

Text and Context: The Role of Context in Discourse Analysis

[Tara E. Tarpey](#)¹, [Donna Delprete](#)¹

1 Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract

For discourse analysts, the notion of context is a key factor that differentiates approaches to data analysis. While most approaches involve a micro-level analysis of stretches of text or talk, it is the “breadth of contexts in which utterances are considered” (Gordon, 2009, p. 192) that varies among approaches. What precisely constitutes context (i.e., whether it is limited to the locally produced utterances or is extended to include the world outside of the text or talk), and how much (or how little) context should be considered in the analysis has generated some hearty debates (see Billig, 1999a, 1999b; Schegloff, 1997; Tracy, 2010). The aim of this forum is neither to rehash these debates nor to argue in favor of one perspective over another. Instead, this forum will further broaden the already broadly defined notion of context by viewing it from multiple dimensions.

This edition of the forum comprises six commentaries on the role of context in discourse analysis by members of Dr. Hansun Zhang Waring’s Spring 2010 Doctoral Seminar in Applied Linguistics at Teachers College, Columbia University. These contributions span a breadth of contexts, from a family dinnertime conversation to a classroom setting, and each contributor presents a distinct perspective on *how* and *how much* context figures into analysis.

In the first commentary, Junko Takahashi examines the role of cultural context in understanding compliments and compliment responses in Japanese conversation. Next, Drew Fagan discusses the importance of considering multiple domains of teacher knowledge as context so as to enrich analysis of language classrooms. Catherine DiFelice Box employs the notion of *procedural consequentiality* to demonstrate how context unfolds within the discourse of a classroom interaction. Sarah Creider utilizes both conversation analysis and Goffman’s (1974) theories of *frames* and *footing* to reveal the multiple layers of context in a single turn of teacher talk. Rebekah Johnson and Donna DelPrete analyze a family dinnertime conversation to show how context features in family discourse. Finally, Tara Tarpey merges conversation analysis and ethnography in the analysis of an interaction between a tutor and a tutee in a writing center.

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COMMENTARIES

Culture as Context

Junko Takahashi

Teacher Knowledge as Context

Drew S. Fagan

Classroom as Context: Procedural Consequentiality in a Secondary English Classroom

Catherine DiFelice Box

Layered Contexts

Sarah Creider

Family as Context

Rebekah Johnson and Donna DelPrete

The Institution as Context

Tara E. Tarpey