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*Parameters of Context: from Theory to Model and Application*

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Context as a concept is now regaining prominence in many disciplines as it is put to work in more diverse domains from anthropology through to linguistics and artificial intelligence (Hasan, 1999). Without a strong contribution from context, the description of semantic behaviour is not enough for the solution of real world problems to which we bring our models. Most recently, this area of research has been given a new urgency by the pressure of computer science and the model building that is required in this area. While it has typically been conceded that context is fundamental to meaning, it had been, and in some quarters still is, considered too amorphous for scientific investigation. Indeed, unless the bounds of context are very carefully defined, there is certainly a risk that it becomes a description of everything (see for example Cook 1990). Within linguistics this concern has often been addressed by reducing the concept of context to the micro scale of the surrounding words or sounds (what we might call co-text). The obverse of this is the Ethnographic approaches, including Hymes (1962) and later Duranti (1992) and others, who have conceptualized context as the framework of arrangements that pertain to the understanding of the whole communicative event. The formalization of a level of context as part of a poly-systemic representation of language has long been emphasized in the work of systemic functional linguists, especially Halliday and Hasan (e.g. 1985). Their approach can be traced back to J.R. Firth's early collaborations with the anthropologist Malinowski (Butt and Wegener, 2008 but also Butt, 2001). These linguists have worked to systematize the concept, and provide a comprehensive account of the relations of context and text (Hasan, 1999).

Because systemic functional linguistics has tended to incorporate context as a stratum within the theory and shows a proliferation of different models of context such as those of Hasan (1999) and Butt (1999/2004), this approach makes an ideal setting to test the movement of a concept from theory to model and application. The central concern of this thesis is a consideration of the changes that occur when we move from theoretical description to modelling and on to application for real world problems. In so doing I consider briefly some of the historical antecedents of the systemic functional approach to context, the representation in theory of the concept of context as well as some of the central concerns that need to be addressed by any model of context. Hasan's (1999) model of context as it has been adapted by Butt (1999/2004) is then applied in an emergency care environment and consideration is given to some of the challenges that this presents. These challenges show new directions for models of context and ultimately for the theorisation of the concept.