influence on individual language change. Thus, whereas the other collectivities are defined especially in terms of properties of their members, shared goals, norms or values, or by joint tasks, social networks are defined by the (discursive) interactions of the individuals, and hence by definition associated with properties of text and talk, and not only phonological.

Thus, we may assume that an account of the social and political network of Tony Blair provides insight not only into his accent(s), but also into the choice of topics, and other style variation in his way of talking – also depending on the feedback he gets from different interlocutors. For instance, before his speech in parliament, he may have conferred with his advisors, his wife, party members and others about the contents, strategies or rhetoric of his speech, and for insiders the influence of such a network can probably be traced at various points. In our framework this means theoretically that Blair activates old context models, and uses some of their information for the construction of the current one, e.g., its goals, or the kinds of political identities he should make more prominent in his speech, for instance the concerned democrat rather than the autocratic party leader.

In the social sciences, as well as in discourse studies, the notion of *community of practice* is now often used to account for situated interaction and discourse (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; see also Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992). Typical examples of such communities are organizations, clubs, school classes, research teams, and so on, roughly defined by shared goals and joint practices or interaction. Note, though, that even when defined in terms of shared goals and practices, these are collectivities of a quite different nature. Also, given our definition of groups as intentionally constituted collectivities with shared goals, of which one decides to become a member, in my terminology, such collectivities would be groups rather than communities. Crucial for us, again, is whether participants of talk define such "groups of practice" as part of their context models. Given our analyses of the Iraq debate in the British House of Commons (see also Chapter 5), such seems indeed to be the case, namely when people speak as MPs, party members, pacifists, and so on.

More generally, a theory of context presupposes a broader sociological theory of human collectivities that provides an explicit definition and

description of different types of collectivities, for instance in terms of the presence or absence of such characteristics as:

- Location, space, buildings
- Time, permanence, temporality
- Size, number of members
- Membership, access, inclusion, initiation and exclusion
- Shared knowledge
- Shared language and other communication systems
- Shared goals
- Shared norms, values, attitudes or ideologies
- Type of actions of members
- Type of interaction among members
- Type of organization (hierarchy, power, leaders)
- Reference groups (Us vs. Them)
- Resources (for reproduction or realization of goals).

With such a list of criteria, further to be developed in much more detail, we may design a theory of social collectivities such as groups and communities that goes beyond examples. In his definition of "community or practice," Wenger (1998: 73ff.) uses three criteria that are more abstract, and that also need further theoretical development: "mutual engagement," "joint enterprise," and "shared repertoire."

Talk-in-interaction often takes place face-to-face in various kinds of task-groups, often as part of institutions or organizations. For a theory of context it is therefore crucial to have a much clearer picture of these groups, their structures, constraints, and other ways they condition properties of talk. For instance, turn distribution is quite different in parliamentary sessions, classrooms, different kinds of meetings, project-teams, birthday parties or family dinners. The same is true for the selection and change of topics of talk, openings and closings, interruptions, and so on, as conditioned for instance by the presence of a chairperson or leader, the roles and power of the members, the nature of the goals or task, and so on (for further detail, see Chapter 5).

Interaction

Interaction and talk-in-interaction may be reflexively represented as a central, defining, element of context models. People usually are aware of what they are now doing and saying, at least at some level of consciousness and control, and such need to be represented in their definitions of the whole communicative episode. We have argued that past parts of talk by definition become part of the context. Next parts of text and talk are part of plans or designs, which are also part of context models.

Thus, Tony Blair is not only self-representing himself as speaking, as speaking English, as giving a speech, or even as addressing the Commons, but also is aware that his current speech at the same time is (part of) asking for legitimation, governing the country and participating in international politics, among other global actions.

In planning, execution and recall, participants ongoingly represent one or more subjective (inter)action definitions in their context definition, and on various levels of generality. Making a good impression today on the Members of Parliament obviously is more local than managing the international policy of the country, although the former may be part of, or a condition of accomplishing the second action.

Such action representations also feature and implement socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, as does Tony Blair when marshalling a nationalist ideology (standing by our troops in an international crisis) or a democratic ideology (we can debate about these crucial issues), among others. A journalist not only is self-representing herself as writing a news report or an editorial, but also as engaging in doing her (professional) job by informing the public or criticizing the government – among many other central or peripheral, local or global social actions – and as controlled by professional knowledge and ideologies.

We have seen that these cognitive and interactional strategies in the formation of context definitions are at the basis of micro–macro relations and the reproduction of society. It is in this way that more global action representations in context definitions ongoingly control interaction and conversation.

Relevant for this chapter and hence less emphasized earlier is the categorization and representation of relevant social actions in terms of their *organizational* or *institutional* embedding. Writing news is not merely writing any text on interesting recent events, but an institutional, organizational and professional act of writing a report for a newspaper, as part of the collaborative, joint task of producing a newspaper for the public, thus accomplishing the goal of informing the public, and so on. It is not just a practical discourse accomplishment (consisting of grammatical, stylistic, schematic, topical, etc. accomplishments) but especially also an institutional one. This means that the act of writing a news report needs to be controlled by context models in which such relevant institutional actions – as well as their goals – are represented as such, as we have seen above for the representation of (communication and professional) identities involved in institutional talk and text (Van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b, 1999).

In a more local and interactional perspective, news report writing as a practical accomplishment is controlled by an ongoing dynamic model of such a communicative episode, in which the journalist is self-representing "what she is now doing – socially speaking." Thus, at the beginning of an editorial,

she may be reminding the readers of the upshot of a recent event – and thus actualize the knowledge and presuppositions of the readership. Secondly, she may focus on negative actions of a politician and thus engage in the social act of (public) critique, positively self-represented by the ideological attitude of journalists defining themselves as "the watchdogs of society." Thirdly, she may engage, in a third part of the editorial, in recommendations for future actions of the government, an institution or a business enterprise, thus locally producing and accomplishing another global task or function of the newspaper, namely to contribute to public debate, and so on.

Again, as we have seen before, all these possible social acts need not at each moment be conscious as such, but of course a moment's reflection will tell the journalist that by writing this particular evaluation of the government, she is now engaging in the social act of criticizing the government.

In dynamic context definitions for conversations this means that in each state-of-the-context one or two current actions (at various levels) may be focused upon, with more global action definitions in the background. Such reflexivity may routinely become explicit in talk, for instance when participants make explicit their intentions, ongoing actions or past actions in a conversation, as in explicit performatives, or when asked or challenged by other participants.

Formulations The ongoing, reflexive interaction representation as parts of context models may also be expressed or referred to in talk itself. Fragments of conversations that are about aspects of the conversation itself are often referred to by the (rather strange) term *formulations* (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970; Heritage, 1985; Heritage and Watson, 1979, 1980). Often, this notion is used to describe passages that summarize what has been said by a previous speaker, that is, the (subjectively understood) gist, which may or may not be ratified by the speaker thus summarized. Speakers, however, may also comment on any other aspect of the conversation in general, or the previous turn or contributions of themselves and other participants, such as their tone, style, use of a word, meaning, and so on. This means that formulations in principle may also be about the action(s) being carried out by the participants during the conversation. For instance, Heritage (1985: 109) shows how a participant interprets a previous turn of the interviewer as an accusation (of a third party) (see also the discussion in Sacks, 1995: 637f). Such examples show that participants understand ongoing text and talk at several levels, including of course the current action(s) being accomplished.

Although only occasionally made explicit in talk, this also means that the concurrent context definition at each moment needs to feature a "definition of the current actions." Of course, for recipients such contextual representations of the ongoing action are subjective inferences based on what is said (and

of course other information, such as knowledge of the speaker, general sociocultural knowledge and other aspects of the current situation and its history). This means that speakers may reject formulations of their earlier conversational contributions by a previous speaker. In Chapter 5 we shall examine how in these and other ways context may be made explicit in talk.

From this specific example of reflexivity – actors being aware of their actions and showing this as discourse commenting on discourse – we also may conclude in more general terms that the study of such "formulations" needs to distinguish between e.g., the semantics and pragmatics of discourse. It is not the same to summarize the meaning or content in the formulation of gist – which is a feature of relating local and global discourse semantics as well as an interactional move to focus on a specific aspect of the discourse – and to verbally express the normally implicit ongoing action of a participant (including the speaker), which is rather a question of pragmatics. My theoretical point is that participants can only "do" such "pragmatic formulations" if their context models subjectively represent the actions being performed in the current situation. In other words, if participants ongoingly define the communicative situation, they also need to define the current actions. One of the theoretical conclusions of this point is that the societal basis of contexts may not be models of the social situation, but models of social episodes, as defined above.

Social beliefs

Besides such basic categories as Setting, Participants (and their various social identities, roles and other attributes) and Interactions, context models need to feature the relevant beliefs of participants, such as goals, intentions, knowledge and ideologies, as these have been studied in the previous chapter in terms of social cognition. However, knowledge, ideologies and other socially shared beliefs are relevant not only in a social psychological account, but also in a sociological perspective. As we have seen above, they define groups, communities and institutions, and form one of the most powerful organizational forces of social collectives: members belong to collectivities and act as such when they share (part of) these social beliefs. Social beliefs and social collectivities mutually constitute and reproduce each other.

Social beliefs are acquired and used in (communicative) social situations, such as conversations with parents, friends and schoolteachers, textbooks, television movies and debates, and everyday conversations based on them (Van Dijk, 1990, 1999). No step during text or discourse production can be made without the activation and contextual application of sociocultural knowledge of the topic or the social structure of the communicative situation, as explained above.

For a more sociological approach to the "cognitive" categories of situation interpretations, such as the knowledge and ideologies of the participants, the notion of *membership* is crucial. Participants cannot represent all they know (and know about the knowledge of the recipients) in relatively lean context models, and hence need efficient strategies such as those discussed in the previous chapters. Participants generally are able to manage knowledge by assuming that other participants are members of the same cultural, national, local, ideological or professional knowledge community, and hence share the same knowledge as a Common Ground for talk and text. And since participants in any case represent themselves and their interlocutors as members of relevant groups and communities, they only need to activate the relevant social beliefs that go with each social identity. They do this not only for the central operation of the knowledge device in the context, but also for the details of other categories, such as Settings (Time, Place), Participants and Interaction, as explained above.

Relevant here is also the general topic of the societal distribution of knowledge, the abuse of knowledge as a scarce power resource, and related critical issues, a vast domain of study that is beyond the scope of this chapter (see, e.g., Carlson and Apple, 1998; Fardon, 1985; Foucault, 1980; Paechter, 2001).

For the discussion of the social dimensions of context these issues are important especially as an element in the description and explanation of the implementation and the reproduction of epistemic power and power abuse through talk and text. That is, experts may more or less intentionally engage in discourse that presupposes that their knowledge is not shared by the recipients. They may thus exclude recipients from comprehension and hence participation, as we also know from some abuses of professional text and talk of doctors and lawyers (West, 1984; O'Barr and Conley, 1990) and journalists (Wodak, 1987).

Such kinds of power abuse presuppose a contextual explanation in the sense of the relevant strategies of the knowledge device, discussed before. More generally, the acquisition of knowledge in specific communities (occupations, sects, etc.) may be geared towards the reproduction of the power of such a community by epistemically and hence communicatively excluding others. We thus see how power and power abuse, based on knowledge, at the collective (macro) level, may be implemented as well as acquired and reproduced in everyday interaction and ingroup discourse.

Besides the macro-societal basis for knowledge and ideologies as shared by collectivities, and their micro-societal implications for the knowledge of members, such social beliefs as elements of context also have *interactional* dimensions. Thus, we have seen that when speakers are unsure about the relevant knowledge of recipients, they make use of a number of strategies to make sure they are not speaking redundantly, to mitigate the possibly negative effects of repeating oneself or saying what is already known, or to remind

recipients of what has been said before. Thus, assertions are not just all or none, combining old with new information, but consist of rather complex strategies that presuppose most knowledge of one or more epistemic communities, reminding or reactivating some possibly forgotten knowledge, and more or less new personal or public knowledge that most likely is not yet known to the recipients (for details on the management of knowledge in conversation, see, e.g., Chen and Cegala, 1994; Collins, 1987; Drew, 1991; Gibbs, 1987; Gumperz, 1977; Komter, 1995; Peräkylä and Vehviläinen, 2003; Planalp and Garvin-Doxas, 1994).

The problem of media: text or context?

A problem we have not dealt with in this chapter – nor in the other chapters of this study, for that matter – is the (con)textual status of the communication *media*, such as newspapers, television, the internet, mobile phones, billboards, and many more. More in general, we have not dealt with the multimodal nature of much contemporary discourse and communication, a topic that needs a detailed, multidisciplinary study, both of its discursive-semiotic as well as of its contextual properties. Several authors who have worked on context, such as Hymes, include media as part of the context. There is no doubt that written and spoken "mode" (as properties of discourse) as well as various communication media constrain and enable many (other) discourse properties and their variation. Indeed, in a way, and as the very term suggests, media *mediate* between text and context. On the one hand, they do not seem to be really a context property such as Setting or Participants nor, on the other hand, a typical discursive property such as visual or sound structures, but rather some kind of interface between the two dimensions of communicative episodes. If we simply would say that discourse *manifests* itself in, is *expressed* in, or *occurs* (is placed, inscribed, etc.) in media such as letters, newspapers, magazines, television, internet, etc. the location metaphor would suggest a subcategory of the Setting (or of the Place subcategory of the Setting). On the other hand, discourse media are also analyzed in terms of material or electronic "support" of the physical manifestation of discourse (sounds, visuals, etc.) "on which" the discourse is located (indeed, in Italian one does not say that something is "in" the newspaper, but "on" the newspaper, as we also say, in English, "on television"). Following the general theoretical framework, I do assume that language users represent media in their context models, but then in the broad sense of context as – reflexively – including the discourse as social activity itself, as well as its mode of realization (spoken, written, or various other multimodal formats). But at the moment I have no persuasive theoretical arguments to do so as a type of subcategory of the Place subcategory of Setting, as an independent main

category between Setting and discursive activity, on the one hand, or as a property of discourse itself defined in a broad, multimodal way, on the other hand. In the latter case, for instance, we would describe a newspaper report as a discourse "appearing" (being published) in a newspaper, namely as the physical support of its visual manifestation, and such does not seem to be a contextual analysis. Indeed, one would not describe spoken conversation either as occurring in a "context" of the vibrating air that "carries" the phonetic realization of talk, or the tongue and mouth as part of the "context" of its articulation. Rather, we would include such descriptions in the account of the physical (or physiological, bodily, etc.) manifestation, expression, inscription, etc. of text and talk, that is, as part of discourse itself. In sum, there are good arguments for both theoretical formulations, that is, taking media as part of text or of context, or as part of their interface, and for the moment I leave this question unresolved.

Context models in discourse and interaction

We have seen in this chapter that the "application" of context models in the production of text and talk is not merely a form of cognitive discourse processing, as described in *Discourse and Context*. The "contextualization" of discourse is at the same time a practical accomplishment, following interactional strategies for the production of appropriate text and talk.

Contextualization also involves the application of general, shared rules and categories, as when Tony Blair (and the MPs) knows how to address the UK House of Commons, how to address members of his own party or those of the opposition, what routine formulas to use, what (formal) stylistic lexical choices to make, and so on. That is, previous experiences (and hence episodic, autobiographical memory), as well as shared professional knowledge (as MP and PM) and group beliefs (such as Labour ideologies), may be applied in the ongoing production of the many aspects of contextually variable structures of text and talk, from the choice of appropriate topics to the production of appropriate pronouns and intonation. Without such general knowledge and abilities, social members would be unable to form plans of speaking and contexts, to project their contexts onto their text and talk, and to speak appropriately in the real time of fast conversation.

Yet, as we have repeatedly seen in this study, contexts are mental models that are unique and hence not only feature instantiated general knowledge shared by members. They also feature specific personal histories, current personal opinions, ad hoc interpretations of the social identities of the interlocutors or readers, doubts about the action goals and intentions, and so on. Despite its "known" or "routine" characteristics, each communicative

situation is more or less unique, and hence needs both cognitive and interactional strategies to produce (or understand) appropriate text or talk.

In sum, contextualization is always also a practical accomplishment in which participants not only apply general rules and strategies of mapping contexts on text and talk, but also need to resolve many local problems, such as doubts or lacking knowledge about one of the crucial aspects of the communicative situation, e.g., unknown time as part of the Setting, doubts about the identity, status or power of the interlocutor, doubts about own goals, or lacking knowledge about the knowledge of the recipients, and so on.

Some of these "complications" may be routine and be resolved in routine ways (West, 1984), such as lacking knowledge about the knowledge of the recipient. Others are unexpected problems that need to be resolved in ad hoc ways – as was the case when Tony Blair was interrupted and criticized when he referred to the "main" parties in the House of Commons, thereby ignoring (or at least not counting them as "main" players in politics) the Liberal Democrats and hence their present MPs in parliament. In that case the solution was not just a general interactional one – such as apparently agreeing with the wrong description ("Oh yes . . . ") – but turning his correction-agreement into an ironical attack against the Liberal Democrats, that is, into a political move of criticizing the opposition. Such a move can only be appropriately analyzed and understood when described in terms of a unique context model that controls not only the general interactional business of such an exchange in parliament, but also many other social and political dimensions of the communicative situation as represented in the context definitions of the participants, such as goals, political identities and political beliefs of the participants.

Final remarks

It is the task of the sociology of context to articulate the societal foundations of the ways discourse participants are able to form and apply definitions of communicative episodes in their ongoing text and talk.

We have seen that this requires a complex sociological analysis of social situations, that is, of time and place as relevant settings for discourse, a detailed analysis of the relevant roles, identities and social beliefs of participants as members of collectivities, as well as a representation of the ongoing action at various levels of social structure.

In principle, such relevant societal categories of context definitions should be displayed in text and talk or otherwise be procedurally consequential. However, we have seen that there are social conditions of talk and text that are undoubtedly relevant for its production or interpretation, but whose (tacit, indirect) influence cannot be detected by discourse or conversation analysis alone.

We also have seen that the notion of context is able to serve a mediating role between macro and micro levels of societal structure and their analysis.

One of the major problems of this chapter, however, is not so much sociological, but rather sociocognitive: How are participants able to construct and apply a mental model of the communicative situation that features all the undoubtedly relevant societal information associated with settings, participants and interaction? This requires not only interactional strategies of focusing on relevant social categories or dimensions of participants and situations, but also powerful cognitive ones, for instance in the management of (shared and new) knowledge and the formation of participant schemas.

Another problem we have not been able to solve is the status of the "media" that carry, transport or manifest text and talk. They may be defined as a type of physical location of discourse, and hence as part of the Setting, or as an independent main category of the context model, or else as an inherent part of the material or electronic manifestation of text or talk, as we would also do for the spoken, written and other "modes" of discourse.

Although we have made many analytical remarks on the speech by Tony Blair in the UK House of Commons, we have not made detailed further analyses of text and talk in this, more theoretical, chapter. I have dealt more explicitly with the influence of context on discourse in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 4), and provide further examples and analyses in Chapter 5 of this book.

Finally, we have repeatedly made reference to shared sociocultural knowledge as a basis for the formation and use of context models and the production and comprehension of discourse. However, we have not paid attention to the fact that such knowledge may culturally vary, and hence also the context definitions and the discourses based on them. This then will be the topic to be dealt with in the next chapter.

4 Context and culture

> What is context? Everything and nothing. Like a shadow, it flees from those who try to flee from it, evading the levels and categories of theory, and pursues those who try to flee from it, insinuating itself as the unnoticed ground upon which even the most explicit statements depend. If you are persuaded by the phenomenological concept of incompleteness, then context is inexhaustible. The more you try to specify it, the more blank spots you project, all in need of filling it. Ultimately, context is nothing less than the human world in which language use takes place and in relation to which language structure is organized.
>
> (William Hanks, 1996: 140).

Introduction

In *Discourse and Context* we saw that Malinowski and Firth, and later Halliday, made a distinction between the notions "context of situation" and "context of culture." The first kind of context is local, and involves participants face-to-face, and within a specific setting. "Cultural context" is usually defined as more global, and involving members of a whole community, as well as many of their fundamental properties, such as their knowledge, norms and values. In the previous chapter, I have called this the social "macro-context."

In this chapter, I shall explore these "cultural" dimensions of context, although we need to begin to question the very notion of "culture." I am concerned here not only with the global contexts of cultures, but also with the influence of culture on local contexts. Indeed, I have argued that local, situational contexts are the interface between global, cultural contexts and discourse, by means of the cultural knowledge of the participants.

The reason that I also examine the broader cultural aspects of local contexts is that interpretations and definitions of social situations in general, and hence of contexts in particular, are variable across cultures and languages. For instance, whereas age, power or gender of participants may be relevant in all or many communities, other social attributes of participants – e.g.,

specific kinship relations – may be more or less relevant in different communities. Implicitly this formulation also presupposes that whatever the *cultural diversity* of context definitions, there might exist *universals of context*.

Besides differences in the very construction of social situations as contexts, cultures may also be different in the ways context definitions impinge on text and talk. For instance, whereas an African American customer in Los Angeles may define the customer role in a neighborhood shop as enabling or requiring making pleasant small talk with the shop owner in a service encounter (e.g., as a form of politeness), the Korean shop owner, who may have the "same" analysis of the situation of the service encounter as involving a relation between customer and shop owner (or service provider), may project such roles on the conversation by limiting the contribution especially to business-related talk, without the kind of informal, personal "small talk" that is reserved for family members and close personal friends in the Korean community (Bailey, 1997).

Of course, apart from a different relation between context and conversation, such differences may also be described in terms of a different definition of the situation, for instance if customers in Korean communities are not categorized as "intimates" – a contextual category that is relevant in many cultures, and also controls discourse features (e.g., pronouns or politeness) and non-verbal conduct in European cultures.

These and related questions will be dealt with in this chapter. I shall do so first by examining the way contexts and communicative events have been defined and analyzed in linguistic and cultural anthropology, beginning with the seminal work of Dell Hymes and others in the tradition of the ethnography of communication. Then I shall focus on the study of context in more contemporary developments in anthropology. Given our special interest in discourse, our focus will be on developments in linguistic anthropology and related approaches.

One other reason to include an anthropological or ethnographic account in a more general theory of context is that no doubt anthropologists have most extensively contributed to the definition and analysis of contexts, as is obvious from the work of such prominent scholars as Hymes, Gumperz, Levinson, Duranti and Hanks, among others. Thus whereas mainstream sociology and sociolinguistics may have focused on macro-level phenomena of class, gender or ethnicity and their role in language use or interaction, close ethnographic analysis of communicative events tends to examine details of social situations, their interpretations by the participants and their influence on talk. And whereas conversation analysis may focus on talk and interaction itself, linguistic anthropology typically situates such talk in its broader cultural "context" as well as its local situations.

As we have observed in the previous chapters, we shall, however, also see in this chapter that differences between directions of research are slowly becoming less distinct. It is hard to distinguish, for instance, some research in interactional sociolinguistics from ethnographic studies of conversation in linguistic anthropology, among other approaches – even when linguistic anthropology has been increasingly defining itself as an independent subdiscipline (Duranti, 2001).

Culture?

The similarities and differences in the way people in different societies understand communicative situations and the way these are consequential for text and talk have just been described as "cultural." Such a description presupposes the complex notion of "culture" – one of the fundamental (and fundamentally contested) concepts of anthropology and of the social sciences in general (see, e.g., Kuper, 1999).

Although general, foundational concepts of disciplines (such as language, discourse, society, mind, and so on) usually are not defined, but the object of whole disciplines, the controversy over the definition of culture in anthropology and the other social sciences is especially notorious. Already half a century ago, two major anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, published a review in which they listed 164 definitions of the term "culture" (Kuper, 1999: 56). Obviously, it cannot be our task in this book to provide even a summary of the relevant literature on culture, so I shall (again) limit myself to a few observations on culture that may be relevant for a multidisciplinary theory of context.

For instance, in the example of communication conflicts between the African American and Korean citizens in Los Angeles, I used the notion of "community" to refer to African Americans and Koreans, and assumed that differences of conduct in the "same" situation may be due to "cultural" differences between these communities, for instance differences in the definition of service encounters, customers, customer–owner relations, the norms of respect and politeness and more generally norms or rules for "small talk": when, where, with whom, and how one engages in such talk. However, if we were to observe differences of conduct in the "same" situation between younger and older Koreans, we probably would not call these "cultural" (even if we sometimes use the phrase "youth culture," see, e.g., Bucholtz, 2002), but rather "social," and we would talk about different "generations" rather than about different "communities."

This is only one of a large number of problems we may encounter if we want to define the notion of "culture" and delimit it from related notions. In the case of the neighborhood shop example, an informal attempt at differentiation might include such criteria as sharing the same language,

knowledge, norms and values – and hence types of conduct based on these – and maybe a common history, location or origin. But it will be easy to give examples where such criteria would not hold, or where others will be needed. So let us first of all accept that the concept of "culture" is essentially fuzzy, and better to be avoided and replaced by lower level, more specific notions, such as a shared language, knowledge, beliefs or practices.

Crucial for us is not how we categorize communities, beliefs or conduct, but to examine how people understand social and communicative situations, how such understandings influence their discourse production and understanding and especially *how such practices may be quite diverse throughout the world*.

We have seen that apart from the personal differences that define unique context models, the crucial contributions to the construction of such models such that people can communicate in the first place come from social representations, that is, shared knowledge, beliefs, norms and values. And these are precisely the kind of things that are often called "cultural." In cognitive anthropology, such shared social representations (say about politeness, or about service encounters) are often called *cultural models* (Holland and Quinn, 1987; Shore, 1996) – a notion of "models" that should not be confused with our notion of subjective, ad hoc models of specific events. Following such a cognitive approach to culture, it is not surprising that cultures often are defined in terms of what people need to know in order to be able to participate as competent members in a community – although such knowledge may also be "procedural" or "practical" knowledge about *how* to do things. The problem then is again that such would also apply to, say, students of linguistics or any other epistemic community we would want to characterize in social rather than in cultural terms. And to solve such a terminological and theoretical problem, we probably wind up again by applying the term culture preferably to *ethnic* communities, which need to share more than just knowledge.

For our purpose we will simply assume that if the sociocultural beliefs of a community are different, the context models of their members will be different and hence the discourses or communicative events based on them. As we have seen, in actual practice such differences need to be quite general and systematic for them to be called "cultural" and shared by different communities, of which "ethnic" communities are the prototype. For if young people in the same community have slightly different norms of respect than elderly people (as is the case in many communities), then we do not call them "cultural" but "social" or "generational." Hence, generalized cultural or "ethnic" differences are more likely for communities with their own language, history, origin, daily experiences, institutions and sociopolitical organization, thus adding social and historical criteria to cognitive or symbolic ones. But it is obvious that it is hard to formulate precise criteria beyond *sharing the same social representations, including self-representations of*

who "we" are: an identity. Using another fuzzy term, we may call this the "Cultural Common Ground" (see also Clark, 1996).

It is important not to confuse (cultural) *communities* and (ideological) *groups*. The same community may have different ideological groups, which may be ideologically different, but share many of the cultural dimensions (language, norms, values, etc.) of their community. Thus, pacifists, feminists or socialists are not "cultural" communities, but ideological groups within cultural communities – so that Japanese feminists may be quite different feminists from those in the USA, for instance (for details about this distinction between ideological groups and communities, see Van Dijk, 1998).

First definitions of context in anthropology

Dell Hymes is arguably the anthropologist who has contributed most to the early study of context. His 1962 article on what he called the *ethnography of speaking* is the start of an influential paradigm in anthropology itself, as well as the first of the directions of research that constitute the beginning of contemporary discourse studies in the 1960s (see the historical accounts of discourse studies in the 1985 and 1997 *Handbooks* I edited). Significantly, Hymes dedicated his 1962 paper to Roman Jakobson, one of the founders of linguistic structuralism, the paradigm that is also quite prominent in Hymes' own article, which proposes an "emic" approach to speech events. Hymes defines the ethnography of speaking as the study of "the situations and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right" (Hymes, 1962: 101), and laments that there are so few "ethnological" studies of speaking in context (p. 130). The notion of context is already prominent in this early article: "All utterances occur contrastively in contexts, but for much of the lexicon and most larger units of speech, the contextual frames must be sought not in the usual linguistic corpus, but in behavioral situations" (p. 104). Contexts, thus, are needed to disambiguate the meaning of utterances. Part of the study of the "speech economy" of a group are speech events, their constituent factors and the functions of speech. He lists seven component factors of speech events: Sender (Addresser), Receiver (Addressee), Message Form, Channel, Code, Topic and Setting, defined in his own initial ("etic") framework, emphasizing that the indigenous ("emic") categories will surely vary with the communities who use them. Most relevant for our discussion is what he says about the Setting:

> The Setting factor is fundamental and difficult. It underlies much of the rest and yet its constituency is not easily determined. We accept as meaningful such terms as "context of situation" and "definition of the situation" but seldom ask ethnographically what the criteria for being a "situation" might be, what kinds of situations there are, how many, and the like. (p. 112)

In a footnote he explains that he does not want to use the "theoretically laden" term "context," and refers, e.g., to Firth and Malinowski for the use of the alternative term "situation," and to Burke for the term "scene." By varying the co-occurrence of the various factors, the "rules of appropriateness" for a person or group can be formulated. He then also lists seven main functions of language, respectively related to the seven components of speech events: Expressive (Emotive), Directive (Conative, Pragmatic, Rhetorical, Persuasive), Poetic, Contact, Metalinguistic, Referential and Contextual (Situational).

In the following years, Hymes further developed the basic ideas of this ethnography of speaking, later called "ethnography of communication." Most influential and widely cited, and used as the most detailed analysis of context in several disciplines, has been his well-known SPEAKING grid which he published in a book on sociolinguistics (!) edited with John Gumperz in 1972 (Hymes, 1972).

Incidentally, this was also the year when several other books began to be published that broke with the paradigm of formal sentence grammars, such as, for instance, Labov (1972a, 1972b) in sociolinguistics and Van Dijk (1972) in text linguistics, soon followed by the first book explicitly dedicated to the ethnography of speaking, edited by Bauman and Sherzer (1974) in the year that conversation analysis also started with the seminal paper on turn taking in conversation by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson.

In sum, Hymes, Gumperz and other anthropologists contributed to the consolidation in the early 1970s of the changes in the humanities and the social sciences that had been explored in the 1960s and that led to such new interdisciplines as semiotics, ethnography of speaking, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, pragmatics and discourse studies.

In his substantial article of 1972, of which an earlier version goes back to 1967, Hymes presents "models of the interaction of language and social life." From the start he stresses that speech patterns in the world are diverse. The theoretical notions and the taxonomy he proposes and applies in several examples are designed to account for that diversity. One of the main theses of the article is that the general theory of language and interaction should "encompass the multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning" (p. 39), including an account of the "diversity of speech, repertoires and ways of speaking," which he sees as one of the major dimensions of the evolution of mankind (pp. 40–41). To account for such fundamental diversity, of which Hymes gives many concrete examples, he stresses that we should not abstract from them, but set up taxonomies as a basis for more theoretical models. Such a taxonomy should aim for an account of the universal dimensions of speaking – also as a guide for comparative research – and should include recent proposals made in various disciplines,

also including literary studies and philosophy, such as the recent work on speech acts.

Within such a general aim of a taxonomy and descriptive theory, Hymes first of all proposes the *social units* for such analysis (pp. 53ff.):

- *Speech community*: "a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech" (p. 54)
- *Language field* and *speech field*: the total range of communities of a speaker
- *Speech situation*: contexts of situation, such as ceremonies, meals, etc., not to be reduced to types of speech events – because such situations may also have non-verbal dimensions
- *Speech event*: activities governed by rules of speech
- Speech act
- Speech style
- *Ways of speaking*: the overall terms of capturing diversity of speech
- Components of speech
- Rules (relations) of speaking.

It is within the category *Components of speech* that Hymes proposes further categories for the description of communicative situations, such as *Speakers* and *Hearers*, and other *Participants*, a category he describes as universal (p. 59). He says that so far about sixteen or seventeen of such components have been found in ethnographic research, but he reduces these to the eight dimensions summarized by the letters of the word SPEAKING as a mnemonic.

Interestingly, Hymes uses the well-known cognitive argument of Miller (1956) that the size of (short-term) memory is limited to "seven plus or minus two" items. He does not give further arguments apart from the use of the word "mnemonic" – for instance in terms of the structure or processes of memory in comprehending speech events – but as far as I know he has been the only one to use this cognitive argument in relation to a theory of context understanding and the structure of contexts. We have seen in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3) why indeed context models probably consist of about seven fundamental categories in the process of understanding communicative situations: context models of dozens (let alone hundreds) of categories could not possibly be managed in the real time of fractions of seconds and at the same time as all the other information that is needed to understand or produce discourse.

Hymes then lists the components of speech as follows (pp. 58ff.):

- Message form – found to be essential, though often ignored – besides "message content"
- Message content: what is being talked *about*

- Setting: time, place and physical circumstances
- Scene: the "psychological setting" or "cultural definition" of an occasion (e.g., a change from a formal to informal occasion)
- Speaker or sender
- Addresser
- Hearer or receiver or audience
- Addressee
- Purposes – outcomes (conventional purposes of a speech event)
- Purposes – goals (may be different for each participant)
- Key: the tone, manner or spirit of the speech event (modality, e.g., mock or serious)
- Channels: oral, written, telegraphic, etc.
- Forms of speech: codes, varieties, registers
- Norms of interaction: all rules governing speaking
- Norms of interpretation (not necessarily the same as norms of interaction)
- Genres.

These sixteen components may be grouped by the keywords: **S**etting, **P**articipants, **E**nds, **A**ct sequence, **I**nstrumentalities, **N**orms, and **G**enres, concepts whose first letters form the word SPEAKING. At the end of his article, Hymes applies these components in a description of several speech events in different societies.

As we see in the other chapters of this book, many of the (later) proposals for context categories overlap with Hymes' proposals, which are among the most detailed presented in the literature, and also accompanied by examples from ethnographic studies of speech events in many parts of the world.

A critical analysis of Hymes' proposals would first of all have to focus on the (often lacking) definitions of the categories, instead of which examples or other comments are given. The overall systematics of the taxonomy is rather heterogeneous, mixing properties of text or talk itself (Form, Content, Key) with properties of social situations (Setting, Scene), mental and social dimensions, specifics (purposes) and general conditions (rules), etc. There are also rather obvious lacunae, especially for an ethnographer: no mention is made anywhere of *knowledge* (apart from rules), which is crucial in any discourse and interaction, nor of *relations between participants*, e.g., of power or solidarity, which we know influence many aspects of talk or text. More generally, besides the reference to the magical number 7, there is little attention to more cognitive aspects of speech events.

Despite its sometimes vague or lacking definitions and systematics, this first taxonomy of relevant social units and components of speech events played a vital role in ethnographic and other work on communicative events in the following decades. Few, if any, more detailed taxonomies have been

proposed since, and the ethnography of speaking has remained a prominent direction of research in anthropology until today (Philipsen and Coutu, 2005).

The cross-cultural relevance of context categories

The categories for the analysis of context that have been examined in our linguistic, psychological and sociological discussions in the other chapters in this study are very general, and probably relevant for the account of contextual relevance in many cultures. However, this is only a hypothesis, and we therefore need to have a second look at them, and ask whether they might be culturally biased, and whether indeed they are general enough for a broader, cross-cultural study of communicative situations. So let us again examine some of these categories in this new perspective. After considering the very term "context" in different (non-Western) languages, I shall review some classic ethnographic studies of communicative practices in different communities, and then proceed to contemporary studies in (especially linguistic) anthropology that may show new insights into the nature and diversity of contexts.

Context

The very first category whose cross-cultural relevance we would need to ascertain is that of *context* itself. As the Latinate origin of the English word suggests, this is probably not an original notion in much of Western culture. We have also seen in *Discourse and Context* that the higher frequency of concepts such as "situation" or "setting" in the use of English suggests these notions might be more "primitive."

In English the notion of "context," derived from Latin "contextus" (from "contegere," weaving together), is only documented since the late Middle Ages according to *Webster's*. Most West and East European languages have the same or a similar concept of "context," both in the sense of verbal context ("co-text") and in the sense of situational context. For non-Western languages we asked native speakers and (other) experts, whose reports may be summarized as follows:[1]

In Chinese there is no general notion of "context," but the notion of verbal context is expressed as *xiang xia wen* ("up down text," i.e., "the text above and below," presupposing that text is written from above to below), with a strong didactic emphasis on interpreting words always in this verbal context, as is also the case in Western cultures (Ron Scollon and Chen Ping). *Yu jing*

[1] Acknowledgment is made here to local informants and (other) experts on the languages mentioned below. Their names are mentioned as sources for each language, without adding that these are personal communications.

("language environment") may also be used to denote verbal context. The notion expressed by *jing* (environment) may be combined with *bei* to form the expression *beijing* ("background"), or with *huan* to form the expression *huanjing* ("surrounding environment"), but as a morpheme *jing* cannot stand alone to denote context in general (Chen Ping).

Reiko Hayashi reports that Japanese makes a distinction between verbal context (*bunmyaku)* and social context (*shakaiteki youkyou*: social situation), although in linguistic publications *kontekusuto* (from "context") is also used. Sometimes *bunmyaku* is also used to denote social contexts. In more general terms *ba no youkyou* ("situation of the event") may be used to refer to social contexts. Japanese verbal interaction is prominently influenced by the concept of *seken* (the social audience), which is a broader notion than that of the local audience of talk, and which involves the whole reference group or "generalized Other" (in the sense of Mead), and which is associated with the norms and values of interaction. Hall and Hall (1987) define Japanese as a "high context" culture, meaning that because of the vast background culture shared and presupposed in talk, Japanese speakers are able to say very little and yet are understood. It may, however, be doubted that this is fundamentally different from Western (or other) cultures, in which conversations as well as many other forms of discourse presuppose vast amounts of shared knowledge. Since, however, all Western linguists share such knowledge and only a few that of Japanese culture, presupposed knowledge, norms and values in Japanese may appear to be much more extended. What may vary, however, in different cultures are the rules of presupposition and assertion, which may make some forms of Japanese discourse, e.g., conversations, more indirect, and in need of more social inferences, than similar genres in Western culture (see also Maynard, 1997).

In (classical) Arabic the notion of *maqaam* was traditionally used by rhetoricians to evaluate the normative appropriateness of discourse, following the general principle *li-kulli maqaalin maqaam* ("for each text – article, essay – there is a context"). Meanings may be said to be dependent on text or verbal context (*maqaal*) or on social context (*maqaam*). Current approaches of context are more descriptive and include such notions as speakers, listeners, etc., but also social and historical circumstances of speech (Esam Khalil).

In Turkish "context" is usually translated as *baðlam*, "verbal context" as *sözel baðlam*, and "social context" as *toplumsal baðlam* (Sema Ogünlü).

Hungarian sometimes uses the technical (borrowed) word *kontextus* to refer to both verbal and social context, but the more general notion is *környezet* (social, physical environment), and the compound *szövegkörnyezet* for verbal context. Also the word *összefüggés* is sometimes used (referring to a relation between two notions), also in combination with *szöveg* to mean verbal context (Anna Magyarosi).

Some decades ago Thai introduced the notion *borribot* (or *porribot*) as the equivalent of the general notion of "context" in English. To express the notion of a social context, the concept *sangkhom* ("social") is added (Somsonge Burusphat).

Many American native languages do not seem to have expressions for the notion of context (Dell Hymes). Thus, despite the vast variety of contextual notions in Tzeltal metalinguistic vocabulary (see below), there is no general concept of context in Tzeltal (Brian Stross). Also Kuna does not have a general term for "context" (James Howe). Athabaskan languages have neither the concept of "text" (as written discourse) nor that of "context," but conceive of communication and interaction as integrated, as what someone does, but without isolating the words of such actions (Ron Scollon).

In Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche in southern Chile, the concept translating (verbal) context is *wallon* (physical environment), whereas social context may be rendered as *trawün wallon* (where *trawün* means meeting, encounter) (Cecilia Quintrilea).

Concluding from this modest survey of some non-Western languages we see that most of them do not have a precise equivalent of the general notion of "context." Some of them have, however, introduced new words that correspond to the social or technical notion of context, whereas most other languages indicate context in terms of such notions as environment, place, situation, or the whole communicative episode. Several languages do make the distinction between verbal context and social context, e.g., by modifying corresponding general notions for environment, respectively.

Context categories

In fieldwork carried out in the ethnography of communication paradigm, the following contextual categories have been found, rendered here in English and using my own categorizations, based on analyses made by students of Muriel Saville-Troike (2003; basically the same as in the earlier 1983 edition of this book):

- **Participants: Age, Gender, Position**. In Bambara (Mali), during a traditional village meeting in which decisions are being made, only ("active") males of 45+ years of age may take the floor, and males of 21–45 only when invited to do so. Males of 14–21 may be present, but do not speak. The presiding Chief speaks to the audience (and is spoken to) only through the intermediary of the Herald. (Issiaka Ly, in Saville-Troike, 2003: 128–129).
- **Participants: Gender, Age; Act sequence**. In Abbey (Ivory Coast) during a house visit, a male visitor greets first; these greetings must be replied to

by an adult man, or by a woman at home, with apologies, if no man can be found to greet the visitor. Children below the age of 10 are not being greeted, but expected to look for an adult. Greetings consist of greeting, finding a seat and asking the news. (Marcellen Hepié, in Saville-Troike, 2003: 129–131).

- **Participants: Gender; Setting: Time**. In Abbey (Ivory Coast), during a formal condolence ceremony, taking place on a street near the house of the bereaved, after dark and within 24 hours of the death, males seated on chairs receive (only non-verbal) condolences. Announcements are made by ceremonial drum. During informal condolences later at home, only women cry at length and sit on the floor when men cry only briefly and sit on chairs (Marcellen Hepié, in Saville-Troike, 2003: 131–133).
- **Participants: Gender, Age**. Japanese (Japan). During a marriage proposal a young adult man asks a young adult woman to marry him; the young woman responds only silently, head and gaze down. (Harumi Williams: in Saville-Troike, 2003: 133–134).
- **Participants: Gender; Kin relationship; Knowledge**. Newari (Nepal). Suitor's aunt interviewing bride and bride's aunt for suitability. Young girls should be shy and accept compliments with silence. Compliments about the beauty of the girl are only made on such occasions. The aunt already knows the answers to the questions before the meeting (Jyoti Tuladhar in Saville-Troike, 2003, 138–139).

Other cross-cultural data reported and summarized in Saville-Troike (2003: 108ff.), who discusses the various categories of communicative events, include the following observations on specific categories (pp. 111ff.): in Navajo one can only talk (tell stories) about hibernating animals during the winter time; Orthodox Jews cannot talk about secular topics on the Sabbath; in Igbo, greetings are preferably made during the morning.

From this first round of data, as reported by various ethnographers about various languages and cultures, we may conclude that although speech events and their contexts may be partly different from Western ones, the contextual *categories* largely appear to be the same as in Western languages and culture: Setting (Time, Place), and Participants: Age, Gender, Authority, Power, Status or Position. Different though are the *rules* and *norms* that relate these categories to forms of discourse or conduct, for instance who may greet whom. It should also be emphasized that ethnographic observations of such (sometimes unique) communicative practices are not always made repeatedly, nor have they been focused on the analysis of contexts, so that generalizations should be treated with care. Moreover, also under the influence of other cultures, many communicative practices may change within one or a few generations.

Context categories in some classical studies

Many classical studies in the ethnography of speaking deal with contextual categories. Let us briefly review some of them.

Albert (1972), in her famous study of speech patterning in Burundi, emphasizes the following categories: *ubukuru* (seniority, superiority) as the major principle, which may apply to gender, age and caste: the elderly are superior to the young, men to women, higher castes to lower castes, and so on. Good breeding, aristocracy (*imfura*) implies speaking well. Women are trained to be artfully silent or evasive and to recount what they have heard. As in many other cultures, women must show shyness and delicacy. Nearly everybody must learn how to speak to superiors or inferiors, including taking specific body positions (like kneeling in requests directed to superiors at home). Appropriate styles for inferiors are attached to roles and situations, not to persons. A strong avoidance taboo limits the visits of fathers to their married daughters, so that communication between them must be indirect, for instance through the mother.

Interesting for our theoretical framework is that within the Participant category, we have not only the familiar subcategories of gender and age, but also that of caste or class, which may be expected in many cultures. Perhaps even more interesting is that these various participant categories combine with a general category of participant-relations, namely superiority, which may produce gender superiority, age superiority and caste (or class) superiority. Although perhaps in less marked and explicit form, these participant relations of superiority also exist in Western cultures, quite explicitly so for age and class, and in many respects still for gender: also in Western culture the elderly, men and people of higher class positions or status are usually addressed with more respect, politeness, etc. If not universals, these seem to be very general features of social structure, and hence of context, in many cultures. That women are (more) silent or silenced in many communicative situations is one of these very general manifestations of social inequality that can be found in many societies.

In Frake's (1972) discussion of the Yakan (Philippines) concept of litigation, the author observes that the courts in which litigation takes place are quite informal, i.e., without a courthouse, props (gowns, etc.), and so on. Litigation takes place on the porch of the judge's house. The judge must be a parish leader of political power, learning, military prowess, economic success, among other criteria to be a leader or *bahiq* (elder). Within each side of the dispute there is a further role division between a principal, a guardian (the one who takes responsibility for the ruling) and supporters.

Relevant for our discussion is first of all that the Setting and props of litigation may be quite different in different cultures, and that a main

participant such as the judge need not be an occupational role, but a social role assumed by an (elder) leader. Although age is obviously an important criterion, we see that also other conditions of power may be involved in leadership. Indirectly, thus, these social conditions are relevant for judges and the way they speak. Apart from the notion of superiority and power, we might assume that the related but different notion of *authority* may be relevant here as a contextual condition of speech.

In similar ways, other classical studies in ethnography also deal with various contextual conditions, such as gender, age and dominance in verbal dueling among Turkish boys of between 8 and 14 (Dundes, Leach and Özkök, 1972) or among African American boys (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972).

Forms of address in many languages have been extensively studied in ethnography and sociolinguistics, especially since the early and seminal study of Brown and Gilman (1960), who related language use (pronouns, titles) to interaction and social relations of "power and solidarity." Thus Ervin-Tripp (1972) includes the following variables as conditioning address in American English:

- +/– adult
- +/– marked setting
- friend or colleague
- kin
- rank
- male or female
- +/– married
- +/ ascending generation.

Such participant attributes account for such forms as Dr. Brown, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Brown, Miss Brown, Uncle John, John and zero.

We see that that gender, age and rank or status play an important role as context factors in variation, but also some other variables such as kin and (un) married status – with the interesting difference that there is a special form of address for unmarried women (*Miss*) but not for unmarried men. The same is true in Spanish (*señorita* but not the equivalent *señorito*) and in French (*mademoiselle*, without an equivalent for an unmarried young man).

Similar conditions hold for the well-known choice between (polite) V- and (familiar, intimate) T-forms of pronominal address, as in French *vous* and *tu* or Castilian Spanish *Usted* and *tú*, where besides the contextual categories just mentioned, +/– familiarity is also an important contextual factor. These systems, however, not only are quite variable in different cultures, but also subject to change concomitant with other social changes (see also Friedrich, 1972).

Thus, as is the case in other Western European cultures, in the Netherlands, several decades ago, age and status in forms of address were clearly marked

with the V-form *U*, whereas since the 1970s the familiar T-forms *jij* and *je* have become much more widespread, e.g., by children to parents or teachers, or adults to unknown other adults – with much variation of class and age. The polite V-form *U* remains dominant when directed at the elderly (even among the elderly), among older adult strangers, and directed at people in positions of power or higher status.

One of the major problems of a theory of context defined as mental models is that our evidence is usually only indirect: we can only infer what at each moment is relevant for participants from what they say and how they say it. We seldom have data about people's own evaluation of *why* they used one form or another. This is why the study by Covarrubias (2002) of the use of *Usted* and *tú* in a Mexican construction firm is interesting: she taped conversations and afterwards interviewed the participants and also asked them *why* they used these forms in their talk. Her analysis of these data show that in general *Usted* is associated with the concept of *respeto* (respect), and *tú* with *confianza* (trust). The contextual conditions involved, however, are more than the usual conditions of familiarity, deference or showing respect for age, rank, status and authority; they also include such criteria as respecting someone's rights, good manners and company protocol.

Ervin-Tripp (1972), referring to earlier work in sociolinguistics, also stresses that the social conditions that control variable forms of address more generally are at the basis of style, such as the rather general division between formal, colloquial and slang, associated with different situations and occasions. In other words, variable social conditions may be variably expressed at several levels of discourse, e.g., in intonation, pronouns, syntax, lexical selection, etc.

Because topic choice also is related to variable style or code-switching, Ervin-Tripp also takes topic as "cultural unit," like the other variables. In our critical comments on the notion of "context" used in systemic linguistics in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 2), I already argued that "topic" is not a (non-verbal) context category, but a property of the global meaning of the discourse itself. However, because much older sociolinguistics did not yet take discourse as the unit of analysis, but sentences, it seems obvious that discourse topics were traditionally treated as context categories, instead of co-text categories.

Note that the general social categories that explain stylistic variation, such as age, gender, class, power, familiarity or intimacy, may be combined and extended in infinitely complex ways, as is so well described in the study of *vy* and *ty* in the Russian novel by Friedrich (1972). Thus, usually class will override age, at least among adults, but since people's social position may change, there are complex changes also in the way mutual (symmetrical or asymmetrical) forms of address may change, depending also on other aspects

of the situation, such as interaction in public or private settings. Such social conditions are further combined with cognitive and emotional conditions, such as knowing or not knowing people, and whether or not there is some emotional bond between interlocutors. This finding offers strong empirical support that it is not objective, isolated social "variables" that control discourse variation (and in this case, pronoun choice) but rather interpretations of whole communicative situations, as represented in context models.

In their study of social meaning of linguistic structure in a Norwegian village, Blom and Gumperz (1972) further explore Bernstein's thesis that "social relationships act as intervening variables between linguistic structures and their realization in speech," and assume that permissible alternates in conversation are "patterned and predictable on the basis of certain features of the local social system" (p. 409). They see verbal communication as a two-step process. In step 1, clues from the outside are translated into appropriate behavioral strategies – parallel to the perceptual processes in which referential meanings are converted into sentences. In step 2, "these behavioral strategies are in turn translated into appropriate verbal symbols," depending on the speaker's knowledge of the linguistic repertoire, culture, and social structure, and "his ability to relate these kinds of knowledge to contextual constraints" (p. 422). These contextual constraints are the participants, the environment and the topic. The authors define "settings" as the way people classify their ecological environment into distinct locales, such as the home, workshops and plants, on the one hand, and public meeting places, such as the docks and the shops, or schools and churches, on the other hand. Social situations are defined as the "activities carried out by particular constellations of personnel, gathered in particular settings during a particular span of time" (p. 423). Social events center around a limited range of topics and have sequential structure with stereotypical opening and closing routines. Each step (setting, situation, event) requires more detailed contextual information. Changes in the definition of the situation (rights and obligations) are expressed in many different ways, e.g., by code-switching, which may be called "situational switching." There is also code-switching in the same social situation, but in that case largely occasioned by topic, e.g., use of dialect to speak of family affairs and use of standard language to speak of business. This is called "metaphorical switching": it may bring an extra flavor of social meaning, e.g., of confidentiality or privacy to the conversation (p. 425). Standard language may also convey expertise, formality, etc.

We see that unlike much other work dealing with context, the study by Blom and Gumperz features a quite detailed theoretical framework that explains the relations between structures of social situations and forms of language use. Although they abstractly conceptualize social relationships as "intervening variables" that are translated – quite vaguely – as "behavioral

strategies" (and not as participant definitions), they place them between (shared knowledge of) the linguistic system and actual language use, as I also suggested for the location of context models in discourse production. Similarly detailed remarks are made for Settings and other context categories. We see also that these authors include "topic" as part of the context – which would of course be fine if it were defined not as discourse topic, but as some kind of "thought topic," or mental model, that is, as part of the macrostructure of speaking plans, or as part of the mental model that controls the production and comprehension of global meaning.

Fishman (1972) distinguishes the following dimensions of multilingual settings as determinants of variation between different languages or language varieties: topic, and especially *domains* of language behavior (such as family, playground, school, press, church, etc.): "institutional contexts and their congruent behavioral co-occurrences" (p. 441). Domains allow descriptions of language choice and topic in face-to-face encounters to be related to widespread sociocultural norms and expectations. There are also socio-psychological definitions of domains: intimate, informal, formal, intergroup, etc. (p. 442). Domain is defined as a "sociocultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a speech community, in such a way that *individual behavior and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other*" (p. 442, italics in original). Domains can be differentiated into role relations (pupil–teacher, buyer–seller, etc.). Domains empirically established by Greenfield (1968, cited in Fishman, 1972) for study of Puerto Ricans in New York are, for instance, family, friendship, religion, education and employment.

Seeger (1986) reports that among the Suya in Brazil, some forms of speech may only be engaged in by men, such as *grútnen kaperni* ("angry speech"), which may be used by men of any age who want to make their feelings public, and *kapérni kahr ido* ("slow speech"), which is exhortative speech of any older man addressing the entire village from the village plaza (p. 61).

Ochs (previously publishing under the name Keenan) reports that women in Madagascar are able to express anger and criticism openly and directly, whereas men are supposed to hide such feelings or express them indirectly and subtly. It is this indirectness and subtlety that are considered the ideal – but difficult – style. This also means that women are responsible for most practical business requiring direct speech, e.g., bargaining in the market (Keenan, 1974).

Irvine (1974) studies another important contextual condition: the status of participants. In her analysis of greetings in Wolof (West Africa), she finds that greeting is pervasive for all people, who are visible to each other, even

in a small village. People of higher rank are greeted earlier than people of lower status rank. Status is based on age, gender, caste or prestige (which may be moral or financial). Older people and men are greeted first, and people of lower rank must initiate the greeting. Since rank difference is obligatory in interaction, people need special strategies to lower or elevate theirs' or others' rank.

Besides gender and age, Maori rituals make a difference between locals and visitors as participants (Salmond, 1974).

Perhaps most impressive of all languages and cultures of which the meta-linguistic vocabulary has been studied is the richness of the Mayan language Tzeltal, which has hundreds of expressions for different kinds of discourse, speech or talk (Stross, 1974). Less abundant perhaps than the vocabulary for types of talk, but still quite impressive are the expressions used in Tzeltal to describe context categories, including such concepts as personality, physical condition, mental condition, emotional state, postural position, location, social identity, voice quality and volubility of the speaker, the number of participants, the spatial arrangement of participants, the social identity of the addressee, the location, time and duration of the speech event, channel sounds accompanying message, gestures, message channel, sequencing of the speech event, truth value of the message, reception of message by addressee, topic, genre, message form and code (language) (Stross, 1974: 217).

Although there is no doubt that these and other properties of communicative situations may be relevant in many – if not all – cultures, it is not necessarily the case that these are all explicitly conceptualized and lexically expressed as such. The complex Tzeltal expressions seem to be readily translatable and conceptually understandable in English, but it remains impressive that these are explicit factors of speech events. Stross does not show the discourse relevance of these factors in his article, but given the conscious use and double control by native speakers, it may be assumed that these are indeed relevant contextual categories. It is surprising, though, that missing from the list are precisely some of the more frequent categories found for other cultures, such as those of age, gender, power, status, etc., but these might be part of the global category of social identity. It is hardly likely that with a detailed and explicit categorization of speech situations, Tzeltal speakers would not make such obvious distinctions.

In their study of Athabaskan oral narratives Scollon and Scollon (1981) stress the role of subtle communicative style in storytelling for the purpose of managing social relations, educating children or entertaining the elderly. Among many other observations on Athabaskan discourse and interaction (also as compared to that of US or Canadian speakers of English) is that Athabaskans may prefer not to speak in situations where English speakers tend to speak or to speak (much) more, for instance when participants do not

yet know each other or each other's opinions. And conversely, knowing each other well involves much speaking among Athabaskans, whereas among English speakers one may remain more silent when interacting with someone one knows very well (p. 15). Also, the relations of dominance and independence involve different expectations for English and Athabaskan speakers, for instance in the sense that for Athabaskans being dominant means taking care of the non-dominant person, feeling responsible, also in conversation. In English it is the non-dominant or dependent person who is supposed to do the talking when asking for assistance and to display his or her best side, whereas in Athabaskan those in a situation of dependence will remain (more) silent and more indirect, but carefully observing the dominant party, while avoiding speaking first, especially with people they do not know.

Participation structure

There are a large number of contemporary ethnographic studies of communicative events that more or less explicitly deal with various contextual constraints. Let us consider some of these studies in somewhat more detail.

In the introduction to their edited book on responsibility and evidence in oral discourse in various cultures, Hill and Irvine (1992) highlight the analytical relevance of participation structures in the collected studies, thus continuing, for more culturally diverse situations, the earlier work of Goffman on *footing*, already studied in the previous chapter (Goffman, 1974, 1979).

Judith Irvine herself, whose work on Wolof greetings we briefly mentioned above, shows – again for Wolof – how *xaxaar* ritual insult poetry, performed by professional verbal artists (griots), may strategically avoid blame because responsibility cannot simply be attributed to the women of a family to which a new bride has come and who hired the griots (Irvine, 1992). Indeed, the ones who vent such insults are the griots, and those who spread them have heard them from the griots, whereas the griots themselves escape blame because they are merely hired singers.

We see that although the speech event may be culturally specific, the principle is not much different from the practices of journalists in many cultures, who may cite a third party in order to report "objectively" something negative about a politician or other news actor without taking the responsibility themselves (Van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b). In fact, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the news article itself featuring such a quote is the product of many different institutional participants, and not just of the reporter. And as Judith Irvine also recalls for another example, it is the newspaper or its publisher or editor that may be sued for slander, and not (only) the reporter. Again, as is the case for the Wolof, in other societies responsibility for news

discourse and its consequences is related to the *hierarchy* of participants: editors are ultimately responsible for the texts of their reporters because they have the power to instigate and to prohibit reporting and final publication.

Similar concerns are addressed in Amy Shuman's study of stories about fights among inner-city high school students in the USA (Shuman, 1992). The main concept she uses to study these stories is "entitlement," and she emphasizes that "entitlement claims involve a contest about contexts" (p. 136). She then specifies:

> In appropriating the floor one also appropriates the context, and contexts can be multiple and intersecting. The entitlement disputes discussed here involve problematic boundaries between the context of talk and the context of the events discussed. (Shuman, 1992: 136)

As is also the case in the example of journalistic quotation we just mentioned, Shuman found that individual speakers telling about what happened rarely take responsibility for their own reports but, by using reported speech, assign authority to some prior speaker (p. 137). Storytellers may thus continuously and strategically shift participant roles, e.g., as participants or observers of earlier events, or as current speakers and first person narrators whose entitlement (to tell the story) may be challenged, so that storytelling itself may become part of a larger, ongoing dispute. Thus, many fight stories relay intentions – and hence preview future fights – rather than detail past fights; would-be fighters thus make sure to select and address the person who is most likely to report the story, as a challenge, to the intended opponent.

Duranti (1992a) discusses participant roles within the framework of a critique of the Western notion of self and personhood as it is implied by the concept of "intentionality" used in the theory of speech acts. With other cited anthropologists he contrasts this kind of responsibility for the contents and meanings of one's utterance with the more social, interpersonal and reciprocal one in Polynesian cultures. Thus, the meaning of discourse and other actions is not (only) a personal responsibility, but a joint, cooperative achievement (p. 41). Thus, meaning in Samoan is conventional social meaning as assigned to an utterance rather than as intended by the speaker. This means that recipients are also actively involved in the public performance and realization of meaning. Duranti concludes that a theory of mind should be "interpsychological" rather than "intrapsychological," suggesting Vygotsky's sociohistorical approach as a good candidate for such a theory (p. 45) (for a theoretically updated version of Duranti's theory of intention, see Duranti, 2006).

Du Bois (1992) in his contribution to the same book also challenges the general relevance of the notion of intention in speech act theory and argues that in some kinds of speech events, such as divinatory rituals, meaning may

be produced without the individual intentions of the speaker, as is also the case in speaking in trance. More specifically, in this case speakers are not only not responsible because they lack intentions, but not even responsible for the (social, conventional) consequences of their words.

Setting: space/place and time Although most context-based variation probably is defined in terms of participant roles and relations, it seems plausible that also some Setting characteristics vary across languages and cultures. This is not only well known for cultural variation in the representation of temporal aspects of events, but also has been investigated extensively for space and place. Different cultural ways of orientation also should influence the organization of communication Settings and their expression in talk, for instance in deictic expressions, local adverbs, and so on. Thus, for languages and cultures of speakers who have absolute frames of reference (or of orientation), descriptions are less context dependent in the sense of being relative to the current place of the speaker (Levinson, 2003). Instead of the context-relative expression "this side of the mountain" such speakers may for instance say "the south-side of the mountain."

There are also differences among European languages and hence within cultures with the same relative frames of reference. Thus, in Spanish the difference between *traer* (bring) and *llevar* (take – away) strictly depends on the current position of the speaker (*traer* implies transportation of objects or people in the direction of the speaker, and *llevar* implies transportation of objects or people away from the speaker, with the speaker and/or in the direction of other people). Although a similar distinction exists in English (*bring* vs. *take*) or in Dutch (*meebrengen* vs. *meenemen*), these languages allow speakers to construct a point of reference that is different from their own position, that is, some kind of topological empathy, locating the point of reference with the recipient, for instance the recipient of a letter, e-mail or phone call. Thus, in Dutch one may promise a participant to "bring" the book to her: "*Ik zal morgen het boek voor je meebrengen*," and she could have asked, conversely to "take" the book to her: "*Kun je dat boek voor me meenemen*?"

These few examples show that besides culturally different frames of reference and hence also differences in the spatial organization of speech situations as organized by mental models, we also may have cultural differences in the way people map directions (towards or from speakers or recipients) on language.

These examples also seem to confirm that language use is not controlled by social situations or physical environments themselves, but by the way participants represent and organize these in mental models – and that it is in these mental models that speakers in different cultures may construe the

environment differently. Conversely, as Levinson (2003) suggests, this also means that we need to accept a (new) version of the Whorf–Sapir hypothesis, namely that speakers of a different language and culture also organize their space and hence their orientation in the world in a different way. Although it remains to be seen how fundamental such differences are, and how pervasive they are for the rest of the organization of the world in people's knowledge, these theoretical and empirical findings at least suggest that also along this dimension context models may be culturally variable.

New directions in the ethnography of context

These earlier studies of context in the ethnography of communication and linguistic anthropology should be placed against the broader background of developments in anthropology since the 1960s. Sherry Ortner (1984) does so in her much cited review article, which gives us an idea of the theoretical backgrounds of various approaches to the study of context in anthropology.

The key notions Ortner highlights for the new anthropology since the 1960s are those of *practice*, *action* or *praxis*. Developments since 1984 only confirm this tendency. Whereas in anthropology, linguistics, literature, and related disciplines, earlier major notions were *grammar*, *system*, *symbol*, *myth*, *folktale*, *text*, *structure* and *code*, especially in European structuralism, the concepts used since the 1960s that became dominant in the 1980s were much more dynamic. This was already the case for the ethnography of speaking, pragmatics and correlational sociolinguistics since the mid-1960s, and especially also for conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology since the 1970s and 1980s.

Ortner recalls that although Clifford Geertz was mainly interested in the study of "embodied" symbols, we find the antimentalist ideology in his conception of culture (as not being in people's heads) that would characterize virtually all tenets of what may be called "interactionism" in the following decades. It is no coincidence that the same is true for the political and production dimensions of symbols, on the one hand, and later interaction studies, on the other hand. That is, possibly with the exception of gender studies, questions of power in context analysis (and other sociological or political-economic concerns) seldom reached center-stage in the ethnography of recent decades – as we shall also see below for the lack of attention given to issues of racism. Since these issues tend to be abstract and typically macro level they were rather incompatible with the observations of local practices in fieldwork, and in terms of the perspective of the "folks on the shore" (Ortner, p. 143). Ortner identifies the beginning of a more "practice" oriented development in 1978 with the first English translation of Bourdieu's book on the theory of practice, and the publication in 1979 of Giddens' book dealing with

"structure" and "agency" (see also the review article on language and agency by Ahearn, 2001). Instead of the abstract systems and structures of structuralism, we thus see the reappearance of real – acting and talking – people.

A similar opposition already appears in the symbolic interactionist reaction against the "system, rules and norms" approach of Parsons and Durkheim. But, those interested in practice went even further than the symbolic interactionists in minimizing the deterministic power of the "system." Instead they saw the original force in strategic daily interaction as a basis for an integrated, but heterogeneous societal framework. Such a framework defies the usual distinction of levels and units, and a distinction between the social and the cultural. As suggested above, however, the focus on practice – as was earlier the case for behaviorism – again seemed to imply a general reluctance to consider the actor's mind:

> Unfortunately, anthropologists have generally found that actors with too much psychological plumbing are hard to handle methodologically, and practice theory is no exception. (Ortner, 1984: 151)

Yet Ortner at the same time is able to observe enough work on self, emotions, and motives – as part of the broader account of social actors. And it is "consciousness" that also here, as in many other studies in the social sciences, is taken as the interface between system and action. And conversely, the system gets reproduced not only by socialization and ritual, as was the focus in earlier studies, but also by the routines of everyday life, as was stressed by those interested in practice.

The general developments sketched by Ortner have had a contradictory influence on the development of context theories in anthropology. On the one hand, the exclusive focus on interaction itself, as is also the case in conversation analysis, initially led to a general neglect of the study of its social and cultural embeddings and situational contexts, at least until the early 1990s when institutional talk became systematically studied (see Chapter 3 for detail). On the other hand, the study of discourse as a form of situated interaction and as a social practice naturally involves settings (placement, timing), actors, actor relations and – maybe at first reluctantly – actor intentions, goals and beliefs that were only abstractly postulated as part of the "system" in the earlier context-free, structuralist approaches to discourse. Note though that in Ortner's survey also there is little attention given to the social practice of talk and text, and hence also hardly any analysis of context.

The current state in linguistic anthropology Let us jump 20 years ahead and examine a much more comprehensive overview of the field, namely the *Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Duranti (2004). Although chapter titles suggest overlap with sociolinguistics and discourse

studies, their contents are also based on ethnographic research, featuring such keywords as: speech community, registers of language, language contact, codeswitching, conversation analysis, gesture, participation, literature, narrative, poetry, socialization, identity, agency, inequality and language ideologies, among others.

Despite this conceptual variety, the notion of context as such is dealt with only marginally (the term "context" does not appear in the Index – although "contextualization" does). The chapters on speech community, registers, participation, identity, agency and social inequality deal with important aspects of sociocultural situations of language use. For instance, Besnier (2004) summarizes some results on power and practice in the discourses of Polynesia and Micronesia, e.g., Duranti's own study (1994) of village council meetings (*fono*) in Samoa, categorized as a "typical hierarchical society" dominated by a chiefly system. Thus, during such meetings rank is signaled by the place where chiefs of different rank may sit, and in which order they may speak. But since speeches may not be interrupted, higher ranking chiefs can hardly interrupt a lower ranking chief attacking him in his speech. Besnier emphasizes that although socially the hierarchical system in Melanesia and Polynesia may be different (Melanesia being less hierarchically organized), the actual practice of power is less rigid, such that in both societies lower ranking people may undermine the power of higher ranking people. Indeed, the Melanesian *bigman* must "constantly show his worthiness as a leader, through persuasive skills, [and] control of rhetorical forms" (p. 112). More generally, though, rank in Polynesian societies, as in many societies, is overtly signaled by honorifics.

Notice that similar contextual conditions as in Samoa hold for the context Setting in the British parliament, where a well-known division exists between frontbenchers and backbenchers, and in which, as we have seen in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 1) and will see in more detail in the last chapter of this book, the Prime Minister speaks first, then the head of the Opposition, and then other MPs. And also here, once they talk, backbenchers may well criticize their leaders, as indeed they do – very politely – in the Iraq debate. And much of what holds for a Melanesian *bigman* is directly applicable to Tony Blair. We see that what seem to be cultural specifics of contexts of discourse in non-Western societies are not that different from those contexts in Western societies.

Similarly, Keating and Egbert (2004) examine how various aspects of context impinge on conversation as a cultural activity. Citing Keating's own work on power and rank in Pohnpei (Micronesia) (Keating, 1998), they show that differences in rank in the evening encounters of *kava* (a drink) sharing, are also expressed both by seating arrangements as well as the use of low-status and high-status verbs. They also recall in their brief review of the role

of gender in conversation that whereas in many societies women are supposed to be silent or subdued in mixed gender conversations, this is not at all a general pattern – there are societies where women are much more assertive, also depending on other context conditions, such as age and class.

A detailed contribution to one aspect of the study of context in the *Companion* is the chapter by Charles and Marjorie Harness Goodwin on *participation* – defined as an action, as forms of involvement in talk. They criticize Goffman's earlier work on *footing* (see previous chapter), by emphasizing that speakers and hearers do not simply have different roles, but also mutually take each other into account, that participation is not a static system of roles but interactively and dynamically organized, that not only the speaker but also hearers have rich cognitive, reflexive capacities, and that not only speech but also other forms of "embodied" practice are involved in such interaction (Goodwin and Goodwin, 2004). Thus, the body position of hearers may indicate understanding of what is being said. More than in much other contemporary work on interaction, the authors emphasize the necessity to attend to forms of expression that reveal "the rich cognitive life" of the participants – a metaphor we have tried to make more explicit in terms of the context models of (all) participants, models that control both production and understanding of talk. The authors then show how participation is organized in storytelling among adolescents, where complex relations exist between instigator, teller, absent parties, disparaging hearer, etc. when a girl A tells another girl B what someone else has said about B, and more complex patterns of gossip (for detail see M. H. Goodwin, 1990).

Similarly relevant, as we also have seen in previous chapters, is the question of identity, dealt with in a chapter by Bucholtz and Hall (2004). They stress that identity not only presupposes similarity, but also serves to manufacture or stress differences with respect to an outgroup, involving agency and power. Indeed, powerful groups usually strive to "unmark" their identity – a form of identity "erasure" that may be observed in ethnic relations in which whites do not consider themselves an "ethnic" group, or where the dominant language has an "unmarked" status. The authors show that whereas (ethnic or other) identity played a role in many ethnographic studies, e.g., on colonialism and racism, there has been a backlash in anthropology against such work because it presupposed biological or cultural *essentialism*, that is, a presumption that such identities – such as those of gender, ethnicity or sexuality – are inherent and cannot change. Many contemporary studies have shown, also in anthropology, that there is much intragroup variation and intergroup similarity. Bucholtz and Hall conclude that this does not mean that the notion of identity should be abolished, but that it should be applied only when it is an ethnographic fact (e.g., *when group members construe such identities themselves*) and not as an ideological position of the analyst. They

emphasize that identities should be studied as properties of situations, rather than of groups, and as a dynamic, and not as a static property. They give examples of ethnographic studies that show that, for instance, status may be dynamically changed in interaction and does not always follow fixed categories. They focus on four processes that have been particularly useful in the study of identity: practice (as habitual action), indexicality, ideology and performance – key terms in much current linguistic anthropology. Finally, they propose three *tactics of intersubjectivity* through which people establish relations of difference and similarity with some reference group: adequation and distinction, authentication and denaturalization, and authorization and illegitimation.

Much less emphasized in many other contemporary studies in the study of talk-in-interaction, Susan Philips (2004) finally reviews the relation between discourse and *social inequality* – a fundamental dimension of social situations at the level of social structure: "Some uses of language are valued more because their speakers are valued more" (p. 474). She examines this inequality in bureaucratic settings, gender relations, the political economy and colonialism. For instance, turn taking and question–answer pairs in classrooms and courtrooms are institutionally established by ideologies of professional or bureaucratic expertise. Ideologies are also at the basis of differential power between men and women as exhibited by speech genres and speech styles. Economic causes influence which language will be dominant, and economic, political and ideological causes have an impact on the linguistic codes that establish the intrinsic inferiority of the colonized.

Although this brief review of a few relevant chapters of the *Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* hardly offers a full picture of the field, it gives an impression of the kind of studies currently being undertaken. We have seen that many of the topics overlap with those in other language disciplines, but then studied in more different and diverse communities than in other directions of research – in which most of the data come from white, Western contexts (although these also are becoming less and less homogeneous due to immigration).

Another general conclusion of the review may be that ethnic or cultural differences obviously exist between discourses or contexts in different societies, but that on the one hand they are seldom very fixed, but may change or may be negotiated, and on the other hand they are not that different from the discourse practices we know. Topics such as speech communities, agency, identity, social inequality and participation obviously tell us much about the more detailed structure of context. However, few chapters explicitly focus on context analysis as a specific aim of linguistic anthropology. No general theory of context–discourse relations is being proposed, and the pervasive influence of social and cultural situations is generally taken for granted but

seldom phrased in terms of participant definitions of their communicative environment. Instead of the flexibility of situation–discourse relations implied by using subjective definitions (and hence cognitive models) the prevalent strategy to escape determinism and essentialism is to rephrase such a relation in the interactional terms of local negotiation. Also for this reason it is not strange that the studies in linguistic anthropology seldom cite relevant work in cognitive anthropology.

Rethinking context

Simply getting one's hand on the shape of context is a major analytic problem. (Goodwin and Duranti, 1992: 13).

Much more explicitly focused on the analysis of context is one of the few edited books entirely dedicated to the study of context, *Rethinking Context* (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992), which also has become the standard reference for most studies dealing with context. Since this cannot be the place to review all papers in this collection, I shall focus on those papers dealing with the cultural dimensions of context.

As is the case in many studies in contemporary linguistic anthropology, most chapters of this book overlap with other directions of research, such as conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, gender studies and discourse analysis, and the editors explicitly welcome such cross-linguistic endeavors in their introduction (Goodwin and Duranti, 1992). After examining further details of ethnographic studies of aspects of the communicative situation above, we also need to focus on more theoretical perspectives on context in linguistic anthropology. Given the importance of this book for the study of context, I shall also formulate some more critical remarks and emphasize some differences with my own theory of context.

The theoretical approach in the field is probably best represented in the substantial introduction to this book (Goodwin and Duranti, 1992). Let us examine this chapter in more detail, because it is one of the few articles that exclusively focuses on a theory of context.

Contexts of talk – not of text – and from a US perspective One of the first critical observations to be made here, and which applies to virtually all work I have reviewed in this study, is that also in this volume the study of language is almost wholly focused on *oral* language. As is true for nearly all contemporary work on language and discourse outside of formal grammar, Goodwin and Duranti (G&D) emphasize the relevance of the study of language *use*, which they say is often ignored in social anthropology (e.g., of kinship relations and social organization), but they limit such a study to *talk:*

"one of the most pervasive social activities that human beings engage in is talk" (p. 1), and then "consider first the behavior that context is being invoked to interpret. Typically this will consist of talk of some type" (p. 3).

Thus, conversation and interaction are the keywords in this chapter and book, and not texts, writing and reading, hardly marginal activities in many societies for many centuries. Obviously, such a general bias for spoken language also has consequences for the theory of context. That is, here also we see a pervasive influence of conversation analysis within a field that in principle should be open to a much broader variety of forms of language use. In the perspective of my commentary, that is, in the current perspective of theory of context, this means that the kind of discourse analysis prevalent in the USA, namely conversation analysis, is closely related to the traditional interest in oral discourse in anthropology. Studies of written and printed documents in schools, universities, the media and other organizations and businesses are few and far between in linguistic anthropology – and so are their contexts. It hardly needs much argument that such is a small basis for a general theory of context.

The second bias that needs to be mentioned here, at least once in this study, is that also in this publication all contributors work in the USA. That is, there may be diversity in the societies being studied, but this is not the case for those who are considered the most prestigious scholars to study these societies. As critical scholars we know that such biases are not arbitrary, but related to the social, cultural and academic power of the USA – as was also the case for the power and prestige of European scholarship a century ago. Although the consequences of such a bias will not be investigated in my review, it should at least be stated at this point that the US academic *context* of this scholarly *text* may not be without influence on the kinds of theories, methods, data or fieldwork reported here.

Defining context G&D start out by recognizing that it is impossible to define contexts (pp. 2–3) – assuming that such contexts are viewed especially or only as involving participants in face-to-face interaction, with everyday conversation as the fundamental type of talk-in-interaction.

Since it is not only talk that may be contextualized, but also, vice versa, behavior that may be contextualized by talk, G&D introduce the term "focal event" as the phenomenon that is being contextualized (p. 3). Context then is usually understood as a "frame" or "field of action" that provides resources for the interpretation of the focal event, as is the case for an "environment" for an "organism." They stress that contexts must be defined from the "perspective of the participant(s) whose behavior is being analyzed" (p. 4), a principle that I also have taken as my point of departure for the theory of

context, but it is not clear how in their view the subjective dimension of a participant perspective can be combined with the "objectivist" notion of the "environment" of talk.

G&D explain with an example (a blind man in the city walking with a stick) how activities performed shape what the relevant context is, like when walking (and not sitting down to eat a sandwich) makes relevant the physical environment of the city. The problem with this concrete example is that it does not square with what is going on. People can only and will only walk (or eat, etc.) when they already know what they are going to do when and where, and they organize and adapt their conduct to such a subjective previous projection or ongoing interpretation of the environment. That is, precisely from the point of view of the actor, the construction of the context and not the physical environment itself shapes conduct, and vice versa, conduct as planned is tuned to environments construed as relevant parts of the context. To be able to walk and orient oneself in the city presupposes our knowledge of streets to walk on, and it is this previous knowledge that the blind man uses to bring his stick in the first place. And when we plan to sit down and eat we need to analyze the situation and construct a context (banks, etc.) in which eating can be carried out. Although this is merely an example of G&D, it needed to be briefly examined as such, because it embodies the fundamental assumptions of G&D on the nature of contexts.

The relation between context and talk This first example and its implications are also important because they presuppose the basic (causal) logic of the relations between context and discourse. People act (speak, etc.) in situations that are already partly analyzed or construed, and it is relative to such understandings that they (more or less consciously) plan what to do or to say next. It is not activities as such that make situations relevant as context, but our *plans* for such activities, because how else can we adapt what we do or say to the context? On the same page (p. 5), G&D say as much when they stress that people dynamically reshape a context that "provides organization for (. . .) actions"; contexts have "dynamic, socially constitutive properties." True, talk also changes contexts, but these changed contexts (as constructs) are contexts for *next* actions, not for the previous actions that brought them about – a point that is quite often forgotten in interactional studies of context.

G&D, of course, know as much. Although contexts are said to be shaped by participants, it is very relevantly added that "this does not mean that context is created from scratch within the interaction so that larger cultural and social patterns in society are ignored." This is an important point, because it rejects quite popular constructionist philosophies that assume that all talk and context are (only) locally produced. At the same time, this quote suggests

that context is not only local or interactional, but also involves societal structure – or rather knowledge of such structure: people can only *invoke* organizational patterns when these (are known to) exist outside the current context and interaction. Contexts, thus, are both socially constituted and interactively sustained – and miscommunication may result from different definitions of the context.

Dimensions of context In their analysis of the "dimensions of context," G&D offer the following list, referring also to other authors in the book:

- Setting: social and spatial framework
- Behavioral environment: the way participants use their bodies
- Language as context, genres: the way talk invokes and creates context or other talk
- Extrasituational context: background knowledge.

We see that this brief list (which is explained in more detail in their chapter) only partly overlaps with the kind of context dimensions or categories we have examined before. Indeed, since Setting involves also the social framework, participants and their roles and relations are part of such a larger "Setting," which in many respects represents what many others call context (as we have seen for the use of that notion by Dell Hymes). However, something does not fit well: to take talk as part of the same context (as G&D define it) is against the temporal logic of dynamic contexts, namely that in an episode *previous* (parts of) talk may become co-text for *next* (parts of) talk. Similarly, genres are defined by aspects of context, and are not *part* of them. Also, there are many context dimensions missing in this short and rather heterogeneous list, such as time and goals – and for a book dedicated to the study of context, this is really a pity, because as prominent scholars the authors jointly have access to a vast repertoire of studies in anthropology, the humanities and the social sciences that could have provided more detailed and more analytical information about the constituent dimensions and structures of context.

Figure and ground One of the pervasive metaphors used, also by G&D, to describe the relation between context and focal events, is that between *figure* and *ground* (pp. 9ff.), referring also to the paper by Hanks (1992) in the same book: the focal event of a situation by definition receives much more, and more detailed, attention than the *back-ground*, a distinction that has been made explicit in much psychological work on attention (see also *Discourse and Context*, Chapter 3). The editors highlight that the difference of salience also shows in the degree of attention: most research, especially in formal linguistics or even in the study of folklore (the analysis of myths and

folktales), is on the focal event (action, discourse) and not on the context. Of course, such a conclusion is precisely the major rationale for G&D's book, as well as mine, so we can only agree with them.

Relevant directions of research G&D then offer a general overview of the directions of research that in their view (also) focus on context and that form the background (context?) of the chapters in the book. Although these approaches do not directly express their own orientations, their choice does seem relevant for G&D's view on discourse and context, so let us briefly comment on this choice.

Not surprisingly (also because of the participation of Charles Goodwin in this chapter), they include, for instance, conversation analysis, and all perspectives "that focus on language as a socially constituted, interactive phenomenon" (p. 13). However, as we have seen in the previous chapters, such a perspective is as such no guarantee at all that such studies also pay attention to context (apart from the sequential "co-text" of previous actions): Most early work in conversation analysis (CA) is no less social-context-free than grammar or story structure analysis, and also later work on institutional conversation studies talk *in* institutions but hardly the relevant aspects of the institutional situations themselves.

On the other hand, G&D exclude work that only formally or indirectly deals with context such as pragmatics (speech act theory) and sociolinguistics. These exclusions are surprising, because although speech act theory is formal and philosophical, it does at least systematically deal with properties of contexts (such as speaker beliefs about hearers, etc.) and notions such as appropriateness, although they do not do so with real language (conversation) data. Similarly, traditional sociolinguistics does of course deal with context (in the traditional sense of "social situation"), and does so systematically, but with other methods and a different (correlational) theoretical framework, and generally not within a discourse analytical perspective. Whatever the criticism one may have of such a sociolinguistic approach (and we have extensively dealt with that in *Discourse and Context*, Chapter 5), excluding it from a survey of context studies, and including conversation analysis that was showing a reluctance to deal with context from the start, is another manifestation of a strange bias in favor of CA-oriented approaches in a book on context. Also, much contemporary work in sociolinguistics (especially on gender) has dealt with the social embedding of talk in other than correlational terms.

Precursors Identity in scholarship is partly defined by whom we recognize as our "precursors." As do others (like Hymes and Halliday), G&D begin their survey of such precursors with the work of Malinowski, who is

said to have invented the notion of "context of situation." Malinowski stresses that language should be studied as part of our everyday experiences and action, that is as a practical accomplishment: "The real knowledge of a word comes through the practice of appropriately using it within a certain situation" (p. 15). Of course Malinowski should be mentioned and credited for introducing the term "context of situation" – later used profusely in Systemic Grammar. However, as we show in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 2), Malinowski did not really have many ideas about the nature of context, and in that respect he is hardly a forerunner of the theory of context. His few examples rather have to do with "contexts of reference," that is, what people refer to in a specific situation, and not with the structure of communicative situations. The quotations given by G&D rather show the *antimentalist behaviorism* of Malinowski. In that respect Malinowski is a precursor of Systemic Grammar and empiricist linguistics and more generally a precursor of the antimentalist perspective of much research of language as "practical action," rather than a precursor of the theory of context.

Another precursor mentioned is, not surprisingly, the later (!) Wittgenstein, whose *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) is the bible of many interactionist studies. The problem is that – as is the case for many religious or philosophical sources – the interpretations of the hardly transparent teachings of the *Untersuchungen* tell us very little about discourse. Wittgenstein says much about words, and word meanings, but virtually nothing about language as action, even less about interaction, and virtually nothing about context. Although he explicitly does not want to be read as a behaviorist or as an antimentalist (because he recognizes he has no idea about what minds are), he is considered a precursor of antimentalist interactionists. The relevant question then is again: Why is he selected as a precursor of a theory of context, unless a theory of context is being identified simply with theories of conversational interaction that see Wittgenstein as a forerunner of a philosophy of language that definitely should not be an analytical philosophy of language and mind?

This is also the reason why Austin is cited because of his emphasis on action, but Searle is found to be already too much influenced by "psychologism" (p. 17), who talks about intentions rather than about conventions (a strange criticism of someone who talks a lot about rules, and also uses the notion of convention in his work). If conventions rather than intentions are relevant for G&D, one may ask how language users can *know* such conventions they act upon without having them in their minds, but that is a debate we need not repeat here.

That is, some scholars who do have something to say on the structures of context and context-relations (such as conditions of appropriateness for

speech acts) are not considered to be forerunners of the theory of context only because they do not engage in conversation analysis or because they do not reduce language use to interaction.

Antimentalism The systematic rejection of all things of the mind in the interactionist paradigm has significant consequences for a theory of context, because it excludes fundamental categories that control all discourse and interaction: awareness, reflexivity, interpretation, rules, intentions, goals, plans, beliefs and knowledge, as well as the very notion of contexts as subjective constructs of participants. G&D reject recipients as "internalized Others" in the minds of speakers because this would deny the active role of such recipients (p. 18). This is a strange conception of the very role of "recipients" or "addressees," who by definition do not do anything else but interpret what is being said or done by the current speaker. Of course such actors actively participate in interaction, but as soon as they do so we call them "speakers" and they no longer play the role of recipients, even when they only minimally show listening and comprehension activity, engage in back channeling, etc. *All* participants appropriately engage in interaction and discourse only if they do so with a model (definition, interpretation, etc.) of the other participants. As far as we know such a model can only be in their mind. G&D seem to forget that interaction involves not only turn taking but also a change of communicative role: Recipients are not actors, but roles of actors.

At several points in G&D's account of "precursors" we find a very familiar straw man, namely "the mind of a single individual." However, this is a serious misrepresentation of the theories they reject. No cognitive account of interaction *reduces* its analysis to such "single" individuals or their minds. Of course social actors participate in interaction as individuals with their own minds, *but* they do so, among other things, by perceiving, understanding and hence representing other participants and on that understanding interact with others. This is the very definition of interaction. *Without this condition, a sequence of behaviors of several actors is not interaction at all*. Each next act in an interaction sequence presupposes that the actor understands (at least partly) what the previous actor has done or said. Moreover, apart from being participants in interaction, individuals may also be objects of study as such – because their discourses are by definition unique and hence possibly unique (Johnstone, 2000). And finally, we also study participants as members of groups, and hence study not only "single minds," but also types of social cognition, such as knowledge and ideologies, and how these shape the interpretation of social situations, that is, context models, and how these models in turn are involved in the production of text and talk. Precisely these aspects of interaction are *not* studied in the interactionist approach

defended by G&D. That is, the straw man of the "mind of the single individual" hardly looks worse than the dyad of the "isolated interaction of two mindless individuals."

Other precursors We see that G&D are interested in precursors not so much because of their unique contribution to the theory of context, but rather as representatives of a mindless approach to interaction. Thus, they cite Vološinov as advocating the study of "concrete verbal communication" – against the Saussurean theory of abstract language systems. Fine, but what they cite of him again contains the now quite familiar straw man of the "individual psyche" of the speakers. On the other hand, if we look at what Saussure says in his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, instead of going by broadly shared stereotypes, we see that Saussure did not aim to study "abstract language systems" at all. On the contrary, he stresses the social nature of language (langue) (see also Hanks' 1996 article on Saussure):

> La langue (...) est la partie sociale du langage, extérieure a l'individu, qui a lui seul ne peut ni la créer ni la modifier; elle n'existe qu'en vertu d'une sorte de contrat passé entres les members de la communauté. (Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, p. 31)

We see again that some forerunners are credited with claims they hardly made, and vice versa, those who are not part of the forerunners of interactionism are criticized for positions they did not defend.

Thus, as may be expected, Bakhtin is generally considered to be a forerunner for his "dialogic" approach to language. The problem is that Bakhtin, interested primarily in literary texts, does not deal with interaction at all, but with intertextuality – the way different "voices" are represented in texts. This is not a property of *context* (or interaction) but of *text*, and a question of semantics (how other texts or authors are referred to, cited, etc.) and not of pragmatics. Of course this is interesting, but not a basis for a theory of interaction or context. Similarly Vygotski is – justly – celebrated for his work on language learning as social activity, but as the reason for this celebration, G&D repeat that he does not focus on the "isolated individual" (p. 21). Unfortunately, we do not get to know what aspects of *context* Vygotski studied.

More generally, G&D repeat various times that

> face-to-face interaction provides the primordial locus for the production of talk (...) and the primary examplar [*sic*] of context (...) one that ties the production of talk to systematic social organization. (p. 22)

No doubt, but does that imply that other forms of language use do not constitute contexts for discourse and are not tied to social organization? One could understand this emphasis on talk in a situation in which the study of

language and discourse is limited to context-less studies of written texts, but such was hardly the case in 1992 when this book was published. And more importantly, instead of repeating the relevance of a study of interaction, one would expect a detailed analysis of how the various developments of language study have contributed to our understanding of the details of these social and interactional contexts of talk. And, surely the vague criterion of the "accomplishment of shared agreement about the events that members of a society encounter in their phenomenal world" (p. 22), that is culture, is not limited to face-to-face contexts. True, face-to-face interaction is inherently dynamic, and "each single utterance changes in subtle but profound ways the operative context of the moment" (p. 22). But it is not said *how* this changes *what* of the context. Moreover, this obviously dynamic nature may also be observed in phone conversations or internet chatting (the latter not yet a habit when this book was written). And again, it is no less true for each sentence in written communication, which also modifies the knowledge and other beliefs of the readers, and hence the context. In other words, there is nothing in talk that makes it better as an example for context studies than other forms of discourse. So the fundamental nature of context is not to be sought in whether or not discourse is taking place in "face-to-face interaction," but in the way participants understand and represent the communicative situation, including other participants, their properties and their knowledge. Precursors of the theory of context, thus, are the social scientists who stressed and analyzed the way social actors mutually understand each other and the social situation of their interaction.

In that respect, Bateson and especially Scheflen are better representatives referred to by G&D, because of their methods of recording visual information and their work on therapy sessions, and how attention is paid to the arrangement of furniture in the room and the use of space. These are indeed possible candidates for relevant categories of a theory of context that are often ignored in other studies of interaction. Bateson is specifically cited for his work on the crucial role of "framing" in discourse, that is, the situation in which the same strip of conduct may be interpreted as playful or serious. Note though that such frames, as interpretative devices, are mental objects, and not properties of conduct.

Frames (or "keys") have also been studied by Goffman, who is rightly considered to be a precursor because he has extensively contributed to our knowledge of context, for instance because of his work on footing and participant structure (see Chapter 3).

Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel) is mentioned for the focus on the role of intersubjectivity and how members negotiate a "common context." Members are not "judgmental dopes" but are reflexively aware of the social events they are producing (p. 28). Fine, so does that mean we need to do more research on

such awareness, e.g., of people who write e-mail messages, news reports or scientific articles? Not so, instead of this, and not surprisingly, the focus is on *conversation analysis* as a major field of research that is relevant for our understanding of context. However, this is not because of its analysis of context as it is usually understood, but for having shifted the analysis from the isolated sentence to the utterance embedded within a "context" (p. 28) – that is, the study of language as a *sequential* phenomenon. The problem is that this is a criterion shared by *all* studies of text and talk since the 1960s, and not limited to conversation analysis. That conversation is "doubly contextual" (Heritage) because its utterances are influenced both by previous ones, and influence next ones, is a property of all sequential phenomena, but has very little to do with a study of social contexts as usually understood, but rather with "co-text." One of the arguments given by G&D runs as follows:

> Participants in conversation have the job of providing next moves to ongoing talk which demonstrate what sense they make of that talk. It is therefore possible to see how members themselves **interpret** the interaction they are engaged in without having to rely on accounts they pass on to anthropologists through interviews or an analyst's rendition of speaker's intentions. (p. 29; bold in the original)

Of course this behaviorist-sounding argument does not stand up to scrutiny. First of all, participants do not *demonstrate* what sense they make of (previous) talk. Their talk *presupposes* such understanding. It is rather the *analyst* who demonstrates that talk of participants makes sense (can be understood, accounted for, etc.) in relation to previous talk. Secondly, such an analysis is only complete when the analyst also shows *how* participants actually understand previous talk. Unfortunately, unless participants say so explicitly (which they hardly ever do in ongoing talk, but may do – of course only approximately – in later interviews), analysts do not have access to such understandings, and can at most *infer* them from talk. Similarly, analysts cannot *see* how participants interpret previous actions: like the participants themselves they can only try to make sense of them. The way participants make sense of previous talk is to interpret such talk in its context, and intentions are (sometimes even explicitly) taken to be part of that context in all those cultures that distinguish between intentional action and other forms of conduct (accidents, forced conduct, speaking in trance or in a dream, etc.). In fact, the mutual recognition of intentions has been shown to be a general property of humanity, that is, as a universal property of human interaction (Tomasello, 1999). From this passage we may conclude again that an antimentalist (interactionist) perspective on talk makes strange shortcuts, putting observational verbs such as "demonstrate" or "see" where verbs of mental acts such as presupposing, understanding or making inferences are in order, thus misrepresenting the very basis of interaction and hence of discourse.

I have dwelt in more critical detail on this introduction by G&D because it appears more a defense of interactionist conversation analysis than a systematic analysis of the notion of context on the basis of the studies in this book or other directions of research and their forerunners. The antimentalist bias is hardly helpful or necessary in a fully fledged account of the way participants construe interpretations, or show awareness, of themselves, each other, and other aspects of the communicative situation. Similarly, restricting the study of context to (face-to-face) conversation, instead of examining contexts of all possible uses of language, provides a much too limited empirical basis.

Other contributions We must be brief about the other contributions to this book, and we shall only comment on those chapters that explicitly and in some detail discuss the notion of context. I shall not therefore discuss papers that only deal with "co-text," that is, sequencing as context, or with (represented) context in stories or alternative ways of interpretation. The contribution by Schegloff (1992a) has already been discussed in the previous chapter.

Also the work on contextualization by Gumperz (1992) has been discussed before (see Chapter 3), but his paper is relevant for our discussion because it highlights what is hardly emphasized in this collection, namely the relevance of (mental) *inferences* used by language users to *interpret* contextualization cues such as intonation or paralinguistic features. Also unlike other scholars he defines contextualization as the use of cues that help to retrieve *presuppositions* and "assess what is *intended*" (my italics) (p. 230). Indeed, language users interpret what is being said and how it is being said in order not only to construe meaning, but also to understand action. To do so they need to attribute intentions to actors/speakers on the basis of the interpretation of talk and the communicative situation, which in turn is based on their shared knowledge of the world. In other words, we see that Gumperz, when dealing with interaction and conversation, is not afraid of cognition, and thus is also able to define in more detailed terms how details of talk (contextualization cues) may be interpreted in terms of properties of the communicative situation. He applies this theory to the well-known case of misunderstanding between British people from England and from India due to intonation differences.

Incidentally, this study by Gumperz has also been criticized because it ignores the fundamental question of racism involved in questions of "misunderstanding" (see, e.g., Singh, Lele and Martohardjono, 1995). This is a fundamental dimension of context missing in this collection, especially where it deals with intercultural situations (which is by definition the case when "Western" anthropologists observe and describe "non-Western" societies).

As we shall see in more detail below when we deal with the contexts of racist discourse, after the critical intervention of Boas in the early twentieth century (see Barkan, 1992), contemporary anthropology, despite its unique disciplinary experience of different peoples and cultures, has regrettably been less than active in the study of racism (see Mullings, 2005, for a critical survey).

Hanks (1992), one of the anthropologists who has written most on questions of context, provides a detailed contribution in one of his specialized areas, namely the study of deixis as applied to Maya languages, to which we shall come back below. However, it should be recalled at this point that such sophisticated studies of deixis tell us more about the situational *semantics* of talk and text, than about its contextual *pragmatics*. That is, once participants have made an interpretation of their communicative environment, as they do in their context models – including what they believe about such an interpretation by the other participants – this partly shared situation (time, place and space, participants, etc.) may become the basis for reference, pointing and bodily movements, as well as the use of deictic expressions. They explain what speakers are talking *about* when they say "I," "you," "here," "there," "today," "tomorrow," and a host of more detailed expressions in different languages, and not whether or not such expressions are more or less *appropriate* – apart from using the correct expressions to refer to specific aspects of the communicative situation. In other words, if semantic and pragmatic models overlap, language users may take advantage of the obvious presence of shared context features so as to use the practical shortcut expressions of deixis.

Duranti (1992b) deals with "respect words" (RWs) used in hierarchical Samoan society, a topic that obviously invites contextual analysis because such words are typically "associated with" people with higher status, in this case orators and chiefs. The vague use "associated with" is intentional, because these words are used not just when addressing people of high rank, but also when speaking about them (so-called "referent honorifics"), for instance during formal meetings (*fono*). This touches again on the tricky problem of whether things or people talked *about* should also somehow enter the account of context. RWs are not words used to refer to, or speak about, people themselves, but words that may refer to their attributes, such as verbs denoting their actions, or the house in which they live. Hilariously, in a discussion in the presence of several chiefs, Duranti – while making field notes – is called a "boy" by his host so as to lower his status in the presence of a chief who had just ironically called him "Alexander the Great" and who may object to such note taking – an objection that might, as Duranti writes, have cost him his dissertation.

Duranti shows that the use of these terms is not simply and straightforwardly defined by the rank of the referent or the addressee, but allows subtle lowering and heightening of rank by the use of appropriate vocabulary, for

instance in order to get things done. As is the case for our alternate use of, say, "Mary" and "Dr. Johnson," for instance during a formal congress, when speaking to her as a colleague or friend or when announcing her talk, respectively, it depends on how the situation is defined. This also confirms our main point that it is not social situations as such that influence talk, but the way participants construe them, including the specific goals of the ongoing contribution.

Duranti stresses that the use of certain RWs may itself help define the context or even *be* the context (p. 87). That not only context controls discourse, but vice versa also discourse controls context is a well-known thesis in many context studies, but we have shown that such a shortcut formulation is simply too vague, and as such misguided while crucially omitting interpretation. It should be emphasized, again, that only *people* (participants) constitute contexts, not situations or talk. They do so both as speakers and as hearers by interpreting (construing) the now relevant properties of communicative situations, including previous turns at talk (or sentence in a text). Thus, it is not the RWs in Samoan that create contexts, but the users interpreting their contextualized usage, possibly including inferences about the goals or intentions of the speakers.

It is also in this way that higher ranking addressees will infer that the use of RWs in a specific situation is not merely a question of respect, but maybe also a way of flattering or a move in a strategy of persuasion. In fact, it is also in this way that the relations of power inherent in the hierarchical structure of Samoan society are being managed in everyday life.

Lindstrom (1992) also writes about discourse in the South Pacific, this time from Tanna (Vanuatu), using an example of a fierce dispute between a chief and his son. The author stresses that in order to understand what is going on we also need to understand the "cultural horizon" – a metaphor often used instead of context, for instance in the phenomenological notion of "horizon of expectations" (*Erwartungshorizont*). The question is, according to the author, what exactly we need to select of that vast cultural background. More than many other scholars in ethnography, he focuses on power, and does so within a Foucauldian perspective. Contexts are thus defined as a "field of power relations," in which some participants may speak, and some participants may formulate the truth. Instead of defining context as a neutral schema of contextual categories (as proposed by Hymes), Lindstrom emphasizes the larger "order of discourse" determining the local relations of power (pp. 103–104). He thus arrives at the following definition of context:

> Let's define the context of talk to be sets of discursive procedures and conditions that organize the qualifications and opportunities of speakers to make statements, and that establish conditions under which those statements are heard as authentic or true. (p. 104)

This sounds very Foucauldian indeed, and there is no doubt that power is an important dimension of many contexts, as we have seen in the previous chapter. But such a definition does not exactly tell us much more about contexts than that they are conditions for specific kinds of power talk. Obviously, such a very general and abstract characterization is not only very vague, but also does not apply to the many everyday situations, also on Tanna, which have nothing to do with power. As we have seen with Wittgenstein, and now also with the inspiration by Foucault, philosophers do not always tell us the details of the procedures we are interested in, but only some very abstract and general constraints.

Within a broader theoretical perspective, Cicourel (1992), always a truly independent mind and interested in multidisciplinary approaches, criticizes the limitation of analysis to narrow, local or sequential contexts, and to the use of simple conversations in our own culture, as was the case in much early CA. He pleads for the inclusion of "broader" contextual analyses, featuring an account of the framing of talk by institutional settings, and he applies such a perspective in a study of a conversation among physicians in a hospital. He describes this setting in some detail, e.g., to be able to explain how doctors' talk can be understood. Indeed, without knowing about the institutional roles of the speakers as different kinds of specialists, and about their specialized knowledge, analysts can hardly make more sense of this exchange than some basic observations on sequencing. Note though that many of Cicourel's observations deal with (semantic) meaning and understanding – which of course needs local and general knowledge about (this) hospital and medicine – and not only with the pragmatic dimensions of contexts. That is, the content and style of the doctors' conversation also index their role as specialists treating patients and the way they refer to such patients ("the eye lady"), that is, the way they construe themselves and the others, their current goals, and so on.

In his brief theoretical paper, Kendon (1992) summarizes some of his earlier work on the important role of spatial arrangements in conversational (and other) interactions. Referring to Goffman's notions of various "tracks" in conversations (Goffman, 1974), he shows that tracks that usually are not explicitly attended to by the participants (and by analysts), such as body posture, distance, and so on, have an important "framing" influence on various aspects of talk, for instance by making manifest intentions of speakers.

Finally, Ochs (1992) examines the way gender is indexed in talk, one of the major topics in contemporary linguistic anthropology and various directions of feminist and discourse studies – after earlier, correlational studies of the role of gender in sociolinguistics. She warns that this does not mean a straightforward mapping from linguistic form to social meaning of gender,

but requires the mediation and constitution of pragmatic stances and other social activities (pp. 336–337). Ideologically based gender hierarchies are socialized, sustained and transformed through talk, and she shows this by a comparison of "mothering" in the USA and Western Samoa. After a brief summary of other work on indexing and the linguistic enactment of social meaning, she examines more closely how gender is indexed. She recalls first that, outside the lexicon (e.g., pronouns), there are very few exclusive gender features of language use, but at most some gendered preferences, e.g., of pitch and pronunciation. She therefore focuses on linguistic features that are constitutive of gender meanings, such as the use of "coarse" and "refined" expressions in Japanese. Focusing on activities and situations, she thus reviews work on gendered differences of politeness and in the participation in formal interactions, on the one hand, and family interactions, on the other – thereby implying that men or women are more or less experts in such situations, and that such may also be observed in their language use. She adds that some of these earlier findings, e.g., that women tend to be more polite than men, are not borne out by her own research in Madagascar and Samoa. In the current paper she summarizes earlier work on "language socialization" in Western Samoa: how children get socialized "in" and "by" language. She concludes that there are important cultural differences in socialization. Thus, whereas in the USA mothers tend to accommodate to children (e.g., by using simplified language and unidirectional praise), in Samoa children are expected to accommodate to their mothers. Such differences also imply differences in the social position of women and mothers, assumed to be more prestigious in Samoa. At the same time this research shows how ideologically based social hierarchies not only influence interaction and talk, but also are being reproduced (and possibly challenged) by them.

William Hanks One anthropologist who has systematically paid attention to properties of context (including indexicality, genres and related issues) is William Hanks, whose academic background is not limited to the USA, but also includes studies in Paris and Madrid, whereas his interests also extend to linguistics, literary studies and other disciplines. His fieldwork focuses on communicative practices of Maya speakers in Yucatan. In this brief review I shall focus on his theoretical writings on context, and largely ignore his extensive contributions to the use of deictic expressions, which I think belong to a theory of situational semantics rather than to contextual pragmatics, as explained above.

His book *Language and Communicative Practices* (Hanks, 1996) shows his broad interests and international studies, because it deals with such diverse theoretical topics as the work of Saussure, Peirce, Bloomfield, Chomsky, Vološinov, Rommetveit, the Prague School, Schutz, Merleau-Ponty, Austin,

Searle, Grice, Ingarden. He thus proceeds from an introduction to the "system" of language in modern linguistics to the study of language "use" (*parole*, performance), speech acts and contexts. The goal of the book is to study "how meaning happens through speech and silence, bodies and minds" (p. 5), and his main interest is to examine how such meaning depends on the *situation*, a notion for which he also refers to Barwise and Perry in the USA and Ducrot in France, theorists seldom referred to in interactional studies. We have seen Hanks' general attitude towards the study of context in the quote at the beginning of this chapter: context is virtually endless. Of phenomenologists such as Vološinov, Rommetveit, Ingarden and Schutz, he emphasizes the contextual role of the "horizon" of possible meanings and the stock of commonsense knowledge, which, however, may change depending on the purposes at hand (p. 166). And whatever contexts may be, they are a cultural phenomenon, while related to the beliefs and values of the speakers. Within the framework of a discussion of cultural variation and linguistic relativity and the work of Boas, Sapir and Whorf and more recent advances (e.g., by Lucy), he examines not (only) how perception depends on our (given, formal) grammar, but rather how (also historically) specific linguistic categories, and especially deictic expressions, may depend on the (different) experiences and practices of language users. The relevance of a study of indexical-referential terms for the study of context is found in the fact that they systematically categorize utterance situations (p. 178). For instance, in Maya locative deictics distinguish between spatially inclusive and exclusive relations, and regional from punctual locations. These forms are also related to different functions of language, such as phatic, expressive or referential functions, as we also know from such English expressions as *There you are!* But despite the complexity of the various conditions on the use of deictics, they are in fact very systematic: they involve the relations between the participants (such as mutual access and perceptibility) and between participants and the object of reference. Interestingly, there are more symmetric than asymmetric deictics, that is, languages appear to give advantage to acts of reference in which people share the same conceptual or perceptual vantage point, and Hanks concludes that "context is based on the intersection of the perspectives of the participants" (p. 183). The more you have in common, the more deictic expressions can be used. No wonder also that they are so common in everyday talk, where indeed people have so much (knowledge, experiences, shared space, etc.) in common. From there, Hanks jumps to other ways language may variously mediate experiences: discourse styles, genres and verbal repertoires, referring, e.g., to the Prague literary structuralists, also seldom referred to in interactionist studies (pp. 184ff.). Reflexivity is examined in the more general terms of the metalinguistic (and even ideological) activities of language users thinking and speaking about their own language

use, if only through the myriad of terms that denote speech acts, genres or verbal activities.

What is true for language – as dependent on people's experiences and activities – is also true for speakers, which need to be differentiated, as did Goffman with the notions of footing and participation structures. That is, language users in various production roles also have awareness about themselves as such. At this point, Hanks shares the criticism (pp. 213ff.) of the limitations to face-to-face talk and ongoing (present, experiential) participation in much conversational and in general phenomenological approaches, a problem we also signaled above. Thus, Hanks moves beyond participation structures to the whole community, to meanings defined also in terms of the general division of labor in such a community, in which there is uneven distribution of knowledge. Instead of individual cognition, we thus enter the field of social cognition, and instead of speakers having access to discourse we have occupants of social positions through which discourse circulates (p. 218). This poses the problem, fundamental to context analysis, of what the (speech or other) *communities* are to which participants belong. Belonging to different communities may involve miscommunication. As also Gumperz has shown, people need to know not only the language of a community but also subtle contextualization cues such as intonation. Hanks discusses several definitions of communities, either as a group with a shared code or repertoire, or independently of language as a social structure, or as a community of practice, as we saw in the previous chapter. He prefers the last option, because it defines language use and variation in terms of a more dynamic approach, based on a joint project and shared activities.

On the basis of this theoretical framework he not only discusses concrete examples of a Maya conversation, and various theories of language, but finally also offers one major product of a theory of context: a theory of communicative practices or genres. Speech, in general, is thus first of all defined as a form of the practical "engagement in the world" (p. 236), which requires that language users ongoingly confront the emergent features of a situation. He then refers to Bourdieu's notions of "field" and "habitus," which Hanks defines in terms of "general social conditions of practice," on the one hand, and "routine modes of perception," on the other hand. Social actors possess an "immense stock of sedimented social knowledge in the form of unreflected habits and commonsense perceptions" (p. 238). Hanks emphasizes the value of the notion of habitus, because it highlights the relevance of habitual action, involves both linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects of practice, and because it is dispositional, and hence related to the perspective of the participants. And whereas such habitus might allow much freedom of action, practices are constrained by the positions and other social constraints of fields. Genres are a key part of such habitus, because as modes

of practice they reflect the enduring dispositions to perceive the world in different ways.

Unfortunately, these explications by Hanks also reflect much of the vagueness of Bourdieu's concepts and terminology. If habitus is based on habituation, does this mean that it cannot be acquired in a single or a few experiences, as is the case for many abilities? Also we do not know what exactly "dispositions" are; they seem to be rather circular, because they include the notion of the practice in its very definition of the practice. How are they different from sociocultural knowledge of routine actions, as we know it from anthropology and the other social sciences, such as the well-known notion of *script* (Schank and Abelson, 1977)? How is it different from the notion of attitude in social psychology? Is it personal or social? And if it is social, how can a collectivity have a "disposition" to act? And so on. These are notions that generate more problems than they resolve until they are clearly defined and related to other notions in the theory of language, action, interaction and cognition. If "habitus" combines social knowledge about action with personal habits, then they may very well be accounted for in terms of generalized (spatiotemporally abstracted) mental models, which would also account for "habitual contexts." The definition of genres as forms of habitus is thus hardly more explicit, and Hanks' brief characterization of genres does not need the notion of habitus at all.

In his larger article on Bourdieu, Hanks (2005) emphasizes that habitus are not rules or mental representations, but *embodied* dispositions and schemas. Although embodiment and body space are prominent notions in Hanks' theory of deixis, one may wonder where and how "dispositions" or "schemas" are located in the body if not in the brain-mind. The problem with this kind of position is that it does not provide more or less explicit alternatives but has recourse to mysterious forms of "embodiment," where none are necessary. Of course people use their bodies to communicate and interact, as they also use their vocal cords, tongue, lips, etc., as well as their arms, hands and head, but would we therefore want to reformulate linguistics in terms of "enmouthed" practices? And we also know that if something is wrong with our brain, forms of "embodiment" will be as impaired as our speech. In other words, both contemporary cognitive science as well as Occam's razor tell us not to invent mysterious entities and forces that can easily be explained in standard theories. Which does not mean that contemporary linguistics, discourse and conversation analysis should not pay much more attention to all the non-verbal (bodily, etc.) tracks of interaction and communication, especially also to account for deictics and their expression not only in words, but also in gestures, pointing, body orientation, and so on.

We see how throughout his 1996 book Hanks introduces various theories, concepts and dimensions of context and its relations with language as system

and language as use and performance. More than other theorists he integrates classical with modern research, for instance phenomenology and situation semantics, and both North American and European scholars, structuralism with phenomenology, and text analysis with interaction analysis. He integrates such approaches in a broad theory of communicative practices, in which he highlights not only language forms such as deictic expressions, but also the many dimensions of the context such as the way people in different cultures (such as the Maya in Yucatan) organize their interactional and referential space, as well as the many dimensions of context related to their bodies. Apart from space and (more briefly) participant roles, he does not examine the many other aspects of contexts, such as other aspects of Setting, power relations between participants, goals and plans, and the many aspects of social cognition. He refers to "ideologies," but only briefly in terms of metalinguistic awareness, and not as belief systems of groups. More generally, the "broader" context of groups, communities, power and their shared belief systems are discussed less in this approach to context – and in that respect his references to European research are rather classical, referring more to phenomenology and structuralism than to critical theories, from Gramsci to Stuart Hall and Habermas, among many other contemporary authors who could have contributed to the more global analysis of context. In this respect, and despite his European orientation, Hanks shares the rather "apolitical" orientation of much contemporary ethnography in the USA.

In his later collection, *Intertexts*, Hanks (2000) continues his explorations of language and context, again on the basis of what he calls his "experiential empiricism" of the real world of Maya communicative practices – and what these mean for the Yucatec actors themselves. Hence also the need, often ignored elsewhere, to explore their intentions and motivations (p. 4). Again citing Merleau-Ponty, he stresses the role of the body as the mediation between society and the individual: body space and the deictic field both have dynamic schematic structure, a self-awareness *in* the body that is an alternative to mental representations, although Hanks emphasizes that this does not mean that deixis is not based on cognitive schemas. For Maya speakers, thus, the spatial coordinates of body orientation also have moral evaluation: for the Maya the left and the back are bad, as is down, and the right and the (visible) front are good, as is up, He might have added that the same is true in European languages (the left is "sinister" and the right is "right," and anything "behind my back" is unknown and suspicious.). On another contextual dimension, we find the basic status asymmetries we know from many cultures, although with many local intricacies: elder is superior to younger, and male is superior to female in Maya households. Thus, only superiors have access to the asymmetric speech event of "bawling out" (*k'eyik*) others – related to the deictic space: he may speak "down" to

someone, and both in front of and behind someone's back. The rest of the chapters in this book deal with metalinguistic talk and awareness of such deictic expressions and with aspects of text analysis, Maya ritual practices and language and discourse in colonial Yucatan. Hanks thus combines his pragmatic-semantic approach to deictics with historical, literary and discourse analytical issues.

Hanks is also the author of the entry on "Communicative context" in the *Elsevier Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (2006), in which he begins by highlighting the importance of the current focus on context in several disciplines, "both as a constraining factor and as a product of discourse." Some of these approaches, such as speech act theory, relevance theory, psycholinguistics and conversation analysis are said to show a commitment to "methodological individualism." He defines these approaches as prioritizing the "individual over the collective, and the reduction of social structures to individual behaviors," as a local, emergent concomitant of talk. Other directions focus on global and durable contexts, that is, on the social and historical scope of context, as is the case in social theory and history, as is also the case for the notion of "discourse formation" of Foucault or language "markets" of Bourdieu. Linguistic anthropology integrates these individual and collective approaches, combining detailed analysis of local facts with the study of global language ideologies.

The fundamental role of context is its role in the production of discourse meaning. It is basically undefined: we do not know what its components are, and if they will ever be detailed enough. Contexts have two major dimensions: *emergence* in verbally mediated activity, interaction and co-presence, and *embedding* in broader frameworks.

Referring also to Schutz's and to Goffman's definition of situation (see Chapter 3), Hanks defines emergence as the context of situation, of interaction between co-present participants. But more is needed than bodily present participants, such as relevance and the semiotic "demonstrative field," relevant for the use of deictic expressions. Hanks then pays detailed attention to the problem of how such locally situated discourses can be embedded in more global ones that are neither discourse-based nor radial. Like Bourdieu, he uses the term "social field" for such a more global context, featuring collectivities such as organizations, communities or classes, as well as institutions such as universities, hospitals and courtrooms. A social field puts constraints of access to participant roles. And in the same way as there are specific relations of variable engagements between participants in the local context, we also may find such relations between modes of occupancy of positions at the global level. One other issue Hanks deals with is that of social vs. individual control over discourse and interaction. As is the case with many interactionists, he seems to reject individual intentions – because the subject

itself is already a social production – but at the end of the article he does recognize intentionality anyway.

As may be expected, the notion of social field also leads to the discussion of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, already dealt with above. At this point, apart from other dimensions (such as Aristotelian hexis), habits and cultural routines are emphasized, including specific ways to show or move our body, as well as the notion (part of Panofsky's definition of habitus) of "mental habits that regulate acts." This is an unexpected cognitive turn in the theoretical framework, and possibly offers the basis of individual intentions of (habitual) action, because even our daily routines can only be engaged in when we decide to (intend to) do so, more or less consciously. Of course, what we then need – and already have in part – is a decent cognitive theory of action and interaction combining intentions (mental models) with the socially shared knowledge we acquire both in socialization as well as through subsequent (other) forms of discursive interaction (e.g., with the mass media). Unfortunately, apart from this aspect of habitus, the other dimensions remain a strange mélange of notions, which on the one hand appear mental (dispositions), on the other hand "material" (bodily) such as bodily habits, and then combined with evaluation. As suggested before, with notions such as "habitus" we have one of these fashionable scholarly notions that owe their success more to their mantra-like vagueness than to their contributions to systematic knowledge. In any case, it does not seem to provide much insight to the concept of context. Unless they are a fancy term for good old (but discredited) attitudes in social psychology, which also have evaluative elements, and also may be seen as some kind of predisposition to act, and – in another, literal sense – also say something about body position.

Finally, Hanks lists the processes through which contexts occur, involving intentionality (as representation and purpose), contextualization and inferences, processes that are related to semiosis. Unfortunately, it is not clear how exactly these processes define, shape, form or otherwise explain context and its relation to discourse. Besides intentional dimensions, he writes, there are also those that are not intentional, such as when I am placed in some social position, whether I want it or not, e.g., as a citizen.

If we now ask whether a student after reading this encyclopedia entry knows what context is, I would bet that she would be more or less in the same position as Hanks describing himself at the beginning of this chapter: confused. It is fine to have doubts, and it is normal not to know all, but accumulated over the last decades we are able to piece together some more or less explicit properties of contexts, an approximate framework for further reading and research that goes beyond an essay at making sense of elusive notions such as habitus. One can only agree with Hanks that anthropology usually does, and also now should integrate the various levels or approaches, between

(macro) societal analyses of global contexts and local micro analyses of interaction. The notions of "emergence" and "embedding" are useful didactic metaphors, but they are metaphors not *theories* of the relations between discourse and local and global contexts. True, these theories are complex, but more than any other discipline anthropology has the means and the opportunity (and the rich field data) to produce such a theory that combines personal with social cognition, local interactional situations with societal and cultural structures.

To sum up, and put very simply, contexts are daily experiences, definitions (interpretations) of the daily situations in which we participate by our interaction and discourse. As such they are as unique as our experiences, whether these are routine or revolutionary. But they are firmly represented by means of the conceptual building blocks we have learned from our group, society or culture, and hence they become experiences that may be partly shared, and hence the basis for mutual comprehension. These contexts control both how we speak or write, and how we understand discourse. This basic idea can easily be formulated in a much more sophisticated way in the theoretical frameworks of current anthropology. More specifically, such an account should also show how different societies in the world have developed different ways of understanding situations, and hence form contexts, and show how such different contexts also control discourse in different ways.

Racist discourse and context

Let me finally summarize some results from my own major project, started in 1981, dealing with structures and functions of racist discourse in various countries in Western Europe, the USA and Latin America (for detail and further references, see, e.g., Van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993a, 2003a, 2005b, 2007; Wodak and Van Dijk, 2000). More specifically, I shall summarize some results that deal with the contexts of these discourses, featuring most prominently the (European) ethnicity of the speakers and the non-European ethnicity of the people they speak or write about.

Together with age, gender and class, ethnicity (or "race") is a primary dimension of the everyday experiences of group members in multi-ethnic societies. These experiences are represented in mental models organized by underlying ideologically based beliefs shared by other members of the ingroup, both about themselves, as well as about the Others. Under special social conditions, such beliefs tend to polarize between positive evaluations of the ingroup and negative evaluations (prejudices) about the outgroup, a well-known intergroup phenomenon, extensively documented in social psychology (among many other publications, see, e.g., Tajfel, 1981, 1982; Augoustinos, 2001).

Everyday (real or virtual) experiences with members of the outgroup may similarly be negatively biased, and form the basis of the typical everyday stories, news reports and other discourses we find in multi-ethnic societies. Although such polarized representations and stories are a rather general phenomenon of human intergroup relations, they are not simply properties of universal social cognition, but rooted in social structure, for instance in relations of power. In everyday life, they serve as the sociocognitive basis of social practices of discrimination of dominated group members by dominant group members. Historically, this has especially been the case in societies where "white" Europeans dominate non-European groups, and such practices have given rise to complex social systems of ethnically or "racially" based domination and inequality we call "racism" (among many publications, see, e.g., Essed, 1991; Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986; Goldberg and Solomos, 2002).

The role of discourse in the reproduction of racism

Discourse plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of such systems of racism (Van Dijk, 1993a; Wodak and Reisigl, 1999; Reisigl and Wodak, 2000, 2001). On the one hand, *intergroup* text and talk are social practices like others that may discriminate against dominated Others, for instance by racist insults, accusations, lacking politeness and respect, and many other ways addressees may be problematized, inferiorized, marginalized or excluded in everyday life (Essed, 1991). On the other hand, *intragroup* discourse among dominant group members may express, form and confirm underlying racist opinions and ideologies. And since racist ideologies in turn control racist discrimination, discourse is a crucial interface in the reproduction of systems of racism.

Although this is, in a nutshell, a fundamental component of a theory of racist discourse and domination, there is still an important dimension missing (and also under-analyzed) in my earlier work on racism and discourse: *context*.

Dominant group members do not simply go around expressing racist opinions in any discourse or communicative situation. This depends on many aspects of the communicative situation: whether they are speaking with in-group or outgroup members, the assumed beliefs of the addressees, the goals of the text or talk, and so on. Also, racist beliefs are not homogeneously distributed in society. There is much variation, and social groups, such as political parties, may be formed that specifically develop and promote racist – or indeed, antiracist – ideologies. This means that, unless people are talking to people whose ideologies they know, dominant group members are not always sure whether recipients share their ideology. And since in many contemporary societies explicit forms of discrimination and verbal abuse are illegal or

politically incorrect, blatantly racist discourse is usually limited to language use by members of radical racist groups, and mitigated, hedged or avoided in other communicative situations.

In other words, in order to be able to speak appropriately ("politically correctly," etc.) about the Others in many Western societies today, language users need to analyze communicative situations according to such constraints. That is, they need to be aware not only of their own knowledge and beliefs about Others, but especially also of those of their recipients. This means that if they do not know or cannot guess the ideologies of the recipients, they will either avoid such "taboo" topics in the first place, or talk negatively about Others in a hedged way.

The stereotypical formula implementing the constraints of such context models in discourse is the disclaimer of the apparent denial: "I am not a racist, but . . . " Interactionally, such disclaimers have several functions. On the one hand they express, in the first part of the disclaimer, the typical positive opinions about Self or the ingroup (or the attempt to avoid a negative impression, see Arkin, 1981), but at the same time they express, in the second and following parts, the prejudiced opinions about the outgroup.

Of course, members need not have only prejudiced beliefs about outgroup members, but may be more ambivalent, combining neutral and some negative beliefs about some attributed properties of the Others, for instance their religion or their ways of dressing – as we know from the debate on the use of the *hijab* by Muslim women in several European countries. This means that models of experience and hence stories (or news reports) may also exhibit such ambivalent beliefs (Billig, 1988). However, in that case these are not typically expressed in disclaimers, but rather in stories that have both negative and neutral (or positive) topics.

We see that the study of racist text and talk should not be limited to the expression of explicitly racist opinions of "racist" ingroup members. In fact, most public discourse today on immigrants, minorities or similar outgroup members in Europe and the Americas is seldom explicitly racist. As is the case for sexist discourse and gender inequalities, racist domination is also implemented in many implicit, indirect, subtle or hedged ways. For instance, instead of directly expressing opinions on African Americans in the USA, white US citizens may use code words such as the "inner city" or "welfare mothers." However, whatever the "underlying" personal opinions or socially shared attitudes or ideologies about the Others, crucial for a systematic analysis of text and talk is an analysis of the way the dominant group define the communicative situation in their context models. Besides the assumed beliefs of the recipients, such contexts may feature whether the situation is public or private, formal or informal, the aims and purposes of the speaker, and so on.

The question is then: How do speakers know the ethnic beliefs of the recipients, so that they are able to form the appropriate context model? One general strategy has been discussed in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 3), and applies for all Common Ground information: if the recipient is known or believed to be a member of the same group or community, then presuppose they share the same beliefs as the speaker. For sociocultural knowledge this is routine, while such knowledge is shared by all competent members of the cultural community. For ethnic beliefs, however, this is not the case, given the ideological variation of groups within the same community. Hence, such knowledge about the beliefs of recipients is limited first of all to all people we know personally (family members, friends, colleagues, etc.), and secondly to members of the same ideological group, for instance a political party. In other situations, such assumptions must be derived from previous experiences or ongoing talk of the other participant(s), contributing to the formation of the appropriate model-fragment of the dynamic context.

When initiating topics in conversations about "foreigners" or "immigrants," for instance in Western Europe, first expressions of a speaker may be noncommittal until other participants explicitly express or indirectly index negative opinions about "foreigners," so that the context model of the speaker can be adapted to the ideology of the recipient and the speaker will feel legitimated to join the participant(s) in negative talk about "foreigners."

We see that such a definition of the situation may require subtle strategies to get to know the ethnic opinions or ideologies of the other participants. Next, it will depend on other aspects of the communicative situation and on whether prejudiced opinions are being expressed or not.

Obviously, a monitored, public event such as a parliamentary debate will be defined quite differently from a personal conversation with a stranger on the train. That is, besides the overall goals of expressing ethnic beliefs, or wanting to persuade recipients, speakers constantly need to be engaged in strategies of face keeping and positive self-presentation. This may mean that in all situations where a threat to one's face may result – whether with strangers or friends – they may express their ethnic opinions in a hedged way in societies with official non-racist norms.

We see that context models control the production and comprehension of racist discourse in complex and subtle ways, for instance as part of combined general strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Indeed, the "same" expression may be racist in one communicative situation, and be antiracist in another.

The role of the elites

There are, however, other contextual conditions – apart from private or public, formal or informal situations, or the image of the speakers – namely

the status or the power of the speakers. Thus, we have found in many projects on racism and discourse and on the basis of the analysis of thousands of news reports, conversations, parliamentary debates, textbooks, and so on, that the *elites* play a special role in the reproduction of racism. Specifically concerned about their public face, the elites generally tend to deny their racism and to systematically blame others – typically "uneducated" people in popular neighborhoods (Van Dijk, 1992).

Similarly, anti-immigration policies in European parliament are typically defended in populist terms: as what the "people" want (Van Dijk, 1993a; Wodak and Van Dijk, 2000). Yet, since racist ideologies are not innate and need to be learned through public discourse, and the elites are those who control such discourse, e.g., in politics, media, education and scholarship, they are the ones who, collectively, are responsible for those public discourses whose "messages" are used to form or confirm ethnic prejudices.

Research on racist discourse in Europe and the Americas confirms this overall result: whether or not supported by the "public at large," the elites give the "bad example" by pre-formulating the information or the ideas on which the ethnic prejudices are based. Given the contextual constraints mentioned above, such formulations will usually be hedged, indirect or implicit, except by members of extremist racist parties, organizations or media – which are called the official "racists."

But, in order to protect the country against such "extremists," some of their ideas need to be expressed and implemented in a less extreme way, lest the "people" massively vote or follow such organizations. This is exactly what has happened over the last decades in Europe: mainstream parties, and not only the conservative ones, increasingly adopted beliefs and policies that earlier were typical of the extreme right. Such a general movement also means that the dominant norms and values are slowly changing, and "being against immigrants (Muslims, etc.)" is thus increasingly less taboo. This also influences the context models, so that public discourse and therefore private discourse are also becoming less subtle and indirect, and more open and blatant.

Contextual constraints affect all levels and dimensions of text and talk. Given the topic of "immigration" ("minorities," etc.), what has been called implicit, indirect or hedged discourse may be implemented in many ways. The overall tendency may be that personal, private talk with known people of the same ideological group will typically give rise to the most explicit forms of racist abuse, whereas indirectness and hedging characterizes other contexts. Such ideological "doing delicacy" may be implemented, more or less consciously, in many ways, such as:

- Avoiding or changing topics to more "neutral" ones
- Disclaimers: apparent denials, concessions, empathy, etc.

- "Doing ignorance": "I don't know, but . . . "
- Saying occasional "positive" things about the Others
- Less negative lexical expressions, mitigations, euphemisms
- Hedges: "sort of," "some," "a bit," etc.
- Modalities: "maybe," "possibly," etc.
- "Downtoning" or making talk intimate: whispering, close by, etc.
- Hesitation phenomena, false starts, etc.
- Avoiding generalizations "Of course, they are not all like that, but . . . "
- Storytelling about negative personal experiences as "objective" proof
- Authoritative proof (e.g., media reports) as a basis for negative beliefs about others
- Argumentation showing the rationality of the opinions.

Here are some typical examples given in informal interviews in Amsterdam in the early 1980s with people in popular neighborhoods, interviewed by students, usually in their own homes, and with the general initial topic of life in the neighborhood:

(1) (Van Dijk, 1984: 65)
   1. A: Did you ever have an unpleasant experience?
   2. B: I have nothing against foreigners. But their attitude is scary.
   3. You are no longer free here. You have to be careful.

(2) (Van Dijk, 1984: 65)
   1. It is nice, so many different people here.
   2. **But**, there are limits to that.
   3. There are many Dutch people who have no job.

(3) (Van Dijk, 1984: 85)
   1. A: Can you tell me about your experiences?
   2. B: Yes, uh, what shall I tell you.
   3. They **probably** don't know how to use a tap.

(4) (Van Dijk, 1984: 86)
   1. You know, slaughtering those sheep, it's one of those **sad things**.

(5) Van Dijk, 1984: 135)
   1. (. . .) among all kinds of nationalities [sigh]
   2. Well, uhh, I don't mind it, but uh
   3. I I do find it a shame that it very uh
   4. **I am afraid that** in this neighborhood
   5. it is getting a bit the upper hand, you know that.

Despite the very approximate transcript and translation, these interviews show, in the bold fragments, the familiar disclaimers in (1.2), (2.1–2) and (5.2–3), an initial positive evaluation in (2.1), an "objective" argument in (2.3), hesitations in (3.2) and (5.2–3), a mitigation in (4.1) and (5.4), and a modal expression in (3.3) – all expressions geared towards toning down negative ethnic opinions and avoiding a bad ("racist") impression.

The following excerpts are taken from similar interviews held in various neighborhoods in San Diego in 1985, again in very much simplified transcripts:

(6) (Van Dijk, 1987: 92)
1. I would put up one HECK of a battle if my daughter decided
2. to marry Black (...) and it doesn't have to do with
3. **superiority or anything else**, it's just too vast a difference
4. for me to be able to cross over.

(7) (Van Dijk, 1987: 93)
1. The husband is the only one who speaks English.
2. And they have a little boy who speaks English,
3. cause he goes to school now.
4. But the mother ... the Mexican gentlemen always seem to
5. keep their wives **incommunicado**.
6. I suppose they have a good reason.

(8) (Van Dijk, 1987: 95)
1. **It sounds prejudiced, but** I think if students only use English...

These Californian examples also show the familiar mitigation and self-presentation phenomena, such as the disclaimer (apparent denial) in (6.2–3), the mock Spanish mitigation in (7.5), the explanation in (7.6) and the disclaimer (apparent concession) in (8.1).

Such forms of impression management are not limited to informal situations. On the contrary, specifically in recorded, public discourse, such as parliamentary debates, such interactional management is crucial. Here are a few examples, from Europe and the Americas, the first two examples from the United Kingdom and Spain:

(9) (Jones, 2000: 285)
1. I must first make it plain that this Government and this country have
2. a justifiable reputation for welcoming to our shores genuine asylum
3. seekers escaping persecution and torture. But the escalating number
4. of economic and bogus asylum seekers who have here (...)
(British parliament, Mr. Simon Burns, Conservative, March 5, 1997, Hansard C856.)

(10) (Van Dijk, 2005b: 29)
1. (...) este gobierno no quiere caracterizarse precisamente (...) por
2. lo que viene a significar un discurso desde la intolerancia
(Mr. Mayor Oreja, Minister of the Interior, *Cortes*, July 1996, p. 868.)
[(...) this government does not exactly want to characterize itself (...) as something that could come to suggest discourse coming from intolerance (...)]

Although these examples need much more detailed analysis (which I give in the original publications), my focus here is only on contextual indexing in these examples. First of all, the style of the examples is markedly formal,

as may be expected in (most) parliamentary debates, as we also have seen for the example of the speech of Tony Blair in *Discourse and Context* (Chapter 1), and as we shall see in much more detail in Chapter 5). Lexical selection ("justifiable reputation") and the metonymy ("welcoming to our shores") in the example of the British parliament, are characteristic examples. More specifically, I am here interested in the strategy of positive self-presentation, protecting face, such as the denial of racism, disclaimers, and so on. Thus, in (9), we find the usual nationalist self-glorification that characterizes most debates on immigration or minorities, both in Europe and in the Americas, typically at the beginning of the debate. Before proposing limitations on the rights of immigrants, the democratic and hospitable reputation of the country is emphasized – in this case specifically applied to the current (Conservative) government. The format here is not of a denial of racism, as does Minister Mayor Oreja in a very convoluted way in example (10) (also applied to his own party), but a positive self-evaluation. Secondly, in the same example, the proposed negative measures are argued for in terms of economic pressures (the usual numbers game argument), and hence sound "objective" and hence not, or less, racist: it is not our fault, but an economic necessity.

Here is an even more explicit example:

(11) (Van Dijk, 1993a: 82)
1. We are neither racist nor xenophobic.
2. Our aim is only that, quite naturally, there be a hierarchy,
3. because we are dealing with France,
4. and France is the country of the French.
(French Assemblée Nationale, Mr. Jean-Marie Le Pen, July 7, 1986, p. 3064.)

This example from the speech of the leader of the racist *Front National* in France, Le Pen, displays the classical form of racism denial as the first pair part of a disclaimer, only to confirm the racist ("natural," "hierarchical") and nationalist ("France," "French") ideology in the second part. Note that even Le Pen, who hardly has qualms about his racist stance (which he redefines as nationalism), feels he needs to deny that his party is racist or xenophobic. Note the political "we" here standing for the contextually relevant ingroup: the *Front National*.

The following example from the USA is from the debate on the Kennedy Bill on civil rights, initially vetoed by the then president, George Bush Sr.

(12) (Van Dijk, 1993a: 83)
1. Well, now can we also agree this afternoon that
2. you can have different philosophies about
3. how to achieve through law civil rights and equal opportunities for
4. everybody without somehow being anti-civil-rights

5. or being a racist or something like that.
   (Mr. Gunderson, US House of Representatives, August 2, 1990, H6781.)

In this example we see that civil rights debates in the USA are more sophisticated than in Europe in the sense that for many years there have been arguments on different aspects of laws protecting minorities, and especially African Americans against discrimination, notably also in employment. The Republican Party obviously opposes any law that curtails the freedom of enterprise, so also this civil rights bill, and it is not surprising that President Bush Sr. initially vetoed the Bill for being a "quota" Bill. This is in a nutshell the global political background of this debate and this fragment, and essential for its (political) understanding. In this case, there is not just the classical denial of racism, nor a positive self-presentation (as elsewhere in this debate, especially at the beginning – note that this debate coincided with the beginning of the Gulf War), but only a plea of diversity, which is a primary value also of the Left and especially those in favor of more civil rights laws. That is, Mr. Gunderson explicitly formulates in more general terms that certain norms of debate must be respected, but of course implicitly he is claiming that his (or their) philosophy should not be construed as racist or anti-civil rights, and hence an anticipatory move to protect himself against such accusations, as in normal disclaimers. Note also the deictic pronoun *we* in (12.1), which in this case does not refer to the ingroup of the Republican Party, but rather to the other ingroup, namely the Members of the House of Representatives. The initial reference to such ingroup agreement is a reminder of, and hence presupposes, the alleged ingroup norm of debates on civil rights (namely not to accuse the other of racism) – which is a rather general norm also in European parliaments.

Let us finally move to Latin America, and listen to a speaker in the Argentine parliament speaking in favor of limiting immigration from poor countries such as Bolivia and Peru. As is the case elsewhere, especially also in Europe, poor immigrants are often associated with crime, both in everyday conversations as well as in the media. As elsewhere, conservative politicians exploit such feelings by anti-immigration legislation with which in turn they hope to get more votes because they are the ones "who do something against it" and "listen to the people":

(13) (Van Dijk, 2005b: 119)
   1. Es imprescindible debatir fuertemente una ley inmigratoria en
   2. la Argentina y avanzar en esta materia. De ninguna manera hago
   3. un planteo xenófobo ni creo que los autores de los delitos que se
   4. cometen sean solamente inmigrantes clandestinos o ilegales.
   (Mr. Pichetto, Argentine parliament, March 14, 2001.)
   [It is essential that we powerfully argue for an Immigration Law in Argentina and advance on this topic. In no way am I making a xenophobic suggestion,

nor do I believe that those who commit crime are only clandestine or illegal immigrants.]

Also Señor Pichetto introduces his policy with the classical disclaimer, but this time not as first pair part, but after announcing the Immigration Bill, that is, not as a preemptive protection against a critical reading, but as a subsequent attempt at correcting possibly negative inferences – a well-known move of face protection. Additionally he backs up his denial by emphasizing that the usual grounds of calling someone a racist do not apply to him, given his belief that he does not think that all crime is committed by immigrants. That is, the disclaimer is not a plain denial, which is less credible, but a denial-with-an-argument, which of course is again a form of positive self-presentation: I am not a bigot.

The few examples briefly discussed here index relevant context in many ways, especially the reputation of the speakers and their respective parties. Proposing the limitation of rights of minorities or immigrants may generally be heard as an expression of racism or xenophobia. It is therefore essential that the speakers deny such prejudices or give arguments for a position that is "rational" or "necessary" and hence should be endorsed by "us" all – a well-known consensus strategy.

Also in everyday talk we find such disclaimers, as well as other signals of doubts, mitigation and in general a strategy to avoid extremist positions that are less credible and less respectable. In other words, the expression of prejudiced contents of mental models (of concrete events) or general social representations (general prejudices) in most communicative situations, and especially in the public sphere and when talking to unknown or outgroup people, needs to be self-monitored. This self-monitoring takes place by the context models of the speakers, and the observed discourse properties, such as disclaimers and mitigations, are discursive signals of the properties of such context models, for instance the combined goals of making a good impression (or avoiding a bad one) *and* speaking one's mind: saying something negative of Others. Many more detailed observations should be made on the examples, as well as on similar examples in different situations in different countries, but the general picture is very much the same, whether in Europe, the USA or in Latin America, despite important historical, social and ethnic differences.

What these have in common is the domination of white Europeans over non-white non-Europeans, as well as historical background of slavery and colonialism, combining indigenous minorities or majorities and African Americans in the Americas, as well as new immigrants (mostly from Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America) in Europe, the USA, and now also in some countries in Latin America, such as Argentina and Chile.

This is the fundamental identity characterizing the speakers and their context models, as well as the macro-context models of the majority of their recipients. Differences exist in the specific perspectives and policies – which in general may be harsher on the Right than on the Left, but it is well known that leftist governments eventually enact no less restrictive laws or measures. The same is true in the mass media and other forms of public discourse – differences are of degree, and no dominant party, newspaper or institution is explicitly antiracist.

This general sociopolitical situation of multicultural societies, shared by many of the elites, and partly by the public at large, influences the formation of local context models whose textual manifestations we have observed above. That is, these few examples also show how language users construe local interaction contexts, but do so on the basis of more general sociopolitical knowledge and ideologies about the Others and ingroup–outgroup relationships. Contextual strategies of impression management thus not only aim to protect the face of the speakers ("I am not a racist"), but also the reputation of the ingroup ("We are not racists"). Thus, more generally, as we know from the social psychology of groups, as soon as language users also speak as group members, such identities are represented in the context models that monitor discourse phenomena such as disclaimers and other forms of positive self-presentation. In sum, most specific for the context models of racist text and talk is that speakers identify as being white (European) and as such instantiate specific negative opinions on Others derived from shared racist attitudes and ideologies according, but finally adapting the discourse (expressing their negative mental models about the Others), to how they construe the audience, their current goals, and other aspects of the ongoing situation.

Concluding remarks

The fundamental presumption of this chapter is that context models, just as the discourses controlled by them, vary culturally. Against the background of a brief discussion of the problematic notion of "culture," I then explored how anthropologists have accounted for the structure of communicative situations in their ethnographic research.

Thus, following the lead of the initial analysis of such situations in terms of the relatively detailed theoretical account of Dell Hymes and his SPEAKING grid, ethnographers of speaking for decades described not only the specific structures of text and talk in different societies, but also their contextual conditions.

To begin with it is not surprising that we do not find an equivalent of the very notion of "context" in all language and cultures. And it is not surprising that in each culture we find the usual variation of who, in what identities and

roles, may or should speak to whom, in what way, with which knowledge and other beliefs and intentions, and so on.

Yet, despite the variation, and the possible conflicts they can give rise to in cross-cultural discourse and interaction, it is perhaps more surprising that, at least in our analysis, the fundamental structures and categories of context models are not that different. Thus participant relations and identities such as power, status, kinship, gender or age are very general, if not universal, in the definitions of communicative situations and the rules applied to them. And no doubt basic cognitive conditions as (shared) knowledge and other beliefs, as well as intentions and goals might be universals of human interaction in general. On the other hand, dimensions of situations that might appear more generally human and hence universal, namely how they see and shape the spatial environment, may again be quite different, as has been found for relativist and absolutist forms of orientation.

Finally, we examined how in contemporary anthropology, and especially linguistic anthropology, the notion of context is being analyzed – also assuming that precisely in such a discipline one may find an integration of linguistic, social, cultural and cognitive dimensions that play a role in communicative events. And indeed, many contemporary studies of context and contextualization have been carried out, organized or published by such leading anthropologists as Hymes, Gumperz, Levinson, Duranti, Hanks and others. At the same time, a critical reading of some of these studies shows that some of these current developments combine an extension of anthropology to studies of power, gender, ideology and other general "social" topics, with on the other hand a frequent theoretical limitation to interactionist positions that ignore or deny the relevance of cognition in (also written!) text and context. In this latter sense, these developments in anthropology also confirm the current deplorable divide between "social" or "cultural" analysis of talk as interaction, and a cognitive approach to meaning, understanding and culture as was prevalent earlier in anthropology. It is also in this perspective that our integrative sociocognitive approach to text and context embodies social, cultural and political dimensions of discourse as interaction, as well as their cognitive basis defining the fundamental principles of all human understanding, that is, in terms of meaning, knowledge, beliefs and intentions and goals of such interaction. Also in anthropology, therefore, a full understanding of the cultural variation of language use, discourse and contexts requires such an integrated approach – perfectly compatible with many rich traditions in anthropology itself.

5 Context and politics: the Iraq debate in the British parliament

Introduction

In this final chapter I shall illustrate the theoretical framework developed in this book and *Discourse and Context*, and provide some more details about the first analyses of a parliamentary debate about the Iraq war, namely the speech by Tony Blair on March 18, 2003. Then I shall also examine contextual dimensions of the rest of this long debate. In the analyses, I shall especially focus on some of the political aspects of the contexts of this parliamentary debate, such as identity, knowledge and political implicatures (for further analysis, both of the British parliament, and of related Iraq debates in the Spanish *Cortes*, see also Van Dijk, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2003e, 2006a).

Context and political identity

We have seen throughout this book that various kinds of participant identities are crucial for contexts and hence for discourse. The same is true in parliamentary debates, and we have already found that Tony Blair's position as Prime Minister and leader of the government and the Labour Party, as well as his identity as being British, play a vital role in his speech. The same is true for the MPs who form his audience. Let me therefore examine these identities in somewhat more detail. Let me first repeat the example we analyzed before:

(1) 1. At the outset, I say that it is right that the House debate this issue and
2. pass judgment. That is the democracy that is our right, but that others
3. struggle for in vain. Again, I say that I do not disrespect the views in
4. opposition to mine. This is a tough choice indeed, but it is also a stark
5. one: to stand British troops down now and turn back, or to hold firm to
6. the course that we have set. I believe passionately that we must hold
7. firm to that course. The question most often posed is not "Why does it
8. matter?" but "Why does it matter so much?" Here we are, the
9. Government, with their most serious test, their majority at risk, the
10. first Cabinet resignation over an issue of policy, the main parties
11. internally divided, people who agree on everything else?
12. [Hon. Members: "The main parties?"]

13. Ah, yes, of course. The Liberal Democrats – unified, as ever, in
14. opportunism and error.
15. [Interruption.]

We have earlier seen that when speaking in the House, Tony Blair might also display a number of *social* identities, such as those of gender, class and age, which, however, I shall ignore here. The first relevant *political* identity on display in this debate is that enacted by Tony Blair as Prime Minister of the UK, explicitly expressed in the Hansard record, but only implicitly present by presupposed, shared knowledge of the MPs. That is, according to the transcript the Speaker does not explicitly announce the Prime Minister as such. Contextually, and hence relevant for a pragmatic account of this fragment, Blair's identity as Prime Minister (PM) gives him the right to speak first (after the Speaker) and to present a motion. Also, as head of the UK government he has the right to propose going to war, as formulated in the motion to the House (not reproduced here). The deictic expression *I* as usual indexes these various identities, in the sense that it is especially his formal identity as PM and head of government that is relevant here, and less his identity as the leader of Labour, among others – identities that, however, may become more relevant later in the debate.

Examining the constituent categories (as defined above) of these political identities of Tony Blair, we find that part of his *activities* as PM and leader of government involve informing parliament, asking for approval of his policies, as well as to realize the local aim of getting a motion accepted. Other categories (such as norms and values, and relations to other groups) are enacted later in the debate.

Ignoring a host of other formal, semantic and pragmatic features of this fragment (and the rest of the debate) and focusing exclusively on the formulation or presupposition of political identities, we find that the next reference to a group or institution is that to the "House," short for "House of Commons" or parliament, referring to the institution but pragmatically (by metonymic inference) also to its members – whom Blair is now addressing. Since Blair is not only Prime Minister but also a member of parliament and hence speaks to his co-members, he is also signaling another political identity. At the same time, however, the majority of the House may well vote against Blair's motion, so that there is also a question of political polarization within the House, and even within Blair's own party. As we shall see below, Blair is aware – in this case in his identity as Labour majority leader – that he cannot simply count on the unanimous support of his own party (Stothard, 2003).

Next, when speaking about democracy that is "our right," Blair uses the political possessive pronoun "our," which reflexively signals this identity of

MP, on the one hand, but at the same time a much broader political identity, namely being a member of a democratic state or system. The next clause ("others struggle . . . ") confirms this identity by opposition (Us vs. Them), as we assumed in the Relations category of political identities: being members of a democracy is a fundamental political identity only when opposed to being a member of a dictatorship – in this case, as implicitly conveyed but not yet formulated, for Iraq.

Co-membership as MPs does not mean that Blair and the other Members of Parliament are united. On the contrary, we may first of all expect opposition to government in general, in this case from the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. However, Blair and the other participants know that in the case of the Iraq conflict, the Conservative Party does not oppose the war. Rather, opposition comes from the left in his own party and from the Liberal Democrats.

The next sentence expresses (or construes) this new identity, namely of Blair as leader of the majority position in his own party and as a member of "those supporting" the war in Iraq. Thus, in the same way as people may construct identities as Pro-Life and Pro-Choice in abortion debates (Reicher and Hopkins, 1996), we now find a Pro-War and Anti-War polarization (both in the Labour Party and elsewhere) about Iraq. These polarized political identities may be associated with pacifist or non-pacifist ideological positions, but such identities need not be the same (Klandermans, 1997). There may be people who are not pacifist, but still do not want *this* war. The polite double negation ("do not disrespect") is a strategic rhetorical move to highlight the democratic values underlying the debate, and of course also contributes to the positive self-image of Tony Blair as a "fair" opponent. In this way, Blair's language use reflexively indexes his democratic stance.

The political identity being constructed here – those in favor of the war against Iraq – is much more conjunctural and hence more micro-contextual than the other ones (PM, MP, Labour, etc.), and so is the division in the House of Commons. We see that what goes on here draws upon various of these identities at the same time. Blair emphasizes the respect for the Others by a well-known move of empathy ("I understand how hard it must be for you"), but the use of "but" that follows suggests that this is rather a disclaimer, and hence (also) a form of positive self-presentation.

Blair continues to speak with a context model that features his combined identities as current speaker, as PM, as MP, as leader of government, and as someone who favors the war against Iraq: "I believe passionately that we must hold firm . . . " This is hardly Prime Minister style. Rather, with such an expression he emphasizes personal emotions and commitments, especially also as leader of those in the UK who favor intervention in Iraq.

If speakers activate various identities at the same time, these may variably and dynamically become more or less prominent or salient at each moment. PMs in the UK may make formal declarations, but are not stereotypically associated with passionate beliefs, as would be the case for political radicals and activists. Note also the use of the characteristic political pronoun "we" ("the course we have set," "we must hold firm"), which may variously refer to any one of the groups whose identities we have discussed above: Blair himself as PM (in which case "we" is *pluralis majestatis*), he and his government, or those in favor of intervention in Iraq (see Wilson, 1990). In a later sentence, he makes this identity explicit by referring to "we, the Government," as well as to its (Labour) majority in parliament.

The reference to "British" troops explicitly introduces a new identity in the debate, namely a national one, which of course was implicit earlier in the debate: all MPs know and presuppose that they are members of the *British* parliament, and speaking about the involvement of *Britain* in the war against Iraq. Thus, perhaps more prominently than many other identities, Blair prominently displays his identity as a Brit. When he formulates a choice of which one is formulated in explicitly negative terms ("stand the troops down") he of course not only disparages those who would do such a despicable thing, but also appeals to nationalist sentiments, that is, to national identity. And as protagonist of the other choice, and hence as defender of the British troops, Blair himself further contributes to his personal self-presentation by implicitly qualifying himself as a proud nationalist.

Blair goes on to activate other identities in the debate when he refers to the "main parties" (being divided about the war). That is, the identity of the MPs as Members of Parliament is backgrounded in favor of that of their identity as party members.

However, as we can see from the interruption, some MPs, probably Liberal Democrats, don't like the label used by Blair of "main parties," which would indeed presuppose that they are less important parties. Again, this is obviously a question of identity, and threatens the political face of these MPs as members of the Liberal Democrats.

As we have seen earlier, Blair reacts with a fast response to the interruption with a disparaging "Oh yes," presupposing that the Liberal Democrats are mentioned as an afterthought, which politically implicates that they are, indeed, less important, and tend to be forgotten when one speaks about national and international politics. Blair ironically admits that the Liberals are not divided, but especially by derogating them as being unified in their error and opportunism. This biting rhetorical move at the same time highlights that whatever identities in parliament may be construed ad hoc, the fundamental power play is between the "main" political parties. Thus, in this case it is not just Blair as PM or leader of government speaking, but

especially as leader of Labour, displaying the political group relation category of Labour identity – that is, the relations to other political parties in the UK. A negative representation of the political Others in this case of course is the ideological base of such expressions as "error" and "opportunism."

Let us examine the next fragment of this debate:

(2) 1. The country and the Parliament reflect each other. This is a debate that,
2. as time has gone on, has become less bitter but no less grave. So why
3. does it matter so much? Because the outcome of this issue will now
4. determine more than the fate of the Iraqi regime and more than the
5. future of the Iraqi people who have been brutalised by Saddam for so
6. long, important though those issues are. It will determine the way in
7. which Britain and the world confront the central security threat of the
8. 21st century, the development of the United Nations, the relationship
9. between Europe and the United States, the relations within the
10. European Union and the way in which the United States engages with
11. the rest of the world. So it could hardly be more important. It will
12. determine the pattern of international politics for the next generation.

One collectivity so far was still missing in this "democratic" debate: the people, the voters, the citizens, etc., denominated the "country" by Blair with the deictic definite expression signaling that all recipients know whom he is talking about. Thus, by recognizing a political division in parliament and claiming that this reflects the country, Blair also recognizes that there are also many ordinary people against his militaristic policy. The people of course need to be represented (in their context model) in the Group Relations category of the political identity of MPs, at least if MPs identify themselves as delegates of the people. Especially in populist discourses in parliament, mentioning concern for the people rhetorically enhances the democratic credentials of the speaker – also by conservative speakers who may have little interest in the opinions and interests of ordinary people. That is, their relevant identity is that of voters, not of ordinary people.

In other words, there is not just a parliamentary debate, but also a debate in civil society. By referring to the people and by recognizing the controversial nature of his policy, Blair aims to enhance not only his (controversial) reputation as a democrat but also his reputation as a good, national leader. His further arguments should thus at the same time be read as arguments directed at the people, and maybe not only nationally, but even also internationally, where the same ideological division exists.

Blair then speaks about Iraq more explicitly, and does so by introducing the political identities of the Iraqi regime, categorized as bad, and that of the Iraqi people, categorized as good. If the war will oppose or destroy the first and thus help the last, such an act of course reflects back positively on the Helper, and his

government and country. We see how political identities are enacted as well as shaped and confirmed by alliances and misalliances: who are our friends, and who are our foes? If Blair wants to fight Saddam Hussein, and SH is bad ("brutalized," etc.), then Blair is good by political evaluative implicature.

Finally, Blair extends political identities to the whole country, Europe, the USA and the world, and thus is "doing" world politics, for an international audience. His own position on the war, as based on his various personal and political identities, is finally said to be shaped by the constraints of world politics, namely the aim of a secure world. Blair and Britain become Bush's buddies, forming a new identity (with some more or less insignificant others, such as Spain, Portugal or Poland) called the Alliance, self-defined as good because of its active stance and action against Saddam Hussein, the mass murderer. Note that in this case the formulation of the identity is not yet a question of norms and values, but first of all a practical aim (a secure world), as well as the national group relationships that are necessary to reach this aim. Rhetorically, this aim and the need for alliances between groups are enhanced with the hyperbole "could hardly be more important," and the extension from the current world to next generations, that is, the future.

From this brief, relatively informal, analysis of two paragraphs we see that parliamentary debates on important national and international issues may involve a host of identities, both directly enacted in parliament by speakers as well as recipients, as well as those of people spoken about (like the Iraqi people, the USA, etc.). Both the contextual interaction, such as the sneer at the Liberal Democrats, or addressing the division in the House, as well as the groups spoken about, offer the relational structure that defines the identities displayed in the debate. Depending on each topic, argument or move, Tony Blair thus activates or emphasizes his identity as PM, as MP, as Labour leader, and international leader, as leader of those in the UK who want to go to war, and so on.

Instead of speaking of one, new, ad hoc or "hybrid" identity, as is quite common in many contemporary studies of social identity, I shall assume that it makes theoretically more sense to describe this as the dynamic, contextually and textually controlled, activation and manipulation of various "given" identities, and only sometimes in terms of new, ad hoc, political identities. As I have already argued often in this study, and contrary to currently popular ideas on "locally, discursively, constructed" or "performed" identities, the very concept of identity presupposes that social actors already "have" such identities, namely as social representations, and without such social knowledge they would not even know how to (en)act or construct such identities locally. Rather, I hold that speakers *use* such identities as resources, as they also do with their knowledge of language and discourse or other social structures. Locally they activate, apply and, where necessary, adapt them to

the current social situation as represented in their context models. In other words, what is locally constructed or performed is *not* the social identity as such – which is a social representation learned over many years, and shared by others of the same community or group – but rather the ad hoc contextualized *use*, "instantiation" or "application" of such an identity. Note though that in each given context, the *configuration* of several identities in the context models of the participants may be unique – some locally foregrounded or central, others backgrounded or peripheral. The same is true for language and discourse: discourses are contextually unique, whereas natural languages are socially shared resources acquired over many years. It is thus that it makes no more sense to claim that Tony Blair now constructs his identity as a Brit, than to say that he now constructs the English language. He obviously uses, applies or performs both, and does so uniquely, and it is a theory of context that describes and explains this uniqueness.

Other interventions in the Iraq debate in the UK House of Commons

Tony Blair's speech opened a debate of many hours, lasting until very late the same day (9:30 pm), with many interventions (52 speeches) of many MPs of different parties, and closed by Jack Straw, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Overall, the apparent division of opinions even within the government party, Labour, is also reflected in the other parties and the speeches of their members. Apart from the usual political arguments in favor of one or another policy (such as the accusation of opportunism leveled by Blair and others against the Liberal Democrats), we here find a fundamental moral polarization between those who think Saddam Hussein should be ousted by force, and those who reject (this) war. Despite these fundamental divisions in the House, however, there seems to be consensus that once the troops are in Iraq, they should be supported loyally: No MP wants to be seen as "betraying" the British troops in action.

Obviously a full and systematic contextual analysis of hundreds of pages of the Hansard transcript of this debate is impossible in this chapter, so I shall use the rest of the debate merely as illustration of some of the ways the context models can be said to actually control part of the debate. After that, we shall examine one speech by an "ordinary" opposition (backbencher) MP from the Conservative Party, who did not follow his party leader (who supported Tony Blair) but voted against the war in Iraq.

Let me begin with some more comments on the contextual constraints on the rest of Tony Blair's speech. Much of the argument deployed by him is accumulating damning evidence on the terrible human rights crimes and the aggression of Saddam Hussein. There are few contextual signals

there – indeed, the same facts could have been, and have been, enumerated in many other discourses in very different communicative situations. In a rather positivistic way, we might say that stating objective facts is rather "context-free," even when the occasion of such a statement must come up, so that at least the topic should be relevant, as it is in a parliamentary debate on international politics and conflicts. Similarly, such an enumeration of historical facts about Saddam Hussein may have a clear political aim, namely to legitimate the war against the tyrant, and hence also contextual conditions and constraints: portraying SH as a tyrant obviously contributes to the persuasion of the MPs to support Blair's perspective and hence is an important move, with its own (overall) contextual conditions.

The more explicit context signals Blair uses in his speech are, e.g.:

- I will not go through the events (column 762) ...
- ... as the House is familiar with them (c. 762)
- ... as the House is familiar with them (c. 762)
- I simply say to the House that ... (c. 763)
- If I might, I should particularly like to thank the President of Chile.

These expressions signal, among other things:

- the intentions of the speaker with regard to his upcoming (planned) discourse ("I will not ...")
- deictic reference to the House as a metonymic expression for the MPs being addressed
- shared knowledge with the recipients ("the House is familiar with them")
- reflexive reference to the ongoing speech ("I simply say ...")
- performative expression of speech act of thanking ("I ... thank ...")
- presupposing the contextual conditions of that speech act: gratitude of the speaker about the actions of the person thanked.

More routine is a dialogue fragment such as:

(3) 1. **Hugh Bayley**: (...) Does my right hon. Friend agree that France's
2. decision to use the veto against any further Security Council resolution
3. has, in effect, disarmed the UN instead of disarming Iraq?
4. **The Prime Minister**: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend. (...) (column 764)

Rather than to request or to express agreement, "to agree" in the British parliament may be used also to ask questions or simply make a comment when interrupting a speaker. Closest to the everyday meaning of "to agree" is to ask for a comment on an opinion – and more specifically, whether an opinion is shared or not. Contextually, this presupposes not only that the speaker has a specific opinion, but also that the recipient has one. In this

debate (and addressing an MP of the same party, hence the mutual address as "Friend") the specific function of the agreement-question is to actually support the speaker, and provide an additional argument for the position of the addressee, Tony Blair. Obviously, such an implicature is the fundamental *political* function of the question, namely to provide support to the leader of one's own party. We see that this specific implicature of the question presupposes a contextual analysis that goes beyond the "normal," conversational, conditions of questions of agreement.

Compare this case with another question about agreement, but in this case asked by the PM of an MP who asks whether diplomacy – which so far had failed – should not be continued in the case of Iraq:

(4) 1. **The Prime Minister**: (. . .) I think that the hon. Gentleman would also
2. agree that unless the threat of action was made, it was unlikely that
3. Saddam would meet the tests.
4. **Simon Hughes** indicated assent/
5. **The Prime Minister**: The hon. Gentleman nods his head, but the
6. problem with the diplomacy was that it came to an end after the
7. position of France was made public (. . .) (column 766).

First of all, we see that a member of the opposition is not addressed as "Friend" but only with a formula transcribed in Hansard as "hon. Gentleman." This contextually presupposes that the PM knows, as well as all the other MPs, that Simon Hughes is MP for the Liberal Democrats, who are not only in the opposition, as are the Conservatives, but – unlike the Conservatives – known to oppose the war. Secondly, the question by a member of the opposition pertaining to the failure to continue diplomatic efforts – instead of going to war – must have been interpreted by the PM as criticism and hence as a form of opposition. This in turn is a condition for his reply, namely as a defense against the criticism, and it is within such a next phase of dynamic context model of the debate that the supposition and indirect question ("I think that the hon. Gentleman would also agree . . . ") becomes appropriate, this time as a question about "real" agreement – which is "real" because the two participants obviously do *not* agree on the main point (whether or not to go to war). That the indirect question of agreement is indeed understood that way by Mr. Hughes may be inferred from the Hansard transcript of a non-verbal reply ("/indicated assent/"), then made explicit for the debate and hence, again, for the record, by the Prime Minister as "nods his head," which implies agreement with the question about agreement.

All this follows the usual rules of parliamentary debates as well as of conversation in general. However, as we have shown throughout, the context definitions and hence the *political* meanings involved in the parliamentary debate are more complex than that. In the same way as the question about

diplomacy by the MP for the Liberal Democrats was interpreted by and reacted to by Blair as a move in an argumentation strategy of political opposition, also Blair's defense is of course political. It is so at various levels of context definition. First of all, it is of course a defensive move against a critical question of an MP. Secondly, it is a defensive move against the MP as a member of the Liberal Democrats and again as a member of the (party) opposition against Blair's government in general. Thirdly, it is a move of defense against all those in the House who are opposed to Blair's Iraq policy. And finally, it may be interpreted even more broadly, as a defense, on the record – also for the international press, and hence for international opinion – against all those in the world who were favoring further diplomacy instead of going to war against Iraq.

It is also within such accumulated context definitions for his own reply to the critical question that the disclaimer engaged in here ("The hon. Gentleman nods his head, but the problem with the diplomacy was that . . . "), duly signaled by "but," is to show *politically* that the opposition to his policy is inconsistent. Blair is implying that one cannot on the one hand agree that Saddam Hussein does not want to change his politics unless he is being threatened by force, and then not actually make use of such force when he does not comply.

This and much more is not actually *said* at this point in the debate, but politically implied by the structures of the context that makes the interventions appropriate at each point. That is, there is no doubt in anyone's mind listening to Simon Hughes that his question is critical and a form of political and moral opposition to Blair, as is also the case when the MPs listen to Blair and understand his answer as a defense against an MP, against the Liberal Democrats and against all those, both in the House, in the country and worldwide, who are against the war. Only such a more explicit analysis of contexts as construed by the participants make their actions both interactionally as well as politically meaningful.

The same analysis may be made of a later reply by Blair to a critical question by Alex Salmond (MP for the Scottish National Party – an item of knowledge the analyst does not find in the debate or its Hansard transcript, but through the internet, but which of course is already known by all participants, and hence part of their context models):

(5) 1. **Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan)**: The Prime Minister says
2. that the French have changed position, but surely the French, Russians
3. and Chinese always made it clear that they would oppose a second resolution
4. that led automatically to war.
5. [Interruption.]
6. Well they publicised that view at the time of resolution 1441. Is it not
7. the Prime Minister who has changed his position? A month ago, he

8. said that the only circumstances in which he would go to war
9. without a second resolution was if the inspectors concluded that there
10. had been no more progress, which they have not; if there were a
11. majority on the Security Council, which there is not; and if there were
12. an unreasonable veto from one country, but there are three permanent
13. members opposed to the Prime Minister's policy. When did he change his
14. position, and why?
15. **The Prime Minister**: First, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong
16. about the position on resolution 1441. (columns 766–767)

Again, Blair's strong ("absolutely wrong") defense against the presupposed accusation of having changed his mind, is not merely a negative evaluation, a disagreement with a previous speaker, as we would say in a context-free conversation analysis, but more broadly political, while addressed to the opposition in the House and against those who more generally are against the war. Such an interpretation of both the seemingly innocent question presupposing that Blair changed his position on going to war, as well as of the forceful reply by Blair (an interpretation no doubt part of the context models of all recipients in the House) can only be explicitly construed, and in fact politically inferred from a context definition as proposed. Note also, the use of "Well" by Salmond after the "Interruption" referred to by Hansard, and which might have been protests against Salmond's interpretation of the historical facts – protests that force Salmond, in a local reaction, to justify his assertion with a reply-initial "well," indicating, among other things, that his assertion is based on (shared) evidence.

That speakers do indeed represent themselves (and much of the context definitions my analysis attributes to them) sometimes becomes explicit, for instance in the following fragment:

(6) 1. **Sir Teddy Taylor**: The Prime Minister is making a powerful and
2. compelling speech. Will he tell the House (. . .)
3. [intervention of another MP about a speech by Bush accusing Iraq of
4. supporting terrorists]
5. **The Prime Minister**: First, let me apologise to the hon. Member of
6. Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor). He was making a
7. point in my favour and I failed to spot it. Secondly, to my hon. Friend,
8. yes I do support what the President [President Bush] said.

Sir Teddy's compliment in lines 1–2 might be interpreted as the first pair part of a disclaimer, in this case, however, not followed by a *but*. Since Sir Teddy is a well-known member of the Conservative Party (and as a member of the Monday Club one of the staunchest defenders of right-wing conservative values – as also all MPs surely know, knowledge they may activate when they hear Sir Teddy speak), he hardly is a friend of Blair. However, although the Conservatives are the Opposition party, but in this debate are

not opposed to Blair's Iraq policy, their interventions are not intended or interpreted as critical of Blair, and hence not as a form of opposition. Hence the compliment of lines 1–2 is not intended as, and not interpreted as the first (positive) part of a disclaimer followed by a critical (negative) part, as might be the case in other circumstances. Actually, this may also be the reason why Blair might initially have overlooked the compliment as a "real" one, that is, as a "point in his favor." We see that in this political debate in the House of Commons, we not only deal with the usual conditions and rules of conversational interaction, which would account for the compliment – that a positive evaluation of the recipient is heard as a compliment. If so, the Prime Minister would have expressed his gratitude right away, as is usual in Compliment–Thanks adjacency pairs in the Commons. In an analysis of the political context, however, compliments of opposition members may routinely be heard, at the beginning of a turn, as Apparent Concessions, that is, as first parts of disclaimers, followed by *but*, and hence functioning as criticism and hence as political opposition. However, since in this case the Conservatives, and even very conservative MPs, agree with Blair, the routine interpretation of the disclaimer does not hold, and hence Blair in the meantime realized he was really being complimented. Apart from this contextual analysis of the conversational interaction (against the backgrounds of the institutional rules of the House of Commons), my point is also to show that the speakers are actually aware (or should be aware – as Blair's apology presupposes) of the political implicatures of each turn in the debate, namely whether a speaker is for or against the Prime Minister and his current policy.

Of course, besides such quite "local" issues of interaction that have quite "global" conditions and consequences, there are moments in the debate that are more explicitly crucial and transcendental – and qualified as "solemn" in the first intervention of Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith, when he realizes that the country very soon will be at war. Here are a few fragments – cited at length to capture the content and style of the debate – of a central moment in the debate when Tony Blair formulates the crucial political questions to be debated and decided in the debate, and that hence are the "pragmatic macrostructure" of the context definitions we are analyzing:

(7) 1. **The Prime Minister**: (. . .) We take our freedom for granted. But
2. imagine what it must be like not to be able to speak or discuss
3. or debate or even question the society you live in. To see friends and
4. family taken away and never daring to complain. To suffer the
5. humility of failing courage in face of pitiless terror. That is how the
6. Iraqi people live. Leave Saddam in place, and the blunt truth is that
7. that is how they will continue to be forced to live.
8. We must face the consequences of the actions that we advocate. For
9. those of us who support the course that I am advocating, that means all

the dangers of war. But for others who are opposed to this course, it means – let us be clear – that for the Iraqi people, whose only true hope lies in the removal of Saddam, the darkness will simply close back over. They will be left under his rule, without any possibility of liberation – not from us, not from anyone.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: In a moment. This is the choice before us. If this House now demands that at this moment, faced with this threat from this regime, British troops are pulled back, that we turn away at the point of reckoning – this is what it means – what then? What will Saddam feel? He will feel strengthened beyond measure. What will the other states that tyrannise their people, the terrorists who threaten our existence, take from that? They will take it that the will confronting them is decaying and feeble. Who will celebrate and who will weep if we take our troops back from the Gulf now?

Glenda Jackson: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry. (. . .)

The House wanted this discussion before conflict. That was a legitimate demand. It has it, and these are the choices. In this dilemma, no choice is perfect, no choice is ideal, but on this decision hangs the fate of many things: of whether we summon the strength to recognise the global challenge of the 21st century, and meet it; of the Iraqi people, groaning under years of dictatorship; of our armed forces, brave men and women of whom we can feel proud, and whose morale is high and whose purpose is clear; of the institutions and alliances that will shape our world for years to come. To retreat now, I believe, would put at hazard all that we hold dearest. To turn the United Nations back into a talking shop; to stifle the first steps of progress in the Middle East; to leave the Iraqi people to the mercy of events over which we would have relinquished all power to influence for the better; to tell our allies that at the very moment of action, at the very moment when they need our determination, Britain faltered: I will not be party to such a course.

This is not the time to falter. This is the time not just for this Government – or, indeed, for this Prime Minister – but for this House to give a lead: to show that we will stand up for what we know to be right; to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk; to show, at the moment of decision, that we have the courage to do the right thing.

[1.23 pm]

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The House and the whole country rightly recognise that we are soon likely to be at war. It is a solemn moment in the life of our nation, and our first thoughts and prayers today must be with our troops and their families as they prepare for action. The Opposition recognise the heavy responsibility that the Prime Minister and the Government have to bear. I remind the House that the Prime Minister's decision comes

58. at the end of 12 years of what was too often indecision by the
59. international community.
60. I make it clear from the outset that the official Opposition will vote
61. tonight in the same Lobby as the Government. In saying that, I
62. recognise that there are honestly felt and genuinely carried differences
63. of view on both sides of the House about further military action in
64. Iraq. I respect those unreservedly, wherever they are held, and I
65. recognise that they reflect strong differences of view that are felt
66. throughout the country. However, given the differences and the
67. difficulties that they have posed for the Government in general and for
68. the Prime Minister in particular, I say frankly to the House that the
69. official Opposition could somehow have sought to manoeuvre
70. themselves into the No Lobby tonight. After all, we have argued
71. consistently that Ministers have failed to convince the public of their
72. case, and we have sought to hold the Government to account in the
73. House for their mistakes. In particular, we have also pointed out the
74. failures with regard to the humanitarian consequences of war.
75. However, I believe that when the Government do the right thing by
76. the British people, they deserve the support of the House, and
77. particularly of the main Opposition.

This part of the debate, at the end of the Prime Minister's main speech defending his motion and seeking the approval of the House for the armed intervention in Iraq, features the usual rhetoric legitimizing such an action. Contextually, the deictic expressions "we" and "our freedom" should therefore be interpreted as vaguely referring to "us" in Britain and more generally to all people of the "free" (Western, democratic, etc.) world. The freedom associated with "us" is further highlighted by the stark opposition with the fate of those described in the following lines (2–7). The hyperbolic contrast thus rhetorically construed by Blair is taken as the moral ground for "bringing freedom and democracy" to the oppressed.

However, the point is not merely to describe the terrible lot of the Iraqi people – as could be the case in a newspaper opinion article or a conversation. Beyond the semantics and rhetoric of this passage, both Blair and the MPs are ongoingly aware of the *political* context of what they say. Indeed, Blair is quite explicit about that when he says what the consequences are of *not* going to war, namely that Saddam Hussein would be left in place (line 6). In other words, he is spelling out the terrible political consequences of what will happen if the House of Commons votes against his motion, that is, against his proposal to go to war against Saddam Hussein. He does so in lines 8 to 14 in a way that is more explicit and more straightforward than in the rest of the debate. That is, he is making explicit the ideological groups and participants in the debate ("for those of us who support the course that I am advocating . . . ," lines 8–9), and hence the protagonists of the context definitions Blair is employing in the debate, thus polarizing Us vs. Them. By

making explicit what will happen to the Iraqi people when Saddam Hussein is not removed, and hence when we do not go to war, Blair indirectly accuses his opponents of being guilty of the continued oppression of the Iraqi people – a form of moral blackmail that is no doubt the context interpretation of at least those who do not agree with him. Again, Blair does not say so explicitly, but the structure of the context is such that it satisfies the conditions of an accusation, namely that the decision of the selected recipients ("but for others who are opposed to this course . . . ," line 10) is associated with the bleak future of the Iraqis. Hence also Blair's reference to the moral principle that we must "face the consequences of the actions we advocate," which also applies to the political and discursive actions engaged in right now in the debate and the final vote. That is, Blair formulates not only elements of his own context definition, but also what general norms or principles are to be applied to them, and hence to the actions and discourses that take place in such a context.

Of course other context definitions are possible, and Glenda Jackson, a prominent member of his own party, twice tries – in vain – to interrupt Blair at this crucial moment, probably in order to oppose the way Blair thus manipulates the House with his moral blackmail. But Blair continues in lines 17 through 25 with an even more explicit description of what will happen when British troops are pulled back: "If this House now demands that at this moment . . . " This doubly deictic-metonymic reference to the MPs and the actual moment thus explicitly links the current context of decision making to likely consequences in the real world – as constructed and presented by Blair.

Again, the rhetorical emphasis on Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and the fate of the Iraqis serves to hammer home the consequences and hence the moral responsibility of those who oppose the war. With such a hardly subtle strategy of manipulation (Van Dijk, 2006a), we also get more explicit insight into the way the leading participant in this debate, Tony Blair, construes and updates his context models. He knows that to go to war in Iraq is serious business, and that he also faces significant opposition, both in the House, within his own party as well as, massively, in the country and worldwide. Hence he needs a very persuasive rhetoric and very strong arguments to attack the opposition, namely by accusing them of being responsible for the continued oppression of the Iraqis should they withdraw British troops.

This means that each word and each move of Blair's speech is geared towards the positive presentation of his own position and towards a negative presentation of those who oppose the war – or rather of the consequences of their actions, because he cannot attack his own party members that explicitly.

We see in line 30 how Blair moves back and forth between the stark description of the fate of the Iraqis, on the one hand, and the political

dilemma here and now in the House. It is not surprising to find many deictic expressions in this passage, namely to the very debate ("this discussion," line 28; "the House wanted," line 28; "these are the choices," line 29; "this dilemma," line 29, etc.).

That is, Blair is explicitly formulating his definition of the current communicative and political situation, and since he defines it also as a dilemma, we see how he polarizes the participants as well as their positions – thus making explicit the political choice between going to war or not, and morally between good and bad. This explicit context formulation is again supported by specifying its consequences for the people in Iraq, again in the familiar hyperbolic terms ("groaning under years of dictatorship"). Practically, politically as well as theoretically, we see how current discourse and the ongoing debate are related through their polarized context definitions (participant roles, definition as dilemma, etc.) to the political consequences as represented by Blair. Implicit accusations of continued suffering of the Iraqis are being made against those who oppose him, and how not only the context definitions influence talk and its interpretations, but also how talk is used to construct context definitions in which statements of consequences can be interpreted as accusations. The lines that follow in the same paragraph (30–49) are not limited to the terrible consequences for the Iraqis, but apocalyptically apply to the United Nations and the whole world.

At this point, the context definitions feature not only the opposition Us vs. You in the House, but more generally the basic norms and values of "our" country or society: "would put at hazard all that we hold dearest," in which deictic "we" ambiguously may again refer to "us, in the UK," but also to "us, in the democratic world." The micro-context of the debate is thus continuously extended to a macro-context of global decision making about war and peace and the future of the world. Note also that among the various identities being constructed by Blair, a nationalist one also appears when he says in lines 42–43: " . . . when they need our determination, Britain faltered: I will not be party to such a course." Such a formulation provides some explicit signals to a more nationalist, and hence politically relevant, interpretation of "we" in these passages. And the firm announcement by Blair that he will "not be party to such a course" should in that case not only be interpreted as that of the valiant warrior who will not forsake his national duties, or even his international responsibilities, but might more locally be interpreted as a veiled threat that he might resign as Prime Minister should the House not follow his lead. In that respect, debates on international affairs always have local implications also, and the MPs know this.

Again, whereas Blair's discourse may be interpreted as a lofty moral defense of taking action against Saddam Hussein – something also others may do in other communicative situations – the current context definitions of

himself and the MPs suggest a more concrete political power play between the PM, his opponents in his own party, and other opponents in the House as well as in the country, and finally, internationally, his own credibility as a world leader (and ally of the USA).

Lines 44–49 culminate such a process by further deictically extending the context from his own role of responsible politician ("this Prime Minister") and "this Government" to "this House," and even beyond that to our whole country – "to do the right thing." We see that Blair in these passages tries to broaden the very local context of a debate about a motion in the House to a much more global and noble national and international debate among "us" Britons and democrats about how to vanquish world dictatorship and terrorism. To do this he needs to redefine the boundaries of the local context and extend its implications and consequences on the world scene. The persuasive rhetoric, hence, is not just to get his way with the MPs (that they vote for his motion), but rather also an attempt to influence their very context definitions towards very noble and global scenes: namely that they decide on the fate of the world.

Thus, each word of his speech should be understood in relation to one of these contextual conditions, such as the positive self-presentations as the democratic warrior against dictatorship and terrorism, the negative presentations of his opponents as colluding with the enemy, the political relationships in the House, the definition of the current debate as a major dilemma, the veiled threats as well as the more or less explicit moral blackmail, and so on.

When Conservative Opposition leader Duncan Smith takes the floor after this apocalyptic finale of Blair's speech, he can only share in the grand and "solemn" definition of the current situation. Also he talks in the nationalist terms that characterize parliamentary decisions to go to war ("our nation," "our troops" lines 53–54, etc.). That is, apart from defining himself in the next lines in terms of the leader of the Opposition (line 60), he first of all defines himself as a Brit, thus construing a broad ideological base to his own political identity in the context model he tries to convey to the other MPs, and especially to Blair.

Similarly, whereas the Opposition does not usually agree with the government, it is crucial that this is an exception, and that the interests in this case, as in all wars, are rather national and international and hence not partisan. Hence his identity and those of his party members, namely as Conservatives, is not emphasized in this case, because there is no party-political gain to be made in this debate. This means that the context definitions, also by the Opposition MPs, must be adapted accordingly, as also their later speeches will show. In the rest of the paragraph, however, Duncan

Smith shows that such a redefinition of the context is not straightforward, and as such needs further argument.

It is not surprising that his support for Tony Blair's initiative to join the USA in the war against Iraq also meets with some criticism from a quite different perspective in the British House of Commons:

(8) 1. **Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan)**: Will the right hon.
2. Gentleman take this opportunity to apologise to the Muslim world for
3. supporting Saddam Hussein when he used chemical weapons against
4. his people and killed 1 million Muslims? (column 778)

To produce and understand this critical – or perhaps ironical – intervention appropriately, the normal contextual conditions are that Duncan Smith has done something wrong by prevailing social or cultural standards. Hence the speaker presupposes that Duncan Smith supported a dictator he now wants to go to war against – a criticism generally leveled against those who now want to go to war against Saddam Hussein, but earlier did not. Not surprisingly, Duncan Smith rejects the presupposition ("I have never supported Saddam Hussein at any time when he has used any weapon, particularly not chemical weapons.") and thus takes away the grounds of the demand for an apology. Undoubtedly, Mr. Sarwar was not expecting one either, and not only because he knows that Duncan Smith did not personally support Saddam Hussein when he massacred his own people. That is, the context conditions of a "real" demand for apologies are not met, and we hence need to devise an alternative definition of the communicative situation, namely by means of a series of inferences that make sense of the political implicature according to which Mr. Sarwar (who is a member of the Labour Party) is not demanding an apology, but indirectly criticizing the Conservative Party for having supported Saddam Hussein during the time he committed these crimes, and hence of a rather inconsistent policy when they now want to support a war against him. Mr. Sarwar's question is to be understood in terms of context models that feature his (Labour) party membership, his identification with Muslims (hence the emphasis on the death of a million *Muslims* rather than on the death of a million Iraqis), as well as his opposition to the Conservative Party, despite their current support of Blair's Iraq policies.

We see how both the production as well as the most likely understanding of Mr. Sarwar's intervention can be made sense of if we are able to make explicit the relevant context models. These on the one hand instantiate more general social and political knowledge (e.g., about the political parties in the UK, policies of the previous Conservative governments, Sarwar's membership of the Labour Party, etc.), and combine these with knowledge about the current communicative situation, such as the explicit support by Conservative Party leader Duncan Smith of Tony Blair. It is this

hypothetical unique context model of the speaker that ensures that his intervention, which has the direct form of a question and the speech act function of a demand for an apology, is understood as a criticism of the Conservative Party.

Another interesting exchange in the debate occurs when the Speaker of the House demands from one of the MPs that she withdraw a remark (not transcribed in Hansard) made in an interruption of Mr. Kennedy, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, who opposes the war:

(9) 1. **Mr. Kennedy**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, but the
2. answer is no. I will not do so because our consistent line is that we do
3. not believe that a case for war has been established under these
4. procedures in the absence of a second UN Security Council resolution.
5. That is our position?
6. [Interruption.]
7. **Mr. Speaker**: Order. The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham
8. (Mrs. Gillan) should not make such a remark. She will withdraw it.
9. **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)**: I withdraw that
10. remark.
11. **Hon. Members**: Let's hear it.
12. **Mr. Speaker**: Order. All the House has to know is that I heard the
13. remark.
14. **Mr. Kennedy**: I will see you afterwards, Mr. Speaker?
15. [Hon. Members: "Oh."]
16. I assure the House that a Glaswegian Speaker knows whether that is
17. said as a threat or affectionately. (column 782)

Again, a fairly complex contextual analysis is necessary to understand this exchange. Although interruptions are quite common in the UK House of Commons, they obviously should follow the rules of the House, and apparently Mrs. Gillan said something that was so much against such rules that the Speaker of the House explicitly demands withdrawal of what was said – a demand complied with by Mrs. Gillan, without any argument or protest, so that we may infer that she knew her remark was indeed inappropriate.

Note how this sequence develops: the Speaker first stops the debate with the usual intervention "Order," which may be said on many occasions (typically when one or more MPs speak out of order, etc.), but also when someone breaches the rules of the House. Then the Speaker makes explicit such a breach with the modal expression "should not," presupposing some rule or convention, probably a rule of the House itself. After such a statement, the demand to retract the remark can be made explicit, and such is not being done in the form of a request or suggestion, but by a direct order, formulated in a future tense, rather than in the form of an imperative

sentence. The further contextual condition that makes such a demand appropriate is of course that the Speaker has the power to demand withdrawal of inappropriate remarks.

Interesting in this case is what follows: MPs who had not heard the remark ask what she had said (which contextually presupposes their lack of knowledge), a request denied by the Speaker, and again prefaced with "Order." Also the style of the denial displays the authority of the Speaker, which again presupposes that he need not divulge to the House what he has heard – which probably means another rule or convention the MPs know, and which needs no further explanation or justification. Finally, the MP who was interrupted in the first place, Mr. Kennedy, comments (line 14) that he "will see" the Speaker "afterwards" (deictically implying: "after the debate"), an intervention that is commented on collectively with an expression of surprise ("Oh") by the MPs. To understand that expression and what follows, the participants (and the analyst) need to know that a request or demand to see someone "afterwards," that is, after current business is being completed, may be heard as a threat, in this case to force the Speaker to divulge what Mrs. Gillan had said in her interruption. Obviously, such a demand or even a request might be appropriate in the macho sphere of discussion in the pub, but most certainly not in parliament – given also the authority of the Speaker and a host of other rules and norms of (peaceful) interaction and debate. Mr. Kennedy understands that he might have been understood in the wrong way, and not in terms of an insincere, pseudo-threat, and hence in lines 16–17 he makes his speech act, and hence his intentions explicit, by making a remark about the Speaker in the presence of the Speaker and hence indirectly addressing him too, and making an appeal to his identity as (also) being from Glasgow, and hence as able to distinguish a threat from a joke or pseudo-threat as part of colloquial, dialectal ingroup pragmatic rules.

We see that such a less serious side-sequence of a very serious debate about war is perfectly understandable by the participants as soon as we make explicit a large number of contextual categories, rules and inferences, such as the position and the authority of the Speaker of the House, the rules for interruptions, the power of the Speaker over MPs, the conditions of making demands, the (lacking) knowledge of the participant MPs, the normal conditions of threats, the (shared) regional identity of the Speaker and one of the MPs, and so on.

Without this contextual information, we would not be able to understand or explain – among other things – why the Speaker is able to bluntly tell an MP what (not) to do, why the MP complies with the demand, why Mr. Kennedy can make a pseudo-threat, reacted to in (similar mock) surprise by the House, and finally how such an apparent threat may be redefined by Mr. Kennedy on the grounds of shared regional identity, and hence on the basis of

shared knowledge about what the contextual conditions for a correct interpretation of such a quasi-threat are. That is, besides the usual rules of interaction, we here find specific rules for the House of Commons, as well as social norms and shared knowledge of speakers of the same speech community.

Another intervention that provides some more explicit insight into the nature of the underlying context models of the participants is the following by Mr. Savidge (MP for the Labour Party), who obviously has serious misgivings about going to war:

(10) 1. **Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North)**: There is only one issue
2. that we must consider today: whether we should go to war at this time
3. and set what is, to me, the terrible precedent of starting a pre-emptive
4. war on a dubious legal basis without the support of the United Nations.
5. Nothing else should matter. The issue should transcend party
6. politics. We know how the Front Benchers, Whips and others will
7. argue that support for the war is a vital party loyalty test – whether
8. that is support for the Conservative party or for the Labour party – but
9. the issue is too serious for that. It should transcend our careers,
10. whether we are Back Benchers or Front Benchers, because in this
11. context we should regard ourselves as here today, gone tomorrow
12. politicians. I do not remember the Prime Minister's exact words, but
13. he summed it up when he said something to the effect that we are
14. talking about the future safety of the world and therefore we should be
15. concerned about the future of our children and future generations.
16. (columns 816–817)

Apart from the deictic expressions ("we," "today," "me," etc.), relevant here for further analysis is the passage in which this speaker provides an insider's view of the pressures on the MPs to toe the party line – as it is traditionally policed by the Whips. That is, besides the rules of the House, as well as more general social and cultural norms and rules of interaction, there are also more or less tacit conventions of party politics, solidarity and loyalty underlying all the actions of the MPs, as well as their discourses. At many moments in this debate the sentiment is made explicit that the decision to go to war is not merely political, but more generally moral. Hence the claim of Mr. Savidge (and many others) that following the party (Labour) on this is not required, for instance if it does not square with one's conscience or one's interpretation of international legitimacy (such as going to war without explicit permission of the UN). For many MPs what Mr. Savidge expresses is part of their models of the current communicative event: one speaks under the influence of the party norms of the leaders of the party (Front Benchers) and as made explicit by the Whips. In this case the content of this norm is even made explicit ("they will argue . . . "), which may mean a direct

(approximate) quotation of what party leaders have said, or a personal (re) formulation of an implicit norm. Note the (apparent concessive) disclaimer structure of the argument of Mr. Savidge: "We know . . . *but*." His argument, thus, is that decisions about whether to go to war or not are more important than party rules and loyalty. However, he could simply have objected to Blair's policy and provided arguments against it, as do most speakers (e.g., failure to have UN legitimacy for the war). But he does not, and makes explicit his flouting of party rules in the first pair part of the concessive disclaimer, which shows to his recipients, and especially to the obliquely addressed Front Benchers and Whips, that he is aware of these rules – a move which makes the breach more reflected upon and hence more acceptable, e.g., as a breach out of personal conscience and not of disobedience or lack of loyalty. Such a move is obviously part of a larger strategy of positive self-presentation (as being a "good" party member, despite his apparent breach of loyalty). The rest of this paragraph then provides further moral arguments for his apparent disloyalty – e.g., in terms of the consequences of the war.

Interesting for our analysis is not only that Mr. Savidge makes his context model explicit, but even explicitly describes the current communicative situation in terms of "context," followed by an explicit reference to one of the identities of the MPs, namely that they are politicians. Now, at first sight that is rather strange, because identities are normally presupposed, and need not be asserted, unless there is doubt about them. The point of Mr. Savidge, however, is not to focus on their identity as politicians, but on the *temporary* nature of being MPs who vote for a war that may far transcend their current position. That is, he is providing an argument intended to influence the context models of the recipients, also by expressing that he is seeing himself in such a temporary identity. This is one of the examples of the debate in which not only the semantic mental models (about the war in Iraq) are being influenced by persuasion, but the very context models of the ongoing debate, the participants and their current identities and actions.

See also the following intervention by another Labour MP, also referring to the question of party loyalty as an implicit norm of current conduct for MPs:

(11) 1. **Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North)**: After my right hon. Friend the
2. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made his personal statement to the
3. House last night, I felt it necessary to drive back to my constituency
4. and speak with a number of people whose opinions I trust and value –
5. people who are close friends and who have been members of the
6. Labour party for many years. Not one of them wanted war, and neither
7. do I. My constituency chair said to me, "Barry, you have to remember
8. that this is our party leader and I trust him. He is our Prime Minister
9. and, even though I disagree with the war, I want to give him our

10. support now." I will not support the Prime Minister out of loyalty. I
11. will support him out of the conviction that what he and the
12. Government are doing is right. (column 822)

Depending on how broadly we want to define contexts, we see that the current speaker not only speaks under the influence of rules of party loyalty, but even under the contradictory pressure of his constituents – which obviously is relevant for any MP who wants to be re-elected.

Not surprisingly, websites of MPs make explicit how they stand and have voted on crucial issues. No doubt, then, as also Mr. Gardiner makes explicit, his current intervention is also based on a context definition in which he knows that his constituents do not want a war, and his local leaders plead for party loyalty despite their opposition to the war. When Mr. Gardiner, just like Mr. Savidge before him, then makes explicit that blind party loyalty in a serious case like this is morally unacceptable, he places himself on a morally higher level by making explicit that his vote must be based on what he thinks is right, that is, on moral grounds. All this is also the case for many other speakers in the debate, but only occasionally are such contextual conditions made explicit by the MPs.

In this case, apart from the many categories we have been considering as relevant for context models, such as participant identities and relations, positions and status, etc., we see the relevance of institutional and organizational norms and rules, of which speakers obviously are aware, especially when they flout them – which means they need higher level (moral) rules or norms that legitimate disloyalty and other breaches of "normal" rules. Incidentally, as is the case for all socially shared knowledge, these rules are not part of context models of *specific* communicative events themselves (as is sometimes assumed in other concepts of context). Rather, they are part of the *general*, socially shared cognitions that are at the basis of all context models of the same epistemic (and in this case, political) community.

The following sequence in the debate shows that Mr. Gardiner is not merely following his Prime Minister, but is also personally convinced that the UK should now go to war, and that no further UN resolution is necessary for that – a position that draws some rather loud protests ("Give way!," "Answer!") when he does not want to respond to several interruptions from other MPs.

Another intervention makes explicit other context properties, namely the speech of Brian Sedgemore, Labour MP and strongly opposed to the Iraq war, an intervention that deserves to be quoted at length:

(12) 1. **Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)**: We have
2. just heard a courageous speech, although I am not sure how well it
3. will go down with warlike taxi drivers from Billericay.

It is customary on these occasions to wish our forces well when they carry out the thankless task that we ask them to do in our name. In my capacity as the civilian president of 444 Squadron, Shoreditch – I proudly wear its tie today – I hope against hope that all our airmen and women, soldiers and sailors will return home safely from the war. I also hope that men, women and children in Iraq will be safe. With apologies to Churchill, I hope that this will not signal the end, or even the beginning of the end, for our Prime Minister. However, my gut instinct tells me that he will face almost insurmountable problems because of the position that he has taken. The scale of his misjudgment on this issue is enormous.

Who would have thought that the actions of a Labour Prime Minister would have given rise to the biggest demonstration in our history against his own Government? Who would have thought that his actions would give rise to the biggest parliamentary Back-Bench rebellion in modern political history? How did he manage to poison the idea of European unity? The attempts to make France the scapegoat for the miserable failure of British diplomacy have demeaned both our Foreign Secretary – I regret to say that – and our Prime Minister. Listening to some of today's debate, one would think that there is such an anti-French feeling that people have started to read the editorials in *The Sun*. It will be a long time before the civilised citizens of our continent forgive them.

How came it that our Prime Minister allowed a road map for peace to become a road map for war, thereby sowing deep division in the United Nations? Did he really think that the United States Government could bully and bribe all the nations of the UN to acquiesce in armed conflict? It is sad that, both as a politician and as a lawyer, the Prime Minister should have forsaken the ideal of a tolerant and liberal internationalism in favour of the frightening concept that might is right.

We are supposed to admire the Prime Minister because he is a man without doubts and one shorn of scepticism – two of the greatest qualities that the British people have. He just knows that he is right and is therefore prepared to ignore the advice of virtually all the leaders of the great religions in the world, including the Pope and our own archbishop. I find that approach rather frightening.

Worse than all that, the Prime Minister shows himself to be oblivious of and careless towards the shrewd moral judgment of the majority of the British people. No, we do not govern by opinion poll and focus groups, but in a modern democracy we need something stronger to hold on to than the slogan, "My Prime Minister, right or wrong."

In this catastrophe the Prime Minister, a self-avowed admirer of Baroness Thatcher, has ignored the principal lesson of her demise. He should know, as the rest of us do, that when arrogance turns to hubris, come-uppance is never far behind. (columns 836–837)

I have quoted this intervention at length because it renders quite well the flavor of the internal party opposition to Tony Blair, as well as the MPs' definition of the current communicative situation. Instead of a detailed commentary on the complexity of the speaker's hypothetical context model, let me summarize some of its elements in a list:

- A deictic expression ("We have just heard . . . ," lines 1–2) showing that previous discourse may become part of the current context model, e.g., as a basis for an evaluation ("courageous," line 2) and further commentary, presupposing a contextual time category ("just") and the relevant participants (MPs) ("we").
- The formulation of a rule ("it is customary that," line 4) for the current communicative event, referred to by current discourse deixis ("these occasions," line 4).
- The expression of an identity that may not be known (shared) by the other MPs ("my capacity as the civilian president of the 444 squadron," lines 5–6).
- The deictic expression of the usual communicative event participants, Setting, etc. ("I," "today," "our Prime Minister," *passim*), specifically also presupposition of national identities ("our airmen and women . . . ," lines 7–8).
- Indirect address, following House rules: speaking to the Prime Minister in third person, instead of second person (*passim*).
- Reference to the current position on the war by part of the MPs (especially of the Labour Party) who are present, and an evaluation of such a position in light of a political macro-context ("the biggest parliamentary Back-Bench rebellion in modern political history," lines 18–19).
- Deictic reference to the current communicative event ("today's debate").
- General deictic reference to (many of) the MPs ("the people have started to read," lines 24–25).
- Evidential and explanation of previous parts of the debate by comparison to a tabloid newspaper (*The Sun*), suggesting comparative evaluations of context properties in terms of style, tone or general political content.
- Addressing two identities of the Prime Minister ("as a politician and as a lawyer"), of which only one is contextually obvious, but the second is not, and hence needs to be made explicit.
- Explication of a specific norm ("We are supposed to admire the Prime Minister") based on general norm ("because he is . . . ") (line 35).
- Expression of national identity ("the greatest qualities that the British people have") (lines 36–37).
- Expressing critical evaluation of the recipient ("He just knows he is right . . . prepared to ignore the advice . . . , etc.) presupposing breaches of general social and political norms (e.g., "one should heed the advice of good people") (line 37).

- Accusation of lacking democracy while ignoring the advice of the people (lines 41–42).
- Rejection of a possible counterargument namely that when reference is made to what the majority of the people want this may be heard as being populist ("we do not govern by opinion poll"), but in the form of a disclaimer, with a first pair part expressing the norm, and the following part emphasizing what the opinion is anyway ("but in a modern democracy- . . . ," line 44).
- Reference to, and critical evaluation of, a political principle of party loyalty ("My Prime Minister, right or wrong." line 45).
- Reference to shared knowledge ("he should know . . . as the rest of us do," lines 47–48).

We see in this listing how many context elements may be signaled or even explicitly addressed in such a short fragment, such as various participant identities and relations, evaluation of participants, current and previous actions (speeches), as well as the general social and institutional norms and rules applied in the construction of the current context model.

One aspect needs further comment. Apparently, the rule in the UK House of Commons is that one should not directly address other MPs. So, Mr. Sedgemore cannot directly address and evaluate the Prime Minister, but must do so in an indirect, third person reference. Consider for instance the following exchange:

(13) 1. **Mr. Marsden**: I say to each hon. Member: think so carefully. I want
2. you to be able to look your children in the eye in years to come and
3. say that you did everything you possibly could to stop the war and
4. keep your conscience clear. To answer the hon. Gentleman, I say it is
5. up to you. It is up to each and every one of us.
6. **Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord)**: Order. The hon. Gentleman
7. must use the correct parliamentary language.
8. **Mr. Marsden**: My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is up to each and
9. every hon. Member to decide for themselves. (column 870)

We see here that Mr. Marsden suddenly uses a direct address of the MPs ("think so carefully . . . you . . . "), and is criticized by the Deputy Speaker, and then he reformulates his address in the usual third person format, from which we may infer what the apparent rule is applied by the Deputy Speaker.

The speech by John Randall

To further elaborate our analysis of fragments of this crucial debate, let us examine another example, from the (5-minute) speech of a Conservative MP, Mr. John Randall, representing Uxbridge. The (highly simplified) Hansard

transcript does not tell us more about the context than the time this speech begins (4.52 pm), the time it ends (4.57 pm) and the name and the constituency of the speaker (in bold) at the beginning of his speech. Anything else that might be relevant to understand in this speech must be inferred from what the speaker says, and what has been said before in this debate, as has partly been analyzed above, although the participant MPs of course know much more about Mr. Randall, and construe their models of him and his intervention accordingly.

Let us look at the first fragment (rendered in Hansard by a paragraph followed by a blank line) of Mr. Randall's speech:

(14) 1. **Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge)**:It is a pleasure to speak in such a full
2. Chamber. My normal lot is to speak when the Chamber is almost
3. empty, which is probably a good thing. I am afraid that when the gift
4. of making good speeches was handed out I must have been
5. somewhere else, but I shall try to explain why I intend to vote for the
6. amendment tonight. I shall do so with a heavy heart, and the Prime
7. Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition nearly
8. persuaded me to vote with them. Unfortunately, the right hon.
9. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) nearly
10. persuaded me not to vote with him.

A large part of this fragment is indexically and reflexively about Randall's own, current speech – which obviously has neither been referred to before, nor can information about this speech be inferred from general knowledge. In other words, such information is now being constructed as part of the context model of the speaker himself, featuring himself as a participant in the communicative role of speaker, the ongoing action itself (to speak), the speaker's current emotion or state of kind (pleasure) and the setting (the House). That is, the speaker at the same time deictically refers to, evaluates and performs the very act he is now engaging in. The use of the expression *such* is equally deictic here, because it presupposes shared knowledge based on observation about the current situation (Setting), namely that the Chamber is (now) full.

Note that nothing, so far, presupposes any previous intervention, and no sequential relevance of previous interventions (although of course there may be relevance with non-verbal aspects of the interaction: timing and order of interventions, the agenda of the session, etc. – only a few of which are mentioned in the Hansard transcript). The only way we can describe and account for what Mr. Randall says is by making explicit some properties of his probable representation of himself and the situation he is speaking in: a parliamentary debate held in the UK House of Commons. When the MPs listen to him, a large part of Mr. Randall's context model is shared by them, namely the date, time of day, location, the participants, that Mr. Randall is an

MP and a member of the Conservative Party, and hence being a member of the Opposition, that they are now in the role of communicative participants, and also MPs, and so on. One part of Mr. Randall's context model that is *not* shared, and hence *not* presupposed, and therefore possibly relevant for expression, is Mr. Randall's state of mind, namely that he likes to speak to a full House. Although comments on one's state of mind are common in the House of Commons, it is less common that MPs express their pleasure to speak to a full House. This means, first of all, that by the contextual rules of knowledge management, the speaker is entitled to express such a state of mind, because it is neither shared or presupposed, nor irrelevant or trivial or otherwise uninteresting and hence liable to be suppressed as an expression of emotion. Secondly, we may assume that such an expression does not stand alone, but fulfills a discursive and interactional function, which indeed it does: Mr. Randall continues to speak about his speaking in parliament, but now in more general terms ("my normal lot") when he self-mockingly refers to his earlier speeches as made to a nearly empty House. Again, what he says here is occasioned by his previous utterance, but not by previous utterances of previous speakers. Rather, since also this information cannot be inferred from what has been said before, nor from shared sociocultural knowledge, we must assume that this statement expresses (a generalized model about) previous experiences. The current experience (mental model) is thus compared and contrasted with earlier experiences (in the form of a generalized mental model) and hence made relevant for actual expression in this speech. Note that Mr. Randall is not referring to the "objective" fact of his earlier speeches to an empty house, but to his subjective experiences of such acts, that is, to previous mental models, as evidenced by the marker *my normal lot*, which presupposes an evaluation or an emotion.

So far, we see that in order to be able to account for these reflexive, self-referential or deictic expressions, we need the notion of a context model – none of what is said so far is occasioned by previous actions, nor inferable from the topic of the debate (Iraq), nor inferable from shared knowledge (except the shared meaning of the words, and the shared context of speaking in the House and the presence of MPs as participants). But there is more. Again, it is not very likely that Mr. Randall, or the MPs who are his recipients, interpret what he is now saying merely as an expression of his current and past states of mind or emotion (such as his pleasure to speak now to a full House, and his usual frustration to speak to a nearly empty House). Rather, applying their (shared) *political* knowledge about the House, MPs, speeches, etc., they are entitled to (and probably *do*) infer that if Mr. Randall typically speaks to an empty House, he must be a very unimportant MP, a typical backbencher. Such a plausible inference is not only relevant, but crucial because it is involved in the political weight assigned to

the current speech of Mr. Randall. Such a *political* implicature of the current speech cannot be inferred from current or past meanings and actions of the discourse as they would normally be described. But if both Mr. Randall and his recipients draw such an inference, it becomes relevant in their representation of the current context, and crucial to understand *why* Mr. Randall talks about his current and past emotions.

In the following part of this fragment Mr. Randall further comments on his earlier experiences but in this case with another evaluation ("a good thing"), implying that he thinks of himself as a bad speaker. This implication is made explicit in the next clause ("I am afraid that . . . "). This generalized self-description may simply be read as an expression of an opinion, duly represented in the current context model of the speaker about himself in the communicative role of speaker. However, again there is more to this than just an opinion, and also this utterance has interactional functions: describing oneself negatively and with self-irony, at the beginning of a speech, specifically about the speech itself, may be heard as an expression of modesty, and hence, rhetorically, as a *captatio benevolentiae*. Moreover, such a rhetorical move not only has the function to positively influence the opinion of the recipients about himself as speaker, that is, their context models, but again also has a political implicature, namely as a move in the kind of political persuasion that characterizes political debates in parliament.

We see that, based on such an account of context, much is going on in this fragment, and that making it explicit explains why Mr. Randall is saying what he says. Not only is this first fragment a form of apparent negative self-presentation, but at the same time he is conveying several political implicatures, some of which are no doubt shared by his recipients, so that they actually can function interactionally.

Note finally, that all these implications and implicatures presuppose not only the context models of the participants, but also general, socioculturally shared knowledge, such as knowledge about the House of Commons, public speaking, modesty, and so on. More specifically cultural is the (here: mock) belief that people's qualities are "gifts (. . .) handed out," which presupposes (socioculturally shared) tales about fairies handing out character traits to babies in the cradle. Moreover, when referring to the lack of rhetorical gifts, both the speaker and the recipients need to orient to norms and values of parliamentary debates in general, and whether it is relevant, socially or politically, to be a "gifted" speaker.

The *but* in line 5 shows that the modesty move of negative self-presentation may be heard as the usual disclaimer introducing what the speaker really wants to say. Indeed, he now comes to the point about his (political) function in parliament, namely whether or not he is going to vote for the amendment. The speech in that case is thus politically interpreted (by himself as well as the

recipient MPs) as what is called a "declaration" of a vote, that is, as an account. Again, this move is expressed with further expressions of modesty and hesitation ("try to . . . "), continuing the initial modesty move. This account is presented as an explanation of the crucial political act of the vote, which is already represented mentally, namely as an intention, that is, as part of the mental model of what the participant is going to do – and since it is part of the current debate, such a self-representation is again part of the context model.

Note that the use of the immediate future with the expression *shall* implies that the speaker already must know what he is going to say and what he is going to do. This is only possible when he has a (tentative, global) model of such future acts, and again we must assume that such "plans for speaking" are part of the ongoing context model – featuring information that is relevant to express in the speech, so that the recipients also can adapt their own context models: knowing the future political act of voting for the amendment, and that the speaker is going to explain his decision, makes it easier for them to understand, locally, what the speaker is saying and implying – as is the case for all presupposed headlines, summaries and abstracts.

That is, interactionally, the expression of relevant parts of the context model will function (and be interpreted) not only as an account, but also as an announcement. Moreover, it is not just justification of any future act, but also an account of a political decision, and hence of his intervention as a *political* speech, consistent with the general knowledge the participants have about the current situation and the global act of a parliamentary debate. The deictic expression *tonight* straightforwardly signals the Time category of the context model, and an interpretation of the scope of the temporal expression *shall* – a temporal scope that is continued in the next sentence ("I shall do so . . . ").

The discursive act (of voting for the amendment, and hence against the motion of the Prime Minister, and supported by the Conservative Opposition) announced is metaphorically associated with another expression of emotion ("a heavy heart"). This move continues the previous strategy of positive self-presentation, necessary because of the breach of alignment with the party, as does the movement of apparent doubt (" . . . nearly persuaded me") referred to in the rest of the sentence – implying that the decision of dissent has been difficult.

All this, I would claim, is based on the details of the context model of the speaker: this is how he defines the current communicative and interactional situation. He thus not only defines what he is now doing, and what he is going to do, but also the relevant opinions and emotions associated with these acts/discourses. Note, however, that this is not merely a representation of a situation of predicament or difficulty, as in any everyday decision making, and not merely an instance of the general persuasive strategy of positive self-

presentation, but more specifically a *political* move. That is, deviating from the party line, and not voting with the Prime Minister and not even with his "Friend," the leader of his own party and of the Opposition, puts the speaker in a problematic situation, because he is committing an act that could be blamed on him.

Hence, this passage is at the same time a form of *political* accounting for his current acts and talk. This, obviously, is not explicitly expressed, but no doubt intended and interpreted as such by the MPs in general, and the political leaders in particular. Simply expressing his lack of speech skills or his emotions about his decision would in this political situation hardly make sense, and hence the context model as construed by the speaker and the recipients needs to make explicit what they all understand by this fragment, namely a *political* account of a *political* decision. It is in this way, I suggest, that the political situation of the parliamentary debate subjectively impinges on the talk of the MPs in general, and of the current speaker in particular.

The same line of analysis applies to the rest of this intervention. As part of the overall discursive act of accounting for his decision and vote, Mr. Randall provides reasons, that is, rationalizations after the earlier moves of showing emotions. Thus, whereas he first presents himself as a sensitive and modest person, in a later part of his speech he presents himself as someone who has "good reasons" to say and do what he does, and hence as a rational person. Again, this is not merely a general move of positive self-presentation and accounting, but more specifically a *political* one in the current situation. That is, the *political* context model that controls his intervention steers the selection of arguments that are *politically* relevant in the current situation of the debate: comparisons with similar situations – and decisions – in the past: Yugoslavia, Kosovo, etc. The reasons not to support war in Iraq are also associated with an emotional dimension ("worries").

The dynamic context model of the speaker is ongoingly updated with other situational information, and we find traces of such a context model in the text itself, e.g., when he says elsewhere in his speech, "Enough has been said in some excellent speeches," a disclaimer (routinely followed by "but") that shows that speakers during their speeches have a memory representation – and an evaluation – of what has been said before. From this contextual representation inferences are drawn for the situation at hand, namely a negative evaluation ("lost my faith," "blatantly," "abused," "propagandists") of those who favor going to war. This is not just any kind of judgment, but in the current situation a *political* judgment, and hence a valid warrant for his own political decision not to support Blair and his own Conservative Party leader. The disclaimer following this judgment ("I do not seek to make a party political point, but . . . ") confirms that he knows that his words are most likely to be interpreted by the recipients as a political argument – that is, he

knows the probable consequences of his words for the context models of the other MPs. But, as is typical for the disclaimer, what follows "but" is the real message, that is, that the decision to go to war or not should *not* be political, but moral ("truth," "faith," "trust"), combined with the usual association of nationalistic positive self-presentation (the reference to "keep the faith" presupposes that the UK *has* this faith and truth). The political point of this speech, thus, is not to deny the political account of his actions, but to criticize the party-political account by advocating a higher-level moral account, which by itself is of course another move in the strategy of positive self-presentation, which is part of the overall strategy of persuasion – as we have seen for others opposing Blair's motion.

The reference to the Whips elsewhere in his speech is again a comment on the current situation of the debate itself, and hence reflexively signals the context models of the speaker and the other MPs. By *not* respecting the party line, Mr. Randall needs to make sure, again, that his decision is not merely interpreted as arbitrary dissent, for which he might be blamed, but as the result of a higher-level, moral decision. He therefore recommends that the MPs make up their own mind – emphasizing that both moral parties in the debate are responsible. Again, this may be interpreted as a partial expression of the context model of the speaker, reflexively referring to the ongoing act of decision making, to participants in different roles ("I," "Whips," "Members," "those who are voting . . . ," "the Government"), the current situation ("on this occasion"), an evaluation ("it is best"; "it is very difficult to . . . ").

The rest of this speech provides further (personal) arguments sustaining the speaker's decision, arguments that on the one hand emphasize his moral character, but at the same time have the political implicature of serving as a model of "doing decent politics."

An even more detailed contextual analysis of this speech would require many more pages. It may have become clear, however, that an adequate analysis of this contribution to a political debate in parliament requires theoretical terms and theories that go beyond conventional discourse and interaction analysis.

As has also been made clear in current work on talk in institutions, the speech of Mr. Randall should also be defined in terms of the institutional constraints of parliamentary discourse: who may speak (MPs), in what role (as representatives of their constituents, as party members, etc.), how long (5 minutes), after getting the floor from the Speaker of the House, addressing other MPs as well as the Prime Minister on the occasion of a motion, and with the goal of "declaring" his vote.

This, and more, can be derived from more general institutional rules and norms, acquired and applied as a knowledge script by the participants. That

is, we cannot simply map institutional macrostructures on this specific speech, also because that would be deterministic and not explain the current speaker's dissent. Rather, we need a theoretical and empirical interface that explains how general institutional norms and rules, represented and shared as political knowledge of members (and of MPs in particular), are instantiated subjectively in mental models of the current situation, that is, as context models.

The analysis of a fragment of this speech has shown how such a context model is able to make explicit several dimensions of this speech that cannot simply be accounted for in (general) conversational moves and strategies (such as those of positive self-presentation, etc.), but need to be introduced in the analysis so as to understand why and how these same moves and strategies are also *political*, and hence relevant in the political situation of a parliamentary debate. We have seen that in such an account of ongoing talk as interaction we cannot exclude the cognitive dimension underlying the plans, goals, current monitoring of speech by the speaker, and the relevant (political) interpretation of the recipients.

Context models thus do double duty: on the one hand they explain in much more detail the underlying mechanisms of talk as action and interaction, and on the other hand they explain how the macro (institutional) is related to the micro of discursive interaction.

Finally, our analysis and its theoretical basis also show how Mr. Randall's speech is interactional. For a classical account of the speech there are very few moments in which the speaker explicitly "reacts" to what has been said by the previous speaker(s). However, in a sociocognitively based contextual analysis, we were able to show that the interaction takes place at a very different level, and not just locally sequentially. That is, by his speech Mr. Randall first of all disagrees with Tony Blair and his plans, and hence engages in (normal) opposition. Secondly, he also disagrees with the support given by his own (Conservative) party and its leaders to Tony Blair and his plans. By so doing, an MP engages in a form of political dissent that may be interpreted as party disloyalty. In both cases, thus, the interaction takes place at a more global level of interaction in this debate. And finally, by expressing his *moral* disagreement with both Blair and the Conservative Party, and with anybody else supporting the war, the MP also engages in even more global *social* opposition. Without a detailed context analysis, neither the local, nor these important global aspects of the interaction in this parliamentary debate can be accounted for.

Concluding remarks

The partial contextual analysis of some fragments of the Iraq debate confirms various of the theoretical claims made in this book, and at the same time

shows that such a theoretical framework can be relevantly applied to discourse. First of all, we have seen that most of the contextual categories postulated characterize the context models of the MPs and hence influence their discourse. Besides the obvious categories of Setting (current date, parliament, Britain), we specifically also highlighted the many Participant identities and relations of the speakers and recipients.

Secondly, besides the usual dimensions of a discourse and conversation analysis, we have found that much of the political "point" of these speeches is not being expressed at all, but needs to be inferred from the context models of the participants (and the analyst), namely as political implicatures. Voting against the party line is morally and politically very risky for MPs, also because it may be interpreted as dissidence, as a lack of solidarity, and in the case of war, as treason. In such a case, discourse needs to be strategically very persuasive so as to avoid such interpretations, but without breaching rules of politeness, rules of the House, party rules, and so on. Much of this is done at the implicit pragmatic level of implicatures: Things everybody understands, but that cannot be said openly in parliament.

Thirdly, we have seen how properties of context models are controlled by various sets of (parliamentary, party, moral, etc.) rules, which are part of the Common Ground of the participants. However, whereas such rules (like the rules of grammar and interaction) govern parliamentary speeches in general, what is contextually specific and contingent is the *application* of these rules in the current situation. In that case, breaches need to be accounted for, and this occurs in terms of the implicit, but locally shared, structures of the context model being used by each MP.

Finally, even a very fragmentary contextual analysis of this debate has shown how besides the usual context categories, such as political identities, it is especially also the *power* relations between participants that characterize the context models of the participants. Tony Blair's institutional power as Prime Minister and party leader might in principle satisfy the conditions for being able to persuade parliament to vote for his motion. But in this case, and for the first time in his long reign, Tony Blair is not so much challenged by the Conservative Opposition, but from within his own parties and among his own voters. That is, his usual power is seriously compromised, and although the discourse may show various moments of his usual arrogance, as in his reply to the "The main parties?" interruption by Liberal Democrats, his speech shows in many ways that he may not get the support he wants.

Similarly, in the contextual analysis of the speech of a Conservative backbencher, we also see multiple manifestations of the presupposed power relations in parliament as well as in British politics. Opposition in this case is only possible, not by plain dissidence with respect to party discipline – as

symbolized by the Whips – but in the supra-party values of the higher morality of pacifism or being against *this* war.

We conclude that parliamentary discourse first of all needs to be analyzed at many well-known levels of text or talk – grammar, style, rhetoric, speech acts, interaction, and so on. But a more (politically) significant, and hence more *relevant* and *critical*, analysis of discourse takes place in contextual terms. Some of these contextual dimensions are signaled in discourse, and allow participants to invite or make correct inferences. But often it is only a complex combination of discourse structures, world knowledge and political context that allows them to understand the many implicatures that define the very political *point* and *functions* of the speeches and the whole debates. Subsequent speeches in the debate not only react to what has actually been said by the Prime Minister or the MP, but to what has been politically implicated. This is only possible when all MPs are able to construe the relevant context models that allow them to infer such implicatures in the first place.

A theory of context – defined in terms of subjective mental models of participants based on shared social knowledge, norms and values – makes such local constructions of the communicative situation explicit. They thus significantly complement current theories of discourse with a dimension that hitherto was only dealt with in vague, impressionistic terms, if at all. At the same time they show more explicitly how the production and comprehension of all other levels and dimensions of discourse are being controlled by such context models. They thus provide an important missing link in the psychology of discourse processing, and a theory of how global social, cultural and political structures and their local situational manifestations are related to those of discourse in interaction.

6 Conclusions

In this chapter I shall only briefly list the major conclusions of this voluminous two-volume study, and finally formulate some open problems and tasks for the advancement of an integrated, multidisciplinary theory of context.

1. **Necessity of a theory of context.** After decades of studies focused, more or less autonomously, on text and talk itself, with occasional lip service being paid to the relevance of context, the time has come to develop an integrated theory of context and its relations to discourse. Such a theory should be related to context studies in other disciplines.
2. **The term "context."** The term "context" is widely used in academic and other genres of discourse, generally in the rather vague sense of "environment" or "situation" and related notions. In the language sciences, "context" is also used as "verbal context" of some expression (word, sentence, etc.), that is, as "co-text." In this study, "context" is defined as a theoretical term, within a broader theory of discourse, that must account for the ways discourses are produced and understood as a function of the properties of the communicative situation – as they are understood and represented by the participants themselves.
3. **From context-free to context-sensitive scholarship.** Many of the humanities and social sciences have shown a development in the last four decades away from autonomous approaches focusing on text, talk, communication, literature, cognition, etc. in their own right, towards more context-sensitive, dynamic, situated accounts of social phenomena. "Contextualism" is thus a general property of contemporary scholarship, extending also to philosophy and the sciences.
4. **Context as definition of the situation.** The main thesis of this book is that contexts are not "objective" (dimensions of) social situations – such as gender, age or class – that cause or determine (properties) of discourse, but *subjective definitions* of the currently relevant dimensions of such situations by the participants. Since all social actors have their own personal history, and hence are individually different, their definitions of the situation are also always minimally different. Given the situational

nature of contexts, several of the chapters examine the nature and structures of situations as these are studied in several disciplines, especially in the social sciences.

5. **Context as everyday experience.** The communicative situations that are the basis of contexts are daily experiences like all others, but with discursive activities instead of non-verbal activities or events. Hence, contexts must partly be theorized in terms of the daily experiences of social actors.
6. **Contexts are subjective.** Contexts as experiences of (communicative) events are subjective, and embedded in set of autobiographical representations in episodic memory. Accounts of the history of the theory of the situation in the social sciences also emphasize the subjective nature of contexts.
7. **Contexts as mental models.** Subjective definitions of situations are cognitive objects that need to be made explicit in cognitive terms, namely as special mental models, called *context models*, located in episodic memory. These context models control the variable properties of discourse production and comprehension. They are the crucial interface that enables language users to adapt the production or the understanding of (each fragment of) discourse to the communicative situation. Context models – which account for the pragmatics of discourse – also control the expression or formation of subjective mental models of events or actions, that is, what discourses are *about*, namely the semantics of discourse. Since contexts are a type of everyday experience, context models are special cases of subjective models of everyday experience that control the everyday activities of social actors. Since context models are by definition unique, the discourses or interpretations they control are also unique – whatever else they have in common among participants.
8. **Contexts are dynamic.** Context models are not static, but dynamic: They partially change during interaction, or the production or comprehension of written discourse, if only by the changes in the knowledge states of the participants ("what has already been said or learned"). In that sense, previous parts of discourse automatically become part of the context.
9. **Contexts are organized by schemas.** As is the case for all complex information, contexts also are organized by cognitive schemas consisting of a limited number of relevant categories people use to analyze and understand the communicative situation. Since context models control all discourse production and comprehension they must be relatively simple, so that they can be managed (formed, updated or changed) in real time (fractions of seconds in spontaneous talk) and in parallel to the many other tasks involved in discourse processing. Much of the investigation has been

focused on the possible and necessary categories for context models. These appear to be quite general – as for all experiences – and feature such general categories as Setting (Time, Place), Participants (and their various roles and relations), the ongoing Activities and the relevant cognitions of the participants: Knowledge, Beliefs and Goals. These schemas and categories are partly universal (such as Knowledge), partly culturally variable (such as the relevant roles and relations of participants).

10. **Contexts and interaction.** Critical analysis of the history and current state of sociology shows that whereas situations and contexts were traditionally taken into account in order to describe and explain action, many contemporary approaches were predominantly context-free, at least until the 1990s. We have seen how especially conversation analysis (CA) has been quite reluctant to introduce such a notion.
11. **Micro- and macro-contexts.** Contexts may represent face-to-face communicative situations (micro-contexts), such as a parliamentary speech or debate, but also various meso or macro levels of social situations and structure, such as parliament as an institution or even democracy as a system. Such levels may ongoingly be (made) more or less relevant for ongoing text or talk. The context theory as presented thus also accounts for the well-known issue of the relations between "structure" and "agency" in the social sciences.
12. **Knowledge as a Common Ground component of contexts.** A crucial component of context models is the way participants manage various kinds of knowledge. They need to know what recipients know so as to be able to decide what information to presuppose, leave implicit, remind or affirm. Such intersubjectively or culturally shared knowledge is the core of the Common Ground of the participants. Special strategies apply to calculate for each communicative situation, and then for each step of the context model, what the recipients (must, may, should) know, and how to adapt the next discourse fragment (word, clause, sentence, proposition, turn, etc.) to such knowledge.
13. **Contexts are planned.** Contexts are not formed ad hoc and from scratch from the moment interaction or communication starts, but partly planned in advance, especially in less spontaneous forms of text and talk, such as institutional discourse: Before entering a communicative situation, participants usually already know the Setting (Time, Place), (something about the) other participants, the aims of the verbal activity, the topic of discourse, and so on. Once the interaction has started the context models become specified – by the information inferred from the interpretation of the communicative situation – and ongoingly updated.
14. **Contexts as models of social and communicative situations.** Since contexts model the relevant dimensions of communicative situations,

their analysis presupposes a theory of social situations, in general, and of communicative situations, in particular, and the ways these are understood by the participants and as such influence their conduct and the interpretation of conduct by other participants. Social psychological, sociological and anthropological analyses of social situations are needed as an empirical basis for the acquisition and usage of context model schemas. As micro and macro models, contexts also function as the necessary interface between social structure and agency.

15. **Social representations as basis of contexts.** Context models are by definition unique, but are based on socially and culturally shared general knowledge about social and communicative situations. These shared social representations (knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, norms or values – depending on the communicative community) also guarantee that context models are sufficiently similar to enable communication and interaction.
16. **The sources of context model formation and change.** Context models are formed, updated or changed on the basis of the following types of information:
    a. Previous context planning yielding a provisional context
    b. Observation and analysis of the current social and communicative situation
    c. Inferences from previous discourse in the situation
    d. Inferences from ongoing activities of participants
    e. Recalling previous context models
    f. Instantiation of general knowledge about contexts
    g. Application of general personal and social aims and goals.
17. **Context models are culturally variable.** Context models and their categories are partly culturally variable, as are the experiences of everyday situations. As there are universals of human languages, however, there are also universals of human cognition and interaction, and some of these are relevant in the acquisition and uses of context models. For instance, no human interaction and discourse is possible without a knowledge component that regulates presuppositions, implicitness, speech acts, and so on.
18. **Dominant context categories.** Besides universal context categories such as Knowledge, some context schema categories are very general and very dominant in all or most cultures: gender, age and status/power. In other words, whenever there is a difference of (perceived) gender, age or status/power between participants it will nearly always be explicitly indexed or tacitly taken for granted in interpretation. Also ingroup–outgroup membership of various kinds – such as ethnicity, origin (nationality), religion or political ideologies – frequently control text and talk.

19. **Relations between contexts and discourse are complex.** Discourse as interaction or communicative activity is reflexively part of the communicative situation modeled by context models: participants subjectively represent not only the communicative environment, but also the activities in which they are engaged, including the verbal activities. Relations between the discourse and the (other elements of the) communicative situation are multilateral. Context categories control discourse categories, and vice versa. For instance, social properties and relations of participants may control pronouns of address or politeness markers, and the use of such pronouns or markers may also confirm or change the construction of social relations (e.g., distance, familiarity, etc.) between the participants. Contextual control is not deterministic but a combination of personal goals, etc. and sociocultural norms and rules, as defined (to be relevant) by the context model. Text–Context relations may be described in different terms, e.g., in terms of control, conditioning, influence, mapping, expression, (re)production, functions, and so on, depending on level of description, goals and type of theory.
20. **Contexts control discourse variation: genre, style and register.** Contexts control the variable properties of text and talk (obligatory properties are of course context-free) and hence are the basis of genre, style and register. Although genres have often been described in terms of their discourse structures, more often than not they should be defined by context features, such as the Setting, the kinds of participants, the type of social activity, the goals, and the associated beliefs of the participants, as we have seen especially for parliamentary debates. Contexts define style variation, in principle especially at the level of expression (sound/image, lexicon and syntax), given more or less the same meaning, but may also be defined at other levels if some lower level is kept constant: e.g., a variation of local meanings with a global meaning (topic) kept constant. Personal or social styles function as markers of uniqueness, individuality, distinction and difference with respect to other participants or groups. Register is a combination of grammatical properties of sets of genres.
21. **Discourse level specific context control.** Context control must be examined for all levels of discourse, from expressions (sounds, visuals, words and syntax), formats (schemas) and rhetoric, to meanings (local and global), speech acts, and interaction.
22. **Empirical evidence of context control.** Although most situation-based discourse influence has been investigated for gender, relatively few gender influences on discourse are generalizable, and often can or should be accounted for in other terms, e.g., of social position, or everyday experiences and practices. Most empirical research suggests that single

context dimensions hardly have generalizable main effects on discourse variation, and that it is the combination of such dimensions that should be investigated – thus confirming the necessity of an approach in terms of complex context model control instead of isolated social variables and correlations.

23. **A concrete example: the Iraq speech of Tony Blair.** Throughout this study we have used one of the speeches on Iraq by Tony Blair given in the UK House of Commons just before the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003. We set out to show that in order to be able to produce such a speech and adapt it to the communicative situation, as well as to understand it, participants need context models that control production and understanding and that explain its appropriateness. It has been shown that current theories of discourse and conversation may describe many relevant dimensions of this speech (and its components), but are unable to account for its crucial functions, namely its *political* point in a parliamentary session. Finally, in a more detailed analysis of the rest of Blair's intervention, as well as that of other Members of Parliament, it is shown how contextual analysis may go beyond other aspects of discourse and conversation analysis. Thus, the *political implicatures* of text and talk can only be made explicit in terms of context models that feature the relevant political categories and information.
24. **Functions of contexts.** Why account for contexts? A theory of context, defined in terms of subjective mental models, has many theoretical and analytical functions – and is not an irrelevant or marginal extension of current theories of text and talk. As also summarized above, contexts account for the following aspects of discourse and language use:
    a. In general terms, contexts are the sociocognitive interface between society and social situations on the one hand and discourse on the other hand, between the personal-subjective and the social-collective aspects of language use and communication.
    b. As mental models contexts also mediate between personal experiences and social knowledge on the one hand, and discourse on the other hand.
    c. Contexts (as models) explain how language users are able to flexibly adapt their text or discourse (and their interpretation) to the communicative and social situation.
    d. They explain why and how discourses at all levels may vary from situation to situation.
    e. They offer a theoretical basis for the notions of genre, style and register.
    f. They explain many of the contradictions of sociolinguistic research of mono-causal social variables, and suggest how influence of social

environments should be formulated in terms of the subjective models of participants, featuring a complex of relevant social properties of communicative situations.

g. They integrate cognitive, social and cultural investigations of the (understanding of, and participation in) social situations and communicative events.

Open problems and future research

The theory of context presented in this study is only a first sketch. Some of its general characteristics are consistent with other directions and findings in the cognitive and social sciences. However, there are still many of its aspects that have not yet been dealt with in enough detail – or at all.

First of all, and despite the research from several disciplines presented and reviewed in this book, we only have an approximate idea of the precise organization of context models. We have discussed various (sub) categories, of which some appear to be very general, if not universal, and also seem vindicated in most empirical research. On the other hand, there are others, such as environmental conditions (such as temperature, props, clothing of participants) that have no or a different kind of influence on discourse. More empirical and comparative research will be needed to establish which categories are (more or less) dominant in which cultures, and how these categories are organized in a model schema, or possibly in other formats of mental organization we still do not know. Also, we need to examine in more detail the textual or contextual status and properties of the "media" that manifest discourse.

Knowledge and other social cognitions play a fundamental role as the basis of context models. We need much more cognitive research into the structures of different kinds of knowledge, and how knowledge is being used and updated in (the definition of) the communicative situation. Similarly, we have little insight into the ways ideologies influence the construction of context models by the participants.

Neuropsychological research will be necessary into the formation, uses and changes of context models during discourse production and comprehension – including the contextual-pragmatic disorders that may result from brain injury or mental illness.

Systematic research is needed to investigate the acquisition of context formats and categories, and the ways these control discourse and comprehension. Context modeling involves mutual mind modeling – such as knowing about the knowledge or intentions of other participants – and we need to know when and under what conditions children acquire such cognitive and interactional abilities.

Mental models (no more than meanings or actions) are, as such, not observable. Besides systematic analyses of the manifestations of their control over discourse, we may want to investigate such models more directly, e.g., through scans of their neurological representation and activities in the brain, think-aloud protocols, priming, recognition and recall tasks, interviewing, and so on.

Empirical work so far has especially focused on the role of gender, besides some work on age, class, profession, status/power and ideology. However, such studies should be multiplied, combining the different social dimensions as they are relevant for speakers, that is, according to context models. There are still many genres, communicative events, activity types and communicative situations that have as yet hardly been investigated. Although there is a vast amount of research on conversation, storytelling, argumentation, literature, and so on, there are few, if any, detailed monographs on such daily and influential genres as editorials, textbooks, bureaucratic text and talk, board meetings, cabinet meetings, police interrogations, and so on – also because the access to elite discourse and communicative events is severely restricted.

These problems can only be dealt with satisfactorily when scholars from different disciplines and directions of research cooperate and join forces in the development of theory, analysis and empirical research. Throughout this book I have repeatedly criticized those directions of research that for whatever practical, theoretical or ideological reason reduce their focus to only very limited aspects of discourse, interaction and cognition. I have especially pointed out that without a solid bridge between social interaction research, also in institutions and organizations, and social cognition research, any theory of discourse will be incomplete, inadequate, trivial or superficial. Contexts are definitions of participants and hence mental models, but they are models of experiences and social situations that may culturally vary, and they have "real" consequences for texts and talk. In the same way as discourse itself cannot be described only as one "track" (verbal, interactional or cognitive) the same is true for the contexts that control such discourse. And of course, even more generally, no account of discourse can be complete without an explicit theory of its contexts.

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