

Don't Take It Out of Context!: Leveraging Foreign Language Teaching Practices

IUP Methodology Conference on
Foreign Language Teaching
April 16, 2021

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"Yes, I said '#\$%!%', but it was
taken out of *context!*"

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Workshop Goals: Participants will be able to:

- Discuss the role of context in classroom practice.
- Establish a meaningful and purposeful context for language instruction.

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Why is Context Important?

A context is meaningful when it matters to students and involves topics and interactions to which students can relate and that they perceive as useful to their learning and future use of the target language outside of class.

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Context: More than an overarching theme/topic?

- Examples: Holidays, sports, the city, health
- Problems with this definition:
 - Details may be shallow, uninteresting
 - May not reflect communication beyond classroom
 - Lack larger goal or reason to explore them
- "You are a doctor. Give advice to your patient on how to care for a cold. Use the imperative form of the verbs provided."
- Activity 1: What is the problem with this type of context?

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CONTEXT

- Factors that make language comprehensible, meaningful, memorable, and purposeful
- Context provides information that has a purpose such as "knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015, p. 12).
- Includes information such as who is speaking, the interlocutors' relationship with each other, why they communicate, and the manner of communication.

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CONTEXT vs. CONTENT

- Content = WHAT we talk about
- Context
 - Enables content to be understood
 - Provides the WHY, HOW, WHEN, PURPOSES, INTENT
- When context is not understood, content is not understood.
- Example: A lesson/unit on THE CITY is Content. The context is WHY study the city— for what goal or purposes?

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CONTENT WITHOUT CONTEXT IS NOISE



"Yes, I said '95%' but it was taken out of context!"

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Analyzing Context: The SPEAKING Model (Hymes, 1974)

- **S**etting or scene in which communication takes place (when and where)
- **P**articipants involved (who)
- **E**nds or goals of the communication (why)
- **C**ommunicative **A**cts or language functions performed to meet goals of communication (how)
- **K**ey or tone of the interaction (formal/informal)
- **I**nstrument or channel through which communication flows (conversations, email, etc.)
- **N**orms or rules that govern talk
- **G**enre that shapes communication (chit chat, stories, narratives, etc.)

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Activity 2: Analyzing a TV Commercial

- Watch the following TV commercial.
- Then describe the context of interaction by explaining as many of the components of the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model as you can based on your observational data. If parts of the context are unclear to you, explain why.
- See Handout for activity sheet.

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ACTIVITY 2: ANALYZING A TV COMMERCIAL

1. Watch the following TV commercial.
2. Then describe the context of interaction by explaining as many of the components of the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model (Hymes, 1974) as you can based on your observational data. If parts of the context are unclear to you, explain why.

Setting or scene in which communication takes place (when and where):

Participants involved (who): _____

Ends or goals of the communication (why): _____

Acts or language functions performed to meet goals of communication (how):

Key or tone of the interaction (formal/informal): _____

Instrument or channel through which communication flows (conversations, email, etc.): _____

Norms or rules that govern talk:

Genre that shapes communication (chit chat, stories, narratives, etc.):

Other Considerations About Context

- Critical for comprehension of and meaning-making in TL
- Can never be reduced to the grammar point of the day (**GRAMMAR ≠ CONTEXT**)
 - Grammar is one essential mediational tool that is not an end in and of itself
- According to brain-based research, meaningfulness is pivotal in learning and context provides meaning and purpose (Sousa, 2011).

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Deconstructing the Practice: Two Phases At a Glance

- PHASE ONE:
 - Establishing the context in terms of:
 - The topic/theme, inquiry question, language functions
 - Step 1 in Backward-design planning model
 - See External Mediational Tool #7 and Rubric in Handout.
- PHASE TWO:
 - Carrying the context through instruction and assessment
 - Steps 3 and 4 in Backward-design planning model

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PHASE ONE

- Step 1: Establish the topic or theme
 - Example: Nutrition
- Step 2: Identify the inquiry question that drives the topic or theme
 - Presents an issue to investigate, a problem to solve
 - Answerable only by synthesizing information and results of communicative exchanges conducted over the course of instruction; NOT discrete point!
 - Examples in nutrition theme:
 - How have eating habits changed over the years?
 - How is one's diet influenced by cultural perspectives?

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PHASE ONE cont'd.

- Step 3: Identify language functions and how they relate to the lesson/unit
 - *Language function*—a global task for which language is used to communicate, such as ordering a meal in a restaurant or obtaining information
 - See SPEAKING model
 - Examples in nutrition theme: Sharing opinions about popular diets, asking a friend about preferred nutritional habits, or comparing nutritional models across cultures (e.g., the United States Department of Agriculture food plate, Belgium food triangle, Spain's food pyramid)

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PHASE ONE cont'd.

- Step 4: Identify the grammar and vocabulary relevant to the context.
 - Selected as tools for making meaning and engaging in target-language interactions based on the context
 - Avoid pre-teaching grammar and/or vocabulary out of context.
 - Examples for Spanish in nutrition theme: present tense, noun/adjective agreement, expressions of comparisons (e.g., *más/menos* + adjective + *que*), the subjunctive mood to express doubt or inquire about the existence of certain foods in a particular diet
 - Vocabulary: Foods/ingredients/beverages, adjectives for describing how foods taste (e.g., salty, sweet, sour); diets and dietary restrictions; menu vocabulary; etc.

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PHASE TWO: Carrying the context through instruction and assessment

- Step 5: Design target-language assessments that feature the context
 - Design of assessments should precede design of instructional plan to keep end goals in mind
 - When context in assessments is lost, so is meaning.
- Step 6: Design instructional tasks for meaningful and purposeful practice in context
 - Classroom practice must maintain context so that language use remains meaningful and purposeful.

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Activity 3: Rehearse the Practice

- Choose ONE of the following speech situations and identify at least 2 communicative language functions expressed as a speaking event (what is talked about) that could be observed in these situational contexts. For example, if the speech situation is a party, one could observe a self-introduction to a person one does not know, individuals stating likes and dislikes about recent movies, or discussions about school, jobs, or leisure time activities. See Handout for activity sheet.
 - At the shopping mall
 - At home watching TV with a friend
 - In school

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Post-Session Practice

- Now develop your own context for a lesson or unit of instruction by identifying:
 - The theme or topic
 - The inquiry question
 - Language functions (You might review the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Model)
 - Grammar and vocabulary relevant to the context
 - 2 sample target-language interactions for students to complete in class
 - One formative assessment task
- See Handout for activity sheet.

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From Teaching Works 2021

Great teachers aren't born.
THEY'RE TAUGHT.

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ACTIVITY 3: REHEARSE THE PRACTICE

Choose ONE of the following speech situations and identify at least 2 communicative language functions expressed as a speaking event (what is talked about) that could be observed in these situational contexts. For example, if the speech situation is a party, one could observe a self-introduction to a person one does not know, individuals stating likes and dislikes about recent movies, or discussions about school, jobs, or leisure time activities.

- At the shopping mall
- At home watching TV with a friend
- In school

Speech situation selected: _____

Communicative language functions: Students will:

SOURCE: Adapted from Glisan & Donato, 2021, p. 26

POST-SESSION PRACTICE

Now develop your own context for a lesson or unit of instruction by identifying:

1. The theme or topic (Sample themes: Sports, The City, Health, School/Education, The Restaurant, Freedom, Saving the Planet)

2. The inquiry question: _____

3. Language functions (You might review the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Model):

4. Grammar and vocabulary relevant to the context:

5. 2 sample target-language interactions for students to complete in class: _____

6. One formative assessment task: _____

SOURCE: Adapted from Glisan & Donato, 2021, p. 27

External Mediation Tool #7: Establishing a Meaningful and Purposeful Context for Language Instruction

Note: The questions in the second column are relevant for teachers who use a textbook or curriculum guide. A “yes” response should be accompanied by examples and a “no” response should indicate how the weakness will be addressed in creating the context.

Steps in Establishing a Context	Questions to Ask if Using a Textbook or Curriculum Guide
Identify the topic or theme of the lesson or unit.	Does the textbook or curriculum guide offer a context that is interesting, meaningful, unambiguous, and purposeful?
Identify one inquiry question that drives the topic or theme.	Does the context of the textbook or curriculum guide provide a real reason for learning the language beyond learning or practicing a grammar ‘rule’? Is there a tangible outcome or goal relevant to the context that can move exploration of the context and content of instruction forward?
Identify the language functions of the lesson/unit and how they relate to the context.	Does the context of the textbook or curriculum guide allow for interactions in the target language that go beyond simple mechanical practice of language forms? Can students perceive that what will be learned is useful and reflects ways that language is outside the classroom in everyday encounters?
Identify the grammar and vocabulary relevant to the context.	Are grammar and vocabulary presentations in the textbook or curriculum guide situated in the context and do demonstrations and explanations illustrate how the grammar is used to make meaning in context?

SOURCE: Glisan & Donato, 2021, p. 31

RUBRIC: HLTP #7: Establishing a Meaningful and Purposeful Context for Language Instruction

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Developing	Unacceptable
Nature of Context: Meaningful, Purposeful in Learning Goals and Objectives	Context is meaningful, has a clear purpose in learning goals and objectives. Context motivates learners to want to learn and interact in the target language.	Context is meaningful, has a clear purpose in learning goals and objectives.	Context is meaningful but lacks purpose in learning goals and objectives.	Context is superficial and lacks meaning and/or purpose in learning goals and objectives. Context may be from a textbook or curriculum guide with no adaptations to make it meaningful/purposeful.
Scope of Context	Context is driven by a larger goal or inquiry question that presents an issue to investigate or a problem to solve.	Context makes connections to a larger goal or inquiry question that presents an issue to investigate or a problem to solve.	Context makes connections to a larger goal but lacks an inquiry question that presents an issue to investigate or a problem to solve.	Context provides a topic or theme but is not related to a larger goal or inquiry question.
Connection of Context to Language Functions	Context is anchored to specific language functions that include speech events, speakers, goals, language necessary to carry out speech events.	Context identifies specific language functions that include speech events, speakers, goals, language necessary to carry out speech events.	Context identifies specific language functions that include several but not all of the following aspects: speech events, speakers, goals, language necessary to carry out speech events.	Context lacks a connection to specific language functions.
Relevance of Grammar and Vocabulary to Context	Selected grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for the context, including the inquiry question and language	Selected grammar and vocabulary are taught within the context.	Most of the grammar and vocabulary are taught within the context. Or either the grammar or vocabulary	Grammar and vocabulary tend to be taught (or 'pre-taught') out of context and/or grammar and vocabulary

	functions, and are taught within the context.		is taught within the context, but not both.	are from a textbook and lack a connection to the context.
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SOURCE: Glisan & Donato, 2021, p. 32

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