



ISSN Print: 2664-7699  
ISSN Online: 2664-7702  
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00  
IJHA 2024; 6(2): 124-128  
[www.humanitiesjournals.net](http://www.humanitiesjournals.net)  
Received: 10-09-2024  
Accepted: 16-10-2024

**Dhanashri Sambhaji Kamble**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of General,  
Sciences and Humanities  
Shah and anchor Kutechi  
Engineering College, Chembur,  
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

## The Role of Utterance, Contextual Relevance and Content-based Appropriateness in Effective Communicative Competence

**Dhanashri Sambhaji Kamble**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26647699.2024.v6.i2b.103>

### Abstract

In last several decades, English language teaching in India, has emerged as a special research area as well as a discipline of study. The way in which communication takes place in this globalized world, is totally changed and has become challenging. Communicating cleverly, instantly and appropriately according to the situations is the need of an hour. Communicative Competence is one of the significant concept/terms in ELT since 1960s and introduced by Dell Hymes. It is defined as 'an ability of a person to use language according to the context and situation. As proposed by Malinowski in a practical use of language utterance and context are inseparable. Context plays a very significant role in deriving the meaning of an utterance. Communicative Competence differs as per the speakers who convey their proposed meaning in language and within the context. The present paper will focus on some basic questions in relation to the effectiveness of Communicative Competence, like, what role the context and content plays in communication and how it makes a difference to what a person communicates? How the meaning of an utterance is subject to the context in which it is spoken? And why content-based appropriateness as per context is necessary for the effectiveness of Communicative Competence.

**Keywords:** Communicative competence, utterance, content, appropriateness, and context

### Introduction

English language teaching has become a research platform for showcasing the studies related to various concepts, skills, and pedagogical experimentation including methods, approaches, as well as techniques of teaching English as a language. English language, from its historical background in past to its being global language of communication today, has witnessed a tremendous change in its use and application by its users. Any language grows and functions according to its use and application, so does English. India is a second largest country in the world where people use English language largely for communication in professional, academic and to some extent social context also. Communication is always beyond a fluent speaking in a particular language. It is more about understanding a meaning which is provided by an utterance in as specific context or situation and with the help of appropriate content. Effective communication indeed is a reflection of 'Communicative Competence of an individual'. In its simplest sense 'Communicative Competence' is using language appropriately in a social context, as defined by International Encyclopaedia of Education (1985). In the field of ELT, the credit of popularizing this term goes to Dell Hymes (1960s). According to Hymes Communicative Competence involves knowing not only the language code but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. He introduced this term in response to Noam Chomsky's distinction in the use of language as competence use and use of language as performance. Hymes's concept of Communicative Competence is theoretical as well as practical. Hymes underscored the cultural and social appropriateness and significance of an utterance while speaking. He also emphasized on the contextual relevance of an utterance or speech acts. This paper thoroughly discusses the role of an utterance in creating a meaning in communication, why a context of communication (background knowledge/ information about the situation) is necessary to understand the meaning of the spoken utterance, and how the content- appropriateness is required to achieve the 'Communicative Competence'. In a nutshell it focuses on an utterance, context, and content in a broader frame of 'Communicative Competence' and the need, significance,

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Dhanashri Sambhaji Kamble**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of General,  
Sciences and Humanities  
Shah and anchor Kutechi  
Engineering College, Chembur,  
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

relevance and appropriateness of the same to understand what is being communicated. Because in today's global platform communicating with the people of diverse culture, attitudes, mindsets and backgrounds has become the corporate/ industry/ business prerequisite. How you communicate with your fellow people surely catches the attention today. And hence, the idea of being communicatively competent is more valid in this regard. Utterance, Context and Content- appropriateness all these three aspects are unavoidable for the effective Communicative Competence of an individual on this global front. This paper will analyse these three aspects from communicative perspective.

The very first aspect of this discussion of this research paper is an utterance. "An utterance is a part of the meaning of a sentence that is not directly related to the grammatical or lexical features but is obtained either from associated prosodic and paralinguistic features or from the context, linguistic and non- linguistic in which it occurs. (Lyons, John.1995) <sup>[6]</sup>. The definition makes a distinction between a sentence meaning and an utterance meaning by underlying features of its use. An utterance is a complete unit of talk bounded by the speaker's silence. (Glossary of Linguistic Terms) In its most simple sense, it is any sound of talk that human produce. For example, Aww! Wow! Ohh Really! My God! Beautiful! Amazing!, Excuse Me! etc etc. An utterance is the use of any piece of language by a particular speaker on a particular situation. It can be in the form of a sequence of sentences, a single clause, a single phrase or just a single word (2012). In the light of this definition it is apparent that a meaning of an utterance can be understood in a more specific and effective way in a related context. It always becomes easy for a speaker and listener to express and understand utterances in a particular or similar known context. Another definition of an utterance is, "The term utterance refers to complete communicative units which may consist of single words, phrase, clauses, and clause combination spoken in context (2006).

The utterance has the following characteristic. These characteristics informs more about the functions of an utterance.

It is spoken.

It has a physical event (A setting in which people communicate)

Grammaticality of an utterance can be ignored if the meaning is understood by the receiver.

It can be meaningful or meaningless.

It can be uttered by specific person (in particular accent)

It can be uttered by specific time or on particular occasion.

It can be a single phrase or single word.i.e. congratulations! Or Good Morning!

There are many kinds of utterances amongst which performative utterances plays a very significant role in communication as it gives a scope for spoken utterance through its various kinds. These kinds express various speech acts through which a 'speaker – hearer' more often communicate with each other. These speech acts are categorised according to the kinds of performative utterance. The examples of kinds of performative utterance and speech acts can be listed as below.

Directives -speech acts, i.e. ordering, commanding, requesting, pleading, begging, entertaining, questioning, etc.

Commissives – speech acts, i.e. promising, threatening, agreeing, refusing, etc.

Expressives – speech acts, i.e. thanking, apologizing, consoling, greeting, etc.

Declaratives – speech acts, i.e. declaring a war, seconding a motion, finding guilty or innocent, etc.

These performative utterances can be best understood in a specific context. Without knowing the context in which it is spoken, a receiver or listener is unable to understand it. For example, a single word utterance like "Look!". The first context to understand this utterance may be as a speaker is talking to the listener about something like a new place he visited or a new dish he tried in a restaurant, and while showing the pictures, he can produce this utterance, "Look!". This same utterance can be produced in a different context when a speaker wants a listener to understand or act upon something.

e.g. Look! John, you have to understand the delicacy of this matter.

The utterances like Congratulations! Thank You! I am sorry! All the best! Happy Birthday! Happy Anniversary! are used in a particular context which is similar known to the speaker and listener of communication. An utterance meaning changes according to its function and this function can best be understood in a specific context. Let us take an example of two above mentioned utterances – 'Thank you!' and 'I am Sorry!'.

e.g. Thank You!

1. Thank You! (utterance) – for understanding my point in the discussion. (context)
2. Thank You! (utterance) – for the best birthday gift ever. (context)
3. Thank You! (utterance) – for listening patiently. (context)
4. Thank You! (utterance) – for the help you offered. (context)

e.g. I am Sorry!

1. I am sorry! (utterance) – I didn't do it on time. (context)
2. I am sorry! (utterance) – I forgot to bring a milk you asked me to. (context)
3. I am sorry! (utterance) – I have hurt you, again. (context)

Thus, the knowledge of the background context is necessary to understand such utterances. In short, an utterance is a small communicative act performed by the speaker. It helps to create a meaning in communication. Various utterances used at various communicative situations or contexts plays a significant role in providing meaning to the communication process between a sender and receiver.

The second point of the discussion of this paper is the contextual relevance of an utterance. The question which is tried to answer at this point is, why the 'context of communication' is required to understand the meaning of a spoken utterance? To answer this question very first ground of consideration is that human beings do not communicate in vacuum. Communication between individuals is always governed by some or the other situation or background. In its simplest sense then, we can say, context is the situation or background for communication.

The dictionary meaning of context is 'the situation within which something exists or happens and that can help explain it (Cambridge English Dictionary). "In common use almost, every word has many shades of meaning and therefore needs to be interpreted by context." (Alfred Marshall, 1920) <sup>[8]</sup>. This statement underlines the need of context in background of communication very clearly. Any communication happens in the premise of context. From

informal day to day conversations to the formal communication in conferences or seminars takes place within a specific context. "Context is the circumstances surrounding a message. The circumstances might include the setting, the value position of the people and appropriateness of the message. This means considering your audience, the forum under which you are speaking, the era and accepted norms." The author further states that, context is very important from both the point of views of senders and receivers. Understanding the receivers and then constructing a message is required on the part of sender. Because if a receiver couldn't understand a meaning of message due to lack of vocabulary or limited vocabulary or any other reason, it directly leads to the failure of communication. And in this case, it is context, which helps them to send and understand a message." (Missy 575, Certified Educator) This is the reason the contextual relevance of what is being communicated is always important for the success of communication and for effective communicative competence also.

Lee McGann in his article 'Understanding Communication Setting: The six kinds of context' underlines the importance of context. He has defined context as 'the most important influence on 'what is appropriate' and 'how messages are interpreted 'is context. He came up with the view that we can better understand communication if we become aware of all the six contexts of communication. The six kinds of context he has presented in his paper are Physical Context (room/ temperature/ arrangement of furniture in a room etc), Inner Context (feelings/thoughts/ emotions), Symbolic Context (previous discussions, background knowledge or information), Relational Context (relation between a sender and receiver i. e. teacher- student, father- son, manager-employee, seller- buyer etc), Situational Context (having a class, playing a game, discussing on the problem etc), Cultural Context (various cultures – American, Indian, Japanese etc). To line up with what the author has mentioned here, we can definitely state that consciously or unconsciously, we all are communicating with each other in some or the other context mentioned above.

As the very basic notion of communicative competence is speaking appropriately according to the various situations, context is vital to the application of any kind (formal/informal) of communication. Contextual relevance of an utterance is required for effective communicative competence because context helps to understand the meaning of an utterance. What is said is an utterance and where it is said is the context, and, these two plays an important role in the process of communication. Thus, while interpreting an utterance a context of situation is unavoidable.

Many linguists and researchers have given a meaningful insight about the context and its role importance and application. Let us take a look on that. In semiotics, linguistics, sociology and anthropology, context refers to those objects or entities which surround a focal event, in these disciplines, typically a communicative event of some kind. Context is "a frame that surrounds the event and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation. (Charles Goodwin, Alessandro Duranti. 1992) [5]. This definition focuses on understanding the role of context as a frame surrounding a communicative event and its appropriate interpretation is quite inevitable for the success of effective communicative competence. Brainslow

Malinowski has coined the phrase 'context of situation' to refer to the cultural context of use in which the utterance was located. He emphasized on the view that context and utterance are inseparable. Patricia Mayes, put forward Halliday's view on text and context as "M.A.K. Halliday maintains that meaning should be analysed not only within the linguistic system, but also taking into account the social system in which it occurs. In order to accomplish this task both, text and context must be considered. Context is the crucial ingredient in Halliday's framework: Based on the context, people make predictions about the meaning of utterances." Halliday further elaborates his notion of context by saying, 'language does not consist of sentences; it consists of text or discourse- the exchange of meaning in interpersonal contexts of one kind or another'. He continues to highlight the importance of context in deriving meaning by saying, 'we do not experience language in isolation- if we did we would not recognise it as language – but always in relation to a scenario, some backgrounds of persons and actions and events from which the things which are said derive their meaning. Thus, the focus is entirely on the context or background of communication.

Another Linguist, Firth put forward a view that meaning (provided by an utterance) is context dependant. He has also explained some of the dimensions of context as – Contexts are embedded in the experience of everyday lives of people, contexts must be described in abstract, general terms, contexts only consist of relevant aspect of social situation, and contexts consist mainly of participants, actions and their consequences.

In his research article, Steven Bradley says that, "Context is everything. It shapes the meaning in all communication. Without context you can't communicate effectively. When your message is delivered in one context and received in another, it likely leads to miscommunication." He came up with the view that the message relies on the context to communicate. Constant communication is one of the predominant features of all human interactions, communications and relationships. Every day we are acting as the senders and receivers of the messages, so the received communication must be sensible and clear. (June 26, 2014). According to a writer of a web article, "The best thing about context is that it deepens your understanding of the message, so that, a true dialogue can take place. The hardest thing about communicating effectively is knowing how to "set the context". (August 17, 2016). He further says, setting the context of communication is mandatory because it helps people to process information faster and to make decisions quicker. Melinda Sinclair in her research paper has tried to answer some questions about context and interpretation of an utterance. She has provided three possible answers to 'what context is 'question. First, context is the situation of the utterance. Second, context is the co-text of the utterance. Third, context is the conversational common ground. Amongst these three answers, the first and third answer is directly related to the concept of communicative competence and plays an important role in it. As any utterance can be understood well in context and if the sender and receiver of communication share the same conversational common ground, the purpose of communication i.e. understanding a message is served.

In short, all the above discussed definitions, views and opinions of various linguists and researchers fetch our attention to one important aspect of context that is, without

it, any communication is very difficult to understand. Context makes understanding easy for receivers, when it is a single word utterance or well-constructed lengthy message. To put it in more apt words, "Understanding context can improve a speaker's effectiveness, whether they are having an intimate conversation with one person or broadcasting to millions". (Justin Beach, 2018) [2]. Thus, the contextual relevance of an utterance as well as what is being communicated, from a simple idea to critical thought, is more mandatory for effective Communicative Competence of an individual.

The third aspect of the discussion of this research paper is Content -based appropriateness while communicating. The question to be answered here is, how content appropriateness i.e. right subject matter of communication is necessary to achieve effective communicative competence. Dell Hymes emphasized on appropriate use of language in his concept of communicative competence. While seeing the content- based appropriateness, we can refer to one of the four parameters Hymes has spoken about in relation to Communicative Competence of an individual. It is, whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to the context in which it is used and evaluated. Content is another important element along with context.

"A thoughtful, careful, and elaborate content is fundamental to convey the concept." (Andres Soto). Any critical concept can be made 'easy to understand' with above said characteristics of a content. A content is defined in many ways. The dictionary definition of content is "Text matter of a document or publication in any form. Content is both information and communication: the sum total of the freshness, readability, relevancy and usefulness of the information presented and the manner in which it is presented." (Business Dictionary). Wikipedia defines it as, "in publishing, art, and communication content is an information and experiences directed towards an end - user or audience. Content is something that is expressed through some medium as speech, writing, or any of various arts.

Taking into consideration both the definitions, a content can be summarised as any information, idea, thought, knowledge, or experience that is put in appropriate words and relevant to the communicative event. In communication this content is conveyed in the form of certain messages. A content of the message delivered by a sender also creates a strong impact on the success of communication. As it is discussed earlier, the contextual relevance of an utterance is necessary to understand a meaning, equally significant is the content or subject matter is. Effective communicative competence is inclusive of the situational appropriateness of a content. A content (subject matter) is always needed to minimize, elaborate, modify or change according to the needs, understanding level, backgrounds of the receivers, easiness or difficulty level of the topic to be communicated, and the context or situation in which it has to be communicated for the effective communicative competence "In linguistics and communication studies, appropriateness is the extent to which an utterance is perceived as suitable for a particular purpose, and a particular audience in a particular social context." This statement throws light on the fact that appropriateness is always perceived as per utterance, purpose, audience, and context. Thus, it can be stated that, if the content of communication is appropriate according to all the four aspects mentioned here, it can be

effective for successful communication. The ability to use any content by taking into consideration the above four aspects is the Communicative Competence of an individual. (Norquist Richard, 2018) [10]. In addition to the above four aspects, the content of communication also changes according to the types (formal/informal) and the register (Science, Law, Journalism, Literature etc.). To achieve the effective communication, irrespective of the people who are participating, the content should be appropriate, to the point, or elaborated as per the need of a communication in specific situation/context.

#### **For example, in a Corporate/ Official/ Business Context**

"This is to inform you all, that a meeting is scheduled tomorrow at 3 p.m." (Inadequate content)

"This is to inform you all, (employees working under Sales Department of the company), a meeting is scheduled tomorrow at 3 p.m., in presentation room, first floor." (adequate content)

Content – based appropriateness according to the Communicative Event (Conference) and Speech Act (vote of thanks/ introducing a speaker or resource person) is very important. In the context of conference as communicative event while performing the above said speech acts, what is expected from the speaker is providing the necessary and relevant information. i.e. while giving vote of thanks, a thank you note should be mentioned for all the considered people in brief. And while introducing a resource person, a speaker should concentrate on his professional achievements and not on the details about his personal life and or life style.

Content definitely plays a very firm role in any kind of presentation- oral or written. From the presentation of a sales report of a company to a speech at a condolence meeting, it is an appropriate content which strengthen the meaning or message in communication. To put it more correctly, from the formal, professional, technical, written communication to the informal, personal, interpersonal oral communication, the role of content is very inevitable. And so, the content- based appropriateness is vital to the achievement of communicative competence of an individual. Developing a content includes addition, subtraction, modification, keeping in mind the audience, receivers, listeners of the communication. This is a very important work of a sender, speaker or performer of any message. Learning to be more competent or skilful in presenting the information you have fits into the idea of Content- based appropriateness. When we are communicating, we need to know, how much information to be disclosed, to whom, where, and in what manner? This ability to manage the content (subject matter/ knowledge/ information) that we have according to the various types of situations or relationships we share with the receivers, automatically leads the Content -based appropriateness in communication. And this surely contribute to the effective Communicative Competence of an individual

#### **Conclusion**

To put the discussion in a nutshell, the present paper has tried to answer all the three questions raised with adequate analysis required. To conclude the discussion, it can be stated that, the success and effectiveness of any communication depends on nothing but a successful sender-receiver interactions. These sender- receiver interactions

