some circumstances (i.e. a 'context') in which the sentence could be acceptably used?

Any analytic approach in linguistics which involves contextual considerations, necessarily belongs to that area of language study called **pragmatics**. 'Doing discourse analysis' certainly involves 'doing syntax and semantics', but it primarily consists of 'doing pragmatics'. When the principles which we have expounded in 1.3 are placed alongside Morris's definition of pragmatics as 'the relations of signs to interpreters' (1938: 6), the connection becomes quite clear. In discourse analysis, as in pragmatics, we are concerned with what people using language are doing, and accounting for the linguistic features in the discourse as the means employed in what they are doing.

In summary, the discourse analyst treats his data as the record (text) of a dynamic process in which language was used as an instrument of communication in a context by a speaker / writer to express meanings and achieve intentions (discourse). Working from this data, the analyst seeks to describe regularities in the linguistic realisations used by people to communicate those meanings and intentions.

Brown + Yule

2

The role of context in interpretation

2.1 Pragmatics and discourse context

In Chapter 1, we emphasised that the discourse analyst necessarily takes a pragmatic approach to the study of language in use. Such an approach brings into consideration a number of issues which do not generally receive much attention in the formal linguist's description of sentential syntax and semantics. We noted, for example, that the discourse analyst has to take account of the context in which a piece of discourse occurs. Some of the most obvious linguistic elements which require contextual information for their interpretation are the deictic forms such as *here*, *now*, *I*, *you*, *this* and *that*. In order to interpret these elements in a piece of discourse, it is necessary to know (at least) who the speaker and hearer are, and the time and place of the production of the discourse. In this chapter we shall discuss these and other aspects of contextual description which are required in the analysis of discourse.

There are, however, other ways in which the discourse analyst's approach to linguistic data differs from that of the formal linguist and leads to a specialised use of certain terms. Because the analyst is investigating the use of language in context by a speaker / writer, he is more concerned with the relationship between the speaker and the utterance, on the particular occasion of use, than with the potential relationship of one sentence to another, regardless of their use. That is, in using terms such as **reference**, **presupposition**, **implicature** and **inference**, the discourse analyst is describing what speakers and hearers are doing, and not the relationship which exists between one sentence or proposition and another.

2.1.1 Reference

In presenting the traditional semantic view of reference, Lyons (1968: 404) says that 'the relationship which holds between words and things is the relationship of *reference*: words *refer to* things'. This traditional view continues to be expressed in those linguistic studies (e.g. lexical semantics) which describe the relationship between a language and the world, in the absence of language-users. Yet, Lyons, in a more recent statement on the nature of reference, makes the following point: 'it is the speaker who refers (by using some appropriate expression): he invests the expression with reference by the act of referring' (1977: 177). It is exactly this latter view of the nature of reference which the discourse analyst has to appeal to. There is support for such a pragmatic concept of reference in Strawson's (1950) claim that '"referring" is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do'; and in Searle's view that 'in the sense in which speakers refer, expressions do not refer any more than they make promises or give orders' (1979: 155). Thus, in discourse analysis, reference is treated as an action on the part of the speaker / writer. In the following conversational fragment, we shall say, for example, that speaker A uses the expressions *my uncle* and *he* to refer to one individual and *my mother's sister* and *she* to refer to another. We will not, for example, say that *he* 'refers to' *my uncle*.

(1) A: my uncle's coming home from Canada on Sunday + he's due in +
B: how long has he been away for or has he just been away?
A: Oh no they lived in Canada eh he was married to my mother's sister + + well she's been dead for a number of years now +

The complex nature of discourse reference will be investigated in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.1.2 Presupposition

In the preceding conversational fragment (1), we shall also say that speaker A treats the information that she has an uncle

as presupposed and speaker B, in her question, indicates that she has accepted this presupposition. We shall take the view that the notion of presupposition required in discourse analysis is pragmatic presupposition, that is, 'defined in terms of assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge' (Givón, 1979a: 50). The notion of assumed 'common ground' is also involved in such a characterisation of presupposition and can be found in this definition by Stalnaker (1978: 321):

> presuppositions are what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation.

Notice that, in both these quotations, the indicated source of presuppositions is the speaker.

Consequently, we shall, as with reference, avoid attributing presuppositions to sentences or propositions. Thus, we can see little practical use, in the analysis of discourse, for the notion of logical presupposition which Keenan (1971: 45) describes in the following way:

> A sentence S logically presupposes a sentence S′ just in case S logically implies S′ and the negation of S, ~ S, also logically implies S′.

If we take the first sentence of extract (1) as S, and present it below as (2a), we can also present the negation of S, as (2b), and the logical presupposition, S′, as (2c).

(2) a. My uncle is coming home from Canada.
b. My uncle isn't coming home from Canada.
c. I have an uncle.

Following Keenan's definition, we can say that (2a) logically presupposes (2c) because of constancy under negation.

However, it seems rather unnecessary to introduce the negative sentence (2b) into a consideration of the relationship between (2a) and (2c) which arises in the conversation presented earlier in (1). Though it may not be common knowledge that the speaker has an uncle, it is what Grice (1981: 190) terms 'noncontroversial' information. Moreover, since the speaker chose to say *my uncle* rather than *I have an uncle and he . . .*, we must assume she didn't feel the need to assert the information. What she appears to be asserting is that this person *is coming home from Canada*. Given this assertion, the idea that we should consider the *denial* of this

assertion in order to find out whether there is a presupposition in what the speaker has not asserted seems particularly counterintuitive.

The introduction of the negative sentence (2b) into a consideration of (2a) creates an additional problem. For example, it has been suggested (cf. Kempson, 1975) that a sentence such as (2d) is a perfectly reasonable sentence of English and undermines the argument for logical presupposition, as it is defined above.

(2d) My uncle isn't coming home from Canada because I don't have an uncle.

Sentences like (2d) always seem typical of utterances made by a speaker to deny another speaker's presupposition in a rather aggressive way. Yet the circumstances in which (2d) might be uttered are likely to be quite different from those in which the first sentence of extract (1) was uttered. *The speakers*, we may suggest, would have different presuppositions, in the two situations. If we rely on a notion of speaker, or pragmatic, presupposition, we can simply treat (2c) as a presupposition of the speaker in uttering (2a). Sentences (2b) and (2d) do not come into consideration at all.

In support of a view that hearers behave as if speakers' presuppositions are to be accepted, there is the rather disturbing evidence from Loftus' study (1975) of answers to leading questions. After watching a film of a car accident some subjects were asked the two questions in (3).

(3) a. How fast was car A going when it turned right?
b. Did you see a stop sign?

We can note that one of the speaker-presuppositions in asking (3a) is that *car A turned right*. A number (35%) answered yes to question (3b). Another group of subjects were asked the questions in (4).

(4) a. How fast was car A going when it ran the stop sign?
b. Did you see a stop sign?

One of the speaker-presuppositions in asking (4a) is that *car A ran the stop sign*. In this situation, a significantly larger group (53%) answered yes to question (4b).

It is worth noting that a number of subjects did not answer the *b* question in terms of truth or falsehood of fact, but according to what the speaker, in asking the preceding question, had appeared to presuppose. (For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Loftus, 1975 and Loftus & Zanni, 1975.)

We shall reconsider the notion of presupposition in section 3.3.2, but generally avoid the complex arguments which revolve around the presuppositions of sentences and propositions. (See the contributions and bibliography in Oh & Dineen (eds.) 1979.)

2.1.3 *Implicatures*

The term 'implicature' is used by Grice (1975) to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean, as distinct from what the speaker literally says. There are **conventional implicatures** which are, according to Grice, determined by 'the conventional meaning of the words used' (1975: 44). In the following example (5), the speaker does not directly assert that one property (being brave) follows from another property (being an Englishman), but the form of expression used conventionally implicates that such a relation does hold.

(5) He is an Englishman, he is, therefore, brave.

If it should turn out that the individual in question is an Englishman, and not brave, then the implicature is mistaken, but the utterance, Grice suggests, need not be false. For a fuller discussion of conventional implicature, see Karttunen & Peters (1979).

Of much greater interest to the discourse analyst is the notion of **conversational implicature** which is derived from a general principle of conversation plus a number of maxims which speakers will normally obey. The general principle is called the *Cooperative Principle* which Grice (1975: 45) presents in the following terms:

> Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

The conversational conventions, or maxims, which support this principle are as follows:

Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation: Be relevant.

Manner: Be perspicuous.
Avoid obscurity of expression.
Avoid ambiguity.
Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
Be orderly.

Grice does not suggest that this is an exhaustive list – he notes that a maxim such as *Be polite* is also normally observed – nor that equal weight should be attached to each of the stated maxims. (The maxim of manner, for example, does not obviously apply to primarily interactional conversation.) We might observe that the instruction *Be relevant* seems to cover all the other instructions. However, by providing a description of the norms speakers operate with in conversation, Grice makes it possible to describe what types of meaning a speaker can convey by 'flouting' one of these maxims. This flouting of a maxim results in the speaker conveying, in addition to the literal meaning of his utterance, an additional meaning, which is a conversational implicature. As a brief example, we can consider the following exchange:

(6) A: I am out of petrol.
B: There is a garage round the corner.

In this exchange, Grice (1975: 51) suggests that B would be infringing the instruction *Be relevant* if he was gratuitously stating a fact about the world via the literal meaning of his utterance. The implicature, derived from the assumption that speaker B is adhering to the Cooperative Principle, is that the garage is not only round the corner, but also will be open and selling petrol. We might also note that, in order to arrive at the implicature, we have to know certain facts about the world, that garages sell petrol, and that *round the corner* is not a great distance away. We also have to

interpret A's remark not only as a description of a particular state of affairs, but as a request for help, for instance. Once the analysis of intended meaning goes beyond the literal meaning of the 'sentences-on-the-page', a vast number of related issues have to be considered. We shall investigate some of these issues in the course of this book, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7.

As a brief account of how the term 'implicature' is used in discourse analysis, we have summarised the important points in Grice's proposal. We would like to emphasise the fact that implicatures are pragmatic aspects of meaning and have certain identifiable characteristics. They are partially derived from the conventional or literal meaning of an utterance, produced in a specific context which is shared by the speaker and the hearer, and depend on a recognition by the speaker and the hearer of the Cooperative Principle and its maxims. For the analyst, as well as the hearer, conversational implicatures must be treated as inherently indeterminate since they derive from a supposition that the speaker has the intention of conveying meaning and of obeying the Cooperative Principle. Since the analyst has only limited access to what a speaker intended, or how sincerely he was behaving, in the production of a discourse fragment, any claims regarding the implicatures identified will have the status of interpretations. In this respect, the discourse analyst is not in the apparently secure position of the formal linguist who has 'rules' of the language which are or are not satisfied, but rather, is in the position of the hearer who has interpretations of the discourse which do, or do not, make sense. (For a more detailed treatment of conversational implicature, see Levinson, forthcoming.)

2.1.4 *Inference*

Since the discourse analyst, like the hearer, has no direct access to a speaker's intended meaning in producing an utterance, he often has to rely on a process of inference to arrive at an interpretation for utterances or for the connections between utterances. Such inferences appear to be of different kinds. It may be the case that we are capable of deriving a specific conclusion (7c) from specific premises (7a) and (7b), via deductive inference, but we are rarely asked to do so in the everyday discourse we encounter.

(7) a. If it's sunny, it's warm.
b. It's sunny.
c. So, it's warm.

We are more likely to operate with a rather loose form of inferencing which leads us to believe that *the hats and coats* mentioned in (8) belong to visitors to the house which has *the dresser* in its kitchen.

(8) in the kitchen there was a huge dresser and when anyone went in you see + the hats and coats were all dumped on this dresser

It may be, of course, that such an inference is wrong, but, as discourse processors, we seem to prefer to make inferences which have some likelihood of being justified and, if some subsequent information does not fit in with this inference, we abandon it and form another. As an illustration of this, consider the following example (9), taken from Sanford & Garrod (1981: 10):

(9) John was on his way to school.

If we were to take a formal view of the entailments of such a declarative sentence (like that, for example, expressed in Smith & Wilson, 1979: 150f.), we would be obliged to accept as entailments a set of sentences which would include the following:

(10) a. Someone was on his way to school.
b. John was on his way to somewhere.
c. Someone was on his way to somewhere.

This view of what we infer from reading (9) will only provide us with a limited insight into how readers interpret what they read. Most readers report that they infer from (9) that John is a schoolboy, among other things. When sentence (9) is followed later in the same text by sentence (11), readers readily abandon their original inference and form another, for example that John is a schoolteacher.

(11) Last week he had been unable to control the class.

In order to capture this type of inference, which is extremely common in our interpretation of discourse, we need a relatively

loose notion of inference based on socio-cultural knowledge. Gumperz (1977) presents an extended discussion of the types of factors involved in this type of pragmatic, as opposed to logical, inference. We shall discuss the influence of inference in more detail in Chapter 7.

For the moment, we simply present a view which claims that the terms *reference*, *presupposition*, *implicature* and *inference* must be treated as pragmatic concepts in the analysis of discourse. These terms will be used to indicate relationships between discourse participants and elements in the discourse. Since the pragmatic use of these terms is closely tied to the context in which a discourse occurs, we shall now investigate what aspects of context have to be considered in undertaking the analysis of discourse.

2.2 The context of situation

Since the beginning of the 1970s, linguists have become increasingly aware of the importance of context in the interpretation of sentences. The implications of taking context into account are well expressed by Sadock (1978: 281):

> There is, then, a serious methodological problem that confronts the advocate of linguistic pragmatics. Given some aspects of what a sentence conveys in a particular context, is that aspect part of what the sentence conveys in virtue of its meaning . . . or should it be 'worked out' on the basis of Gricean principles from the rest of the meaning of the sentence and relevant facts of the context of utterance?

If we are to begin to consider the second part of this question seriously we need to be able to specify what are the 'relevant facts of the context of utterance'. The same problem is raised by Fillmore (1977: 119) when he advocates a methodology to which a discourse analyst may often wish to appeal:

> The task is to determine what we can know about the meaning and context of an utterance given only the knowledge that the utterance has occurred . . . I find that whenever I notice some sentence in context, I immediately find myself asking what the effect would have been if the context had been slightly different.

In order to make appeal to this methodology, which is very commonly used in linguistic and philosophical discussion, we need to know what it would mean for the context to be 'slightly different'.

2.2.1 *Features of context*

Consider two invented scenarios in which an identical utterance is produced by two distinct speakers.

(a) *speaker:* a young mother, *hearer:* her mother-in-law, *place:* park, by a duckpond, *time:* sunny afternoon in September 1962. They are watching the young mother's two-year-old son chasing ducks and the mother-in-law has just remarked that her son, the child's father, was rather *backward* at this age. The young mother says:

I do think *Adam's* quick

(b) *speaker:* a student, *hearers:* a set of students, *place:* sitting round a coffee table in the refectory, *time:* evening in March 1980. John, one of the group, has just told a joke. Everyone laughs except Adam. Then Adam laughs. One of the students says:

I do think *Adam's* quick

(In each case phonological prominence is placed on *Adam*.)

Clearly we can do a formal analysis on these tokens and, in both cases, the speaker says of Adam that he is quick. It is clear, however, that the utterances in the contexts of situation in which they are cited, would be taken to convey very different messages. In (a) we shall simplistically assume that the referents of *I* and *Adam* are fixed by spatio-temporal co-ordinates. This 'Adam' is being compared (or contrasted), favourably, with his father. *Quick*, may be interpreted, in the context of *backward*, as meaning something like 'quick in developing'.

In (b) different referents for *I* and *Adam* are fixed spatio-temporally. This 'Adam' is being compared (or contrasted) not with his father and favourably, but with the set of other students unfavourably. In this case *quick* must be interpreted as meaning something like 'quick to understand / react / see the joke'. Moreover, since it is said in a context where Adam has just manifestly failed to react to the punch-line as quickly as the set of other students, the speaker (given this type of speaker to this type of hearer in this type of surroundings) will be assumed not to be intending to tell an untruth, but to be implicating the opposite of what she has said.

Is it possible to determine in any principled way what aspects of context of situation are relevant to these different interpretations of the same 'utterance' on two occasions?

J. R. Firth (regarded by many as the founder of modern British linguistics) remarked:

> Logicians are apt to think of words and propositions as having 'meaning' somehow in themselves, apart from participants in contexts of situation. Speakers and listeners do not seem to be necessary. I suggest that voices should not be entirely dissociated from the social context in which they function and that therefore all texts in modern spoken languages should be regarded as having 'the implication of utterance', and be referred to typical participants in some generalised context of situation.
>
> (1957: 226)

Firth, then, was concerned to embed the utterance in the 'social context' and to generalise across meanings in specified social contexts. He proposed an approach to the principled description of such contexts which bears a close resemblance to more recent descriptions which we shall go on to examine:

> My view was, and still is, that 'context of situation' is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events . . . A context of situation for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:
>
> A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.
>
> (i) The verbal action of the participants.
>
> (ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.
>
> B. The relevant objects.
>
> C. The effect of the verbal action.
>
> . . . A very rough parallel to this sort of context can be found in language manuals providing the learner with a picture of the railway station and the operative words for travelling by train. It is very rough. But it is parallel with the grammatical rules, and is based on the repetitive routines of initiated persons in the society under description.
>
> (1957: 182; for a practical application of Firth's approach, see Mitchell, 1957.)

An approach similarly emphasising the importance of an ethnographic view of communicative events within communities has been developed by Hymes in a series of articles. Hymes views the role of context in interpretation as, on the one hand, limiting the range of possible interpretations and, on the other, as supporting the intended interpretation:

> The use of a linguistic form identifies a range of meanings. A context can support a range of meanings. When a form is used in a context it

eliminates the meanings possible to that context other than those the form can signal: the context eliminates from consideration the meanings possible to the form other than those the context can support.

(Hymes, 1962, quoted in Wootton, 1975: 44)

Hymes (1964) sets about specifying the features of context which may be relevant to the identification of a type of speech event in a way reminiscent of Firth's. Like Firth, he seizes first on the 'persons' participating in the speech event. Generalising over speech events, he abstracts the roles **addressor** and **addressee**. The addressor is the speakér or writer who produces the utterance. The addressee is the hearer or reader who is the recipient of the utterance. (Later Hymes also distinguishes **audience**, since the presence of overhearers may contribute to the specification of the speech event.) Knowledge of the addressor in a given communicative event makes it possible for the analyst to imagine what that particular person is likely to say. Knowledge of his addressee constrains the analyst's expectations even further. Thus, if you know the speaker is the prime minister or the departmental secretary or your family doctor or your mother, and you know that the speaker is speaking to a colleague or his bank manager or a small child, you will have different expectations of the sort of language which will be produced, both with respect to form and to content. If you know, further, what is being talked about, Hymes' category of **topic**, your expectations will be further constrained. If then you have information about the **setting**, both in terms of where the event is situated in place and time, and in terms of the physical relations of the interactants with respect to posture and gesture and facial expression, your expectations will be still further limited.

The remaining features of context which Hymes discusses (in 1964) include large-scale features like **channel** (how is contact between the participants in the event being maintained – by speech, writing, signing, smoke signals), **code** (what language, or dialect, or style of language is being used), **message-form** (what form is intended – chat, debate, sermon, fairy-tale, sonnet, love-letter, etc.) and **event** (the nature of the communicative event within which a genre may be embedded – thus a sermon or prayer may be part of the larger event, a church service). In later recensions Hymes adds other features, for example **key** (which involves evaluation – was it a good sermon, a pathetic explanation, etc.), and

purpose (what did the participants intend should come about as a result of the communicative event).

Hymes intends that these contextual features should be regarded rather as general phonetic features are regarded. Just as a phonetician may select, from the general phonetic features available, the features *voiced*, *bilabial* and *stop*, but not *lateral*, to characterise a [b], so, he suggests, the analyst may choose from the contextual features, those necessary to characterise a particular communicative event. Just as the phonetician may wish to make a more detailed, more specific description of the [b] under consideration, for example mentioning delayed onset of voicing and some protrusion of the lips during the period of closure, so may the ethnographer wish to specify some of the contextual features in great detail. We shall return to this point. Hymes' features constitute essentially a checklist which would enable a visiting ethnographer to arrive by helicopter in a location where a communicative event is in process and to check off the detail of the nature of the communicative event.

Let us consider such an ethnographer as an invisible witness to a particular speech event. He would begin, presumably, by noting the larger-scale features of context: what *channel* is being used (we shall say *speech*), what language *code* is being used (we shall specify it is *English*), what *message-form* is being performed (we shall specify it is *conversation*), what *event* is it embedded in (we shall specify it is part of an *interview*). He can identify the participants: the *addressor* is a young scientist who is being interviewed by the *addressee* who is doing research on language. The setting is physically located in the addressee's territory in Edinburgh University and a prominent physical feature is a tape-recorder which is switched on. The time is during the later 1970s (so it is reasonable to expect that they will speak modern English, with Scottish accents). It has just been agreed that they will talk about the young scientist's work, the tape-recorder is switched on and he says:

(12) I must admit I'm very nervous.

His *topic* at this point, we shall simplistically assume (see further discussion in Chapter 3), is his nervousness.

Given the knowledge of context the analyst has, he should find

this a fairly unsurprising utterance. It is very rarely the case in real life that we can predict in detail the form and content of the language which we will encounter, but, given all of the ethnographic information we have specified, the actual occurring utterance is much more likely (hence, we assume, much more readily processed by the addressee) than any of the following 'utterances' which did not occur:

(13) a. Please pass the marmalade.
b. My cat has just been sick again.
c. Get into the box.
d. I am about to make the first incision.

The more the analyst knows about the features of context, the more likely he is to be able to predict what is likely to be said (see 2.4).

It is further the case that the ethnographic features will give us a value for the deictic forms occurring in the utterance which was actually produced. Thus *I*, *must*, and *am* must be interpreted with respect to the speaker, the young scientist, at the time of making the utterance. (The context here makes the other possible reading, that the speaker is characteristically nervous all of the time, so unlikely as not to be considered apparently by the addressee, or indeed by the analyst until the process of analysis was brought to conscious attention.) In 2.1 we pointed out that deictic elements of the utterances can only be interpreted with respect to the context in which they are uttered. Hymes' checklist of ethnographic features offers one characterisation of context to which we can relate such deictic elements. A more elaborate checklist is provided by the philosopher Lewis (1972), specifically to provide an index of those co-ordinates which a hearer would need to have specified in order that he could determine the truth of a sentence. Like most formal linguists, Lewis assumes that the *channel* is speech, the *code*, English, the *message-form* conversation and the *event* one where one individual is informing another. His interests lie, not with these general features of the communicative event, but with those particular co-ordinates which constitute 'a package of relevant factors, an index' (1972: 173) and which characterise the context against which the truth of a sentence is to be judged. The co-ordinates of the index are specified as follows:

(a) **possible-world** co-ordinate: this is to account for states of affairs which *might be*, or *could be supposed to be* or *are*

(b) **time** co-ordinate: to account for tensed sentences and adverbials like *today* or *next week*

(c) **place** co-ordinate: to account for sentences like *here it is*

(d) **speaker** co-ordinate: to account for sentences which include first person reference (*I*, *me*, *we*, *our*, etc.)

(e) **audience** co-ordinate: to account for sentences including *you*, *yours*, *yourself*, etc.

(f) **indicated object** co-ordinate: to account for sentences containing demonstrative phrases like *this*, *those*, etc.

(g) **previous discourse** co-ordinate: to account for sentences including phrases like *the latter*, *the aforementioned*, etc.

(h) **assignment** co-ordinate: an infinite series of things (sets of things, sequences of things . . .)

Rather similar lists are proposed by scholars who are concerned with the construction of formal discourse domains (see discussion in Chapter 3). For our present purposes we should note that Lewis' list, like Hymes', makes reference to the *speaker* and *hearer* in order to assign values to the deictic categories of speaker and audience (addressor / addressee) realised in first and second person pronouns. Hymes' category *setting* is expanded to take explicit and distinct account of *time* and *place*. Hymes' generalised feature of *topic* is now distributed between the deictic co-ordinate *indicated object*, the *assignment* co-ordinate and the *previous discourse* co-ordinate. This last co-ordinate specifically enables the hearer to interpret what is said in the light of what has already been said. It builds in a cumulative temporal structure to the index, in that the hearer must continually update the information in his *previous discourse* component, to take account of what has most recently been added.

It is, obviously, not possible for us in a textbook to permit you to

have the experience of everyday discourse in what Stenning (1978) calls a 'normal context', where the hearer is part of the context and then experiences the text. We have to have recourse to what Stenning calls 'abnormal' contexts, where the analyst reads the text and then has to try to provide the characteristics of the context in which the text might have occurred. We are going to provide you with three written fragments, abstracted from the contexts in which they appeared. The first two are printed, the third spraygunned on a wall. We ask you to consider what, if any, difficulty you have in understanding them, in terms of the co-ordinates of Lewis' index.

(14)
a. Place two fingers in the two holes directly to the left of the finger stop. Remove finger nearest stop.
b. He seemed to resent them on that occasion and will not wear them today.
c. SQUASHED INSECTS DONT BITE MAD MENTAL RULE

We have not, as yet, introduced any satisfactory way of handling your experience of previous similar texts (see discussion in 2.4). For the moment we shall suppose that you probably recognise the type of writer in (a) as some impersonal / institutionalised writer addressing a general reader rather than a particular individual (paying attention to *Place* and *Remove* and the ellipsis in the second sentence (the) *finger* nearest (to the) *stop*). If you have difficulty in interpreting this fragment it is probably partly because you are not sure of the referents of the expression *the two holes* and *the finger stop*. You may work out that the two holes have to be of a suitable size for an individual (?) to put two fingers in, possibly near enough to each other to put two fingers of the same hand in, and, having established this scale, it seems likely that the object referred to as *the finger stop* is only centimetres removed, rather than kilometres removed. It would certainly help you to have the following information:

The *addressor* is the Post Office.

The *addressee* is you as a telephone user.

You can probably work out the rest if you did not know it already. However we shall spell out some more:

The *time* of utterance in clock or calendar time does not seem relevant, but what certainly is relevant is that you should know whether this instruction still applies. (It does.)

The *place* of the original utterance is hardly relevant but where you would encounter the text is. (Look in your telephone directory.)

The *possible world* that is relevant is specified in the *previous discourse*: 'It is worth remembering how to dial 999 in darkness or smoke.'

(We should point out that you are not here being asked to use the co-ordinates for the purpose Lewis intended them for, to determine the truth of a sentence. It is a matter of debate whether truth can be assigned to sentences in the imperative form.)

In text *b* the problem of interpretation arises because of not knowing the referents for the expressions *He*, *them*, *on that occasion* and *them* and not having a value to fix the time expression *today*. You may be able to work out that *He* refers to an animate masculine entity, the subject of both clauses. You may wonder why it is reported that *He seemed to resent them*, which may suggest that he was unable to express his own resentment, which may limit your range of potential interpretations of the expression *He*. You note that he *resented them*, where *them* is plural, and you may consider what plural entity may be both *resented* and *worn* (or not worn). This example has all the characteristics of a sentence occurring within a larger piece of text, and illustrates quite clearly the need for a 'previous discourse' co-ordinate, as well as the more obvious 'time' and 'place' co-ordinates. This text appeared in *The Sporting Chronicle* on 4 June 1980. In the preceding part of the text, the writer has been describing a particular racehorse (*He*) which had been fitted with blinkers (*them*) for its previous race (*on that occasion*).

The third text, *c*, offers more thorny problems. Whereas the language of *a* and *b* is quite straightforward and all you require to arrive at an interpretation are values for expressions being used to refer, you may feel that the language here is obscure, perhaps not even meaningful. It is relevant that the time at which this text appeared was in the late 1970s. Your experience of previous similar

texts in the 1970s may have familiarised you with the form *X rule OK* which may permit you to divide this unpunctuated sequence into two parts:

SQUASHED INSECTS DONT BITE
MAD MENTAL RULE

The place at which it appeared is relevant. It was spraygunned on a wall in Glasgow. The form of the text, together with the information about place, may suggest to you, if you have previous experience of such texts, that this text derives from an interaction between street gangs. Encyclopaedic knowledge of the world might inform you that the writer is a member of 'Mad Mental' (a street gang) and that the intended addressees are members of 'The Insects' (another street gang). You then need to make appeal to previous discourse in which the Insects had proclaimed INSECTS BITE. (You might then appeal to your knowledge of what Hymes calls 'message-form' which informs you that street gang interactions on walls consists of taunts and counter-taunts. Thus you might arrive at an attribution of intention in the warning SQUASHED INSECTS DONT BITE and the straight assertion MAD MENTAL RULE – without the *OK* tag, which might be taken to invite assent on the part of the addressee.)

Texts *a* and *b*, addressed to the general reader, are relatively accessible fragments of language which require only specification of the intended referents to make them readily interpretable. Text *c* is intended for specific addressees, not for the general public, and it is hard for the general public to interpret without access to shared presuppositions and previous experience which cannot comfortably be forced into the framework proposed by Lewis. In order to take account of this, we are going to need some way of making appeals to notions like 'shared presuppositions', 'encyclopaedic knowledge', 'intention / purpose in uttering' and 'experience of previous similar text' which we have simply appealed to in an *ad hoc* way in our discussion so far. We return to these questions in 2.3.

What we have shown in this section is that the contextual features suggested by Hymes, supplemented with the index of co-ordinates proposed by Lewis (put forward, remember, with quite different purposes in mind) do enable us to give a partial account of what the undifferentiated term 'context' may mean. From this it follows that

we could give some account of what it might mean to 'change the context' in the sense in which Fillmore (1977: 119) envisages this when he says 'I . . . find myself asking what the effect would have been if the context had been slightly different.' We could reply that if you alter the condition specified by any of the co-ordinates, you alter the context.

At this point we shall consider only the alteration of one co-ordinate, the speaker co-ordinate. Obviously, if Jane says *I'm skipping* and Mary says *I'm skipping* we observe that on one occasion it is Jane who announces that she is skipping and on another it is Mary. In each case the sentence is true if the person who spoke was skipping at the time of the utterance. However, if we are further told that speaker Jane is only three years old, we may, in addition to paying attention to the announcement, consider that it is a remarkable feat for a three-year-old. Whereas if Mary is eight years old and known to be an intrepid skipper, the announcement may be one of a depressingly predictable series. We pay different amounts of attention to the announcements and react to them differently, because one aspect of the context, the speaker, is significantly different.

Consider the following fragment of conversation:

(15) A: are you often here
B: quite often + about once a month + actually ++ I come up to see my children

You have to suppose of B that B is of an age to have children. What we are interested in is the different sorts of inferences which we make as addressees, depending on variables like the age and sex of the speaker, as a result of hearing what B says. Suppose B is a man of seventy. We assume that B's children will be grown-up. Nothing particular follows from the fact that he visits them once a month, except perhaps we infer that he has a close relationship with them. Suppose the speaker is a young man in his thirties. We assume that children he has will be young children, children of an age who usually live with their parents. We may then wonder why B's children are not living with their father, wonder whether the exigences of his professional life, or of his relationship with the children's mother, constrains him to live apart from them. Suppose the speaker is a young woman in her thirties. Again we assume that

she would have young children, children who would normally be expected to be living with her. Since, in the case of the parents being separated, young children usually live with their mother in our society, we might infer that the woman's children are in some form of institutional or educational care. (In the conversation we quote from, the speaker was a man in his early thirties and the children were living with his estranged wife, all inferences which had been drawn by A before B went on to explain that this was the case.)

Observe that the sorts of inferences we have been discussing are not sanctioned by the form of language used. The different inferences arise because of the alteration of the context, in the simple manipulation of age and sex of the addressor. It is the interpretation of the utterance in context which permits the hearer to draw such inferences (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of inferences).

2.2.2 *Co-text*

In our discussion so far we have concentrated particularly on the physical context in which single utterances are embedded and we have paid rather little attention to the *previous discourse* co-ordinate. Lewis introduced this co-ordinate to take account of sentences which include specific reference to what has been mentioned before as in phrases like *the aforementioned*. It is, however, the case that any sentence other than the first in a fragment of discourse, will have the whole of its interpretation forcibly constrained by the preceding text, not just those phrases which obviously and specifically refer to the preceding text, like *the aforementioned*. Just as the interpretation of the token ɑ in the child's representation of 'without to disturb the lion' and the token [p] in [greɪpbrɪtn] are determined by the context in which they appear, so the words which occur in discourse are constrained by what, following Halliday, we shall call their **co-text**. Consider the following lexical items in a number of verbal contexts cited almost at random from Darwin's *Journal during the Voyage of HMS Beagle round the World:*

(16) a. The children of the Indians are saved, to be sold or given away as servants, or rather slaves for as long a time as the owners can make them believe themselves slaves. But I believe in their *treatment* there is little to complain of. (114)

b. The same evening I went on shore. The first *landing* in any new country is very interesting. (169)

c. When we came within hail, one of the four natives who were present advanced to receive us and began to shout most vehemently, wishing to direct us where to land. When we were on shore the *party* looked rather alarmed. (206)

d. After crossing many low hills, we descended into the small land-locked plain of Guitron. In the *basins*, such as this one, which are elevated from one thousand to two thousand feet above the sea, two species of acacia . . . grow in large numbers. (257)

(1892 edition)

The point we wish to make here should be an obvious one and can of course be made with respect to many of the other items which we have not italicised in the cited texts. However, consider the sort of lexical content you would expect to find associated with the forms *treatment*, *landing*, *party* and *basin* in a dictionary entry, and note how finding the forms embedded within a co-text constrains their interpretation.

Just as the interpretation of individual lexical items is constrained by co-text, so is the interpretation of utterances within a discourse. Consider this text of the beginning of a sixteen-year-old Scottish pupil's account of a Sempé cartoon:

(17) a. a man and woman sitting in the living room + the woman sitting reading quite happily – the man's bored goes to the window looks out the window + and gets himself ready and goes out +

The reader must interpret *the woman sitting reading quite happily* as the 'woman' already mentioned, hence must construct an interpretation which has her 'sitting reading quite happily *in the living room*'. Similarly the *window* which the man approaches must be interpreted as 'the window of the living room'. The speaker continues with a change of location and we have to assume that what follows is within the newly introduced location:

b. goes to his goes to a club + has a drink talks to the barman + then he starts dancing with a beautiful girl long black hair + has a good time +

We interpret everything that happens here as happening to the man we met in the living room who is now at *a club*. So he *has a drink*, *talks to the barman*, *starts dancing* and *has a good time* all at the 'club'. The speaker announces another change of location

c. then he goes home and he calls her + and his wife overhears him +

Again we assume that we are still talking about the same man, that he has returned *home* to the location where the 'living room' we first met was located. Now the analyst may be in some doubt how to interpret *and he calls her*, since the man might reasonably go into the house and call (shout for) his wife. However this interpretation is ruled out by the following co-text *and his wife overhears him*. So we are obliged to interpret *calls* as meaning 'phones' and *her* as referring to 'the beautiful girl with long black hair with whom he danced and had a good time'.

Within the co-text, as we have seen in (17) above, a further context may be constructed which has its own index of co-ordinates. Indeed within that constructed context, further contexts may be nested. Consider the following passages:

(18) About four months before the time I am writing of, my Lady had been in London, and had gone over a Reformatory . . . The matron, seeing my Lady took an interest in the place, pointed out a girl to her, named Rosanna Spearman, and told her a most miserable story: which I haven't the heart to repeat here; for I don't like to be made wretched without any use, and no more do you. The upshot of it was, that Rosanna Spearman had been a thief . . .

(Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*)

The actual place and time of writing of the manuscript by the author, Wilkie Collins, or indeed the identity of the author, is not a necessary piece of information for the reader to interpret the text. We may assume, however, that he will have a better understanding of the purpose of the author in constructing the text in the way it is constructed if he knows that it is written in the late nineteenth century (which will account for some differences in *code*, in Hymes' terms) in Victorian England (which will account for the reference to a *Reformatory*) and that the author is constructing the first English detective story, narrating the events from the point of view

of four different participants, whose characters are in part revealed by the narrative style which the author assigns to them. We have then, an author and an actual time and place of writing the novel (or a series of times and places). Then to each narrator is assigned a time and place of the writing of his contribution. It is presumably that time which is relevant to the comment *which I haven't the heart to repeat here* where *I* refers to the current narrator. Immediately preceding this extracted fragment, the narrator has been describing an incident relevant to the main story. This is referred to in the expression *the time I am writing of*. The narrator then proceeds to give some background information, which he situates in a previous time *About four months before*. He introduces *Rosanna Spearman*, who, at the time four months before was a resident of the *Reformatory*, but at some previous time to that, *Rosanna Spearman had been a thief*. Within the time domain of 'four months before' a new speaker and hearer are introduced:

(19) My Lady . . . said to the matron upon that, 'Rosanna Spearman shall have her chance, in my service'. In a week afterwards, Rosanna Spearman entered this establishment as our second housemaid.

At the time of utterance, *four months before the time I am writing of*, the beneficent lady speaks of the future, *shall have her chance*. In the following sentence the narrator comments on what happened a week later than the time of the lady's speech, from the point of view of his context at the time of writing his contribution to the novel, *In a week afterwards* . . .

This brief introduction does scant justice to the interest of the temporal structure of this passage. It does, however, indicate the complexity of nested contexts established by co-text which, as hearers / readers, we are capable of interpreting.

In Chapter 6 we shall discuss the issue of anaphoric reference which is generally held to depend crucially on co-text for interpretation.

For the moment the main point we are concerned to make is to stress the power of co-text in constraining interpretation. Even in the absence of information about place and time of original utterance, even in the absence of information about the speaker / writer and his intended recipient, it is often possible to reconstruct

at least some part of the physical context and to arrive at some interpretation of the text. The more co-text there is, in general, the more secure the interpretation is. Text creates its own context. As Isard (1975: 377) remarks: 'communications do not merely depend on the context for their interpretation, they change that context'.

2.3 The expanding context

In our discussion so far, we have been concerned to impose some sort of analytic structure on the lumpen mass of context. We have abstracted away from particular contexts, across communicative contexts in general, to arrive at a set of features, some of which seem relevant to the identification of a speech event as being of a particular kind, to the ability of the hearer to predict what sort of thing the speaker is likely to say in a given type of context, and to the constraining of interpretation in context. The observant reader will have noticed that we have helped ourselves to the content of the features proposed by Hymes and the co-ordinates proposed by Lewis in a fairly arbitrary way. So we have given variable amounts of information about the *speaker* or the *hearer* or the *time* or the *place* as we have discussed different fragments of discourse. This behaviour is consistent with Hymes' own expectations about how his framework would be used. You will remember that he thought that contextual features might be considered in the way that general phonetic features are considered: sometimes, but not always relevant, and specifiable to variable degrees of delicacy for different purposes (2.2.1).

A problem for the discourse analyst must be, then, to decide when a particular feature is relevant to the specification of a particular context and what degree of specification is required. Are there general principles which will determine the relevance or nature of the specification, or does the analyst have to make *ad hoc* judgements on these questions each time he attempts to work on a fragment of discourse? For the moment, we shall limit our discussion of this question to those features which relate directly to the **deictic context**, those features which will permit interpretation for deictic expressions like the temporal expression *now*, the spatial expression *here*, and the first person expression *I*. Are there standard procedures for determining what information is relevant to the interpretation of these expressions?

Lyons (1977: 570) suggests that there might, in principle, be such standard procedures:

> Every actual utterance is spatiotemporally unique, being spoken or written at a particular place and at a particular time; and provided that there is some standard system for identifying points in space and time, we can, in principle, specify the actual spatiotemporal situation of any utterance act.

There clearly are standard systems for locating points in time and space. It would be possible to specify the time of an utterance as stretching between say 9.33 a.m. and 9.34 a.m. on 5 June 1961, specifying the utterance in terms of clock and calendar time, good standard systems. We could, then, presumably, if we had the relevant instrumentation, specify the place of the utterance in terms of a fine interaction of latitude and longitude. It is not at all clear, however, that these particular standard systems produce the relevant information on all occasions. Presumably some patrol ship on the high seas might log messages in this way, but it is clear that, as humans, our experience of utterances is not that we have recorded in memory a list of utterances to which are attached standard tags specifying time and place in these terms. A friend can attempt to recall to your mind some utterance which you both experienced by a variety of place and time tags:

(20)
a. But you just said he wasn't. (Place: maintained; time: only minutes ago)
b. You said in the staff meeting yesterday that he wasn't.
c. You said last week at the staff meeting that he wasn't.
d. You said last year when we met in Toronto that he wasn't.

The further away in time the message was situated, the less likely the speaker is to remember precisely the date and time at which it occurred, and the larger the time-span he is likely to make available for it to have occurred in. It seems unlikely then, that 'standard procedures' of recording space and time are going to be relevant to the unique identification of utterance acts.

Perhaps the standard procedures will enable us to fix the relevant space spans for the interpretation of deictic expressions like *here*. Suppose X is talking to Y, standing on the blue border of the carpet in X's office, in a given street, in Manchester, in England, in

Britain, in Western Europe . . . Y might produce any of the following utterances:

(21)
a. There's another worn section which needs repair here.
b. You've got a very nice room here.
c. It's a really nasty day here.
d. You have a comparatively mild climate here.

It must be clear that the spatial location identified by *here* in each of these expressions could be interpreted as a series of concentric rings spreading out from the speaker and encompassing different amounts of physical space, but the interpretation of the spatial range of the expression *here* on any particular occasion of use will have to be sought in the context of what the speaker is talking about. What appears to be stable in interpretations of *here* (apart from curious usages deriving from long-distance telephonic communication and long-distance travel, discussed in Lyons, 1977) is that the deictic centre is located where the speaker is.

Very similar problems arise with the interpretation of the temporal deictic expression *now*. Consider the following possible utterances:

(22)
a. Clap altogether NOW. (gym mistress to class)
b. I think you should begin the next chapter now. (supervisor to student)
c. Now I'm getting older I really do find policemen look younger.
d. From the iron age till now, man has been making increasingly complex artefacts.

In *c* and *d* the utterances appear to be located within different temporal spans, one relating to the speaker's advancing age (involving a span of 20–30 years) as opposed to the advancement of man (involving a span at least of decades and possibly centuries). Utterances *a* and *b* are different in that the action specified is to follow the utterance, immediately in the case of *a*, but after some expanse of time in *b*. Once again we suggest that the deictic centre is located within the context of utterance by the speaker, but that the interpretation of the expression *now* as relating duratively or subsequently to the utterance, and the time-span involved, must be determined with respect to the content of the utterance.

We should note that this fixing of the deictic centre is particularly appropriate to what Lyons (1977: 637) calls

> the canonical situation of utterance: this involves one-one, or one-many, signalling in the phonic medium along the vocal-auditory channel, with all the participants present in the same actual situation able to see one another and to perceive the associated non-vocal paralinguistic features of their utterances, and each assuming the role of sender and receiver in turn.

It is, of course, possible to use the expressions *here* and *now* in what might be described as 'displaced contexts'. Consider how you would interpret the utterance *We'll land here* said by one astronaut to another, on earth, as they study a map of the moon. Or, how you interpret the message on each sheet of one brand of government-issue toilet roll, which reads *NOW WASH YOUR HANDS, PLEASE*. Speakers, or writers, do have the option of transferring the deictic centre to the hearer's, or reader's, spatio-temporal situation in which the text will be encountered.

From our discussion of the spatio-temporal co-ordinates which seem, in principle, peculiarly accessible to standard specification, it must be obvious first, that deictic expressions may retain a standard deictic centre but must be interpreted with respect to the content of the utterance in which they occur and, second, that the relevant standard temporal description of an utterance, for instance *9.22 a.m. on Tuesday 28 June 1873*, as opposed to *in the late nineteenth century*, will vary depending on the knowledge and intention of the analyst (or speaker) in referring to the utterance as located in time. That is to say, even if there were an agreed, standard system for tagging utterances with spatio-temporal features, there is no guarantee that that tagging system provides the relevant information. Thus in 2.2.1. we discussed a fragment of discourse:

> He seemed to resent them on that occasion and will not wear them today

where we specified the time of utterance as 4 June 1980. The newspaper article from which this fragment was extracted did indeed appear on that date. However, for anyone who knows what the expression *the Derby* means, it would almost certainly have been more informative to tag the time of utterance as *Derby Day, 1980*.

The space–time co-ordinates cannot be regarded as simple

unstructured cues to interpretation in context. Similarly, the other co-ordinates relevant to the deictic context, *speaker*, *hearer* and *indicated object*, cannot be regarded as simple unstructured cues which demand standard specification. What does it mean to specify, for instance, the indicated object co-ordinate? We could identify a person by name. We could report *Ellen Blair said she'd like to come*. This might be adequate to identify the speaker, indeed the expression *Ellen* might be sufficient. If, however, you do not know who this person is, or might be, it would be more helpful if we were to give some indication of why we have introduced her into the conversation. So we might say *my friend Ellen Blair*, or *the former chairman Ellen Blair*, or *a nurse in the ward called Ellen Blair*, giving, in some sense, 'credentials' for her existence and for her relationship to the speaker who is responsible for introducing her into the conversation. Morgan (1975: 442) asks 'What can we infer about the speaker's intentions from the fact that he has chosen this particular description, rather than any of the others which would call to mind the same referent?' For any individual there will be an immense number of possible descriptions which will be more or less appropriate in different contexts. We may identify the person from external physical cues: *the woman in the corner*, *the man with a beard*, *the student who has had his hair dyed*, *the child in the pink dress* or, more or less flatteringly, *the tall distinguished-looking man / the man with a big nose and stringy hair*. We may identify people from a description of what they are doing: *the woman who is chatting up the Admiral*, *the man who's fixing the car*, etc.

The variable which interests us most is that which is concerned with the various roles played by the individual. Lyons (1977: 574ff.) distinguishes between the **deictic role** of an individual (which assigns, for instance, first, second and third person pronouns) and his **social role** or 'status'. Lyons points out that, for example, the terms of address used by a social inferior to a social superior may be different from those used between peers, as in vocative terms like 'Sir' or 'Doctor' or 'My Lord' (in the courtroom). In different social contexts, then, different terms of address will be found. (Consider for instance, the distribution of the *tu / vous* pronouns in French.) In general we may assume that, in a particular social context, only one role is taken by an individual at

one particular time. A glance at any newspaper will yield a rich crop of identifications of individuals in terms of the social role relevant to the news item. Here are just a few:

(23)
a. *Daily Telegraph cartoonist Nicholas Garland* showing how he sees *the Prime Minister*.
(*Stop Press*, 27 February 1982)
b. *Frank Silbey, chief investigator for the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee*, picked up his telephone.
(*Time*, 31 May 1982)
c. *Sophia Loren, the film actress*, awoke in a prison cell in Caserta, near Naples, today.
(*The Times*, 21 May 1982)
d. *Mr. Robert Mugabe, the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe* yesterday sought to reassure prospective investors in his country.
(*The Times*, 21 May 1982)
e. *Senor Jorge Blanco of the ruling Revolutionary Party* was officially declared winner.
(*The Times*, 21 May 1982)

In each case the individual is identified either by the role which is relevant to the content of the article, or by the role by which he is known to the public. Each individual may play many other roles – parent, child, niece, brother, chess player, gardener, diarist, but these roles are not relevant in this context, so not mentioned on this occasion.

It is possible for more than one social role to be relevant at one time. Rommetveit (1974: 45) discusses a sentence introduced in Chomsky (1972: 67):

> I am not against MY FATHER, only against THE LABOR MINISTER

Rommetveit argues that the sentence is not necessarily self-contradictory even if the individual referred to by the two nominal expressions is the same individual. It merely expresses the ambivalence which is a common human experience where some aspect of an entity pleases you and some other aspect fails to please. Rommetveit argues against 'the notion of identifying reference as an unequivocally defined point in a monistic and epistemological transparent space, constructed on axiomatic prerequisites for specific operations within formal logic' . . . where 'the severe laws of

truth values prescribe that the speaker must know him (the indicated entity) fully or not at all' (1974: 48).

It is possible for speakers, hearers or indicated entities to be regarded from the perspective of more than one role. Consider:

(24) a. As his neighbour I see quite a lot of him, as his colleague I hardly ever see him.
b. As a colleague you're deficient but as a neighbour you're marvellous.
c. I quite like her as a colleague and she's very pleasant as a casual friend but she's impossible to live with.

It is clear that we can hold partially or severely differing opinions about the same individual in different roles.

In the following extract from a report in *The Times* (15 May 1982) the same individual is referred to by a number of different expressions which relate to the multiple roles that the reporter considers relevant to the incident:

(25) *Priest is charged with Pope attack* (Lisbon, May 14)
A dissident Spanish priest was charged here today with attempting to murder the Pope.
Juan Fernandez Krohn, aged 32, was arrested after *a man armed with a bayonet* approached the Pope while he was saying prayers at Fatima on Wednesday night.
According to the police, *Fernandez* told the investigating magistrates today *he* had trained for the past six months for the assault. *He* was alleged to have claimed the Pope 'looked furious' on hearing *the priest's* criticism of his handling of the church's affairs.
If found guilty, *the Spaniard* faces a prison sentence of 15–20 years.

We have italicised the expressions relating to the man identified in the headline as *Priest*. The relevance of his role as priest (referred to by the expressions *Priest*, *a dissident . . . priest*, *the priest's*) is presumably as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church of which the Pope is Head. Since the incident reported takes place in Portugal (*Lisbon*) and any subsequent prison sentence will be served in Portugal, it is relevant that the priest is not Portuguese (*a . . . Spanish priest*, *the Spaniard*). A potentially confusing indefinite referring expression, *a man armed with a bayonet*, apparently

relates back to the period before he was identified as 'a dissident Spanish priest'. He is identified by his name, as an individual, in the set constituted by the intersection of the various relevant roles (*Juan Fernandez Krohn*, *Fernandez*). As Levy (1979: 193) remarks, 'the speaker by *making reference* may not simply identify but may *construct* the object by selecting from a field of relations those properties that *are* relevant at the *moment of utterance*'.

Consider the response of a five-and-a-half-year-old girl in a Yorkshire infant school where she is asked to say how two pictures are different from each other. She replies:

(26) a. That one's over there in *that* but it in't *there*.

The teacher then holds the little girl's hands, so she can't point, shuts her own eyes and says to the child:

b. Now I can't see the picture. Tell me the difference again.

This time the child says:

c. In this picture the teddy's on the chair but there ain't no teddy in that one.

The pictures are identical except in three respects: the presence or absence of a teddy bear sitting on the chair, a difference in the pattern on the counterpane, a difference in the position of a mirror. For the child the teddy bear is clearly the salient object. She relies in her first response on the teacher's access to the shared visual context to interpret what she says. She points to the teddy bear (*that one*) in the first picture and then points to the empty chair in the second picture (*there*) and assumes that the teacher is paying attention to what she is pointing to in their shared context of situation. When the teacher inhibits the child from pointing and pretends not to be able to see the picture, the child understands that the communicative situation has changed, that she can no longer rely on the shared visual context and she makes her reference explicit (*the teddy*), locates him verbally rather than by pointing to him (*on the chair*) and makes explicit how the second picture differs from the first (*there ain't no teddy*). A salient aspect of the addressee, her ability to see what the child can see, has been changed by the utterance of *b* and the acts accompanying the utterance.

Speakers, hearers and indicated objects are not featureless, colourless spheres. Nor do they come simply tagged with proper names appropriate to all occasions together with one identifying description appropriate to all occasions. They are, characteristically, endowed with immense numbers of physical and social properties, any one of which may be the property which is relevant to a particular communicative act. The philosopher's crisp index, which permits the identification of speaker and hearer as X and Y, is only relevant in a restricted model world. The discourse analyst working in the real world has to be able to extract, see as relevant, just those properties of the features of context which are relevant to the particular communicative act which he is describing, and which contribute to the interpretation (or intended meaning) of the utterance. As Enkvist (1980: 79) remarks, 'The context analyst's first embarrassment is richness.' How is he to determine which properties of which features of context are relevant on a particular occasion? Are there general principles to appeal to? Is it reasonable to assume, as we tend to do, that those features of context which are salient to the speaker are equally salient to the hearer? Ought we not rather to think in terms of partially intersecting views of context? Bar-Hillel (1970: 79) states that 'the depth of the pragmatic context which is necessary for the full understanding of various sentence-tokens, is different, of course, from case to case'. As yet we have only a very limited understanding of how we might set about determining 'the depth of the pragmatic context which is necessary' for interpretation. We outline a possible approach to the problem in the next section and in Chapter 3.

2.4 The principles of 'local interpretation' and of 'analogy'

In 2.3 we have discussed the problems for the discourse analyst in specifying what aspects of the apparently illimitable features of context are to be taken into account in the interpretation of discourse. How is he to determine the relevant span of time in the interpretation of a particular utterance of 'now' or the relevant aspects of a character referred to by the expression 'John'? We must assume that the problem for the discourse analyst is, in this case, identical to the problem for the hearer. There must be principles of interpretation available to the hearer which enable him to determine, for instance, a relevant and reasonable interpretation of an expression 'John' on a particular occasion of utterance. One principle which we can identify we shall call the **principle of local interpretation**. This principle instructs the hearer not to construct a context any larger than he needs to arrive at an interpretation. Thus if he hears someone say 'Shut the door' he will look towards the nearest door available for being shut. (If that door is shut, he may well say 'It's shut', rather than consider what other doors are potentially available for being shut.) Similarly if his host says 'Come early', having just invited him for eight o'clock, he will interpret 'early' with respect to the last-mentioned time, rather than to some previously mentioned time.

Consider again extract (17) presented here as (27).

(27) a man and woman sitting in the living room . . . the man's bored goes to the window looks out the window . . . and goes out + goes to his goes to a club + has a drink talks to the barman

In our discussion in 2.2.2, we pointed out the effect of 'co-text' in limiting the interpretation of what follows. The initial setting of the co-text determines the extent of the context within which the hearer will understand what is said next. He assumes that entities referred to will remain constant, that the temporal setting will remain constant, that the locational setting will remain constant, unless the speaker indicates some change in any of these, in which case the hearer will minimally expand the context. Not only does the hearer assume it is the same 'man' who is being talked about throughout, he also assumes that the man will stay in the same place unless the speaker announces that he moves. When the hearer hears *goes to the window*, he assumes it is 'the window' in that same 'living room' which has already been mentioned, and he assumes that the man 'goes to the window' on the same occasion, within minutes of the original setting 'sitting in the living room'. When the man *goes to a club*, the hearer assumes that the 'club' is in the same town, that the man has not caught an aeroplane and flown to Las Vegas. Again the minimal expansion of the spatio-temporal setting will suggest that the man *has a drink* and *talks to the barman* within that same club and on that same occasion, within a restricted time-span, say an hour rather than a year.

It is this principle, which instructs the hearer not to construct a context any larger than necessary to secure an interpretation, which accounts for how we understand Sacks' (1972) much-quoted sequence:

(28) The baby cried.
The mommy picked it up.

It is possible, of course, to imagine that the first of these sentences describes one event and the second describes another, quite unrelated, event (so the person identified as 'a mother' may be picking up a chair in the course of cleaning a room). The principle of local interpretation however, will guide us to construct a limited context in which 'the mother' is the mentioned baby's mother and the expression *it* is used to refer to the previously mentioned baby. Moreover the sequence of events will be understood as happening adjacently in time and situated adjacently in place. It does not even occur to the reader that the baby might have cried one year in Singapore and be picked up by its mother a year later in Aden. It would, of course, be possible to establish a setting in which such a sequence of events would be plausible, but, if no such setting is established, the reader will assume a local interpretation in respect of time, place and participants.

It must be obvious that 'local interpretation' may only be vaguely conceptualised. It seems unlikely that in interpreting (28) the reader postulates any exact physical distance between the mother and the baby at the point before the mother picks the child up, or that he bothers to wonder whether the mother picks the child up after it has finished crying (and if so how long after, in terms of minutes or seconds) or whether the child was still crying when the mother picked it up. Similarly it seems unlikely that the reader will bother to construct a three-dimensional, photographic representation of 'the baby' which cries in the first sentence and which is picked up in the second sentence. 'Local interpretation' probably relates to another strategy which instructs the hearer / reader to do as little processing as possible, only to construct a representation which is sufficiently specific to permit an interpretation which is adequate for what the hearer judges the purpose of the utterance to be.

Everything that we have said so far in this section leans heavily

on the hearer's / reader's ability to utilise his knowledge of the world and his past experience of similar events in interpreting the language which he encounters. It is the experience of similar events which enables him to judge what the purpose of an utterance might be. It is his knowledge of the world which constrains his local interpretation. Consider again (27) presented here as (29).

(29) a man and woman sitting in the living room . . . the man's bored goes to the window . . . goes out . . . goes to a club

We suggested that *goes to the window* will be interpreted as meaning that 'he goes to the window in the living room', whereas *goes to a club* will be interpreted as meaning 'goes to a club in the same town', i.e. not 'in the living room', nor even 'in the same house'. Knowledge of the world tells us that houses which contain living rooms do not usually contain bars. *Goes out* cannot be simply interpreted as meaning 'goes out of the room', it has to be interpreted as meaning 'goes out of the house'. (In Chapter 7 we return to a discussion of 'knowledge of the world'.)

We must suppose that an individual's experience of past events of a similar kind will equip him with expectations, hypotheses, about what are likely to be relevant aspects of context. Bartlett, one of the founders of modern psychology, comments on the importance of relating a particular experience to other similar experiences:

> it is legitimate to say that all the cognitive processes which have been considered, from perceiving to thinking, are ways in which some fundamental 'effort after meaning' seeks expression. Speaking very broadly, such effort is simply the attempt *to connect something that is given with something other than itself.*
>
> (1932: 227, our emphasis)

The individual, he suggests, generalises over particular experiences and extracts from these a number of *types* of experience. This notion is, of course, implicit in the construction of the sets of features of context which we have been considering in this chapter. In order to construct a notion of 'speaker in a context' it is necessary to generalise over contexts and to determine what characteristics speakers in different contexts share. Similarly, in order to construct a notion of 'genre', it is necessary to generalise across experience and determine what it is that is common to fairy stories, chats, news

broadcasts, epic poems, debates or salesmen's routines which enables us to recognise one as being a token of the generalised type.

On the basis of experience then, we recognise types of communicative events which take place against the background of a mass of below-conscious expectations also based on past experience which we might summarise, following van Dijk (1977: 99), as 'the ASSUMED NORMALITY of the world'. We assume that our muscles will continue to move normally, that doors which normally open will continue to open, that hair grows on heads, that dogs bark, that towns retain their geographical locations, that the sun will shine, and so on. It is interesting to observe the powerful constraints on creators of surrealist or science fiction in this respect. Alice may enter a looking-glass world where unexpected things happen, but she is still constituted like a human being: walking may take her in an unexpected direction, but the nature of the physical act of walking is taken for granted. If too many expectations are flouted, the writer may be suspected of being mentally unbalanced, of being incapable of seeing the world in a normal way.

Thus, on the one hand, expectations make interpretation possible and, on the other, they constitute an extension or further affirmation of their own validity. Popper makes the point cogently: 'we are born with expectations: with "knowledge" which, although not *valid a priori, is psychologically or genetically a priori*, i.e. prior to all observational experience. One of the most important of these expectations is the expectation of finding a regularity. It is connected with an inborn propensity to look out for regularities, or with a *need* to *find* regularities' (1963: 47, original emphasis). Furthermore, as Lewis (1969: 38) points out, 'fortunately we have learned that all of us will mostly notice the same analogies'. Not only are we all primed to look for regularities, we tend to perceive the same regularities. Clearly the smaller the community, the more notions of regularity will be shared, since the contexts which the members of the community share will be very similar.

Once the individual begins to establish regularities, to generalise over experience, it becomes possible for him not only to recognise a particular experience as being one of a type, say a scolding or an interview, it also becomes possible to predict what is likely to happen, what are likely to be the relevant features of context,

within a particular type of communicative event. It follows that the hearer in a speech situation is not in the position of trying to pay attention to every feature of the context (in principle an impossible task). He only pays attention to those features which have been necessary and relevant in similar situations in the past. Bartlett suggests that the individual has 'an overmastering tendency simply to get a general impression of the whole; and on the basis of this he constructs the probable detail' (1932: 206). We pay attention to those salient features which are constitutive of the type of genre, and expect that the peripheral features will be as they have been in the past. Obviously there will be types of occasions which have not occurred within our past experience. We have cultural stereotypes which suggest that such occasions are difficult for us, potentially embarrassing, because we do not know the appropriate responses. Thus, if it is the first time someone tells you a particular genre of joke, you may not know the appropriate type of response. The second time around, however, you feel more confident of what to expect. (Tolstoy, in *War and Peace*, gives a brilliant account of the insecurity engendered by the first occasion of a new type of experience in his description of Pierre's induction into membership of a masonic brotherhood.)

Our experience of particular communicative situations teaches us what to expect of that situation, both in a general predictive sense (e.g. the sort of attitudes which are likely to be expressed, the sort of topics which are likely to be raised) which gives rise to notions of 'appropriacy', and in a limited predictive sense which enables us to interpret linguistic tokens (e.g. deictic forms like *here* and *now*) in the way we have interpreted them before in similar contexts. We must assume that the young child's acquisition of language comes about in the context of expanding experience, of expanding possible interpretations of forms like *here* and *now* in different contexts of situation, contexts which come to be recognised, and stored as types.

Against the background of this mass of expectations which derives from and constitutes our experience, it must become possible to identify the relevant properties of features of the context of situation in terms of norms of expectation within a particular genre. The more highly constrained and ritualised the genre, the more likely we are to be able to identify norms. Thus it seems likely

that examination questions in chemical engineering at degree level will bear certain similarities of form and content, and share certain presuppositions, in institutions throughout the world. The less constrained the genre, primarily interactional 'chat', for example, the less likely it is that we can confidently state norms of expectation which will generalise even over the experience of the English-speaking population. For the individual participant in a chatting relationship, this does not constitute a difficulty, because he has plenty of previous personal and local experience to call upon. For the discourse analyst, on the other hand, the more personal and particular the occasion for the participants, the more limited and circumspect he must be in his interpretation. Confronted with data of the following sort, an extract from a private diary only intended to remind the elderly writer of how she passed a day in January 1982, the discourse analyst may not be able to proceed very far in his analysis.

(30) Did more to Ivy's letter. A.A. rang me at 4 o/c she returned on 2nd and had had grand time with Gwenda and families. As was nice p.m. I went to Evensong (rev. Carlil) and walked back with Mrs. Nicholls (85!!) and daughter. Cos' Doris rang 8.15 and will come tomorrow! Bed. 11.15.

Of course, if the discourse analyst experiences a great deal of data like this, he will feel more confident in his description and interpretation. He, too, is constrained in his interpretation by past similar experience, by interpreting in the light of what we might call the **principle of analogy**.

The principle of analogy will provide a reasonably secure framework for interpretation for the hearer and for the analyst most of the time. Most of the time, things will indeed conform to our expectations. However, conventions can be flouted and expectations upset, either deliberately for a stylistic effect, or by accident or oversight. Note that where the speaker / writer is deliberately flouting a convention, upsetting an expectation for a stylistic effect, he can only bring off that effect because the convention / expectation exists. The 'non-limerick' which follows only makes an effect in the light of the conventional structure for limericks which have a characteristic rhythm and an *aabba* rhyme scheme:

(31) There was a young girl of St Bees,
Who was stung on the nose by a wasp,
When asked 'Does it hurt?'
She replied 'Yes it does,
But I'm glad it wasn't a hornet.'

The principle of analogy is one of the fundamental heuristics which hearers and analysts adopt in determining interpretations in context. They assume that everything will remain as it was before unless they are given specific notice that some aspect has changed. Dahl (1976: 46) formulates a principle for speakers: 'Indicate only things which have changed and omit those which are as they were before.' To repeat what is known to be shared knowledge, 'things as they were before', flouts Grice's maxim of quantity. (Speakers do, of course, remind each other of knowledge which they share, in order to make that knowledge part of the activated context of discourse, as McCawley (1979) points out.)

Discourse is interpreted in the light of past experience of similar discourse, by analogy with previous similar texts (remember the relevance of experience of previous similar texts in the interpretation of (14c) in Chapter 2, SQUASHED INSECTS DONT BITE MAD MENTAL RULE). Relevant previous experience, together with the principle of local interpretation, will impel hearers / readers to try to interpret sequential utterances as relating to the same topic. When two sentences are placed together in sequence by a writer who does not want us to consider them as a continuous text, their separateness or disconnectedness must be positively indicated. In a linguistics textbook, the following two sentences were presented as separate citation examples to illustrate structural ambiguity.

(32) 1. The bride and groom left early last night.
2. He greeted the girl with a smile.
(Brown & Miller, 1980: 84)

In the context of a linguistics textbook, expecially one on syntax, we would not expect to have to interpret two continuous cited sentences as describing an event sequence. In most contexts, however, the natural 'effort after meaning' will impel the hearer / reader to try to co-interpret chunks of language which he finds close

to each other on a page, or a stone or a wall and, where possible, to interpret the language as relevant to the physical context.

This last point leads us to an important, but frequently misunderstood, concept in the analysis of discourse. The imperative '*need* to *find* regularities' which Popper speaks of, coupled with Bartlett's 'effort after meaning', constitute a powerful expectation in human beings that what is said or written will make sense in the context in which it appears. Even in the most unpropitious circumstances, the natural reaction of man appears to be to make sense of any sign resembling language, resembling an effort to communicate. The reaction of the man who finds what are apparently signs etched in a stone in the middle of a desert is to try to decipher their meaning. The reaction of parents to infants, and of friends to the speech of those who are gravely ill, is to attribute meaning to any murmur which can be interpreted as relevant to the context of situation, and, if at all possible, to interpret what appears to be being said as constituting a coherent message, permitting the hearer to construct a coherent interpretation. The natural effort of hearers and readers alike is to attribute relevance and coherence to the text they encounter until they are forced not to.

The normal expectation in the construction and interpretation of discourse is, as Grice suggests, that relevance holds, that the speaker is still speaking of the same place and time, participants and topic, unless he marks a change and shows explicitly whether the changed context is, or is not, relevant to what he has been saying previously. Similarly the normal expectation is that the discourse will be coherent. The reaction of some scholars to the question of 'coherence' is to search for cues to coherence within the text and this may indeed yield a descriptive account of the characteristics of some types of text. It ignores, however, the fact that human beings do not require formal textual markers before they are prepared to interpret a text. They naturally assume coherence, and interpret the text in the light of that assumption. They assume, that is, that the principles of analogy and local interpretation constrain their experience.

There are as many linguistic 'cues to coherence' (a concept to be discussed in detail in Chapter 6) holding between the pairs of sentences:

(33)
1. The bride and groom left early last night.
2. He greeted the girl with a smile.

as there are between:

(34)
The baby cried.
The mommy picked it up.

It is not the sequence of sentences which represents 'coherent discourse'. Rather it is the reader, driven by the principles of analogy and local interpretation, who assumes that the second sequence describes a series of connected events and interprets linguistic cues (like *baby – it*) under that assumption. Encountering the first pair of sentences in the context in which they occur, the reader does not assume that they describe a connected sequence of events and consequently does not interpret the potential linguistic cues (like *groom – he*) as referring to the same entity. The principles of analogy (things will tend to be as they were before) and local interpretation (if there is a change, assume it is minimal) form the basis of the assumption of coherence in our experience of life in general, hence in our experience of discourse as well.