

Confronting the Communicative Approach with its Context of Communication

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Summary

This article argues that Hymes' theory of communication has two applications to language teaching. The first one is well known in that it has been influential in changing the emphasis of language teaching from teaching language as a self-contained grammatical system towards teaching language for use in social contexts. However, the theory of communication in context can equally be applied to the language classroom, which is itself a social context. This article analyses a so-called communicative lesson within a school system in which the communicative approach has apparently been in use for more than fifteen years. The analysis reveals a gap between the named method and the actual "method-in-use" It is hence by applying the theory of communication itself that we may conclude that a communicative approach is not suited to all contexts.

Key words. Communication - communicative approach - social context - language teaching - classroom analysis - functional

Confronting the Communicative Approach with its Context of Communication

Hymes is often quoted in favour of one particular approach to language teaching based on his definition of "communicative competence". (Hymes, 1971) Working from an ethnographic perspective, Hymes emphasized the way language was used and suggested that when language use was described in context, it showed evidence of regularities of structure that could not be adequately defined in terms of rules of linguistic grammar.

The change of emphasis in language teaching towards a more "communicative" approach was partly dependent on the influence of a view of language that can be summarized in one quotation from Hymes, (1971:15) and in Brumfitt and Johnson, (1979:14).

There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless.

This article will argue that a balanced appraisal of the theories and views of Hymes, not only on the nature of language itself but also on the applications of his views of language to education, might lead to very different conclusions about the feasibility of applying a

communicative approach in certain contexts. In this respect Hymes *Ethnolinguistic Essays* (1980) as well as his earlier work on language as communication are particularly relevant.

The discussion in this paper will follow an ethnographic principle of forefronting data and analysing it in detail before pedagogical conclusions are drawn. It will be based on the non-pedagogical analysis of a recording of a "communicative" lesson as an instance of communication in context. The analysis outlined here is part of a wider ethnographic investigation that attempts to follow principles that Hymes outlines in some detail. According to Hymes(1980) structure cannot be separated from ethnographic inquiry.

Ethnography is inquiry that begins with recognition that one is at work in situations that are , indeed, massively prestructured, but prestructured by the history and ways of those among whom one inquires. (p74)

Hymes (op. cit.) considers four aspects of patterning : (p2)

1. the patterning of utterances in discourse,
2. the patterning of expression and interpretation of personality (of participants),
3. the patterning of speech situations in terms of the social system,
4. the patterning of attitudes and conceptions about speech, in terms of cultural values and outlook.

Overview of the Lesson

The lesson described was recorded in a secondary school using a communicative course called the Crescent English Course. Having taught the language of advice and recommendation in a previous lesson, the teacher now sets up opportunities to practise this function. The different phrases for giving advice are listed on page 68 of the Pupil's Book. The Teacher's Book (page 26, B2) recommends group work for an activity to practise the different realizations of the functional language.

Ask pupils to think of one or two real problems they have. In groups they should then discuss these problems and try to give sensible and realistic advice on how these problems could be solved.

The lesson conceived by the writers would therefore involve students discussing their problems in English with each other in groups. In this way the typical teacher's role of dominating the discourse from the front of the class would not be adopted. Instead the teacher would circulate maintaining general control and providing guidance (etc.). The students would in theory have control over the topic content of their discussion and would be responsible for structuring their own interaction within their groups.

The actual lesson that was enacted did not follow the teacher's book at all, as the following overview of the lesson clearly shows.

Fig1 Overview of the lesson in seven stages.

1	Revision of advice using the context of a doctor giving advice to patients. Independent Interaction is, however, soon abandoned to elicit a wider variety of the different phrases learnt to offer advice listed in pupils' book, page 68. The language becomes the discourse topic .
2	Students are given a short time to write down a problem they have.
3	The teacher then elicits these problems from different students, reconstructing the language where necessary.
4	He then <u>initiates interaction</u> where he is the advisor and <u>offers advice</u> for the problems
5	He briefly demonstrates the writing of a dialogue on the board then students write their dialogues in pairs.
6	Different pairs of students then act out their dialogues in front of the class.
7	Finally the teacher presents his own problems trying to elicit advice from the students.

Extracts from each part of the lesson will now be examined to analyse the roles of the teacher and students at different stages in the lesson and to assess how far the tenor of discourse differs during interactive stages (6 & 7).

Part1

Three different levels of discourse briefly summarized below will be referred to in the interpretation of the lesson.

3 Levels of Discourse.

LEVEL 1	Classroom reality
LEVEL 2	Topic from displaced discourse world
LEVEL 3	Topic is form of the language

In level one or level three discourse the typical pattern of eliciting exchanges outlined Nunn,96 (This volume) would be the norm.

I - (R - N)ⁿ - R - T

At the beginning of the lesson the teacher attempts to construct a role play in which he is the patient and the students take the doctor's role. In real level two interaction the teacher should be playing the lower status role and would not be expected to dominate the discourse patterning. From the beginning of this section it is clear that there are two competing topics of discourse,

i) the displaced topic of the doctor's surgery (level two)

"You are doctors and I am ill"

ii) the functions of advice (level three)

"What phrases would you use ?"

In the initial section in sample 1 below the discourse would be on level two if it really simulated an authentic doctor-patient interview with the teacher as patient. However, the routine level one classroom exchange in which the teacher confirms the students' (SS) response dominates the discourse structure. The inauthentic content of the "doctor's" response also indicates that authenticity of displaced communication on level 2 is not the main purpose of this part of the lesson.

	Sample 1	1	2	3
	T When I say I am ill , what do you advise me to do ? When I say I am I am (ref) ill, (Writing on board) what .. do you advise ...me ...to do ? Then I am asking for your advice, for your (ref tone)	I I		
	SS advice	R		
L2→	T advice - you are doctors and I am ill - and everyone is going to give me an advice.	T		
L3→	What phrases would you use, what can you say when you want to advise somebody ? Yes.. ?	I		I
	S Er I advise you to.....	R		R
	T (int) Yes, I advise you (writes)	N		N
	S to drink medicine	R		
	T I advise you...yes (ref)	N		
	S to drink medicine	R		
	T to take medicine	T		

The same sequence continues In sample 2 below. Role confusion arises when the student,

in the role of a doctor if the discourse is really on level two, omits a phrase of advice. The teacher wants a list of functional phrases on level three. ("Give me an advice". "We have still other phrases" etc.) He is enacting his role as teacher here. Regardless of "authenticity", the teacher has planned to practise the functional phrases of advice on level three and it is important from his angle to make sure that the functional phrases are actually used regardless of the effect on the authenticity of level two discourse.

Sample 2				
	T Yes. (nom)	I		
	S to go to hospital	R		
L3→	T Ya Saif. Give me an advice	N		N
	S I advise you to go to hospital	R		R
	T You say only , "I advise you" ? We have still other phrases (nom - gesture from bid inferred)			N
	S I advise you			R
	T Not only advise (nom - gesture inferred from bid.)			N
	S I advise you			R
L3→	T Not I advise you - we have taken many things			N
	S If I were you (S-nom ? both out of picture.)			R
	T If I were you, yes (writing) if I were you, I would this is another phrase.			T

In sample 2, which continues below, the level two topic has been totally abandoned while the teacher focuses on the list of phrases that can be used to offer advice using a repetition drill in which each response is repeated. ("Who remembers other phrases of advice?")

In this initial section the discourse was structured by the teacher in every respect. Typical classroom roles for the Qatari setting were adopted. Students' contributions were all nominated responses (with two possible exceptions when the teacher was not in the video shot, but probably nominated by gesture). The teacher dominated totally and rejected one self-nomination by a student. The purpose of this section could be said to be a rehearsal phase where the language of advice was being rehearsed for a later performance. The focus was mainly on functional (level three) discourse. No discourse could be satisfactorily analysed as independent level two discourse.

L3→	sample 2 cont)			
	T Who remembers other phrases of advice?			In
	S You should.. (nom by gesture.)			R
	T You should... That's right (writing) You..... should			T
	S Saad. You must .. you must..			(R)
	T Yes.. (nom)			In
	S You must			R
	T No, we can say you should..yes (ref tone - all)			N
	S Never			R
	T Never. Yes, we can say never Never eat sweets.. never eat ice-cream. (ref tone) Yes....(ref)			N
	S I recommend			R
	T I recommend . (Writing) I recommend that you should I recommend that.....(ref)			N
	S you should.			R
	T You should.			T

The section also illustrated how functional communication can be very economic. Students are ready to use a limited code ("*to go to hospital*"). The teacher feels his job is to make the students use a wider repertoire of phrases for offering advice (level three) and not just to set up a situation where they can communicate with a limited code by either missing out the functional language altogether or using only one phrase (I advise you....).

Parts 2 & 3

In part two the students were asked to write down a problem they had. The level two topic is book-independent here, although it is difficult to assess how authentic the problems are. The task of writing down problems itself is clearly not an "authentic" task in terms of the discourse that would be produced in a displaced context. It is a classroom (level 1) task to facilitate the later performance stage.

In part 3 of the lesson the teacher elicits the problems (sample 3 below). There is no independent level two interaction here during the routine (level one) elicitation of the problems. Level one elicitation dominates with occasional trouble shooting on level three.

Sample 3			
T	(pointing to book) You can use one of these two questions when you ask about advice or recommendation. Yes..(ref)	I	
S	I lost my glasses what advice you give me ?	R	
T	I lost..(writing) I have lost my glasses	N	
S	What advice you give me ?	R	
T	(writing) What advice..	N	N
S	give me	R	R
T	can ..you ..give..me ? I have lost my glasses, what advice can you give me ? This is good	T	T

There is a brief incursion into real world, book independent, level two discourse immediately following this extract (sample 4) when the teacher checks the authenticity of the problem. There is a collision of levels one and two here, but this whole sequence is a kind of aside from the normal procedure of eliciting problems.

L2→	Sample 4		
	T Really you have lost your glasses ?	I	I
	S Yes..	R	R
	T When ?	N	N
	S Yesterday	R	R
	T Yesterday	T	T
	T In the afternoon or in the morning ?	In	In
	S in the morning	R	R
	T in the morning .. Nothing's at school ?	T In	T In
	S Not at school	R	R
	T in the house	T	T

Part 4

In part 4 of the lesson the teacher takes on the role of adviser for the problems (sample 5). The role of the teacher is not incompatible with the role of adviser, so here there is partial fusion of levels one and level two independent interaction once the situation has been set up on level one (*"I am your adviser"*). The only indication of level one domination in sample 5 is the elliptical nomination, "yes".

Sample 5			
T	I am your adviser. Ask me again One by one..yes What's your problem ?	I	I
S	My problem...I lost ...I have lost my glasses	R	R
T	I advise you to go to the police I advise you to go to the police station Yes, what's your problem ?	T	T
S	I want to travel	I	I
T	I advise Italy , because you like to play football. I advise Italy.	R	R
		T	T

The authenticity of the communication on level two is judged by the teacher, who is operating on two levels of discourse. In sample 6 we see that he is not satisfied with the authenticity of the conversation, so he adds a metalinguistic comment - "What do you say when I give advice?". The exchange here projects the discourse onto level three with a ritual three-part exchange of which the topic is the language. Interaction can be maintained on level two only where it is accepted as adequate by the teacher. Whenever he intervenes in his role as teacher, the independence of the interaction from the pedagogical setting is sacrificed for pedagogical reasons.

Sample 6				
T	Yes...?	I		
S	My eyes are bad.	R	I	
T	Ahh.. I'm sorry to hear that ..your eyes are bad. Short sighted or long sighted ?	T In	R I	
S	Short-sighted	R	R	
T	Yes, if I were you, I would see a doctor. If I were you I would see a doctor.	T	I	
→	What do you say when I give advice ?	I		I
S	thank you	R	(R)	R
T	You say.....thank you	T		T

Part 5

In the fifth stage of the lesson the teacher sets up pairwork for the writing of dialogues. Again this is uniquely a classroom activity as it involves writing down spoken language in preparation for a performance phase (part 6). A model for the dialogue is provided by the teacher by means of the example in sample 7. Here we could note that the teacher provided the model for the dialogue more by necessity than by strategy. He abandoned his

original plan to allow students to attempt to structure the dialogue alone when he considered this would not work and delayed the start of independent pairwork to provide a model.

→	<p><u>Sample 7</u></p> <p>T OK now everyone has got a problem. Now how can we advise others ? Read now please. Then we have read about it. Now how can we give the advice? Then we can use one of these. Then in pairs.. now every two... in pairs write your problem and you give him the answer. Use one of these. Use one of...(ref)</p> <p>SS these</p> <p>T these.</p> <p>(Interrupts pairwork)</p> <p>Now we are going to write a little dialogue. I want to write a little dialogue for you.</p> <p>What is your problem? What is your problem ?</p> <p>My friends are always noisy. I think this is number 1.</p> <p>[Writing] My friends.. my friends ... are always noisy.</p> <p>Then he said , "What do you advise me to do ?"</p> <p>[Writing] What do you..what do you advise me to do ?</p> <p>Now I am the adviser. What should I say to him? I want to use one of these. (ref to list in the book) [Reading]</p> <p><i>"If you want my advice, the best thing for you to do is to , If I were in your shoes I would... Your best bet is to I advise you to."</i></p> <p>Choose one of these to give him advice.</p> <p>I say, "I advise you to" [Writing] I advise you. And I have chosen this phrase. [writing] I advise you to "tell er Mr er headmaster Abdullah. OK Then write a short conversation. You ask your friend and he gives you his advice. In pairs. Every two. You write a problem and he gives you..... [Explains again in Arabic]</p> <p>PAIRWORK : teacher circulates explaining in Arabic mainly. [8 mins 20]</p>
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Part 6

In part six of the lesson the dialogues are performed in front of the class who act as an audience. The student with the problem comes to the front of the class, while the student who will advise him remains seated with the rest of the class.

The extract in sample 8 (above and below) shows how level one discourse restrict the independence of discourse on level two. The teacher negotiates on level one for a better level two performance embedding the level two interaction the level one discourse that he dominates. The independence of the level two performance is always vulnerable to level one intervention. The level two topic has a flavour of displaced communication, but the overall tenor of communication is not radically different from the level one communication that could be used to reconstruct any type of text from the book.

	Sample 8		
	T Now this is a pupil and this is the adviser at the school. Yes, please.	I	
	S1 I always come to school late. What do you do... What do you think ?	R	I
	S2 I advise you to get up early.		R
	T (reaction in Arabic suggesting it needs filling out with "Good morning "etc) [Student goes to sit, but is brought back again.]	N	
	S1 Good morning	R	I
	S2 Good morning		R
	S1 How do you do ?		I
	S2 I'm fine. How do you do ?		R
	S1 I want you to advise me		I
	S2 I advise you to get up.....		R
→	T He says," I want you to advise me." Rassam you gave him the advice. First you hear the problem. (Ismaa mushkila Trans into Arabic)	T	
	Yes, what' s your problem ?	In	
	S1 I always come to school late.	R	I
	T My problem is I come to school always late. I always come to school late. What do you advise him ?	T I	
	S2 I advise you to get up early.	R	R
	T This is very good. This is very good. I advise you to get up early. Do you like it ? Do you agree ? Do you agree that he should er get up early ?	T I	
	SS Yes....	R	

Sample 9 below further illustrates the embedding of performance in level one discourse when the teacher negotiates reconstruction of the dialogue. By reconstructing to give the dialogue a more authentic flavour, he actually renders the discourse less independent and therefore less "authentic" in terms of discourse structure. The embedding of the students level two contributions is observed by looking at the fourth column in sample 9.

	Sample 9			
	SS saad... saad			
	T Yes, Rashid..... Rashid	I		
	S1 I have a pain in my stomach	R	I	
	T Say a greeting. Greet him. Good morning . How are you? I'm very well thank you.	N		
	S1 OK, I have a pain in my stomach. What advice can you ... what advice can you give me ?	R		
	T Let's read the question again. (background noise.)	N		
	S1 I have er got in my stomach	R	I	
→	T a pain in my stomach.	N		N
	S2 Your best bet is to go er doctor.	R	R	
	T Your best bet is to go to the hospital - this is good advice - because there you find doctors.	T	T	

An interesting phenomenon also observed elsewhere in the data is the difficulty the teacher has in correcting on level three once the students have established some independent discourse on level two. In sample 9 his level three intervention ("*a pain in my stomach*") is not responded to. The student (S2) simply carries on with his level two response and the level three negotiation by the teacher with the other student S1 is ignored.

After five such performances with increased background noise from students the teacher changes the activity. It is clear that even teacher-controlled performance by one pair at a time with observers in the room cannot be kept under control for an extended period.

Part 7

The teacher then improvises a final phase in which he returns to teacher-whole class interaction. He tries to set up a reversal of the typical roles, whereby the students are asked to advise the teacher on his problem. This would seem to indicate that the students are to be given a more dominant role. Apparently this is born out when a student negotiates the teacher's initiation, asking ("*Why*" ?).

In spite of the student's negotiation above, the teacher does not exploit the possibility of students taking more control of the discourse. The interaction in sample 10 (continued below) shows that even when the students have a more dominant level two role, they are still vulnerable to interruption on level three. The teacher retains his aim of making students use the language of advice already taught. So, instead of accepting a response that offers advice without using one of the functional phrases taught in the preceding lesson, he interrupts the "independent" level two discourse to insist on this. ("*Yes, advise me*".)

	<p>Sample 10</p> <p>T Now , gentlemen, I have got another problem, I want your advice.</p> <p>SS Yes</p> <p>T Before we finish with this and revise everything. My child doesn't like me My child , my son, doesn't like me.</p> <p>→ S Why ?</p> <p>T Why ? I don't know I am good to him. I am kind to him But I prevent him from going outside the house after nine O' clock. I prevent him . He's not allowed to go outside the house out of the house , after nine o' clock What advice can you give me ? What shall I do ? I am your teacher ..I have got a problem. My son doesn't like me Yes, using the language of advice please advise me. (some students raise hands) My son doesn't like me because I prevent him ... I stop him from going outside the house after nine o'clock in the evening</p>	I		
	<p>Yes, Adjel</p> <p>S I think talk about the problem with him</p> <p>T Yes, advise me If I were you I would</p> <p>S My advice to you</p> <p>T Yes</p> <p>S talk to him about it</p> <p>T talk to him about it. Thank you very much What else can you advise me ?</p> <p>→ S My advice to you if you want advice me</p> <p>T My advice...if you want my advice</p> <p>S you should buy a bicycle..</p> <p>T you should buy him a bicycle</p> <p>S2 If I were you I would buy him a diary</p> <p>T I would buy him a diary Maybe he will be occupied er busy and will not leave the house</p>	R	R	N R
		I	I	
		N		
		R		
		I		
		R		
		T	F	
		In	In	
		R		
				N
		R	R	
		Ng		
		R	R2	
		Ng	T	

Sample 11 below illustrates another reason why genuine displaced communication is not likely to occur in Qatari classrooms. The situation seems to be right for students of the same age as the teacher's son to give real advice to their teacher. Potentially genuine communication could occur. However, this potential for genuine communication is not exploited. The teacher intervenes not only on level three, but also on level two where he comments on the content of the advice itself after a student had advised him to shout at his son. ("You should persuade him" etc). The teacher is evaluating the student's advice, whereas normally it would be unusual to evaluate freely offered advice. The ritual repetition eliciting a group (SS) response that follows "You should persuade him" suggests he is responding as a teacher on level one, rather than as someone who is being offered advice on level two.

	Sample 11		
	T Yes	Inom	
	S3 I advise you to shout at him	R	I
	T to ...?	N	
	S shout at him	R	
	T to shout at him	T	
→	T Do you think that shouting at your son is good ?	Ig	N
	S4 No	R	R
→	T because he has mind...you should persuade him. You should persuade ... (ref)	N	F
	SS him	R	
	T Yes...	(I)nom	
	S5 I advise you to give him a good book to read	R	I
	T A good book (ref)	N	
	S6 To read	R	

Summary of the Functional Lesson

The summary information in the table below indicates that the discourse of this lesson involved a lot more teacher controlled text construction and reconstruction than independent interaction between students simulating non-classroom roles. In spite of the interactive sections of the lesson, 52% of all exchange terminations were literal repetitions of students' responses by the teacher reflecting routine classroom roles. The very small amount of self-selection by students and the small amount of non-response contributions they use also indicate that the functional objectives of the lesson do not change the tenor of the discourse significantly.

Summary Information

	contributions	
Level one	335	93%
Level two	displaced 62 ind 25	7%
Self selections	2	
Student contributions other than responses	1	
"Independent" level 2 moves	25 (including teacher as advisor)	

The teacher did not set up the kind of independent level two discourse suggested in the teacher's book. Instead he used typical teacher-whole class elicitation to encourage students to construct and reconstruct discourse in which the main theme was advice. The linguistic content was "functional", but the discourse created was not genuine displaced communication. The teacher wanted a performance of a dialogue (level two). To achieve this he rehearsed the students in the functional language of advice. He also elicited problems from the students using level one eliciting exchanges. The approach for most of the lesson was not far removed from the non-communicative techniques of teacher-fronted language construction and reconstruction. Even when the dialogues were performed, the students were not really able to interact independently of the teacher.

The Crescent Communicative Course and Functional Lessons

Functional lessons are central to the method proposed in the teachers' book of the first Crescent Course being used in the lesson described. In the 1982 version of the teacher's book of Crescent Book 7 (page five) used for the lesson illustrated in this paper, the background to the teaching approach of the course is outlined.

The Crescent English Course is based on the current appreciation of the communicative nature of language and on an understanding of the implications this has for teaching and learning.

The view of language that is expressed is unambiguous. *Language is first and foremost a means of communication.* The practical outcome of this view for the first Crescent Course

was the emphasis on the teaching of the communicative function of language illustrated in this article.

The guidelines on the approach to teaching functional lessons are also unambiguously critical of "traditional" teacher-fronted interaction.

The typical classroom with its fixed rows of desks, with the teacher traditionally positioned at the front of the class confronting rows of children, does not allow communication to take place easily. These materials encourage alternatives to this arrangement. (Crescent Book 7, teacher's book page 5.)

The last line of this statement from the teacher's book of the communicative course indicates materials were deliberately written to change typical classroom roles in a given educational context. Communication here can be interpreted as meaning independent level two communication that simulates displaced contexts as realistically as possible.

This article has described a functional lesson in some detail. The roles of the teacher and students are still very different from the roles suggested by the teachers' book. In considering the gap between the course book expectations and the actual behaviour, it is important to remember that they are using a course introduced some sixteen years previously and supported by a large scale teacher training project aimed at radically changing typical classroom roles. It seems unrealistic to expect these roles to change rapidly, because communication reflects the real context of situation. The teacher himself is not able to avoid the role constraints of the context.

More General Conclusions.

Classroom dynamics depend on the typical roles of teachers and students and the teacher's assessment of the need to adopt techniques according to the wider norms of schools in their socio-cultural context. In the lesson analysed in this article, the teacher restructured the lesson as it was designed by the British Course writers according to his own typical classroom norms. The roles the teacher and his students took matched the typical tenor of the context observed in other local lessons recorded and analysed for a wider research project. Analysis indicates that local teachers never allow students to be put in control of their activities so that they could gain more practice in controlling the structure of their own discourse. The displaced context was inevitably heavily embedded in the real context.

There is a certain inevitability about this state of affairs that should lead us to consider whether the design of materials should not try to predict the consequences of the proposed approach for the actual "method-in-use" in classrooms where the course will be used. It is not realistic to expect the majority of teachers to be able to set up natural use of

displaced discourse in certain classroom settings. It does seem possible to adapt teacher-fronted procedures to interactive discourse provided that teachers consider that conditions allow this. Course writers could assist the process of improvement by adopting a more evolutionary approach to improvement, suggesting procedures that are not as radically different from what teachers are already doing. It is difficult for teachers to modify what are to them very exotic teaching procedures to an acceptable compromise that works in their real communicative context.

Hymes' work on communicative competence has led to important progress in the content and approach to language teaching, but it should not be forgotten that he also suggests that educational innovation, needs to be

enhanced by an understanding of the existing structure , because the innovator's efforts will be perceived and judged in terms of it, and innovations which mesh with it will have greater success than those which cross its grain. (Hymes,1980)

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