Context Theory and the Foundation of Pragmatics

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The new theory of context (van Dijk, 2008, 2009) allows for a reformulation of the foundations of pragmatics defined as the (sub) discipline that accounts for the situational *appropriateness* of language use and discourse. Whereas pragmatics until now is a rather heterogeneous collection of directions of research, e.g., on speech acts, politeness and conversational postulates, its general domain is a specific study of the relationship between discourse and context, which does not collapse with sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics or anthropological linguistics. Thus, taking the crucial notion of appropriateness as the general normative notion defining the aims and domain of pragmatic theory, it is crucial to have an explicit theory of context that subsumes and explains the traditional appropriateness conditions, e.g., of speech act theories. It is shown that traditional concepts of contexts (e.g., as social parameters such as gender, class, age or 'race'), as used in sociolinguistics, are misguided because they presume a direct and objective relation between discourse and social reality. The new theory of context proposes that contexts are subjective definitions of the ongoingly relevant and dynamically changing properties communicative situation *as the participants represent them in context models in episodic memory*. These context models control all discourse production and comprehension and make sure that discourse structures (or their interpretations) are adapted to the communicative situation as it is interpreted by the participants. The structures of these context models provide the basis for the appropriateness conditions of discourse as communicative action, and at the same time provides the basis for new sociolinguistic approaches to variation, as well as for theories of register, style and genre—all defined in terms on relations between text, talk and context.

Keywords: discourse, language use, pragmatics, appropriateness, appropriateness conditions, context, context model, defining the situation, communicative situation, episodic memory, sociolinguistics.

1.   Introduction

In this paper we explore the relations between pragmatics and our new theory of context. Our argument will be that pragmatics needs an explicit and general foundation, a general theory of the relations between language use or discourse, on the one hand, and relevant properties of the social situation, on the other hand.

Our account of context provides just such a theory (*Van Dijk, 2008, 2009), because it coherently deals with the relevant theoretical notions that have been used so far in various approaches to pragmatics, such as language users and their identities and relations, face and politeness conditions, relevance as well as the general conditions of speech acts, such as the intentions and knowledge of the participants, among others. In other words,

the theory of context provides an explicit account for the *appropriateness* conditions of discourse, as is also one of the aims of pragmatic theories (*Fetzer, 2004, 2007; *Leech, 1983; *Levinson, 1989; *Mey, 1993; *Verschueren, 1996).

Crucial of our theory is that these appropriateness conditions are not objective properties of social situations, as is usually assumed in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, but subjective mental constructs of participants. Such *definitions of the communicative situation* will be made explicit in so-called *Context Models*.

2.　Towards a new theory of context

The traditional account of context in linguistics, discourse analysis, psychology and the social sciences assumed that language variation and discourse properties are directly conditioned by social properties of situations, such as age, gender or ethnicity of speakers.

Our recent work on context theory (Van Dijk, 2008, 2009) has shown that this assumption is misguided. Rather, *social situations and their properties do not directly influence text and talk at all*, but such influence is due to a sociocognitive interface consisting of 'definitions of the situation' of the participants. These subjective definitions of the communicative situations explain, among many other things, why the 'same' social situation may affect the production and comprehension of discourse of different participants in different ways. More generally, such a relative concept of context accounts for many other aspects of the relations between society, situations and discourse.

Context Models

Subjective definitions of communicative situations may be represented as *Context Models* in episodic memory (the personal, experiential part of Long Term Memory, see *Tulving, 1983). Such models consist of simple a schema of culturally variable categories used by language users in the interpretation and representation of the communicative situation, such as a spatiotemporal Setting, Participants and their different identities and roles, ongoing social Action, Goals and current Knowledge.

Context models must be relatively simple and hence are assumed to be organized by a schema that will be applicable to many situations, because language users are unable, mentally, to manage a Context Model consisting of dozens or hundreds of categories (*Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). For the appropriate production of all aspects of everyday discourse (informal conversations, work-related talk and text or service encounters), language users need to maintain the Context Model in working memory together with much other, grammatical and discursive information, such as clause structure, current proposition and current topic. For extra-ordinary cases or problems, language users will be able to have recourse to special categories, rules and constraints.

Context models are *dynamic* and adapt to previous parts of text or talk as well as to changes in the situation, such as changes of knowledge, goals and identities of, and rela-

tions between participants. As is the case for the more general experience models that control our everyday lives, also Context Models are ongoingly construed and adapted to the changing situation.

This is especially so because by definition the *knowledge* of the recipients is constantly being *updated* by the discourse and its possible inferences. This also explains why it is usually not appropriate to repeat the same proposition over and over again in a news report, lecture or even a conversation: The appropriateness conditions of the speech act of assertion require that 'S knows that *p*,' and 'H does not know that p.' This means that such conditions must hold in the Context Model—again, not as an objective condition of knowledge, but as subjectively construed (assumed) by the speaker. We see here how appropriateness conditions of speech acts may and should be formulated in the more general framework of Context Models.

Context models explain how language users *adapt* their discourse to the current social and communicative environment, and define the notion of *appropriateness* (see also *Fetzer, 2004, 2007). In other words, Context Models constitute the basis of a theory of pragmatics. Hence we may also call them *pragmatic models*.

In a strategic theory of discourse production (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983), Context Models exercise a fundamental global and local control function in the way properties of discourse are produced, in such a way that the discourse remains appropriate in the current situation.

As suggested above, Context Models are a specific type of more general *experience models*, that is, models that represent our ongoing conscious experiences in everyday life and that control our ongoing actions. Context models are strategically construed in social situations as soon as one or more participants (form the goal to) engage in verbal interaction or communication. In this process of Context Model construction, participants strategically (but generally automatically) analyze the current social situation, and select those properties that are relevant for appropriate verbal interaction, such as the speaker's social identity or role, goals and assumptions about the (lack of) knowledge of recipients. That is, a theory of Context Models embodies a theory of *relevance*.

Context models are not built and updated from scratch during a conversation. Especially in institutional discourse, they may partly be *prepared previously*, as we do with a lecture: we already know the setting, participants, action, and goal, and knowledge of the participants and will adapt our actual discourse to feedback from the real communicative situation—such as nonverbal signals or questions from an audience.

Context models and discourse processing

In discourse production, Context Models take semantic information as input from episodic mental models about personal, biographical experiences, situations, events or actions, as in storytelling (*Neisser & Fivush, 1994), or from models of social and political events, such as in news discourse (*Van Dijk, 1988), or more general, 'semantic' knowledge, as in expository discourse. Just as the Context Models, also these semantic

event models are socially based, but subjective interpretations/definitions of social events (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

Note though that these models of personal experiences or public events are *semantic* models, and not *pragmatic* models: they account for the way participants subjectively interpret or represent the events or situation *talked about* or referred to, and do not represent the situation *in which* participants are now interacting or communicating.

This well-known but sometimes blurred distinction between semantics and pragmatics is important to maintain, even when semantic and pragmatic models may sometimes overlap. This happens when participants explicitly speak about or refer to aspects of the current communicative situation in which they participate, as we know from the use of *deictic expressions* such as *I, me, mine, you, yours,* etc.*; now, today, yesterday, past, future, modern; here, there,* etc.

Pragmatic Context Models control *which* and *how* such semantic information of semantic models should be *appropriately formulated* in discourse. That is, Context Models control the selection of speech acts, genres, overall topics (semantic macrostructures), local semantic strategies (such as level, explicitness, precision, etc. of descriptions), as well as the syntactic, lexical and ultimately phonetic, visual or otherwise semiotic expression.

For instance, if the social relation between the participants is (defined by the speaker to be) formal, the Context Model will tend to select formal forms of address, pronouns and specific topics instead of others, as expression of specific speech acts (say requests instead of demands) rather than others, and as part of a given discourse genre, rather than another (for instance a speech in parliament rather than a phone call to MPs).

Context constraints and discourse *genres* are closely related: For instance the genre of a news report in the press is contextually controlled by spatiotemporal dimensions of the setting category of the Context Model (a specific day/date of writing, a location of the journalist), the Social Identities or roles of the participants (editor, reporter, correspondent, etc.; readers, etc.), the Intentions of the writer (to inform the public), relevant current Knowledge (about recent news events, foreign policy, etc.) and possibly his or her ideologies (professional, social, political, etc.). Many properties of the news report itself are controlled by such contextual constraints *as represented by the participant journalists.*

The theoretical significance of Context Models

The theory of Context Models, thus summarized, explains many aspects of language use that hitherto were ignored, dealt with in separate theories, or accounted for in ad hoc terms. Most fundamentally, the theory accounts for the way language use and discourse are embedded in, and adapted to, the environment and the everyday lives of language users as social and cultural members and citizens.

More specifically, the theory shows how a pragmatic and sociolinguistic theory of language use is to be related to the semiotics, semantics and grammar of language:

- Classical *speech act theory* and the appropriateness conditions of speech acts are can now be coherently accounted for in terms of the schematic structure of Context Models.
- The subjective nature of Context Models also rejects the determinism of traditional *sociolinguistic* approaches to language variation in terms of fixed social 'variables'.
- *Discourse genres* are not only, and not so much, defined by discursive properties, but rather by aspects of the social situation (such as a parliamentary Setting, roles as MPs of participants, political action, goals and specialized knowledge and ideologies of MPs as defining characteristics of the genre of parliamentary debates) and hence should be accounted for by Context Models.
- Finally, at the local level of sentence production and comprehension, Context Models control the uses of specific lexical items, syntactic constructions, rhetorical figures as well as many of the details of local semantics, such as which information should be asserted, reminded, presupposed or left implicit, or the level (general vs. specific), amount of detail or degree of granularity of descriptions, among many other properties of discourse.

In sum, an explicit theory of context plays a fundamental role in completing the theory of discourse with a dimension that establishes how language use adapts to its social and cultural environment in the everyday lives of social members.

In the cognitive psychology of discourse processing, as well as in much classical AI, research was initially focused on lexical, syntactic and semantic sentence production and comprehension. This research was later extended to also account for the processing of (more complex) text and talk. However, with the exception of some aspects of discourse, such as deictic expressions, context and situational appropriateness of discourse were largely ignored until recent work on Context Modeling, which however defines context in very restricted ways (for instance in terms of time or space). In psychology, discourse processing was studied in the laboratory and seldom in real life situations, or in highly restricted forms of context, such as Question-Answer interaction.

3.   Context theory and pragmatics

It has repeatedly suggested above that the new theory of context offers a general foundation for pragmatics defined as the study of language use and its relation to the social environment. Since such a definition also holds for sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and critical discourse analysis, among other directions of research, we may want to define pragmatics in more specific terms, so that it does not dissolve into what decades ago was called the wastepaper basket of linguistics. One way to do so is by limiting pragmatics to the (normative) study of speech acts, or illocutionary acts, and their appropriateness conditions (*Searle, 1969). Similarly, pragmatics has been associated specifically with the theory of politeness and more generally with conditions of impression or face

management in conversation—thus overlapping with Conversation Analysis (Brown & Levinson, 1987). A different perspective again is offered by the study of conversational postulates and maxims by *Grice (1989), although some of these do not pertain to context conditions, but to properties of text and talk: truth, style (conciseness, etc.).

We see that what today counts as pragmatics is not so much defined by a coherent theory of basic concepts, but rather by a rather heterogeneous collection of approaches that set themselves apart from formal sentence grammars, much in the same way as was the case for sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and conversation analysis in around 1970.

If there is one notion that combines many of these approaches, and that is definitely different from grammatical notions, it is the concept of (inter)action, sometimes related to other cognitive or social properties of language users, such as knowledge, intentions, face and social identity.

These various notions may be combined and further extended by associating them to the *structures of communicative situations,* featuring such categories as time, place, participants and their roles and mutual relations, ongoing actions, as well as the intentions or knowledge of the participants, among others. In other words, in such a broader perspective pragmatics is the study of the way the structures of communicative situations influence, and are influenced by, properties of discourse or language use.

However, as suggested above, this may also be a definition of sociolinguistics, and we may therefore restrict pragmatics, as is the case for semantic and syntax, and thus in line with the theory of semiotics, to a specific dimension of these relationships, namely that of *appropriateness.*

As is the case for syntactic well-formedness and semantic meaningfulness and referentiality, pragmatics more specifically deals with the normative knowledge of language users about what discourse properties are (more or less) appropriate in specific communicative situations. It is this normative knowledge of participants about communicative events that is being made explicit in a theory of context and its relation to text and talk. That is, unlike sociolinguistics, pragmatics and a theory of context is not only studying the social dimensions of social situations and their influence on language variation, but how language users define or construe them—on the basis of their pragmatic knowledge. Also, pragmatics is not limited to an account of language (grammar) variation, but studies all aspects of text or talk that may influence its appropriateness.

Of course, just as sociolinguistics also deals with the way sounds and syntax may actually vary in different speech communities, there is also an empirical basis of pragmatics in the *sociolinguistic* study of how appropriateness may have different conditions in different communities. Indeed, promises or commands, politeness or conversational maxims and their conditions may vary in different communities.

Similarly, we may have a *psycholinguistic* study of the actual cognitive processes involved in the construction, application or activation of Context Models, and how Context Models actually control all levels and dimensions of text and talk.

Of course, today, some of these distinctions may have become less relevant in

increasingly multidisciplinary research, in which distinctions between formal, normative, empirical, linguistic, sociological, anthropological and psychological approaches tend to merge or disappear, for instance in such transdisciplines as discourse studies, semiotics or cognitive science—as well as an integrated 'social science' that still needs to be integrated with cognitive science. It is therefore rather for practical reasons that we define (and hence limit) pragmatics to the study of appropriateness, that is, the study of the rules that adapt text and talk to the constraints of their social environment.

4. Contextual conditions of discursive appropriateness

Let us finally briefly examine some of the structures of discourse that are controlled by the ways language users construe their environment as dynamic Context Models. We already have given some examples above, but may do so more systematically, as follows. We shall do so by selecting some prominent categories of Context Models and summarize what discourse categories they control.

Setting

Spatiotemporal information defines language users' ongoing awareness of where they are, what time or part of the day it is, what date or part of the year, and so on. Information in this category may be reduced by the usual seven-plus-or-minus-two constraint on working memory. For instance, *time* awareness is usually limited to a handful of culturally variable scalar categories, such as seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years and centuries in much of western culture.

Such categories multiply control text and talk, such as beginnings and endings of conversations and sessions, time one may have the floor, the day one writes a letter or a news report, the month or year one gives classes or the time of government or legislation, and so on.

The same is true for *space* and *place*, which also may be graded from close to far from the speaker—right here, in this room, house/building, street, neighborhood, city, state/province, country, region/continent and planet. These categories not only define the interpretation of fuzzy location deictics (such as 'here'), but also many types of descriptions, for instance in the news, also metaphorically, as is the case for talking about people or parties being on the Left or on the Right—which obviously presupposes the position (both spatially as well as ideologically) of the Speaker, and hence his or her Context Model.

Participants

It goes without saying that the contextual representation of participants, as well as their social identities, roles and relationships control many properties of text and talk. In most institutional or ritual discourse, only specific participants may use or engage in specific genres, speech acts, topics, styles, intonations or words. Categories of gender, age

or ethnicity—as socially construed!—in most cultures control many aspect of discourse, such as who may talk when and where and with whom, about what, in what style or into-nation. Most work in sociolinguistics and ethnography has documented the role of these constraints. Politicians, journalists, teachers, scholars, police officers, and so on for all 'symbolic' occupations of society have access to specific genres (laws, news, lessons, arti-cles, etc.), speech acts (commands), lexical style (specialized words), more or less formal syntax, and so on. Social roles such as mothers, fathers, lovers, friends or enemies sim-ilarly may allow or limit specific speech acts, topics or styles, which would be inappro-priate for others. Social relations of power and solidarity, including those of position, sta-tus, fame, and so on, have been shown to multiply control nearly all levels and dimen-sions of talk and text, as is the case for politeness, deference or authority in the selection of speech acts, genres, topics, style and so on. In sum, a theory of context providing insight into the possibly relevant kinds of participants and participation structure is cru-cial for a pragmatic theory of appropriateness.

Action

Modern pragmatics was founded with Austin's slogan that we *do* things when we use words (*Austin, 1962). As was reminded above, action is the central concept of prag-matics, and also a central category in the way language users construe communicative sit-uations as Context Models.

Obviously, such action, first of all is the action of discourse 'itself,' variously described as verbal interaction, conversation, talk, text or communication—possibly fur-ther differentiated in terms of locutionary, formulating, meaning, referential or illocution-ary acts, among others, as well as their different forms, formats and modulations (shout-ing, whispering, etc.).

Beyond these familiar distinctions, it should be recalled that people may engage in many social, political and cultural actions, at many levels, by engaging in such verbal interaction, such as discriminate, denounce, manipulate, seduce, govern, and so on.

The point is that each of these speech acts and other social actions control (and are controlled by) specific discourse structures. As we know, promises and predictions require a discourse semantics of future actions and events. Threats presuppose specific relations between participants, and are typically expressed with reference to future nega-tive action, specific words, pitch or volume as well as specific face- and bodywork. People may discriminate by using racist slurs or by representing Others negatively in the news. Manipulation may control the management of explicit or implicit information in discourse, whereas seduction is being accomplished by a complex gamma of speech acts (compliments, etc.), genres, topics, style, intonation, etc.

Thus, as is the case for participants, their actions are systematically related to what they say and how they say it for these discourses (or these actions) to be appropriate.

Intentions, plans and goals

Traditionally, actions are defined as goal-directed human behavior or—in less behaviorist terms—as intentional conduct. For all practical purposes, goals, purposes and intentions should be analyzed in cognitive terms, for instance as mental models of planned or observed conduct, although the notion of 'intention' is controversial in some contemporary interactionist approaches to conversation. In our view, as well as in that of most cognitive scientists, discourse and (inter)action in general must be accounted for also in the cognitive terms of goals, intentions or plans. We therefore assume that Context Models also have an important Intention category that represents what current action language users are now engaging in, and what they want to obtain with their action/discourse. Conversely, recipients need to attribute intentions to speakers in order to be able to understand their utterance as a specific kind of action. Obviously, such an attributed intention need not be the same as the intention of the speaker, and hence misunderstanding may be the result.

Since the criterion of all context categories is that they may systematically influence properties of text and talk, also the Intention category must control such properties— besides being the cognitive basis of currently performed actions. In discourse intentions are expressed in a large number of global and global strategies, for instance when newspaper stories provide examples, quotations or figures with the intention to be more credible or to discredit the president. Many communicative actions can only be defined in terms of the goals speakers want to reach, as is the case for persuasion and manipulation. Similarly, speakers may make their intentions explicit when problems of interpretation (may) arise: "I mean..", or "I did not mean that".

Knowledge

Finally, of the cognitive dimensions of participants as represented in their Context Models, *knowledge* plays a central role. Speech acts, such as assertions and questions, require that speakers and hearers have or lack specific knowledge.

More generally, discourse is unthinkable without speakers making assumptions about the knowledge of the recipients. They do so by means of fast strategic heuristics, such as assuming that recipients of the same epistemic community know more or less the same as what they know as speakers, except recent personal experiences (as in personal stories) or public events (as in news). Much of the semantics of discourse is controlled by such knowledge management, as is the case for implications, entailment and presuppositions.

Such control also shows up in grammar, for instance in the use of (in)definite pronouns, and in many discursive moves, such as reminders, such as "As I told you yesterday…", or "As we reported yesterday…." When such epistemic conditions are not satisfied, interaction problems may occur, and recipients may ask "Whom are you talking about?" to resolve such problems. Within a broader epistemological perspective, we may thus empirically define social knowledge as the beliefs that are presupposed in public discourse.

5. The relevance of context theory for pragmatics

From this brief discussion of a number of central categories that define Context Models, we see that such models control many properties of discourse. Summarizing, we have found that by these constraints the wrong person, with the wrong role, may say the wrong things to the wrong persons, in the wrong way, at the wrong time or the wrong place. In more sophisticated terms, this means that the domain of pragmatics includes all conditions that define the degree of (in)appropriateness of any aspect of text or talk that may vary, that is, chosen by the speaker or writer.

We have seen that the classical conditions of the appropriateness of speech acts are defined in terms of the categories of Context Models, such as what the speaker and the hearer intend, want or know, as well as the (power or other) relations between participants as is the case for commands. Instead of a brief series of abstract conditions, context theory more explicitly and more empirically reformulates such conditions in terms of the properties of mental models, and how these control actual discourse production.

Theories of politeness and deference, for instance in terms of the positive or negative 'face' of participants, may within this broader framework be reformulated in terms of social properties and relations of participants *as defined by the participants themselves*. Thus, it is not so much what infringes the interests or the rights of recipients that defines actual negative politeness, but rather what speakers and hearers define such to be the case —obviously under social and cultural constraints of the community. This also means that context theories must feature specific social properties of, and relations between participants, beyond those of power or status, in order to account for culturally variable subtleties of deference and politeness.

We already suggested that several aspects of Grice's maxims and conversational postulates are not so much pragmatic as semantic and stylistic. Similarly, implicatures are inferences of meaning, and hence semantic, although their conditions may be contextual.

Our theory of context is at the same time a much more elaborate theory of relevance than current approaches abstractly defining contexts in terms of set of propositions (*Sperber, 1995). Rather, the explicit definition of what for participants is relevant in a communicative situation is provided by their Context Models. These models have internal schematic and categorical structure, and are empirically grounded in a theory of episodic memory, and of how such models control all aspects of discourse production and comprehension. In this respect, our theory is at the same time a pragmatic, as well as a sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic theory.

Other applications of context theory

Context theory accounts for much more than for speech acts, politeness and relevance.

First, such a theory is the basis of a **theory of genre**, because genres are not only defined in discourse properties, but rather in terms of situational parameters such as set-

tings, participant properties and relations, type of activity, goals and knowledge. Thus, as we saw a above, a parliamentary debate is defined in terms of the place of the parliament as building, the time of the session, participants who are politicians, MPs and party members, and related as government vs. opposition, who have the goal to make political decisions, laws, etc.

Within a broad conception of pragmatics, this also means that genres come with conditions of appropriateness, for instance the ways own party members or opposition members are addressed in the British House of commons, or that news reports in the press generally should not feature personal experiences of reporters, or that editorials on the other should feature opinions of editors, and so on for all genres.

Secondly, context theory accounts for **style** and **register**, and more generally for the conditions of rule-based **language variation**, such as the use of more formal style (lexicon, syntax) in parliament, or a grammatical register that prefers modal verbs (we must, we should, etc.), plural pronouns (we vs. them), future verbs (as in policies and promises), and so on. Personal and social style signal personal or social properties of the speaker, such as her personality, authority or social position, as well as the relations with the audience, as is also the case for politeness and deference.

Though distinct, style, register and genre are thus intricately related manifestations of the same underlying Context Models, all contributing to making text or talk more or less appropriate in the communicative situation.

Whereas style and register usually are defined for grammatical and discursive *form*, Context Models also control *meaning*, such as global **topics** that are more or less appropriate (obligatory, possible, taboo) for specific situations, genres or speakers. Although informal conversations in principle have few constraints beyond those of general cultural ones, depending on the category and role of the participants, most ritual and institutional discourse is rather strictly limited to specific topics. News must be about important recent social or political events, scholarly articles about scientific topics, doctors' consults about medical problems of the patient, and so on. Again, deviation here is not ungrammatical or meaningless but inappropriate, and hence falls under the domain of pragmatics.

Even **local semantics moves** may be controlled by Context Models. In some situations it is appropriate to be succinct, in others one must be detailed and elaborate. In some situations one may be vague and general, whereas in others one must be precise and specific—again often associated with specific genres. We have seen that contextual knowledge management is at the basis of the complex organization of what is asserted, presupposed, or reminded in discourse, and what is said explicitly or implicitly, because implicitness presupposes that recipients are able to make intended inferences. Appropriateness is again the normative notion that applies here: For instance, being elaborate in a situation where succinctness is required, as we know from Grice's maxims, is an inappropriate form of knowledge management.

We may wonder whether the same holds for discourse **schemas** or **superstructures**. Opening or ending a conversation without a greeting or leave-taking, respectively, may be

defined as inappropriate, in a sense, as is the case for a news report that does not tell about recent events, or does not quote news actors.

Yet, we here are at the boundaries of pragmatics and appropriateness, because in these cases such categories may be defined as normatively obligatory properties of these genres, so that there is no *variation* involved. In the same way, sentences without verbs are formally ungrammatical, and not (in)appropriate. A story without a Complication is not an inappropriate story, but not a story at all. An argument without a conclusion is not an argument and not an inappropriate argument or a fallacy.

In sum, conventional schemas or formats of specific genres are obligatory in some culture, and hence rather should be described in terms of well-formedness rules than in terms of degrees of appropriateness.

Finally, **rhetorical** structures such as metaphors, euphemisms or irony and other moves and strategies used to enhance the intended effects of discourse may be examined for their context dependency and hence their appropriateness. As is the case for style, the use of such 'figures of speech' indeed depends on the context, such as the beliefs of the recipients, on the one hand, as well as on the social properties and relations of the participants and their goals. Irony and euphemism are common moves in the management of negative and positive face of recipients, both as persons, as well as of group members —as we also know from the use of racist labels and slurs. Metaphors may be used to make complex, abstract meanings more concrete, and hence are typically used in scholarly discourse and popularization literature. Contextually they thus need to be defined in terms of the knowledge of the participants, and hence as epistemic moves.

6. Concluding remark

In sum, besides the 'obligatory' structures of sentences and discourses, contexts and their categories appear to control virtually all variable structures at the level of phonology, syntax, lexicon, semantics, stylistics, rhetoric, genre theory and so on. Indeed, the form and content of each discourse needs to be adapted to the social environment as it is defined by the participants, and on the basis of social and cultural norms, that is in terms of Context Models. Any property and variation of text and talk that is thus controlled by Context Models may be described as more or less appropriate, and hence as within the scope of a broadly conceived, empirical pragmatic theory.

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