

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING ?

Gabriel Obando, Pedro Obando, Ana Sánchez
University of Nariño

INTRODUCTION

Sociology and Linguistics have become more concerned with the phenomenon of communication, and each science has developed strategies to integrate the study of language as a common goal. Linguists consider the importance of socially conditioned linguistic events, and social scientists are aware of the social nature of language. Sociolinguistics is the science that deals with this important relation; in which the speech acts are analyzed in all their social dimensions. In contrast to the points of view of some linguists such as Saussure or even Chomsky, sociolinguists have demonstrated that speech is not an isolated manifestation of a standard homogeneous community without the underlying constraints of a complex system of social relations. The role of the social relations is given more importance in the social sciences, especially in the field of foreign language education.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SPEECH ACT

Dialectologically and anthropologically trained linguists claim, that in order to solve some important theoretical problems, the analysis of actual speech in concrete social groups is essential to integrate the social context of the speech act into linguistic descriptions. This point is crucial when we are talking about foreign language teaching. Hymes points out that "the key to understanding language in context is to start not with language, but with context" (1972).

The main goal of teaching English, or another language, is not only to exchange words with others but to understand what they mean. Pedagogy has been aware of the need of using contextualized exercises in teaching the language skills. In this sense, we talk about contextualized oral exercises and not simple repetition drills; contextualized grammatical exercises situated in socially verbal exchanges; contextualized readings with specific focus on the learners' needs and appropriate context. Context is not another skill in language teaching but a fundamental constituent of each one of the skills.

A situation of communication has different dimensions in which an event can be presented. The linguistic dimension determines what elements precede or follow to give general cohesion to the text by choosing the adequate pronouns, deitics, qualifiers, etc. This is an important claim that has been made by the functional approach. Linguistic forms are determined by the internal context of an utterance; intentions, assumptions, desires that give the appropriateness and meaning to a sentence. Elocutionary parts and components together with the perlocutionary effects of the performer give coherence to a text. However, the external context of communication plays an important role in decoding the meaning of a simple or complex text. Context is not only spoken words, but also gestures, bodily movements, and a whole set of external activities that occur during an exchange of speech acts.

Fortunately, the importance of context and social interaction in communication has been well described by sociolinguists and anthropologists. Hymes, based on previous notions of context, created a set of factors that describe the situational context of the speech event. This set of factors is very well known under the acronym SPEAKING, which corresponds to: setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms of interaction and interpretation, and genre. Kramsch (1993) explains these factors with reference to the language classroom. Setting refers to the physical setup of the class; participants include speakers and listeners; ends are related to the purposes of the activities; act sequence refers to the form and content of utterances; key is the tone, manner, or spirit in which a message is conveyed; instrumentalities are the channel and code used in the communication process; norms of interaction and interpretation refer to the way students interact and interpret the oral or written text; genre refers to specific activities developed in the class. Halliday (1989:49) going beyond the specific parts of a linguistic event, points out that another type of relation exists between the texts and the context, that is, the intertextual context and its close relation to assumptions and expectations.

CULTURE

Culture is an integral part of language, and there is no reason for it to be taught separately, as it was a common practice in some curricula. From the first class, culture is involved in the whole process of teaching and learning a foreign language. The

dialogue among students and between students and teacher enacts culture because they not only replicate culture, but also have the possibility of configuring a new culture. Every speech act is not only a production of a message, but a dialectic encounter between participants. In the foreign language classroom, we have the opportunity to meet students from different backgrounds and with differences in class, race, gender, motivation, etc.; who create a new context and a new culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Context is a complex term that has five dimensions: linguistic, situational, interactional, cultural, and intertextual, shaped by people performing their own roles. Context is the result of the interaction between the individual and society, and also between text and discourse.

Context is not a stable entity, but a constantly changing situation because of the differences among speakers, hearers, readers, and writers. The emergence of new meanings creates and adopts new contexts in a given culture.

Teaching a language has various tasks, one of them is how to teach the context of a lesson as an individual product and as a social manifestation of a group. Context determines the types of meanings students manage in the classroom and in real situations outside the school. Context is an important aspect of communication, and an educational objective that allows us to understand culture expressed through language.

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