of their positioning within the social division of labour.

This is, then, an applied linguistic study which has had the consequence of extending theory in the process of its application.

CHAPTER TWO

DECONTEXTUALISATION, CONTEXT AND LANGUAGE

1.0 Introduction

The term decontextualisation is problematic because, from a functional linguistic perspective, all language is operational within some context. Yet the term 'decontextualised' language persists even in the writings of proponents of functional models of language and clearly it has some referential basis. In this chapter, I will attempt to clarify what is meant by the term in order to be able to re-articulate it in a way which is theoretically motivated. To this end, I will review the use of the term by various scholars and it will become apparent that the term opposes 'contextualised' language use. It will be seen that the dimension of language use by reference to which these varieties are identified has to do with the degree to which language is perceived to be dependent for its interpretation on the context of its production.

However, this formulation suggests a narrow interpretation of the concept of context. The concept of context will therefore be reviewed in the second section of this chapter. It will be argued that the concept of context deployed by most writers tends to be a-theoretical. Indeed, Levinson (1983) bemoans the fact that there is no theory which links context and language in any systematic way.

Levinson's remark, though made some years ago, remains

valid for most contemporary main-stream linguistics. There is, however, one theory which does make such a link, and that is the systemic functional model. In the third section of this chapter I will present an account of the relationship between language and context as postulated in the systemic functional model. In this model the notion of context is better theorised. This suggests the possibility that the use of this model may permit a theoretically motivated view of the phenomenon referred to as 'decontextualised' language use. The third section of this chapter will thus provide an introduction to the framework by reference to which the concept of decontextualisation may be further explored.

1.1 Decontextualisation

Much has been written, in the last twenty years, about 'decontextualised' language, principally in discussions of cognitive development, in comparisons of spoken and written language and in accounts of the development of literacy. The reason for such a location of these discussions is that 'decontextualised' language is viewed as a feature of literate language (Scinto, 1986:56), or a prerequisite for its development (Snow, 1983). Before reviewing this literature it should be noted that consensus amongst scholars concerning the adequacy or, indeed, the accuracy of the terms 'contextualised' and 'decontextualised' language is generally lacking.

1.2 Current Definitions and Terminology

Decontextualised language is language that is not

"rooted in an immediate context of time, space or situation" (D'Anglejan & Masny, 1987) but is context-independent (Bernstein, 1971), autonomous (Olson, 1977) or disembedded (Donaldson, 1987). The process of decontextualisation is that "whereby the meaning of signs become less and less dependent on the unique spatiotemporal context in which they are used" (Wertsch 1985:33).

In this review I hope to show that the terms context-independent, autonomous and disembedded appear, from their usage in the literature, to be synonymous; they are the antonyms of the terms context-dependent, non-autonomous and embedded. These three terms and their opposites are used largely by socio-linguists, literacy theorists, and cognitive psychologists respectively though there are cross-linkages. In reviewing the literature, I will use, wherever appropriate, only one member of the antonymous pair, i.e. context-independent, autonomous or disembedded. It is hoped that the antonymous relation will permit the interpretation of the other term in each pair, i.e. context-dependent, non-autonomous or embedded.

1.3 Decontextualisation in Sociolinguistic Theory

Bernstein's use of the terms context-dependent and context-independent seems to have developed from his earlier linguistic description of socio-linguistic codes as involving language that is tied to or free from its context of use. Bruner (1970) drawing on the work of Bernstein expressly refers to context-

independent language as decontextualised language, noting that middle class children learn

> to use language without dependence upon shared percepts or actions, with sole reliance on the linguistic self-sufficiency of the message. Decontextualisation permits information to be conceived as independent of the speaker's vantage point, it permits communications with those who do not share one's daily experience or actions, and in fact does .. allow one to transcend restrictions of locale and affiliation. (Bruner, 1970:15)

The terms context-dependent and context-independent are also used by Greenfield (1972) but the definition and linguistic characterisation of the concepts remained largely global until Hasan's 1973 publication of the distinction between codes, registers and social dialects. Hasan defined context-independent language as language that encapsulates explicitly all the features of the **relevant immediate situation** in which the verbal interaction is embedded. Since the relevant features of the situation are encapsulated in the language, the text may be interpreted without the need to invoke any prior knowledge of the situation. In this sense such language is context-independent.

The distinction between **relevant** immediate situation and **material** immediate situation is crucial in Hasan's definition. She describes the former - relevant immediate situation - as that subset of the latter - material immediate situation - to which reference is made implicitly (in the case of context dependent language) or explicitly (in the case of context independent language) by the forms of the message (Hasan, 1973:284). Hasan points out that

> The implicitness of the context dependent language implies that the correct decoding of the verbal message would be dependent upon the awareness of the relevant immediate situation, which awareness would be derived from sources other than the verbal message under focus. That is to say, in order to have access to the meanings of the verbal message, the decoder has to utilise other sources of information than just the language of the text under focus. (Hasan, 1973:284)

The explicitness of context independent language, by contrast, implies that

> the correct decoding of the message is a simple function of one's understanding of the language, requiring no extra-linguistic sources of knowledge. (Hasan, 1973:284)

It is clear from the above that Hasan distinguishes context and material situation. Indeed, it would appear that the term situation-independent may more accurately identify the concept of context-independent language as defined by Hasan.

1.4 Decontextualisation, Literacy and Written Language

The expression 'situation-independent' is used by Smith (1984:147) and Simons and Murphy (1986). The latter point out that the term 'context' is used to refer to an utterance's situational as well as verbal context. Seeing the need to distinguish these two 'contexts', Simons and Murphy adopt the terms 'situation-dependent' and 'text-dependent'. Situation-dependent language refers "to language that relies on situational cues" (Simons and Murphy, 1986:187) and text-dependent language refers "to language that can be interpreted without reference to the immediate situational context." (ibid). Decontextualised language, for Simons

and Murphy, then, is language that "minimises situation related cues" (ibid) and this definition is reminiscent of Hasan's context-independent language.

Scinto (1986) in discussing language that is more-or-less independent of the immediate context points out that decontextualised language use is one of the generalised features distinguishing oral and written language:

> The actual extralinguistic circumstances, situation, or occasion for production of a given discourse matter more for oral forms than for written forms. (Scinto, 1986:56-57)

The contextual dependence versus independence of Bernstein's elaborated and restricted codes has been adopted by Kay (1977). Kay suggests that autonomous and non-autonomous speech is equivalent to Bernstein's elaborated and restricted codes since the former is context-independent and the latter context-dependent. In this view, decontextualised or autonomous speech

> is minimally dependent upon simultaneous transmission over other channels, such as the paralinguistic, postural and gestural, and it is minimally dependent on the contribution of background information on the part of the hearer. (Kay, 1977: 21-22)

Tannen (1982), also adopts the term autonomous to refer to written language and argues, contra Kay's interpretation of elaborated code, that

> In the autonomous or literate-based mode, the content or verbal channel are elaborated, while the oral-based strategy elaborates paralinguistic channels and emotional or interpersonal dynamics. (Tannen, 1982:15)

The so-called doctrine of autonomous text is most clearly enunciated by Olson (1977). According to Olson, written texts, unlike speech, must be able to function apart from the context of their production - to be fully explicit in order to be "acontextual" or autonomous.

Nystrand (1987), arguing from a functionalist view of text, discusses the way in which writers - specifically Olson (1977) - contextualise their texts. Rather than being autonomous, Nystrand maintains, a well-written text such as Olson's essay "functions not because it is independent of its context of use but because it is so carefully attuned to this context" (Nystrand 1987:205). In arguments that are reminiscent of the Bahktinian notions of intertextuality and dialogism, Nystrand points out that written texts are contextualised in two ways:

i) the author of the text writes for a particular audience and the text is therefore published in a place where it will attract the attention of those the writer seeks to engage, e.g. a scholarly journal having a readership with particular interests.

ii) the writer relates his text to the previously published texts of others, developing his argument with reference to these. This process seems to be one of historically locating the text in order to make inter-textual linkages. Further discussion of this phenomenon will be found in Chapter Eight.

1.5 Decontextualisation and Cognitive Development

Donaldson (1987) uses the terms embedded and disembedded to refer to the distinction between "a situation which you are actually in" (op.cit: 103) and that from which you are remote in time and space. In the former, thinking arises spontaneously and is wholly embedded within "a context of action, direct perception, purpose and feeling" (ibid).

Donaldson also distinguishes between two types of disembedded thinking: that which

> arises directly out of one's own life's concerns, even though it is not about the immediate present, and thinking which is called for by a problem set by someone else. In the former case, the thinking is still embedded in the life of the mind - in a setting of memories, hopes and purposes - if not in the life of the senses and the muscles. But when some other person asks us to consider a problem unconnected with anything that we have been doing, or are planning to do, or that spontaneously engages our minds, then a new, big step in the direction of disembedding is called for. (ibid)

Donaldson is concerned with the cognitive demands of such disembedded thinking which, she suggests, is typical of the educational context. However, she acknowledges that the difficulties presented by disembedded problems "have a great deal to do with the handling of language" (op.cit:104) though, she warns, they cannot be reduced to linguistic knowledge:

> In our ordinary embedded thinking and language-using we do not normally even attempt to make sense of words in isolation. We interpret what people say with the help of what they do - their gestures, their movements - and with the help of the entire setting within which the speech occurs. We use all the clues we can get to arrive at what the speaker means. But when we are given a disembedded problem we have the task of figuring out what the words mean: the words on their

> own. This is an austere and difficult enterprise for the human mind. (ibid)

In other words, the cognitive demands of embedded language are reduced because the physical setting provides the clues necessary for interpretation - to make sense of what is said, to locate the sign's signification in linguistic terms. Disembedded language or thought, on the other hand, requires that the hearers supply their own "cognitive contributions" (Donaldson, 1987:105) in order to make sense, since the extra-linguistic reality by which a sign's signification is established is not perceptually accessible.

1.6 Decontextualisation and Language Development

Olson (1977) argues that there is a cultural and developmental transition from oral language to written language and that

> this transition can be described as one of increasing explicitness, with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning. (Olson, 1977:258)

In support of his position Olson cites de Laguna's oft-quoted discussion of the evolution of language:

> The evolution of language is characterised by a progressive freeing of speech from dependence upon the perceived conditions under which it is uttered and heard, and from the behaviour that accompanies it. The extreme limit of this freedom is reached in language which is written (or printed) and read. For example, it is quite indifferent to the reader of these words under what physical conditions they have been penned or typed. This represents, we repeat, the extreme limit of the process by which language comes to be increasingly independent of the conditions of its use. (De Laguna, 1927/70:107).

Donaldson is more specific about the stages of this developmental process, identifying three steps in the embeddedness of language and thought:

i) embedding in the physical setting or "present moment embedding";

ii) embedding in the personal past and future or "own-life embedding" (what Snow (1983) calls the historical context); and

iii) non-embedded or remote in time and space and from one's own concerns.

> in their very beginnings, language and thought are entirely embedded in the here and now of personal activity and interaction. This is 'present moment embedding'. The next step comes with extension into the past and into the future, but still the focus is on the personal life - plans, memories, hopes and fears. We may speak now of 'own-life embedding'. Beyond this again, progress lies in the growth of the ability to think and talk about things that are not only further off in space and time but remote from the thrust of one's own concerns. (Donaldson, 1987: 106)

The Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, writing about the function and development of speech, also gives an account of the early stages in the development of language that is disembedded or context-independent or autonomous.

In his discussion of the development of (word) meaning Vygotsky (1981:219-220) postulates two primary functions: in the early stages of development, words serve an indicative or indexical function, i.e. to direct a child's attention to an object. This is one of the ways in which, using Saussurean terms, a sign's signification is established. Later, speech serves a

symbolic function where words serve to categorise objects and events in terms of generalised categories. This symbolic function leads to the formation of relationships among the categories it creates. In Saussurean terms this is how the value of signs develops for the individual and the development of this symbolic function may be viewed as the first stage in the development of decontextualised language.

James Wertsch, one of the foremost Western interpreters of Vygotsky's work, poses the question:

> If the original function of speech in Vygotsky's account is the indicative (that is, indexical) function, how is it related to the symbolic function? This is part of the larger question of how the decontextualisation of mediational means occurs. On the one hand, one finds sign functioning that reflects the context-bound aspect of linguistic organisation; it is concerned with the relationship between sign vehicles and the context in which they occur. On the other hand, one finds sign functioning that reflects the decontextualised aspect of linguistic organisation; it is concerned with the notion that certain aspects of language organisation can operate independently of the context in which sign vehicles occur. Both aspects are latent potentials in human language. The task of genetic analysis is to account for the transition from a level where semiotic functioning is always contextualised to a level where decontextualised functioning is also possible. (1985:98-99)

Wertsch, then, is interested in the means whereby the use of decontextualised language develops. Vygotsky (1978) seems to hint at the answer in his discussion of the role of play in the child's development. He writes:

> In play, thought is separated from objects and action arises from ideas rather than from things: a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse. (Vygotsky, 1978:97).

He goes on to say that

> The creation of an imaginary situation is not a fortuitous fact in a child's life, but is rather the first manifestation of the child's emancipation from situational constraints (op.cit:99).

For Vygotsky, then, play creates an imaginary situation so that an object, e.g. a stick, used in such play becomes a signifier for something else, e.g. a horse, the substitute object (stick) functioning as a pivot through which children detach themselves from immediate sensory experience.

The review of the notion of decontextualisation presented so far would seem to suggest that the concept is associated with two related phenomena: i) an atheoretical conceptualisation of context as the material situational setting in which language occurs; ii) a 'mapping' view of language, i.e. the view that language reflects and names an existing reality. Snow, for example, maintains that learning language and learning to read both "require a complex mapping of form onto meaning." (1983:166). Both these views are problematic. In the following section, I will present a brief account of context in an attempt to reveal its highly complex nature.

2.0 Decontextualisation, Context and Material Situation

Any clear understanding of decontextualisation seems to logically involve an understanding of the notion of context. It is clear from the preceding review that, with few exceptions, context is considered to be the material environment in which language is used. If context is equal to the material situation of the

occasion of language use then clearly it is possible to have decontextualised, context-independent language. However, as pointed out previously, to equate context with material situation is to suggest a very narrow interpretation of context. From a functional perspective, all language is inherently context-sensitive. The issue is not the presence or absence of context but rather the extent to which one aspect of context - the material situational setting (Hasan, 1973) - is relevant to the text produced on any occasion.

One theoretical model of language description which includes the notion of context as an essential theoretical construct and which postulates a systematic relationship between context and language is the systemic functional model (e,g, Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevens, 1964; Halliday, 1974a; 1975; 1977a; 1978; 1985/89, 1991). In formulating his framework for context, Halliday acknowledges his debt to Malinowski and Firth. It is therefore appropriate to present a brief historical account of the development of the concept of context in relation to language.

2.1 The Concept of Context of Situation: Malinowski

The importance of the concept of context of situation to the study of language was emphasised by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1923, 1935). A somewhat extended account of Malinowski's concept of context of situation in relation to language will be presented in order to show how subsequent

conceptualisations by other scholars relate to it.

Malinowski's ideas on context developed in the course of his ethnographic study of the Kiriwinian people of the Trobriand Islands. This study was a reaction to the predominantly historical orientation of cultural studies of the time (R.W.Firth, 1957). This reaction to diachronic studies is one of several indirect links between Malinowski and his contemporary in linguistics, F.de Saussure who reacted in a similar way to the diachronic study of language. Saussure attempted to free linguistics from historical philology; Malinowski's major work repudiated the historical orientation of ethnographic studies which hitherto dominated anthropological practice.

Malinowski was an ethnographer who was forced into linguistics by his conception of how to do anthropology and by the central place he attributed to language in this undertaking. He not only considered language to be an aspect of culture: regarding language as a necessary part of other cultural realities, he viewed it as "a cultural force in its own right." (Malinowski 1935:21)

The core of Malinowski's view of language - a view developed in order to resolve problems he found in translating and interpreting between languages of widely differing cultures - is that language is primarily an instrument of action, "a mode of behaviour, an indispensable element of concerted human action" (1923:316). The main function of language is

not to express thought nor even to communicate ideas. Rather its main function is to play an active pragmatic part in human behaviour (1935:5). In fact, from Malinowski's functional perspective, language <u>is</u> a mode of behaviour, and other modes of behaviour both shape the use of words and are influenced by them. Rather than serving to communicate thought, words serve primarily to connect work and correlate manual and bodily movements - to regulate concerted effort within a group. Speech therefore is primarily used for the achievement of a practical result. This pragmatic function of language is, thus, primary and the intellectual and social functions of language are secondary. In other words, the use of language as an instrument of reflection and as a means of establishing and maintaining social relations are derived form the basic pragmatic use (Malinowski, 1923:315-316). Furthermore, this basic pragmatic use of language is mirrored in its structure (op.cit:327).

From this perspective, meaning is defined by Malinowski in terms of experience and situation; it is

> the effect of words on human minds and bodies, and through these, on the environmental reality as created or conceived in a given culture (1935:53).

Such an effect is the result of "cultural responses produced by drill or 'conditioning' or education" (op.cit:59) - in other words, by socialisation.

According to Malinowski, then, words come to have meaning because they act. Language is therefore

operative only within a situation. It is only when interpreted by reference to the context of situation that an utterance can become fully comprehensible. This context of situation explicates what is happening in and via language. A text, then, has meaning because of its relation to the situation in which it is operative. Utterances are linked up with other human activities and with the social and material environment.

This social and material environment in which language is operative is itself part of a wider context, what Malinowski termed the context of culture - "the material equipment, the activities, interests, moral and aesthetic values" of the society (1935:22). Both text and context of situation are only fully comprehensible in the light of knowledge of the context of cultural responses to the biological and cultural imperatives - the economic, legal, political, religious etc activities, beliefs and values and associated social identities and relationships of a society. These are the cultural realities which, for Malinowski, provide the reference point for the situations in which language is used and understood. Thus Malinowski considered that the context of reference for language has two aspects - the context of situation and the context of culture - and in order to understand any utterance, knowledge of both contexts is necessary.

In order to accept Malinowski's view of the centrality of context one has to first of all accept that language is not simply a naming system - words do not stand for

pre-existing concepts. Secondly one has to take as one's point of departure the fact that the meanings of linguistic units are not in some way given or innate, but rather semantic competence has to be acquired. Hasan (1985) points out that, given these assumptions, meaning and use are bound together rather than distinguished, i.e. meaning is abstracted out of or inferred from language use. It is through active experience of signs in conjunction with the physical and social environment in which they are used that the individual develops this semantic competence. This contextual specification of signs with what they signify is especially important for the language learner; it "is the primary means of entry into the language system" (Hasan 1985:31). Malinowski's view of the way in which a sign's signification is established for the novice language learner thus echoes that of Vygotsky referred to in section 1.6 of this chapter.

Malinowski's theory of meaning has found little support amongst philosophers who adhere to a view of the logical basis of language and formal linguists such as transformationalists who regard language as an innate property of the individual. From the perspective of these scholars, language <u>is</u> a naming system and meanings <u>are</u> in some way given.

While social-constructivists and functionalists accept Malinowski's theory of the centrality of context, the theory is not without difficulties, the principal one being his lack of specification of the contextual

parameters that are relevant for language. His emphasis on

> the dependence of the meaning of each word upon practical experience, and of the structure of each utterance upon the momentary situation in which it is spoken (1923:312)

seems to suggest that the meaning of each utterance lies in "the unique actual environment at the time and place in which it occurred." (Robins, 1971:42)

His writings are not always consistent in this regard, however. In his 1923 article (p.315) he states that the outer situation of language use in purely sociable talk - what he termed phatic communion - is not relevant; that the whole situation consists in what is happening linguistically. But in 1935 he writes

> I think it is very profitable in linguistics to widen the concept of context so that it embraces not only spoken words but facial expression, gesture, bodily activities, the whole group of people present during an exchange of utterances and the part of the environment on which these people are engaged. (op.cit:22).

He also writes (1935:26) of a felt need to be able to capture his informant's voice trembling with emotion as the informant recounted experiences of famine; and of his wish to be able to use movie equipment to capture expressions, bodily attitudes and gestures that accompany speech.

These inconsistencies make it difficult to ascertain what exactly Malinowski meant by context of situation. He is usually interpreted, however, as using this term to refer to the total physical and social environment

of the occasion of language use and the passages cited above (with the exception of that concerning the situation in phatic communion) would certainly support this interpretation.

2.2 J.R. Firth and Context of Situation

The notion of context of situation was taken up by a contemporary of Malinowski's, the British linguist J.R Firth who interpreted it in a more abstract way. Like Malinowski, Firth was interested in the analysis and description of meaning which he regarded as the central task of linguistics. Indeed Firth saw the analysis of meaning as being the main concern at all levels of linguistic analysis:

> Meaning .. is to be regarded as a complex of contextual relations, and phonetics, grammar, lexicography, and semantics each handles its own components of the complex in its appropriate context. (1935/57:19)

The "appropriate context" of the meaning of the units of each level is the level above. In other words, the meaning of a unit of a lower level is established by its function as an element in the structure of the units at the level above. This is one of the ways in which, according to Firth, meaning is function in context.

Firth points out that the categories the linguist sets up - at the levels of phonetics/phonology, grammar and semantics - are "ordered schematic constructs" (1950/57: 181) or "language turned back on itself"

(ibid) - abstract metalinguistic categories having no ontological status or existence. They are set up by the linguist in order to make statements of meaning, and their efficacy

> must be judged with reference to their combined tool power in our dealings with linguistic events in the social process. (Firth, 1950/57:181)

Firth proposes that the relevant categories of the context of situation must also be abstract so for Firth the context of situation

> is a group of related categories at a different level from grammatical categories but of the same abstract nature. (1950/57:182)

The categories of the context of situation that he suggests are:

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. (1950/57:182)

For Firth the context of situation is an abstraction - a generalised category set up to account for any instance of language use, like the categories at other levels of language. While the categories at the other levels of language (phonetics, grammar) are set up to account for, respectively, the substance and form of a language, the categories at the level of context are set up to account for "the sociological component" of language (Firth, 1950/57:182). While this level is actually language-external, (unlike the lower levels which are language-internal) it must be considered part of any linguistic theory that seeks to account for the

situated use of language.

As a consequence of viewing context of situation as a schematic construct describable in terms of certain abstract categories, it is possible to regard the various situations in which people participate as types and to identify typical situation types. Situations, in other words, while infinite in number, are finite in kind. Firth (1935/57:28) points out that from birth onwards

> we are progressively incorporated into our social organisation, and the chief condition and means of that incorporation is learning to say what the other fellow expects us to say under the given circumstances.

In other words, human beings tend to typecast one another, objects, events and experiences in the world. Such typifications mean that in face-to-face interaction participants are apprehended as types and the situation is apprehended as typical (Berger and Luckman, 1966:45). Even though situations are infinitely various, typificatory schemes organise them into manageable categories in which the roles are defined and "the lines can be classified and correlated with the part and also with the episodes, scenes and acts." (Firth, 1935/57:28)

For Firth, then, the context of situation was a representation of the environment in terms of certain abstract categories that are relevant to language. The concept of relevance is crucial in Firth's specification of contextual parameters but he gave no

indication of how relevance is to be established (Hasan, in press a) although he hinted at this by stating that the linguist should always keep the text in focus. His contribution to the development of the concept of context of situation in linguistics lies in his interpretation of Malinowski's "environmental reality" as an abstract set of semantically relevant categories. This interpretation brought the notion of context of situation to a more abstract level and placed it firmly within linguistics.

2.3 Hymes' Description of Context

The early sixties saw a number of contributions to the definition of context of situation from American linguists. In particular Dell Hymes, John Gumperz and Susan Ervin-Tripp outlined various schemata for characterising the situation of the text. Of these three, it is perhaps Hymes whose work has been most used by other scholars interested in the concept. It is therefore appropriate to present a brief review of his ideas.

Hymes in a number of articles (e.g. 1962, 1967) urges the study of situations and uses of language - the patterns and functions of speaking as an activity. He coins the term 'ethnography of speaking' (or of communication) for such a study of what is in effect an ethnographic semantics.

Hymes acknowledges the work of Malinowski but finds it unmethodical. In a comment reminiscent of Firth's

critique, Hymes maintains that

> An ethnographic semantics may be bulky, but it need not be on principle indeterminate, nor endlessly ad hoc. It should be more than a narrative reflection of reality. It should be a structural analysis, achieving the economies of the rules of grammar in relation to a series of analyses of texts. (1962:103)

It may be inferred from these remarks that Hymes did not think much of Malinowski's work. Indeed he says that Malinowski's ethnographic method in his description of the language of magic and gardening "amounted in practice to massive narrative." (ibid)

Hymes recommends a paradigmatic approach to the ethnographic study of language. This is the kind of approach that has been used in phonology for example to discover the contrastive sounds of a language. As in phonology, a paradigmatic approach to semantics would involve

> discovering a relevant frame or context, identifying the items which contrast within it, and determining the dimensions of contrast for the items in the set so defined. (ibid)

The questions remain - i) what are the relevant frames, and ii) what are the dimensions of contrast. Indeed what is the unit of analysis? Hymes writes about the speech event or communicative event but seems to avoid the term context of situation. A speech situation is distinguished from a speech event, (Hymes, 1967:19) the former being situations associated with speech, e.g. fights, hunts, meals etc. and the latter are speech activities that are governed by rules for the use of speech. Speech events may consist of only one speech

act or of several.

Hymes (1967:21-25) proposes a list of eight situational factors or components by which speech events may be contrasted. The following is a summary description of the eight situational factors Hymes considers to be relevant in the description of speech events:

Setting or scene incorporating the actual concrete place and time, as well as the type of social occasion, e.g. committee meeting.
Participants or personnel, that is, sender (speaker) and receiver (addressee) and their attributes - age, sex, social class etc, as well as their social roles, e.g. teacher, student, chairman.
Ends, incorporating i) goals and purposes; ii) outcomes e.g. sale, diagnosis, verdict.
Act characteristics including message form e.g. formal/informal; and topic.
Key, that is, the tone, manner or spirit of an act.
Instrumentalities, that is the channel (oral / written) and code (dialect or other variety).
Norms of interaction and interpretation including the cultural conventions of conversation, for example, turn-taking, silence.
Genres defined as "categories or types of speech act and speech event," (op.cit:25) for example, poem, myth, riddle, lecture, commercial, editorial.

These eight dimensions of the speech event are, according to Hymes, essential components in its description, forming an 'etic' framework which will vary in its realisational categories for any language group.

To carry out Hymes' paradigmatic approach to the ethnographic study of language the relevant frames would need to be established. Hymes does not do this and points to the difficulty of classifying speech events or situations - "what classes of speech events are recognised or can be inferred" (1962:110).

Identification of a community's culturally recognised speech events, he suggests, may be undertaken by using the words which name them, for example, seminar, lecture, discussion. However, as Hymes himself notes, there are many speech events that cannot be identified in this way - many that are described by means of more descriptive expressions, e.g. heart-to-heart talk, salestalk, casual conversation, etc. Further, if the eight parameters suggested by Hymes are taken seriously and examined, it will become obvious that their relation is not explicitly described and most of the concepts stand in need of elaboration.

2.4 Some Recent Approaches to the Conception of Context

The concept of context of situation and its relation to language assumed a wider interest amongst linguists when speech act theorists found the need to include the concept within their framework. Currently, the concept of context and its relation to language is of interest not only to linguists but also to psychologists (of both the cognitive and social schools) and sociologists, particularly ethnomethodologists.

A brief glance at a recent review of ideas about context (e.g. Forgas, 1985), or at recent applications of the concept of context (e.g. Mohan, 1987, Cook, 1990) clearly indicates that there is no consensus concerning its conceptualisation. Indeed, Cook's recent use of the concept seems to have much in common with that of Malinowski.

In 'Transcribing Infinity', Cook attempts to classify context types and to examine the theoretical and practical problems involved in transcribing them. It would seem, however, that by context types Cook is referring to contextual parameters or factors, eight being also the crucial number for him. They are:

1. "the text itself .. the linguistic forms realised by the graphetic and phonetic substance" (op.cit:3);
2. the text's physical characteristics - graphetic and phonetic;
3. paralinguistic features, for example gesture, facial expression and any other facial or bodily movements;
4. the physical situation - "the properties and relations of objects and bodies." (ibid). This is identified elsewhere in the article as the context of situation.
5. the co-text - that which precedes or follows the text under analysis (or is believed to precede or follow it); it is part of the same text; this factor is therefore concerned with the boundary of a text;
6. the intertext - "texts which the participants associate with the text under consideration" (ibid) and which are therefore relevant to the interpretation of the text under focus, influencing its meaning;
7. the intentions, knowledge and beliefs, interpretations, attitudes, affiliations, and feelings of the participants; this factor can subsume all the others;
8. the observer - the analyst's selection and interpretation.

In his discussion Cook refers to these 8 factors as 'contexts', for example, the context of thought, the context of the observer etc. It would seem that Cook's identification of the relevant factors differs little from Malinowski's conception of the context of situation and of culture. Cook's factors 3 and 4 seem to refer to the actual environment of the text; factors 6 and 7 refer to the context of culture; factors 1 and 2 refer to the text as an object having a spatio-temporal identity, while factor 8 refers to one aspect of the analysis of the text. Factor 8 thus belongs to the domain of meta-theory.

As far as a speaker's intentions are concerned (Cook's factor 7), it would seem advisable to keep in mind Firth's recommendations concerning the relevance of individual subjectivity to linguistics:

> The intention of a particular person in a particular instance of speech is never the concern of linguistic science. (Firth, 1968:16)

This is because what linguistics is concerned with is the description of the typical rather than of the individual.

Cook's characterisation of context does not include any notion of a socially recognised activity - a speech event (e.g. Firth, 1950/57; Hymes, 1962). While Cook's concern is with the problem of transcription of all the relevant factors, such a concern is not unrelated to the wider concern - that of theorising the concept of context. Indeed, it would seem that a theory of the nature of the relationship between language and context would be necessary in order to tackle the problem of transcription.

Levinson's (1983) definition of context is somewhat narrower than that of either Malinowski or Cook. Like many writers, Levinson acknowledges the need to make relevant selections from all the information available. Levinson defines context as the situational features "that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the production and interpretation of utterances" (op.cit: 22-23) as distinct from the multiplicity of features of

actual situations of utterance. Like Cook, Levinson's purpose in seeking a characterisation of context is due to the importance of the concept in pragmatics. He is therefore embarrassed to admit that although

> we may be able to reduce the vagueness [of the notion of context] by providing lists of relevant contextual features, we do not seem to have available any theory that will predict the relevance of all such features, (op.cit:23)

Clearly the entire literature on the relevance of 'situation' or 'context' to text - depending on who is writing - cannot be reviewed here. In an attempt to summarise the views of many scholars, a list of 'contextual features' considered relevant by various writers since Malinowski is given in Table 2.1. These contextual features represent those considered relevant by scholars whose judgement of relevance depends, to a large extent, on their disciplinary perspective. Thus the contextual features considered relevant by social psychologists such as Argyle, Furnham and Graham (1981) or Brown and Fraser (1979) may differ from those proposed by ethnomethodologists such as Leiter (1980). Within linguistics, a scholar's social as opposed to cognitive perspective on language may result in different conceptions of relevance. Thus Van Dijk (e.g.1984; 1987) and Cook (1990) propose categories that differ from those proposed by Firth (1957), Hymes (1967), and Lyons (1977).

Feature	Theorist
Non-verbal action	Firth
Relevant objects	Firth, Argyle
Persons	Firth, Argyle, Brown & Fraser
Purpose	Hymes, Brown & Fraser
Subject matter	Lyons
Participants - status,role	Firth, Hymes, Brown & Fraser, Lyons, Argyle, Cook, Van Dijk
Formality	Lyons
Verbal action	Firth
Effect of verbal action	Firth, Hymes
Medium	Hymes
Setting / scene	Hymes, Lyons, Leiter, Argyle, Cook
Key	Hymes
Norms	Hymes, Argyle,
Channel	Hymes, Cook
Genre	Hymes, Lyons
Context type	Van Dijk
Social (sub)system	Van Dijk
Social frame/script	Van Dijk
Global action performed	Van Dijk
Previous local action	Van Dijk
Dialogue schema category	Van Dijk
Text - forms	Cook
Kinesics	Cook
Co-text	Cook
Inter-text	Cook
Cognitive states	Cook

Table 2.1 Contextual features

The problem with lists such as this, as Levinson points out in the above quote, is that they are a-theoretical, that is, they have no theory linking them with language in any systematic way, although in some cases (e.g. Van Dijk) empirical research has established the usefulness of some parameters. While, most writers point to the need to identify 'relevant' features, very few have addressed the issue of how relevance is to be established. Furthermore, relevance itself is a relative concept: are the relevant features of context identical for linguists, psychologists and sociologists? In other words, if the linguistically relevant features of context were to be identified

would the resultant schematic construct (Firth, 1935/57) be applicable to the concerns of psychology and sociology? And finally, does one's concept of what is relevant depend on the assumptions underlying one's model of language - one's view of what language is and why it is as it is?

The view of language on which the present thesis is based sees language as constructing meaning. From this perspective language constructs not only (the meaning of) individual messages but also contexts. Reciprocally, context activates meanings which in turn activate lexis and grammar. In other words, according to the systemic functional model of language, there is a systematic non-arbitrary relationship between context and meaning and between meaning and wording. The relationship is one of realisation: wording construes meaning and, meta-redundantly, wording and meaning construe context (Halliday, 1992). Following Firth, context, in this model, is an abstraction - a generalised category set up for the purpose of explicating the situated use of language. The essential function of language, in this view, is not simply to process information; this is a related function which is consequent upon the primary function - that of communicating.

Within the systemic functional framework two models of context have been developed: that of Halliday and Hasan, and that of Martin. This is not to imply that there is nothing in common between the two; nonetheless

the differences are as important as the similarities. In section 3, I shall first present an account of what might be termed the standard model of context. For this I will draw on the writings of Halliday cited above and also those of Hasan (e.g.1978; 1980; 1985/89; and, particularly, in press a) who has explicated and formalised many of the ideas introduced by Halliday. This account will be followed by a brief description of the modifications suggested by Martin (e.g. 1991; 1992) who views context as a connotative semiotic - the content plane for the denotative system of language which acts as its expression plane.

3.0 Context in the Systemic Functional Model

Halliday (e.g. 1978) suggests that the features of context of situation relevant to language may be determined by considering the role of language in the life of the individual and in society generally - what it is that has to be meant via language in each and every instance of language-in-use, that is, in text.

Halliday postulates three broad functions of language. Language has to i) interpret experience, ii) construct social roles and identities and iii) to do these things simultaneously in a coherent manner. Language has to provide the categories within which the experiential and social worlds are typified and subsumed. In learning a language, then, the individual learns how to construe and construct these worlds.

Language in its representational function of

interpreting the experiential world Halliday terms the **experiential meta-function.** It is via this function that language interprets

> the whole of our experience, reducing the infinitely varied phenomena of the world around us, and also the world inside us, the processes of our consciousness, to a manageable number of classes of phenomena: types of processes, events and actions, classes of objects, people and institutions, and the like (Halliday, 1974a:19)

It is not only the experiential world of matter and consciousness that has to be construed via language:

> Language has to express certain elementary logical relations, like 'and' and 'or' and 'if', as well as those created by language itself such as 'namely', 'says' and 'means'. (op.cit:19-20)

The component by which these generalised logical relations are expressed Halliday terms the **logical meta-function.**

Halliday combines the experiential and logical components of language under one heading termed the ideational meta-function since logical relations are derived from speakers' experience of the external world (for a discussion of the relation between the logical and experiential components see Halliday, e.g. 1977a; 1985).

Language in its **interpersonal function** of constructing social roles and identities Halliday terms the interpersonal metafunction. It is via the interpersonal metafunction that language expresses

> our participation, as speakers, in the speech situation; the roles we take on ourselves and impose on others; our wishes, feelings, attitudes and judgements. (1974a:20)

The third function performed by language is that of representing simultaneously speakers' experiences and their participation as speakers

> in a way which relates what is being said to the context in which it is being said, both to what has been said before and to the 'context of situation'; in other words, it has to be capable of being organised as relevant discourse, not just as words and sentences in a grammar-book or dictionary (Halliday, 1974a:20).

This task, Halliday postulates, is performed by the **textual metafunction.**

3.1 Relevant Features of Context in the SF Model

Can the relevant contextual parameters be deduced from the fact that language has to perform these tasks in any text - to express these ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings in any instance of language-in-use? According to Halliday they can. In fact, the only way linguists can establish the linguistically relevant features of the context of situation is by consulting the text - by keeping the text in focus in Firth's terms.

This semiotic perspective, then, considers that context is construed by these three principal kinds of meaning - ideational, interpersonal and textual which, in turn, are construed by wordings (lexicogrammar): context is realised in the semantic unit, text, which is realised in the lexicogrammatical and phonological units of

language. Meaning is the intervening level in this stratified linguistic theory: it intervenes between context and lexicogrammar. The three kinds of meanings that construe context are realised by specific clusters of lexicogrammatical systems and these meanings themselves realise specific parameters of context. These parameters are therefore the ones that are relevant to language and may be informally described as: a) what is being done? b) who is doing it? and c) what part the language is playing in the doing? Halliday refers to these contextual features as Field, Tenor and Mode. A brief discussion of each of these features of context will be presented below. In the discussion of each feature I will first present Halliday's definition and this will be followed by the relevant clarifications and elaborations introduced by Hasan.

a) Field of discourse: What is being done:

> The **Field** of discourse refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what it is that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component? (Halliday, 1985/89:12).

Within field of discourse the types of social processes or activities in which people engage are classified by Hasan (in press **a**) as based in action, relations or reflection. Relation-based activities are defined as those activities that create, maintain or change personal relationships. Reflection-based activities, on the other hand, are essentially semiotic in nature, i.e. they materialise only through some sort of

semiotic mediation, particularly language.

While Hasan claims that these broad classes of activity may be non-exhaustive, it would seem that they encapsulate the distinctions that Malinowski was making when he wrote about language as activity, as reflection and as social activity (e.g. phatic communion), though Hasan's category of relation-based activity would seem to embrace more than Malinowski's phatic communion.

b) Tenor of discourse: Who is doing it:

> The **Tenor** of discourse refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles; what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships in which they are involved? (Halliday, 1985/89:12)

Tenor of discourse includes both linguistic and extra-linguistic roles. The linguistic or speech roles are those defined by reference to language i.e. speaker-hearer, and (the participatory roles of) initiator-respondent (Hasan, 1978: 232-233). The extra-linguistic roles are those defined with reference not to language but to the social system. These roles are, then, the social identities and relationships of participants.

Hasan (1980; in press **a**) suggests that the multiplicity of social roles which people enact in the situations in which they participate tend to fall into 2 categories according to:

i) the degree of institutionalisation of the role -

public or personal. Public roles are the communally recognised and ascribed social identities and relationships; personal roles are those individuated roles which are based on personal attributes. Cross-cutting this distinction is another axis by reference to which roles may be analysed: this is the relation of the participants to the social activity. Such roles Hasan refers to as agentive roles, i.e. the roles are associated with the social activity in which the participants are engaged; they look to engagement in a particular field of discourse.

ii) degree of status - whether or not the social roles and relationships are hierarchic.

A further aspect of tenor is the extent of the social distance between the participants in any interaction (Hasan, 1973; 1980). This in turn depends upon the amount of contact between the particular interactants - whether, how often and in what roles they have previously interacted.

c) Mode of discourse: The role of language in the doing:

> The **Mode** of discourse refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organisation of the text, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?), and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like.(Halliday, 1985/89:12))

The symbolic organisation of the text - its function in relation to Field and Tenor - is what this contextual

parameter is concerned with. Hasan (1985/89:58) examines mode of discourse in terms of the three abstractions:

i) language role; ii) medium - spoken or written; and iii) channel - graphic or phonic. The latter two abstractions, Hasan points out, are closely related but need to be distinguished to avoid confusion. She points out that

> Medium is a historical product of the conditions accompanying channel, but with the increase in our ability to record messages, the relationship between the two has changed. (ibid)

Of the three abstractions relevant to the mode of discourse, it is the role of language in the social process that is of particular interest in the present enquiry. The other two abstractions are, of course not unrelated to the role of language in that certain roles of language are more likely to occur in the spoken as opposed to the written medium and in the phonic as opposed to the graphic channel. A text's function "in relation to the social action" (Halliday, 1977a: 201) refers to whether it is an ancillary of other activities or whether it constitutes the activity. Hasan (1980; 1985/89:58) suggests that the degree to which language is ancillary or constitutive of the activity should be thought of as a continuum rather than in terms of sharply distinct categories - a matter of more or less rather than absolutely one or the other.

A text's function in relation to the social action and

to the role structure also refers to its semiotic function in the environment - its rhetorical mode or genre. As will become clear in the following chapters, the mode of discourse - in particular, the constitutive or ancillary role of language and the rhetorical mode - is central to the problem addressed in this study.

3.1.1 Context and Register

Any instance of language-in-use - any text operative within a context of situation - will be describable in terms of these 3 variables; it will be describable in terms of some configuration of particular values of each of the contextual variables - what Hasan (1978: 230) terms the contextual configuration. The particular values - the configuration of field, tenor and mode choices - are construed by the kinds of meanings being expressed in the text. Variation in the contextual configuration will correlate with variation in the variety of language, that is, with register. A register is therefore a configuration of worded-meanings (Hasan, in press a) that is "typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, tenor and mode." (Halliday, 1985/89:39).

Halliday's deduction of the features of the schematic construct - context of situation - provides a way of grounding Firth's notion of relevant features which Firth himself never provided. By providing a motivation for the inclusion of these features and no other, Halliday's theory also differs from the ad hoc suggestions of relevant categories given in Table 2.1.

This, however, is not to say that categories such as those suggested by, for example, Hymes, are not relevant; rather, the criticism is that these categories remain theoretically unmotivated. Indeed many of the categories Hymes suggests can be subsumed within these three contextual variables deduced by Halliday. For example, Hymes' situational features Participants/ Personnel and Key may be subsumed under Tenor in the Hallidayan model, while Instrumentalities such as channel may be subsumed under Mode.

Halliday's model of relevant contextual features does not calibrate with that of Firth in any simple way. Field is not identical to Firth's non-verbal action, for frequently the non-verbal action of participants is not in any way related to the context of situation created and/or validated by the text. In the same way, the language being used may have no bearing on the non-verbal activity that is going on. For example, in the extract of mother-child talk presented at the end of this chapter, mother and child are eating lunch but the talk in this segment cannot be considered an essential component of this non-verbal activity.

Hymes also talks about the actual physical setting - the time and place - as being a feature of context. But is the setting always a relevant feature of the context? For Halliday as for Firth context is an abstraction from the concrete elements of the material environment in which a text unfolds - what Hasan terms, variously, the immediate material situation (1973) or

the material situational setting (1980). The material situational setting

> always includes elements that are not part of the context of situation .. The overlap between the two can vary according to the role that the language plays in the unfolding of the social process. (Hasan, 1980: 108)

As previously stated, it is this notion of variability in the role played by language in the social process that is crucial to the main concerns of this thesis, i.e. decontextualisation. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. What needs to be elucidated at this point is the nature of the relationship between language and Halliday's linguistically relevant contextual variables Field, Tenor and Mode.

3.2 Realisation: construal and activation.

For Halliday, language is, in essence, a resource - a system of meaning potential (1978:39). This meaning potential is multi-functional, involving the three generalised functions - ideational, interpersonal and textual - in the service of which it has evolved. As for Malinowski, so for Halliday: language is as it is because of the uses to which it is put, these uses being reflected in its structures.

The meaning potential - what one can mean - is related to what one can say; the latter, i.e. saying, is the expression of the former, meaning, and is itself expressed in sounds. The levels or strata of language

are, therefore semantics (meaning), lexis and grammar - or, to use the technical term, lexicogrammar (wording), and phonology (sounds). Each of these strata Halliday represents as system networks - networks of inter-related systems of choices which operate in some environment. This is a way of modelling each stratum as a potential or range of alternatives and gives priority to the paradigmatic relations at each level.

The relationship between the strata of semantics and lexicogrammar is a natural relationship of realisation while the relationship between lexicogrammar and phonology is, by contrast, a purely arbitrary one of encoding.

The relationship postulated by Halliday between context and language is the same as that between the language-internal strata, semantics and lexicogrammar, i.e. one of realisation. This relation is a bidirectional, reflexive one and, so far as the relation between context and language is concerned, this bi-directionality accounts for the fact that, given a language piece - a text - one may infer what the context might be; reciprocally, given a context one might predict what kinds of meanings are likely to be exchanged. In Hasan's words, "the perception of context motivates one's text - i.e. the talk one talks" and reciprocally

> the comprehension of the developing text construes the perception of the context as it appears to be evolving. (Hasan, in press a).

There are, then, two aspects to the relationship of realisation: the level above activates the level below; the level below construes the level above. Thus, lexicogrammar (wording) construes semantics (meaning) which itself activates lexicogrammatical choices - meaning activates wording. In the same way, semantics (meaning) construes context which itself activates semantic choices - context activates meaning, for

> the lexicogrammatical form of a language cannot be validly viewed as evolving independently of what people do when they engage in speech events (Hasan, in press a)

The system is drawn upon in any actual instance of use: on any specific occasion of language use, the system is the potential to which the actual is systematically related.

The four levels of linguistic analysis in this systemic-functional theory and the relation between each is shown in Table 2.2:

		REALISATION
1.	Context of Situation	
	↘	activation / construal
2.	Semantics	
	↘	activation / construal
3.	Lexicogrammar	
	↘	
	code / encode	
4.	Phonology	

Table 2.2: Levels of linguistic description

In Table 2.2, level 1 is language-external and levels 2-4 are language internal. The schematic representation in the table claims that from the point of view of **activation**: choices at the level of context of situation activate choices at the level of semantics which, in turn, activate choices at the level of lexicogrammar; but choices at the level of lexicogrammar (or sometimes at the level of semantics) <u>are coded</u> as choices at the level of phonology. Reciprocally, from the perspective of **construal**: choices at the level of phonology <u>encode</u> the level of lexicogrammar; however, choices at the level of lexicogrammar construe the level of semantics; and choices at the level of semantics construe the level of context of situation.

The horizontal line between phonology and lexicogrammar in Table 2.2 indicates that the realisational relationship between lexicogrammar and phonology is different to that between the higher strata. The relation between lexicogrammar and phonology refers to the Saussaurean signified and signifier relation which is an arbitrary one. The relation between the higher strata, is, however, non-arbitrary: grammatical structures are assigned from the semantic level; semantic structures from the level of context.

The realisation relation between the strata is not a simple dyadic relationship as it may appear from Table 2.2. Halliday (1992) characterises the realisational relation between the strata in terms of meta-redundancy

so that, for example the stratum of semantics is realised by the realisation of lexicogrammar in phonology - by the realisation of wording in sound. By the same token, the stratum of context is realised by the realisation of meaning in wording.

The relation between the strata has a further characteristic: it is what Hasan (in press a) following Hjelmslev (1961) terms a non-conformal relation, i.e. there is not a one-to-one relation between, for example, meaning and wording. If such were the case, there would be no sense in stratifying language for the facts of one stratum would simply be the facts of the other, by another name. The non-conformal relation between the strata is manifested by the fact that it is possible to, say, realise a meaning such as a particular type of question as either interrogative or declarative in its worded form. This does not necessarily imply that variation in wording does not construe variation in meaning; rather, that, at a particular degree of delicacy, there is no variation in meaning associated with variation in wording. This concept of delicacy will be further discussed in the next section.

3.3 Meaning and Context

How do the three kinds of meaning - the metafunctions - construe contexts? Or reciprocally, how do contexts activate the three metafunctions? According to Halliday (1978:63)

> by and large, it is the ideational component of the

> system that is activated by the choice of field, the interpersonal by the tenor, and the textual by the mode.

Note the modifying expression "by and large". In other words, Halliday is making no claim about absolute determinism; rather the realisation relation is a matter of tendency or probability. It may be said that certain lexicogrammatical systems are at risk in the realisation of particular kinds of meaning. Thus

> the selection of options in experiential systems - that is, in transitivity, in the classes of things (objects, persons, events, etc.), in quality, quantity, time, place and so on - tends to be determined by the nature of the activity: what socially recognised activity the participants are engaged in, in which the exchange of verbal meanings has a part ....
>
> The selection of interpersonal options, those in the systems of mood, modality, person, key, intensity, evaluation and comment and the like, tends to be determined by the role relationships in the situation....
>
> The selection of options in the textual systems, such as those of theme, information and voice, and also the selection of cohesive patterns, those of reference, substitution and ellipsis, and conjunction, tend to be determined by the symbolic forms taken by the interact-ion, in particular the place that is assigned to the text in the total situation ... (Halliday, 1977a:201-202)

Hasan points out that, just as a particular lexicogrammatical form will tend to construe a particular meaning, so also with the relation between semantics and context: the contextual variables field, tenor and mode tend to align with the metafunctions - experiential, interpersonal and textual - except under certain conditions which can be stated. For example, while action- and reflection-based activities are

realised by the experiential metafunction, relation based activities -i.e. activities whose nature is the creation, maintenance or changing of personal relations - "are largely construed by the workings of the interpersonal meta-function." (Hasan, in press a).

Central to this probabilistic view of the realisational relationship between the strata is the notion of scale of delicacy. The scale of delicacy refers to the degree of detail with which a phenomenon is described. As the term 'scale' suggests, delicacy is a cline (Halliday, 1976:62) one end of which is the least delicate or primary. The notion of delicacy, like that of system, is applicable at any stratum of linguistic description - from context to lexicogrammar. So, for example, at the most primary degree of delicacy, a single meaning may be construed by a number of lexicogrammatical structures (though at further degrees of delicacy, the variant forms of a meaning will involve differences in the meaning expressed.) For example, an imperative form with implied Subject 'you' will construe the meaning [command] - *Get out of the bath* - as will a related polar interrogative form - *Will you get out of the bath?* or the declarative form - *I want you to get out of the bath.*

In the same way, a single context may be construed by a number of actual text structures, originating in the same generic structure potential or GSP (Hasan, 1985/89). The variant text structures will, however, construe differences in context at further degrees of

delicacy. Whether or not these differences are crucial to the identification of the text and context as instances of particular types depends on whether the particular values of field, tenor and mode that vary are criterial. Thus, a buying/selling context may nevertheless be recognised as such despite differences in values of the tenor variable, for example, social distance, as construed by elements of text structure and realised in lexicogrammatical selections.

3.4 Interdependence and the Contextual Variables.

What is the relationship between the three contextual variables - field, tenor and mode? While discussions of these contextual parameters tend to treat them as separate entities, it should be pointed out that they are dealt with in this way simply for analytic purposes and to show their relationship to the linguistic system. Rather than being viewed as independent of each other, field, tenor and mode should be seen as interdependent. For example, Hasan (in press a) points out that "certain rhetorical modes become associated with certain reflection-based activities" so that the activity is named by the terms associated with rhetorical mode - exposition, explanation etc. This example of the interaction or interdependence of field and mode is a consequence of the fact that such reflection-based activities are <u>constituted</u> by language - i.e. the only way these activities can come about is via languaging. Action based activities, by contrast, are those activities which are <u>facilitated</u> by the use of language.

The interdependence of field and tenor is to be seen in the fact that any social activity entails some particular agentive social roles. Indeed, Hasan (1991:135) notes, the social relation of agentive role is logically inseparable from the social activity itself; for example, there can be no social activity of buying and selling (economic transaction) without the roles of buyer and seller.

3.5 Context of Culture in the SF Model

So far, in this model of the relation between context and language no mention has been made of Malinowski's context of culture. Halliday (1991:7-8) points out that the context of culture is to context of situation as the system of language is to text, i.e. the relation is one of instantiation. Just as the system is the potential that lies behind any instance of language use, so "a culture is the potential behind all the different types of situation that occur" (Halliday, 1991:8). Halliday's diagram of the relation between language and context is reproduced in Figure 2.1:

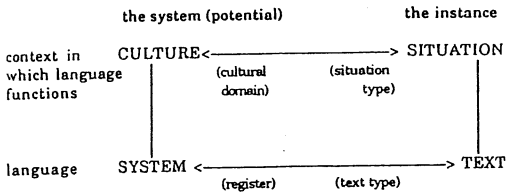

Figure 1 Language and Context

Note: left - right = instantiation [cf. climate <——> weather]
top - bottom = realization [as, within language, lexicogrammar | phonology]

Figure 2.1: The relation of language and context (Halliday,1991:8)

Reading Halliday's diagram in Figure 2.1 above from top to bottom and from left to right, the context of culture is the context for language as system or meaning potential. It is instantiated in contexts of situation, i.e. a context of situation is an instance of culture. The context of situation is the context for an instantiation of the system of language, i.e. a text. Thus there is a proportionality: context of culture is to context of situation as the system of language is to the text; and while the system of language as a whole is realisationally related to culture, the linguistic organisation of the text as a whole is realisationally related to situation. Culture, then, is conceptualised as the totality of the system of systems of context lying behind each situation in the same way that language is the totality of the system of systems lying behind each instance of language in use, that is, text.

The above conceptualisation of context within the systemic functional model of language has by no means been uncontroversial even amongst systemic functionalists. The most developed alternative interpretation is that of Martin whose model of context has been applied extensively and very successfully in pedagogic practice.

3.6 Martin's Theory of Context

The major departure of Martin from the standard SF theory lies in his conceptualisation of genre and register. Since my concern is with the mode of

discourse, this being the contextual variable that is crucially involved in the use of decontextualised language, I will give neither a comprehensive nor a critical account of Martin's theory (for the latter, see Hasan, in press a). Rather, I will review those aspects of Martin's theory which impinge on the development of an account of the phenomenon of interest in this study - decontextualised language use.

Martin (1992:405) interprets the contexts of situation and of culture as "a series of connotative semiotics". His use of the term connotative to refer to a semiotic that has as its form of expression another semiotic (Martin, 1991:123) is taken from Hjelmslev. The series of connotative semiotics are ideology, genre and register, each pair standing in a content / expression relation, i.e. genre is the expression form of the connotative semiotic ideology, and is itself a connotative semiotic of which the expression form is register; considered from below, register is a connotative semiotic for which language is the expression form.

Martin thus separates the terms register and genre which are used, in Hasan's writings at least, interchangeably and thus as synonyms. Halliday uses the term genre to refer to the rhetorical purpose or semiotic function of a text: what is being achieved by the text in rhetorical terms, and locates it within the theory as an aspect of mode of discourse:

> The selection of options in the textual systems

> ...tends to be determined by the symbolic forms taken by the interaction, in particular the place that is assigned to the text in the total situation. This includes the distinction of medium, written or spoken, and the complex subvarieties derived from these... But it extends to much more than this, to the particular function or range of functions that the text is serving in the environment in question. The rhetorical concepts of expository, didactic, persuasive, descriptive and the like are examples of such semiotic functions. (1978:144-145)

As mentioned above (section 3.1), in the works of Halliday and Hasan, register is the term used to refer to the linguistic meanings which construe a context of situation; the register of a particular context - i.e. of aparticular contextual construct (Hasan, 1978) or configuration of field, tenor and mode variables - is the configuration of ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings at risk in the given context. The contextual configuration activates the register; the register construes the contextual configuration.

Martin uses the term register to refer to a different phenomenon. For him, register refers to the particular contextual configuration of field, tenor and mode values - Hasan's contextual construct - as well as to the meanings at risk in a particular configuration. In other words, what is register for Martin, is context for Halliday. Martin conceptualises field, tenor and mode as a semiotic in its own right, a connotative semiotic which has language as its expression form and which itself is the expression form of genre.

Thus genre, while being viewed as a semiotic function - "a staged, goal-oriented social process" (Martin, 1992:

503) - is not considered an aspect of the contextual variable, Mode. Rather, in this perspective, it is a connotative semiotic - content expressed by the stratum of register.

Martin's location of genre above the register (contextual) variables - field, tenor and mode - removes it from metafunctional organisation. Martin sees this as an advantage for

> Generic labels such as narrative or exposition are impossible to tie satisfactorily to any one type of meaning; their realisation cuts across metafunctions. For this reason it is useful not to associate genre too closely with any one register variable (e.g. mode in Halliday's work ..) (Martin, 1992:505-506).

This suggestion that Halliday's location of genre in mode disallows ideational and interpersonal meanings in its formation, restricting it to textual meanings, would seem to be an interpretation of the operation of the textual metafunction that is at odds with Halliday's writings and also with Martin's own interpretation as shown in his discussion of mode. Halliday expressly states that the systems of the textual metafunction operate on ideational and interpersonal meanings in an enabling way in order to create text:

> it is only through the encoding of semiotic interaction **as text** that the ideational and interpersonal components of meaning can become operational in an environment (Halliday, 1978:145; emphasis in original)

This is taken to mean that ideational and interpersonal meanings are present in any genre but for a text to be

recognised as belonging to a particular genre - as being an expository, didactic, persuasive etc text - not only must certain ideational and interpersonal meanings be present; they must also conform to a certain mode of organisation, such organisation bearing the stamp of the textual metafunction. It is this textual metafunctional organisation that identifies the genre of a text and together with the particular configuration of ideational and interpersonal meanings that determines what Halliday terms the register of the text.

Martin finds that his separation of genre and register make it easier to account for the difference between texts having the same subject-matter but different modes of discourse, such as a live commentary on a football match and a newspaper account of the match. According to Martin, two such texts differ in terms of staging - the former unfolds with the actual game, the latter gives the end result first. For this reason, the two texts, while being alike in terms of field (subject-matter) belong to different genres.

That two such texts differ substantially is indisputable; however, the differences between the two would seem to be able to be accounted for quite as easily in the standard theory by reference to mode of discourse even without consideration of their differing media. This argument, however, will be developed further in Chapter Eight.

3.7 Summary of the Development of the Concept of Context

It may be said that Malinowski, finding himself faced with the task of making the meanings of a non-western culture comprehensible to western readers, felt the need to introduce the socio-cultural level into his analysis of the meanings of the group he was studying and so introduced the concepts of context of culture and of situation.

Firth developed the concept of context of situation as a theoretical construct in linguistic theory seeing its usefulness in accounting for "the sociological component of language." (Firth, 1950/57: 182)

Halliday developed this further as a theoretical construct following Firth's precept that the linguist should always keep the text in focus and showing how the relevant parameters of this schematic construct could be determined by consulting the text - the product of the on-going process of meaning in a context of situation.

From the perspective of the systemic functional model of language the structure of the context of situation - the contextual construct (Hasan, 1985/89:55) - is field, tenor and mode because it is only these elements of the extra-linguistic situation that are constituted by language. In Hasan's terms

> human actions and relations and the symbolic modes associated with the enactment of relations and

> actions.... are crucial in shaping the nature of verbal interaction (Hasan, in press a)

Reciprocally, the structure of language is as it is because language has to serve these interactional needs of expressing what is happening, who is taking part and the role of language associated with the social actions and relations in any context of situation. The relevant features of context are, therefore, not postulated in an ad hoc manner but are motivated by reference to the metafunctional organisation of language.

Before moving on to a consideration of the conceptualisation of decontextualised language use within the SF model, it is worth noting that, at about the same time that Firth was advocating the study of language use in typical contexts of situation, the idea of typical utterance types associated with the various spheres of human activity or speech situations was also being put forward in Russia by Bahktin. Such typical utterance types Bahktin termed genres. Noting that the nature and forms of language use are as diverse as the areas of human activity in which language is used, Bahktin observed:

> Language is realised in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All of these aspects - thematic content, style, and compositional structure - are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in

> which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of utterances. These we may call *speech genres*. (1986:60; emphasis in original)

Like Firth, Bahktin emphasised the need to study speech genres, but was as programmatic in his statements as Firth. Unlike Firth, however, Bahktin offered no specification of the parameters of situation or sphere of human activity which might influence language use. His interest lay in the characterisation of utterances. His notion of utterance is, however, problematic. Hasan (in press c) points out that his use of the term is ambivalent, being used in two senses: as a turn in dialogue and as a text or discourse. An utterance, according to Bahktin, has three characteristics which distinguishes it from units of language (i.e. words or sentences):

i) it is framed and delimited by a change of speaker turn; it would seem to be this characteristic that makes an utterance appear to be a turn in dialogue.

ii) it is "a link in the chain of speech communication" (op.cit:84).

iii) it has a wholeness which is determined by three closely associated factors: a) its referential and semantic exhaustiveness; b) the speaker's speech plan or will; and c) its compositional form of finalisation.

These three factors are "inseparably linked in the organic whole of the utterance" (op.cit:76). Thus, the speaker's speech plan or speech will

> determines both the subject itself .. as well as its

> boundaries and its semantic exhaustiveness. It also determines, of course, the choice of a generic form in which the utterance will be constructed (op.cit:77).

Indeed, the choice of a particular genre is seen as a manifestation of the speaker's speech will (op.cit:78). If the speaker's speech will is interpreted as what the speaker wants to do via language, then in SF terms this will be seen as an aspect of the Mode of discourse which activates textual meaning. Field of discourse may be identified as "the subject itself" or "thematic content" which activates ideational meaning. This leaves Tenor of discourse to be accounted for. In fact, Bahktin gives primacy to what is recognised in the SF model as activating interpersonal meaning. For Bahktin, the style and composition of an utterance are determined by interpersonal factors associated with it: its expressive aspect, i.e. "the speaker's evaluative attitude toward the referentially semantic element" (op.cit:90), and the speaker's conception of the addressee: "Each speech genre in each area of speech communication has its own typical conception of the addressee and this defines the genre" (op.cit:95).

Bahktin's view of the inseparable linking of what have been interpreted as ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings in "the organic whole of the utterance" is clear. On this reading, Bahktin's view would seem to present a challenge to Martin's conception of the location of genre outside register. However, Martin's interpretation of Bahktin is that genre integrates ideational, interpersonal and textual

meanings (Martin, in press). What is needed, then, is an empirical investigation of utterances that function as links "in the chain of speech communion" (Bahktin, op.cit:84) between speaker and other participants in the speech situation, showing the relation of such utterances both to context and to language form. The investigation of decontextualisation carried out in this study provides such an opportunity. Such an investigation may also reveal the basis of Bahktin's ambivalent use of the term utterance. These aspects will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

4.0 Decontextualisation and the SF Model

It was pointed out in section 2.0 that what is at issue in decontextualised language use is not the relevance or lack of relevance of context for a text but the degree to which the material situation of the occasion of language use is relevant to the production and interpretation of language. It was also noted that, within the framework of the systemic functional model, the degree of involvement of the material situational setting is associated with the role of language in the social process - the extent to which language actually constitutes the social activity at hand or simply facilitates such activity; in other words whether the part language is playing is constitutive or ancillary.

The terms 'constitutive' and 'ancillary' may thus be used to refer to decontextualised and contextualised language use respectively. The use of these terms is theoretically motivated: they define opposing values of

the continuum of the mode of discourse variable associated with the degree to which language is constitutive of or ancillary to the activity in hand. A further set of terms is that deriving from Bernstein's notion of the relation of meanings to a material base. Thus language that is ancillary or context-dependent is related to a material base of its use if this material base is defined as the material situational setting; constitutive or decontextualised language is related not to the material base but to a symbolic base, i.e. language itself. However, it is difficult to replace the use of an established set of terms by another set no matter how theoretically felicitous the new set may be. Therefore, I will continue to use the term 'decontextualised' in referring to language use that is constitutive.

4.1 The Role of Language in Interaction: An example

Bearing in mind that the role of language in the social activity or process is a continuum, what are some of the activities in which language typically plays a constitutive or ancillary role? This question will be the subject of the following chapter. At this point, I will discuss a relatively lengthy extract of mother-child talk in order to make concrete some of the ideas associated with the concept of decontextualisation which were reviewed in the first section of this chapter. The discussion will also serve as a preview to the ideas to be introduced in Chapter Three.

The extract - 2.1 below - is taken from a dialogue

between Stephen and his mother (the HS dyad). The entire dialogue is presented in Appendix A. Extract 2.1 involves messages 207 to 310 inclusive. The transcriptions conventions have been described (Chapter One, p.14). In extract 2.1 the mother and child - who are having lunch - discuss aeroplanes.

Extract 2.1

207		You're a hungry boy aren't you?
208	C	This is a boat that flies
209	M	A boat that flies!
210	C	Yeah ..
211	M	Is it a hydroplane?
212	C	Yes
213	M	A hydroplane is a plane that can land on the water
214	C	Yes
215	M	Or is it a hydrofoil?
216	C	No
217		It's a hydroplane ...
218		This is - that's the water
219		and it saves people
220	M	Does it?
221	C	Yes ..
222		Every person that's um that's got drowned
223	M	Oh .. There's a helicopter that goes up and down the beaches in summer watching out for people
224		It's called a rescue helicopter
225	C	Oh that's [? mine]
226	M	I think it mainly watches um for sharks
227		but it might also rescue people
228		if they're a long way out from the beach and in trouble
229		It's a good idea isn't it?
230	C	Is it - this is one of them
231	M	That's a rescue helicopter, is it?
232	C	Yes
233	M	Where's the pilot?
234	C	Um this man
235	M	Which?
236	C	What does pilots do?
237	M	Drive aeroplanes and helicopters
238		They're really drivers ..
239	C	Are the captains are?
240	M	Captains? Um I think the captain is the pilot that's in charge
241		Sometimes aeroplanes have more than one pilot
242		because the very big aeroplanes that can fly for a long time .. they need more than one pilot
243		so the captain is the man in charge
244		and he's in charge of the people that come and offer you drinks and dinner and things too
245		He's in charge of everybody, the captain
246	C	Even the - even the people that um fly the aeroplane?
247	M	Well I think the captain -
248		Yes he's in charge of the other people that drive the aeroplane
249		and I think the captain drives the aeroplane sometimes
250	C	Yeah ...
251		[?]
252	M	I can't hear what you said
253		because you filled your mouth full of peanut butter sandwich ..
254		It's hard talking to you <255> isn't it
255		when you've got your mouth full

256		It's a bit rough I think
257	C	Is the captain in charge of the um ..the um - the trees, Mummy?
258	M	No, the captain's not in charge of the trees
259		He's in charge of all the people on - that work on the aeroplane
260	C	Oh
261	M	The stewards and the stewardesses and the other-
262	C	Stewart!
263	M	Stewards, not Stewart, Steward
264	M	The steward is the man that offers you drinks, coffee, tea
265	C	And the - Stewart is um is um Joanne's Mum - I mean Dad
266	M	That's right
267		Stewart is Joanne's Dad ..
268	C	Is he a printer?
269	M	Yes, he is a printer ..
270	C	Is he a captain?
271	M	No he doesn't go in an aeroplane
272	C	Well why?
273	M	Because he's a printer
274		He ah works in a place where they print magazines and things
275	C	Does he work in a plane where they print things?
276	M	No, no a place
277		He works in a place, not a plane
278		He doesn't work in an aeroplane
279	C	But Mummy when he doesn't go to work sometimes
280		does he um does he go on a aeroplane?
281	M	Yes, Stewart's been on an aeroplane
282		Helen and Stewart went to America
283	C	Oh
284	M	They came to visit us last time we were in America
285		when you were in Mummy's tummy
286	C	Oh
287	M	They went in an aeroplane
288		and then they caught an aeroplane back home
289	C	Oh did Joanne come with them?
290	M	No
291		Joanne hadn't been born then ..
292		Have you been in an aeroplane?
293	C	Yes, to New Zealand
294	M	Was it good?
295	C	Yes
296	M	Was there a steward?
297	C	No!
298	M	Didn't anyone give you a drink?
299	C	Yes
300	M	A man or a lady?
301	C	Um a man
302	M	He would have been called a steward
303	C	He - he was
304	M	Was he? ..
305		Did he give you anything else apart from drinks?
306	C	Yes
307	M	What?
308	C	He gave me dinner
309	M	Did he?
310	C	Yes

At the beginning of this extract - message 207 - Stephen's mother comments on Stephen's state as evidenced, we may assume, by the enthusiasm with which he is eating his lunch. Stephen does not enter into

this commentary but rather makes an observation about the inherent attributes of some object in the immediate environment exophorically referred to as *this* (message 208). While we do not have access to the identity of the object it seems fairly safe to assume that it is not, in reality, *a boat that flies*. Rather, Stephen is drawing his mother's attention to either a representation of such an object in the form of a toy or is imaginatively assigning these characteristics to some object which does not inherently possess them, e.g. some food item that is to hand. This latter interpretation would be consistent with the kind of imaginary play that children of Stephen's age frequently engage in. (There are numerous instances of such imaginary play in Hasan's data and many such instances occur in similar material circumstances, i.e. while the child is having a meal.)

Assuming, then, the imaginative interpretation for the moment, it may be said that Stephen uses an object from the immediate environment as a pivot through which he frees himself from the immediate material situational setting, creating an imaginary setting in which the object exophorically referred to is transformed into a representation of something other than itself - *a boat that flies*. The original signification of the object has changed and so has its function: in the newly constructed imaginative context (Bernstein, 1973) the function of this object is to 'save people who are drowning.'

The mother engages with Stephen in this new context providing him with a signifier for his transformed object: 211 *Is it a hydroplane?* and giving an account of what it signifies in her definition: 213 *A hydroplane is a plane that can land on the water*. The mother, in fact, gives Stephen a choice of signifiers - *hydroplane* or *hydrofoil* and Stephen chooses the former possibly because of its resemblance to qualities of the signified as he defined it: *a boat that flies*. In the development of this imaginative context Stephen transforms another object exophorically referred to (*This .. that*) into something which it is not - *water* (message 219), the substitute object signified by the sign *water* presumably being what 'people drown' in (message 222).

The mother uses this imaginative context as an opportunity to instruct Stephen in related but non-imaginary matters. In the process she seems to transform the imaginative context into an instructional one by building on the ideas introduced by Stephen and giving an account of the real world activities of an object that is analogous in function to that which Stephen introduced in the imaginative context (messages 223-228).

The mother's account further frees Stephen from the constraints of the immediate situational setting by doing away with a pivotal object, moving from Stephen's imaginary sign to objects and events in the real world which are not present in the here-and-now of their

interaction. In the process, she introduces another new signifier - *rescue helicopter* - for the signified introduced by Stephen. He is quick to adopt this for his own purposes and thus restores the imaginative context. The mother again engages with Stephen in this context, asking (233): *Where's the pilot?* Again the context is transformed into an instructional one but this time by Stephen who initiates the change with his question concerning the function of pilots generally: 236 *What does pilots do*?

What is the relevance of the above discussion to 'contextualised' and 'decontextualised' language use? Is signification established only through 'contextualised' talk, i.e. through the relating of an object in the immediate situational setting with a sign (signifier / signified)? While undoubtedly it is in terms of the immediate situational setting that a sign's signification is established for the young child, as both Malinowski and Vygotsky, among others, point out, is there a stage early in the preschool years at which the signification of a sign may be established without such recourse? Before attempting to answer this question I will consider a further segment of this extract where, within the continuing instructional context confusion occurs due to the near identity of 2 signifiers.

The mother has given at some length a generalised explanation of the function of different aeroplane crew members, though the explanation is interrupted briefly

by an episode (messages 252-256) the function of which is to repair the conversational channel and facilitate the on-going talk. The mention of stewards and stewardesses (message 261) prompts Stephen's exclamation: 262 *Stewart!* The mother pronounces the difference between the signifiers *steward* and *Stewart* and defines the function of the former - its domain of signification. Stephen identifies the latter (*Stewart*) and enquires about <u>his</u> function, prompting the mother's account of the professional role of *Stewart* (messages 268-278).

Apparently keen to locate Stewart within the semantic field being covered in the discussion, i.e. aeroplane crew members, Stephen asks: 270 *Is he a captain?* The mother's answer to this and to Stephen's further demand for information is to provide details of Stewart's job as a printer: 274 *He works in a place where they print magazines and things*. Stephen's next question: 275 *Does he work in a plane where they print things?* shows that he is still preoccupied with tying Stewart to the semantic domain of aircraft crew not yet having distinguished *Stewart* and *steward*, treating them as the 'same' signifier with, possibly, the same value. This, it seems, accounts for the sign confusion - *place / plane*. The mother's response - 276-278 *No, no, a place, he works in a place, not a plane; he doesn't work in an aeroplane* establishes *place* and *plane* as separate signs.

Stephen eventually succeeds in getting the mother to

allow Stewart on an aeroplane - as passenger, this role being implicit in the recount of messages 281-291. Stephen's own experience of this role is introduced (message 292) and the recount that follows (messages 293-310) allows the mother to return to the earlier topic of the signification of the sign *steward*. It is clear from Stephen's answer to her question: 296 *Was there a steward?* that, indeed, the signification of this sign hasn't been established for him. The mother therefore indirectly defines the identity of the sign: 298 *Didn't anyone give you a drink?* and reinforces this in 302 *He would have been called a steward.* Stephen's answer: 308 *He gave me dinner* to her subsequent query: 305 *Did he give you anything else apart from drinks?* shows that he has now established the signification of the sign *steward*.

In this extract, the immediate situational setting provides an impetus for detachment from the immediacy of perceptual experience through the substitution of one sign for another - the sign *hydroplane*, and for the establishment of its signification. Note, however, that the signification of the sign *steward* is not established through its relationship with any immediate sensory experience. Rather the signification of this sign is established through what Snow (1983) terms an historical context or Donaldson's (1987:106) "own life embedding". In other words, in order to support her definition of the sign - to make it more concrete for the child, the mother recalls the child's previous experience of this sign's signification, i.e. his

experience of being served drinks and dinner by a person on an aeroplane.

It may be said, then, that since the extra-linguistic reality to which the sign *steward* refers is not available in the material situational setting in which the talk is taking place, its signification is established by construing, via language, that material setting in which that reality was available to the child, i.e. his previous experience of being on an aeroplane. In this particular segment the actual material situational setting of the occasion of language use is irrelevant to the activity in hand - language is constitutive or - in popular terms, 'context-independent', 'decontextualised' or 'autonomous'. Decontextualised language can thus be described as that use of language where the role of language is constitutive, recreating the world of referred entities, events, circumstances etc where these are not available to the participants through their sensuous experience of the immediate context of interaction.

4.2 De- and Re- Contextualisation

This process of reconstructing via language some previous material situational setting and relocating it solely by language use within the context currently being construed would seem to be the essence of recontextualisation. Such a characterisation of recontextualisation would seem to be consistent with the formulation of Bernstein (1986). If the definition

of decontextualisation offered at the conclusion of the preceding section is accepted and the essence of recontextualisation is taken as stated here, then the two terms are related in that they are the same phenomenon considered from different perspectives; the term 'recontextualisation' focuses on the experiential status of the text as content and the term 'decontextualisation' focuses on the status of the text in relation to the material circumstances of its production. That 'decontextualisation' and 'recontextualisation' are differing perspectives on the same phenomenon is implied by Wells (1981). Wells argues that of particular importance for school success is the child's prior experience of disembedded thinking:

> the extent to which .. conversational experience helps him to develop an awareness of the way in which language allows particular situations, problems and predicaments to be represented in symbolic categories and relations, which can be communicated about and acted upon independently of their particular contexts of origin - that is to say, the extent to which he learns from his experience to use language as a means of 'disembedded thinking'. (Wells, 1981:259)

Wells' comment is located within a discussion of the role of language in literacy and education generally. He notes that there is variation in the extent to which children experience particular uses of language due to differing family values and orientations, and he locates the origin of such differences in "the varied social relationships into which people enter at work and in their leisure activities.." (op. cit:258).

Wells, while acknowledging the existence of differing

family "values and orientations" is vague about the origins of such differences. It is the work of the British sociologist Basil Bernstein that provides a rigorous theoretical perspective on this and related issues. However, a discussion of Bernstein's main thesis will be deferred for the moment. What needs to be developed, at this point, is a systematic way of showing how even the most 'decontextualised' language is related to its context of use, i.e. contextualised.

5.0 Summary

In this chapter, the literature on decontextualisation was reviewed. This revealed the centrality of the notion of context for any explication of the concept of decontextualisation. It was concluded that the concept cannot be understood apart from an understanding of the relation between context and language use. This conclusion led to a review of the notion of context. It was suggested that the concept of context is best theorised in the systemic functional model which relates it explicitly to both language system and language use.

Within the systemic functional model, the contextual variable considered to be most relevant for an understanding of the term 'decontextualisation' is an aspect of the mode of discourse - the role of language in the social process. In Chapter Three, a closer examination of the role of language in social processes will be undertaken in order to elaborate the notion of decontextualised language use.