

On The Role of Cultural Content and Cultural Context in Language Instruction

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1. Why language, culture and context?

Culture could be said to be the conventionalization of nature. Language could be viewed as the most prototypical of all examples of this process. But language is related to culture not only as an example of a systematic relation between nature and culture but also by presupposing and being presupposed by a range of other primarily nonlinguistic cultural phenomena. The outcome of all this is that linguistic and cultural competence can in no easy way be separated. Becoming linguistically competent presupposes becoming culturally competent and vice versa.

Language and culture are also connected with context. The term **context** here includes both the linguistic context (sometimes called cotext) and the extralinguistic context. Linguistic communication always takes place in a context *which is* constituted partly by nature and partly by culture. The natural context includes such factors as the noise level, the visibility conditions, the temperature, the temporal and spatial difference between the communicators, etc. it also includes various biological characteristics of the communicators, eg a physical handicap. These factors play a role both for the production and comprehension of linguistic expressions.

The cultural context enters through the psychological and social context. On the psychological side such factors as values, beliefs, attitudes, abilities have developed in different individuals as a result of an interaction between their biologically given characteristics and their socialization process which may include contact with one or several cultures. The cultural influence here becomes apparent both in more longterm values, attitudes and beliefs (sometimes called character or personality traits) and in more temporary short term values, attitudes and beliefs (an example here might be a passing mood of anger in a conversation).