

# Appropriateness in context

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Dieser Beitrag analysiert und diskutiert verschiedene Auffassungen von Kontext und Angemessenheit (*appropriateness*). Er diskutiert Implikationen, die diese Auffassungen für die Analyse des Sprachgebrauchs haben, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von (1) Spracherwerb und -unterricht und (2) Kommunikation in Institutionen und Medien. Es wird eine relationale und dynamische Auffassung von Kontext und Angemessenheit vertreten, die auf der Mikro-Ebene Interaktionspartner und ihre Äusserungen in Bezug setzt, des weiteren Interaktionspartner und Äusserungen zu kommunikativen Handlungen in Bezug setzt und schliesslich Handlungen zum sozio-kulturellen Kontext und zur Gesellschaft in Bezug setzt. Dabei wird aufgezeigt, dass ein relationaler Bezugsrahmen eine feinmaschige Analyse des Sprachgebrauchs im Kontext ermöglicht, welche die Beziehungen zwischen Interagierenden und den kommunikativen Status ihrer Äusserungen ebenso in den Blick nimmt wie die Art und Weise, wie Interagierende die kommunikative Umgebung und ihr kommunikatives Handeln konzeptualisieren. Ein dynamischer Bezugsrahmen eröffnet sowohl für die Forschung als auch für die Interaktionspartner selbst neue Perspektiven. Kontext und kommunikative Umgebung sind nicht einfach aussersprachliche Gegebenheiten, sondern sind ko-konstruiert und ausgehandelt; Interaktionspartnern und potentiellen Interaktionspartnern stehen sprachliche Mittel zur Verfügung, mit denen Veränderungen auf der Mikro- oder sogar auf der Meso- und Makroebene erreicht werden können.

**Stichwörter:**

Angemessenheit, kommunikatives Handeln, Kontext, Diskurskritik, Ethnographie, Spracherwerb, Medienkommunikation, Pragmatik, Soziolinguistik, Sprechereignis.

## 1. Introduction

In language studies, natural-language communication is conceived of as rule-governed behaviour with bivalent rules holding for the levels of clause and sentence concerning their grammaticality or ungrammaticality, and maxim-like regularities holding for the levels of paragraph / sequence / episode as well as for discourse as a whole. This outlook on natural language communication obtains for both the production of language, viz. speaking / writing, and the interpretation of language, viz. listening / reading. While rules for the formation of grammatically correct clauses and sentences are more or less discrete and allow for grammaticality judgements as regards grammatical clauses and sentences and non-grammatical clauses and sentences, rules for the formation of well-formed utterances in discourse are not that straight-forward. This is because utterances are always embedded in their local linguistic contexts (or: co-texts), and the discourse of which the utterances are a constitutive part is embedded in social contexts. Social context refers to

institutions on the macro level, and it refers to communicative activity<sup>1</sup> on the meso level. The judgement whether a stretch of discourse is well-formed or not depends strongly on the linguistic mode in which it is produced and interpreted, i.e. written, spoken or written-to-be-spoken, on the addressee(s), and on the context in which it is produced and received.

From a discursive perspective, the production and interpretation of utterances and clauses allow for some variation, as has been shown for the use of the conditional in Italian on the micro and meso levels by Miecznikowski and Bazzanella (2007) and for the linguistic representation of questions on the meso and macro levels by Becker (2007), for instance. The linguistic realization of utterances allows for some variation as regards production and interpretation; this is because utterances occur never in isolation but rather are structurally, semantically and pragmatically related to adjacently positioned utterances (cf. Speyer & Fetzer 2014), and those local contexts are considered in a more and less explicit manner in grammaticality judgements and well-formedness judgements. In contrast to bivalent grammaticality judgements, well-formedness judgements are gradient as they consider explicitly local context, and that is why participants may judge an utterance as well-formed, but not grammatical (cf. Fetzer 2004). For instance, the multiply negated utterance *you ain't done nothing yet* is ungrammatical in Standard English but is frequently considered well-formed in various social and regional varieties of English as well as in the spoken mode of Standard English when used in episodes employing informal conversational style.

Linguistic variation is not arbitrary but follows context-specific regularities, which are interdependent on pragmatic and discursive constraints and best accounted for by the explicit accommodation of more and less congruent relationships holding between linguistic form and communicative function. For instance, the sentence modes declarative, imperative and interrogative provide the syntactic means to produce a statement realized in the declarative mode, e.g., *the child has opened the door with a key*, a request for information realized in the interrogative mode, e.g., *has the child opened the door with a key?*, or a directive realized in the imperative mode, e.g., *open the door with a key!*. Less congruent relationships between linguistic form and communicative function are best illustrated by indirect speech acts, e.g. the imperative mode realizing an offer, e.g., *have another piece of cake!*, the declarative mode realizing a directive, e.g. *I would like some cake*, and the interrogative mode realizing a directive, e.g., *have you got some cake?*. The nature of the relationship between utterances and their context is captured very well by Dell Hymes' norms of interaction systematized in his s-p-e-a-k-i-n-g grid, spelling out **s**etting, **p**articipants, **e**nds, **a**cts, **k**ey, instrumentalities, **n**orms and **g**enre (Hymes 1974).

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, communicative activity (Levinson 1979), communicative genre (Luckmann 1995), speech activity (Gumperz 1996, 2003) and genre are used as functional synonyms.

In the following sections, the concepts of appropriateness and context are discussed, analysed, systematized and operationalized so that they can be adapted to the analysis of discourse. Section 4 connects the two notions and points out where they meet and where they depart, and section 5 presents the conclusion.

## 2. Approaching Appropriateness

The concept of appropriateness has been used primarily in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics in the context of second language acquisition. Trudgill classifies appropriateness as a sociolinguistic concept proper. In his discussion of language variation he says that "[a]nother, less elaborate way to look at this problem is to simply discuss it in terms of the sociolinguistic notion of 'appropriateness'. As is well known, different situations, different topics, different genres require different linguistic styles and registers" (Trudgill 1997: 253). Hymes (1997) goes beyond the primarily sociolinguistic explanation and points out the intrinsic connectedness between appropriateness and context, specifying appropriateness as a kind of optimal mapping between the two, namely as "whether and to what extent something is in some context suitable, effective, or the like" (Hymes 1997: 13). In second language acquisition, Wolfson describes appropriate speech as functionally equivalent to natural speech, or as "suitable, effective, or the like"; deviations from "suitable, effective, or the like" are seen as 'unnatural': "If speech is felt to be appropriate to a situation and the goal, then it is natural in that context. (...) It is only when norms of speaking are uncertain or violated that one gets 'unnatural' speech" (Wolfson 1997: 124).

Appropriateness as an optimal mapping between context and speech, or as 'natural speech', is also connected intrinsically with the sociocultural notions of politeness and impoliteness. Frequently polite speech acts are seen as functionally equivalent to appropriate speech acts, and impolite speech acts are seen as functionally equivalent to inappropriate speech acts; and often face-work (Goffman 1967) is interpreted as doing politeness in communication.<sup>2</sup> In the following excerpt from a political interview between Jonathan Dimbleby and the then shadow minister Tony Blair, the politician responds to the interviewer's conclusions drawn from the politician's discussion about sympathy action as follows: "Now but Jonathan that with respect is absolutely nonsense. What I've said to you is that the court will have to determine ..." (On the Record, BBC1, 27 May 1990).<sup>3</sup> The politician's contribution is not necessarily 'natural' as he evaluates his communication

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<sup>2</sup> Using 'appropriate' and 'polite' as functional synonyms is a great oversimplification, as has been pointed out by Watts (2003). He differentiates between polite speech acts, impolite speech acts and politic speech acts. In his theory of politeness, appropriate speech acts are functionally equivalent to politic speech acts.

<sup>3</sup> To facilitate readability, the transcription presented here adheres to orthographic standards.

partner's conclusions of his prior argument as 'absolutely nonsense'. Yet the analyst would hesitate from classifying the response as impolite or polite, but rather refer to the contribution's face-threatening potential (Brown & Levinson 1987) and to the strategic employment of the mitigating device, viz. 'with respect'.

In spite of numerous controversies about the nature of the connectedness between appropriateness and politeness in sociolinguistics, sociopragmatics, and applied linguistics, there is some general agreement about the connectedness between a face-threatening act and appropriateness. Appropriate speech acts are seen as minimizing the face-threatening potential of the speech act in question, as is reflected in cross-cultural research on the speech acts of apology and request and their linguistic realization across different sociocultural contexts (cf. Flores Salgo (2011) and Ogiermann (2009) for apologies; Economidou & Woodfields (2012) and Wang (2011) for requests). In more interactionally oriented frameworks, appropriateness has been related explicitly to the responsive format and the interlocutors' formulation of responses, distinguishing between 'natural' or appropriate responses on the one hand and 'unnatural' or inappropriate responses on the other, such as *yes please / no thank you* for acceptances and rejections rather than the minimal response tokens *yes / no*.

In the qualitative paradigm, especially in ethnographic and speech-act based analyses, appropriateness is connected explicitly with the following parameters: (1) setting, (2) time, and (3) act sequence. Appropriateness is seen as gradient, with more and less appropriate speech acts in context, and with more and less appropriate initiating acts and responses in discourse. Appropriateness is thus a context-dependent, dynamic notion, which is negotiated by the participants in interaction.

In grammars of discourse, such as dialogue grammar, appropriateness is also seen as a dynamic, context-dependent and gradient concept. It is defined as one of the three fundamental premises, viz. truth, sincerity and appropriateness, of the dialogue act of plus/minus-validity claim (Fetzer 2002), which is negotiated by the participants in interaction. In the case of acceptance, the validity claim is assigned the status of a plus-validity claim, and in the case of rejection, the validity claim is assigned the status of a minus-validity claim. Validity claims are defined in a tripartite system of objective, social and subjective worlds, and need to be negotiated and ratified with respect to all of their references to the three worlds. The objective world is constrained by the truth / falsehood of a validity claim, the social world is constrained by appropriateness / inappropriateness, and the subjective world is constrained by sincerity / insincerity (Fetzer 2002, 2004). In dialogue grammar, appropriateness is a relational concept, relating the textual subsystem and its presuppositions of a validity claim with the interactional and interpersonal subsystems and their presuppositions. The textual

presuppositions are constrained by the Gricean cooperative principle, the maxims and implicatures (Grice 1975), and they are operationalized by the validity claim's degree of dovetailedness (Fetzer 2004). The interactional presuppositions are based on local adjacency, i.e. the structural notion of adjacency position, the semantic notion of adjacency relation and the pragmatic notion of adjacency expectation or conditional relevance (cf. Fetzer & Speyer 2012, Levinson 1983) as well as global sequentiality. The interpersonal presuppositions are based on the participants' face-wants and face-needs (Goffman 1967, Brown & Levinson 1987) and on relational work (Locher & Watts 2005). The dialogue act of plus/minus-validity claim systematizes the contextual embeddedness of a validity claim, its references to local context, and its linguistic realization as an utterance, as will be examined below.

### **3. Approaching context**

Context is a multi-faceted and multivalent concept, which has been analysed and discussed in various research paradigms, for instance in information technology, engineering and science, in the social sciences, as well as in arts and humanities. Not only is the concept as such the object of investigation but so is its application in theoretical and applied domains, such as natural-language communication, first- and second-language acquisition, computer-mediated communication and information technology, robotics, and social-action based analyses.

The heterogeneous nature of context and the context-dependence of the concept itself have made it almost impossible for the scientific community to agree upon one commonly shared definition, and frequently, only a minute part of context is examined. In order to operationalize the important concept of context, it has been described as linguistic context (or: co-text) in text linguistics, social or sociocultural context in sociolinguistics and ethnographic studies, and cognitive context in cognitive linguistics and cognitive science:

- Linguistic context refers to linguistic material that surrounds the linguistic unit to be examined, that is clauses, phrases, and constructions in syntax and morphology, propositions in semantics, and phonemes in phonology.
- Social context comprises the extra-linguistic context of a speech situation and refers to its constitutive parts, viz. participants (e.g., speaker, hearer and audience) and their interactional roles, such as animator, principal, strategist (Goffman 1981), the immediate concrete physical surrounding including setting and time, and the global concrete surroundings including institutional domains.
- Sociocultural context represents a culture-specific configuration and interpretation of social context and its basic parameters, such as time,

space and institution.

- Cognitive context refers to a psychological construct, as if reflected in 'context as other minds' (Givón 2005), comprising mental representations, propositions and assumptions, for instance.

In pragmatics and in socio-pragmatics context tends to be conceived of as a relational construct, relating individual actors and their surroundings, relating social actions and their surroundings, relating social actions, and relating the set of individual actors and their social actions to their surroundings (Fetzer & Akman 2002; Fetzer 2012). The relational outlook on context is also captured by the cybernetic approach to communication, for instance by Bateson and his claim that communication is both context-creating and context-dependent (Bateson 1972: 245). It is also captured by Goffman's frame analysis, in which he concludes that "[i]n general, then, the assumptions that cut an activity off from the external surround also mark the ways in which this activity is inevitably bound to the surrounding world" (Goffman 1986: 249). Furthermore, the relational outlook on context is also manifest in the research paradigm of interactional sociolinguistics which is based on the premises of (1) language being a socially situated form, (2) the indexicality of communicative action, (3) linguistic variation and alternation being not random or arbitrary, but communicatively functional and meaningful, (4) context being imported or 'brought in' as well as invoked or 'brought out', and (5) contextualization as a universal in human communication (Gumperz 1996, 2003).

The various approaches to context examined and discussed above are summarised and systematised in table 1:

<b>local linguistic context</b> - phonemic context - constructions - phrases - clauses - sentences / utterances	<b>global linguistic context</b> - text
<b>local cognitive context</b> - local inferencing and reasoning	<b>global cognitive context</b> - global inferencing and reasoning with update mechanism
<b>local social context</b> - participants - location - time - .....	<b>global social context</b> - institution

<b>local sociocultural context</b>	<b>global sociocultural context</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- situation</li> <li>- participants</li> <li>- end</li> <li>- act sequence</li> <li>- key</li> <li>- instrumentalities</li> <li>- norms of interpretation and forms of speech (Hymes 1974)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- genre and beyond (Hymes 1974)</li> </ul>

Table 1: Context decomposed (adapted from Fetzer 2010: 27)

In the following, the nature of the connectedness between appropriateness and context is examined more closely, considering in particular the delimiting frame of communicative genre and its application to the analysis of institutional discourse.

#### 4. Relating context and appropriateness

The analysis and discussion of context and appropriateness has shown that the two concepts are connected intrinsically, and in language-use based research paradigms, such as ethnographic studies and applied linguistics, appropriateness cannot be described without context. Appropriateness and context have been defined as relational concepts, capturing the nature of the connectedness between selected parts, such as lexical items, utterances or intonation, and a more or less delimited whole, for instance a communicative genre, an episode or a response.

In language studies and discourse analysis, the unit of investigation is best conceptualised as the dialogue act of a validity claim and its linguistic realization as utterance. As has been discussed above, validity claims are negotiated in communication and thus evaluated by the participants as being congruent or as being incongruent; the latter is gradient in nature. If the mapping between utterance and context is evaluated "such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you [participants, A.F.] are engaged" (Grice 1975: 45), the validity claim is evaluated as congruent and it is assigned the status of a plus-validity claim. If the mapping between utterance and context is evaluated not as 'such', it is evaluated as incongruent and assigned the status of a minus-validity claim. Should participants wish to have their validity claim accepted, they will provide evidence to support their claim or they will modify the claim to have it accepted in discourse. At this stage it is necessary to point out that the utterance needs to be accepted as a whole if it is to be assigned the status of a plus-validity claim. If only parts of it are accepted, the utterance is assigned the status of a minus-validity claim that may need to undergo a further process of negotiation. While plus-validity claims are appropriate by definition, minus-

validity claims are not automatically inappropriate. This is because appropriateness is a gradient concept. This means that some contextual references of the utterance may have been accepted and thus been evaluated as appropriate. For instance, the sequential status of the utterance "Now but Jonathan that with respect is absolutely nonsense. What I've said to you is that the court will have to determine ..." (On the Record, BBC1, 27 May 1990) analysed above counts as an answer in the question-and-answer sequence of the political interview and thus is appropriate as regards the interactional subsystem. The interpersonal presuppositions are also referred to in an appropriate manner as the utterance displays deference realized by the mitigating device 'with respect'. As a result, there are utterances which are fully appropriate, utterances which are fully inappropriate, and utterances which are neither fully appropriate nor fully inappropriate. But on what features is the evaluation of the mapping of an utterance and its references to context based?

In the sections on appropriateness and context, the dialogue act of a plus/minus-validity claim has been introduced. Plus/minus-validity claims are anchored to a tripartite system of objective, social and subjective worlds, and appropriateness is defined as the foundation of the social world against the background of which the contextual references and linguistic realization of a validity claim are evaluated. To operationalize the multifaceted and relational concept of appropriateness and facilitate its application to the analysis of discourse, the basic premises of the social world and its interpersonal, interactional and textual subsystems and presuppositions are going to be systematized as genre-dependent appropriateness conditions. It is important to stress that appropriateness conditions always need to be defined with respect to a communicative genre. Moreover, they may need to undergo further context-dependent specification, as is the case with the communicative genre of interview and its specification as media interview, e.g. political interview, news interview, expert interview, interview with celebrities, as medical interview, cross-examination, job interview or oral examination in education.

Unlike speech-act theoretic felicity conditions, which need to obtain for a speech act to be felicitous, appropriateness conditions are gradient in nature and that is why not all of them need to obtain for felicitous communication. Felicitous communication may contain insults and other forms of impoliteness, which are generally not seen as appropriate. Rather, appropriateness conditions serve as guidelines against the background of which the connectedness between utterance and context is evaluated as congruent or as more or less incongruent. Appropriateness conditions do not need to obtain for communication to be felicitous, that is to say, to understand what a speaker means, but they are necessary for communication to run smoothly, that is to say, to avoid potential misunderstandings and threats to the participants' face. Appropriateness conditions are imbued with sociocultural knowledge, viz. with

how things are usually done with words, as is summarized by Saville-Troike (1989: 22): "Shared cultural knowledge is essential to explain the shared presuppositions and judgements of truth value which are the essential undergirdings of language structures, as well as of appropriate usage and interpretation."

Appropriateness is generally seen not only as a culture-dependent concept but also as a sociocultural concept, accommodating relevant sociocultural variables, such as gender, age and ethnicity. However, to apply sociocultural appropriateness to the examination of language use in particular contexts, it needs to be narrowed down even further, as this paper claims. The delimiting frame, against the background of which validity claims and their linguistic realization as utterances can be evaluated as more appropriate or as less appropriate, is genre. The relevance of genre has already been pointed out in the analysis of the ethnographic concept of *s-p-e-a-k-i-n-g* (Hymes 1974), which refers to genre in an explicit manner, accommodating not only the delimiting frame-as-such, but also the corresponding 'norms of interaction', which may be specified as norms for appropriate production, norms for appropriate interpretation, and norms for appropriate negotiation of meaning. Genre thus serves as some kind of a 'blueprint', that is to say a frame of reference, which particularizes these expectations. Thibault (2003) draws the explicit connection between discursive expectations and their linguistic realizations and relates these to the concept of type: "Rather, genres are types. But they are types in a rather peculiar way. Genres do not specify the lexicogrammatical resources of word, phrase, clause, and so on. Instead, they specify the *typical* ways in which these are combined and deployed so as to enact the typical semiotic action formations of a given community" (Thibault 2003: 44; author's emphasis).

#### 4.1 *Micro meets meso*

The sociocultural concept of appropriateness has been defined in the framework of the dialogue act of validity claim where it is anchored to the social world and its constitutive subsystems of textual, interpersonal and interactional presuppositions. Validity claims are further differentiated with respect to their contextual references to local context, viz. micro validity claims, as has been illustrated and discussed with the excerpt from the political interview between Jonathan Dimbleby and Tony Blair above, and with respect to their contextual references with the meso context, which is constrained by genre. The communicative genre of political interview has been analysed in the framework of a macro-validity claim and its systems of objective, social and subjective worlds (Fetzer 2000). In the macro-validity claim of political interview, the premises of the objective, viz. truth, and subjective worlds, viz. sincerity, obtain; the premises of the social world, in particular the premises of the interactional and interpersonal subsystems and their presuppositions are constrained by genre-specific neutralism and by a

clear-cut division of labour as regards the turn-taking system. The discursive expectations for political interviews in the media have thus resulted in a particularization of the interpersonal, interactional and textual subsystems. It needs to be emphasised that these particularizations specify 'typical ways' in which political interviews are done in the media. However, the discursive expectations also allow participants to act in dis-accordance with particularized constraints, for instance, interviewers asking biased questions and interviewees providing non-neutral answers, interviewees taking over the interactional role of the interviewer and asking questions, or interviewees being evasive. Naturally, the sociocultural context in which the interview is performed particularizes the discursive constraints anchored to the other subsystems.

The synergetic effects resulting from the combination of (1) the conceptualisation of an interview as a macro-validity claim and its particularisation of the social world and its constitutive subsystem, and (2) the definition of a communicative genre as a type in which communicative actions are specified as doing-things-in-a-typical-way are intriguing. Not only allow they the description of interviews as question-and-answer sequences with a clear-cut division of labour, but they also allow the particularisation of interviews with more refined constraints, as is the case with media interviews in general and news interviews or political interviews in particular. Furthermore, the combination of the two frames of reference also allows the examination of interviews in different sociocultural contexts and for different communicative goals and purposes, for instance police interrogations, oral examinations, medical interviews and job interviews. All of the different types of interviews adhere to the interactional subsystem's constraint of clear-cut interactional roles and clear-cut participants' rights and obligations, and thus to typical ways of doing interviews, that is interviewers asking questions and interviewees answering the questions. However, there is quite some variation between how questions are asked in the context of media interviews, police interrogations, medical interviews or oral examinations, and there are pronounced differences in what counts as an appropriate answer in the different types of interviews. Another synergetic effect, which results from the integration of macro-validity claim into the genre-as-type paradigm is the possibility to account for local deviations from the macro-validity constraints, such as interviewees asking questions for some specific purpose, such as clarification questions, interviewees not answering questions and being evasive, or the participants not doing enough relational work. It needs to be pointed out, however, that an interview is generally initiated by an interviewer with a typed opening move, whose lexico-grammatical realization may differ. The opening move generally contains some kind of common greeting and an act of self- and other identification, and is followed by the interviewer asking an opening question, and by an interviewee providing an answer to that question. The closing move of the interview is also performed by the interviewer and

generally contains an act of thanking, e.g., the interviewer may thank the interviewee, or the interviewees, for having participated in the interview, s/he may announce a decision to admit a patient to hospital, or s/he may inform an examinee that the examination is over. As regards rights and obligations, the interviewer, or in some interviews several interviewers, is the dominant participant in the genre of interview: s/he has the right to open and close the genre, and how this is done differs from context to context. That also applies to the communicative goals of an interview: political interviews may inform and entertain, medical interviews may identify the patient's medical problems and seek some kind of solution, job interviews may seek the ideal candidate for a job, and oral examinations may evaluate the examinee's academic performance.

The research paradigm of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1996, 2003) offers another enlightening perspective to the integration of the genre-as-type paradigm to the macro-validity claim. Interactional sociolinguistics considers language and language use as socially situated cultural forms and, therefore, as specifications of the more general social and linguistic contexts. Like the validity-claim paradigm, it defines speech activity as a delimiting frame, connecting the micro domain with the meso domain, and connecting the two with the macro domain. Interactional sociolinguistics not only goes beyond language use and external context, but also accommodates the participants' inferencing processes, viz. conversational inferencing, and reasoning:

It is useful to distinguish between two levels of inference in analyses of interpretive processes: (a) global inferences of what the exchange is about and what mutual rights and obligations apply, what topics can be brought up, what is wanted by way of a reply, as well as what can be put into words and what is to be implied, and (b) local inferences concerning what is intended with my one move and what is required by way of a response. (Gumperz 2003: 14).

To account for the micro-meso-macro interface, the explicit accommodation of context is a necessary condition, as Gumperz points out: "With respect to context, psychologists, cognitive scientists, and many linguists who pay attention to context tend to define it almost entirely in extra-communicative terms. I argue that, while these factors are, of course, significant, contextual information is imported into the interpretative process primarily via indexical contextualization cues, in the form of presuppositions of what the activity is and what is communicatively intended" (Gumperz 2003: 119).

The connectedness between micro and meso is not unidirectional, but rather needs to be conceptualized as dialectic in nature. This allows for the explanation of changing genres, and changes within genres. Of course, the connectedness between meso and macro is not unidirectional either, but also dialectical, which is examined in the following.

#### *4.2 Meso meets macro*

An analysis of the appropriateness of language use without the explicit

accommodation of genre and sociocultural and social context does not promise to deliver the results required for the operationalization of appropriateness conditions. Utterances need to be related to the communicative genre in which they occur, they need to be related to the participants involved, and they need to be related to the stage where they occur in discourse. However, it is not just the genre as such which constrains utterance production and utterance interpretation. It is also the social and sociocultural contexts, in which the genre occurs. For instance, in the context of institutional media discourse the British Broadcasting Cooperation requires political interviews to adhere to the constraint of neutralism (Clayman 1992). A similar kind of neutralism seems to be appropriate for oral examinations or medical interviews, even though the latter require more relational work. Job interviews do not need to be produced and interpreted with that particular constraint; they are not only quite different with respect to national settings but also with respect to physical or mediated localities and with respect to professional domains. Again, the explicit accommodation of the connectedness amongst appropriateness, context and language use seems to deliver more refined research results in the analysis of discourse as well as in the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

Analogously to the dialectical relations holding between utterances as realizations of micro validity claims and genres as realizations of macro validity claims supplemented by genre-as-type and interactional sociolinguistics, there is a dialectical relationship between local-context anchored utterance, meso-context anchored genre and their embeddedness in macro contexts. The nature of the dialectical relationships holding between micro and meso are stronger in nature than the ones holding between micro and macro, and meso and macro. Participants are thus freer in acting in dis-accordance with constraints holding for local utterance production and local utterance interpretation than in acting in dis-accordance with constraints holding for meso genre production and meso genre interpretation. This is, however, an oversimplification because in the context of institutional discourse the nature of the connectedness holding between local, meso and macro domains is stronger because there are explicit constraints and explicit sanctions for acting in dis-accordance with genre-specific constraints.

In discourse analysis there is ample evidence for linguistic variation regarding both the production and interpretation of utterances as constitutive parts of a genre, and regarding the genre as a whole. Both can be performed in more and less typical ways, and the constraints holding on the micro and meso levels can be acted with in accordance and in dis-accordance. In general, participants are less constrained in their formulation of utterances on the micro level than in performing the genre as a whole. However, they are not fully free

to formulate their utterances,<sup>4</sup> as is pointed out by Hanks (1996: 235):

Hence it is not that people must share a grammar, but that they must share, to a degree, ways of orienting themselves in social context. This kind of sharing – partial, orientational and socially distributed – may be attributed to the habitus, or relatively stable schemes of perception to which actors are inculcated. (Hanks 1996: 235).

The dynamic framework based on dialectical relations holding amongst micro, meso and macro is based on the interactional-sociolinguistics premise of the indexicality of communicative action. In the integrated framework advocated in this paper, utterances as linguistic realizations of validity claims refer indexically to the local appropriateness conditions systematized by the textual, interpersonal and interactional subsystems and their presuppositions while at the same time anchoring them to the meso constraints of genre. Against this background, appropriateness is seen as an interactional achievement which is brought into the interaction as a constraint anchored to the meso framework of genre, specifying the ways things are usually done, and appropriateness is brought out in the interaction by the participants acting in accordance or in disaccordance with the genre-specific constraints. Moreover, participants may negotiate appropriateness conditions, if not appropriateness as a whole, in interaction by agreeing upon the suspension of particular appropriateness conditions, or by even changing them locally and not-so-locally.

Appropriateness conditions may thus constrain local context, meso context and global context. They may even be seen as a 'mediator' which contributes to 'sense-making', making utterances meaningful in local and not-so-local contexts. Against this background, language users are 'sense makers' and negotiators of meaning, referring indexically to norms and to linguistic variation.

## 5. Conclusions

The examination of appropriateness in context has shown that both context and appropriateness are relational concepts, and that appropriateness cannot be defined without the explicit accommodation of context. To account for the infinite nature of context, which may refer to some local entity, a less local entity and just everything surrounding the entity, the meso-anchored unit of investigation of genre has proved a useful tool.

To analyse language use, the context in which it occurs needs to be described and systematized on the micro domain, the meso domain and the macro domain. Context is not some arbitrary and unstructured surround, rather "structured context also occurs within a wider context – a metacontext if you will – and that this sequence of contexts is an open, and conceivably infinite,

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<sup>4</sup> Participants are – in principle – free to say whatever they intend to and to formulate their utterance with whatever lexical items and grammatical constructions they wish. They need to consider possible sanctions, though, such as being considered as rude, impolite, irresponsible or irrational.

series" as is put succinctly by Bateson (1972: 245), and he continues by pointing out that context must be repeatable otherwise there would be no learning. Moreover, context can be restructured otherwise there would be no change. This fundamental requirement is best captured by an integrated approach, accommodating the premises of genre-as-type, macro-validity claim and indexicality of communicative action. To capture the dynamics of communication, the unit of investigation of genre and its appropriateness conditions provide interlocutors with the linguistic means not only to perform appropriate communicative acts in context, but also to present themselves as autonomous and responsible communicators who have the linguistic know-how to act in accordance, or to act in dis-accordance with how things are typically done with words.

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