

Context, analysis and practice

Jason Anderson reveals the hidden paradigm in ELT.

The importance of context in helping language learners to understand new language (structural, functional or lexical) is acknowledged in most, if not all, recent approaches to language teaching. These include communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and text-based instruction (TBI). Whether the context be textual, situational or visual, it plays an important role in helping learners to decode the meaning, form and use of new language.

In view of this, it is curious that no explicit reference to context is provided in any of the most popular three-stage models currently used in teacher education to support the lesson planning of novice teachers. This includes the enduring PPP (Presentation–Practice–Production) model, more recent models, such as ESA (Engage–Study–Activate) and ARC (Authentic practice–Restricted practice–Clarification) and alternative models, such as TTT (Test–Teac–Test) or Willis’s (1996) *Framework for Task-based Learning*. This lack of attention paid to context may exacerbate a problem often noticed by teacher educators: novice teachers sometimes devote little attention to it or neglect it altogether. In light of this, I would like to share a simple three-stage model (Context–Analysis–Practice) that integrates context as a central component of new language lessons. It is one that I have found useful both on preservice training courses (for example, Cambridge CELTA; Trinity CertTESOL) and for the support and development of novice teachers. I describe it below not as an innovation, but as a reflection of shared notions of best practice—a ‘social fact’, as Freeman (2016: 16) would put it.

To document the existence and emergence of this social fact, I provide an overview of trends in the contextualisation of new language in global ELT coursebooks over the last 30 years, showing that the recent dominance of text-based contextualisation reflects a small but significant paradigm shift in how new language is introduced in coursebooks—a shift that has gone largely unnoticed, and that lends further support to the model proposed.

Changes in contextualisation trends in ELT coursebooks 1986–2016

I conducted an analysis of first editions of popular global coursebooks at intermediate (B1) level over the last 30 years to find out what types of contexts were occurring and how frequently. Four patterns of contextualisation were found:

- *Image-supported*—learners use images alone or images and text to understand context (e.g. matching text to images, ordering images, etc.).

- *Text-integrated*:—learners complete or manipulate text to raise awareness of new language (e.g. gapped text, sentence ordering activity, etc.).

- *Extensive text*—learners read/listen to complete texts (e.g. newspaper article, radio interview, etc., over 100 words), after which the new language is noticed and analysed.
- *No clear context*—example sentences or very short dialogue (under 30 words) without clear indication of why or by whom the text was produced.



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Figure 1 shows the frequency of these four context types. The first notable observation is the frequency of context; rarely did the coursebooks examined fail to provide it. However, the most striking observation concerns a clear change in the late 1990s, when image-supported and text-integrated contextualisation largely disappear and ‘extensive text’ contextualisation begins to dominate.

Since 2000, almost all the coursebooks examined have followed the same pattern: reading or listening skills are first practised through texts that integrate the new language features, after which these features are extracted, analysed and (almost always) practised, usually using both controlled (for example, cloze exercises) and freer (for example, communicative tasks) practice activities. This contrasts with early editions of *Headway*, in which, for instance, context was predominantly image-supported and receptive skills practice followed, providing consolidation of new language rather than context.

Thus, while context has always been an important part of the introduction of new language in global coursebooks, the recent trend has been towards more extensive, receptive skills contexts, possibly under the influences of text-based instruction (Burns 2012), and the increasing demand for English for academic purposes. These changes lend support

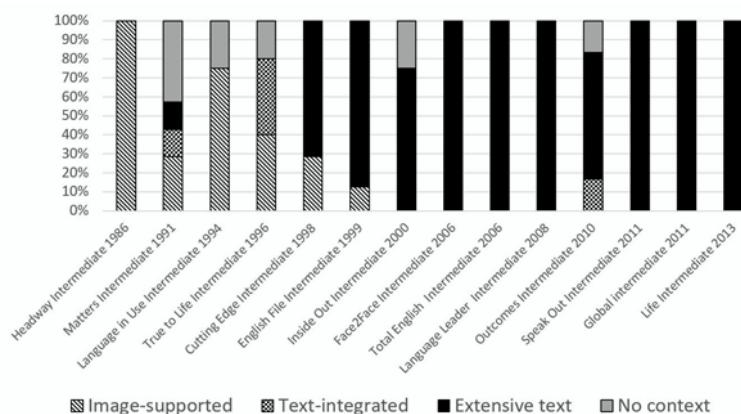


Figure 1: Context types in popular coursebooks

to the use of a 'context-oriented' model for lesson structuring, both in preservice and early in-service teacher education.

CAP as a model for structuring new language lessons

The model I propose includes three core stages; Context, Analysis and Practice, with an optional fourth stage; Evaluation, depending on the lesson type. The stages can be remembered using the mnemonics 'CAP' and 'CAPE'. Table 1 describes what may happen during each stage. It is described here as inclusively as possible of different approaches, recognising the importance of all types of context, allowing for both deductive and inductive analysis, and both controlled and freer practice (as in PPP) as deemed appropriate.

Used as shown in Table 1, CAP describes a typical order

Context	The context for learning is established through a text (listening, reading or video), a presented 'situation' (in the classroom or through audio-visual resources), or the involvement of learners. May be accompanied by activities that raise background schemata, check comprehension, or engage learners meaningfully in the text.
Analysis	Language features are noticed and analysed explicitly for meaning, form, pronunciation and usage as appropriate. This may include grammatical, functional, lexical or textual aspects of the language.
Practice	Learners practise using the language. This may include controlled and freer practice of the language analysed, scaffolded and independent text construction or a communicative task.
Evaluation (optional)	When practice involves text construction, self-, peer- and teacher-evaluation of the text are possible.

Table 1: The CAP/CAPE model

of stages in new language lessons, reflecting the dominant trend in global ELT coursebooks. As such, it provides clear guidance for trainee teachers when planning lessons. However, as indicated by the arrow, contingency for the reversal of the practice and analysis stages (CPA) has been included to reflect the order promoted in some models of TBLT (for example, Willis 1996) or emergent approaches to language teaching. It is acknowledged that such approaches would not normally endorse the pre-emptive selection of language features, and that the focus of the analysis would depend on challenges that emerge during the 'practice'

stage. Slight modifications to the model can allow for other lesson shapes. Task-supported language teaching can be described using a CAT model (Context, Analysis, Task) and the test-teach-test structure can be described using a ChAP model (Check, Analysis, Practice).

On preservice courses, CAP can be introduced first as a three-stage model in the C–A–P order described above. Like PPP, it follows the familiar logic of skill-learning theory that is common to many different types of learning (Anderson 2016), and is therefore easily assimilated into trainees' practice. It may then be complexified through the addition of Evaluation, and through other modifications, such as CAT, ChAP and CPA. Viewed from a sociocultural perspective, CAP serves as a scaffolding artefact, a guiding model in the early stages of training that can be gradually deconstructed, reworked and experimented with as trainees develop their own theories of learning and build their understanding of potential new language lesson shapes (Anderson 2017).

A cautious coda

In offering this model my primary intention is *not* to prescribe how either novice or experienced teachers should teach. I make no claims that this is necessarily the best way to structure new language lessons, nor do I intend to suggest that it is appropriate for structuring all lesson types. I offer it simply as a reflection of what appears to be the currently dominant paradigm for the introduction of new language, at least as expressed through global ELT coursebooks, the practices of those who use them, and the expectations of certain syllabi and educators in preservice teacher education. If we are to understand language teacher education as a social process in which novice teachers are introduced to the practices and social facts of their future discourse communities (Freeman 2016), I offer CAP as a potentially useful tool in this process.

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These changes lend support to the use of a 'context-oriented' model for lesson structuring, both in preservice and early in-service teacher education