

It's Nice to Meet You: Contextual Configuration on Formal and Informal Introductions

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Abstract

The discourse of introduction is a discourse exploiting full of contextual meanings. By means of two approaches, viz. situational context and contextual configuration, this paper aims to delve deeper into the discourse of formal and informal introductions in everyday English conversation. Both discourses are taken from the book *Everyday Conversation*. The data were analyzed from two paradigmatic approaches, i.e., situational context with the components of field, tenor, and mode, and contextual configuration with the three main maxims of OOI (obligatory, optional, and iteration). Based on the careful analysis, the findings demonstrate that both introduction discourses, whether formal or informal ones, are built on the foundation of two types of elements, namely obligatory and optional, which are interwoven within a potential common structure of the following contextual configuration: (OE). [IR¹IG¹IG²]. (IE)(context-dependent) > [(R)¹(RC)]. Ultimately, through this paradigmatic approach to the discourse of introduction, it arrives at an understanding that the relationship between language and its contextual use is that of mutuality; shall language need context in the process of interpretation, the context ipso facto needs language to manifest per se.

Keywords: contextual configuration, potential common structure, situational context

1. Introduction

Language is a human attempt to abstract meaningful concepts through a set of sign systems, generally represented in the form of language sounds, as a means of communicating between one another (Kramsch & Widdowson, 1998; Yule, 2020). Communication at this level has several functions, including one as a means of conveying or transferring information (informative transactional), strengthening social ties through conversation (interpersonal)¹, as well as a form of realisation of self-expression by which language, in this context, has an imaginative function, i.e., aesthetic and religious rites (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 16). Such paradigm of language functions can certainly be of difference, depending on from which perspective it departs; for instance, shall it use the perspective of the social-semiotic aspect, it certainly arrives at the Hallidayan school of thought by means of its systemic-functional linguistics² involving the three language functions mentioned earlier. However, shall it use a broader lens (e.g., culture), then language also acts as a means of embodying self-identity or personal existence—whether in relation to group identity, community identity, or cultural identity (Bucholtz & Zimman, 2018, p. 242; Gee, 2014, p. 2). Although this function of language is rather dilemmatic, biased, and multi-interpreted, at one concrete point it is undeniable that language is a highly meaningful essence in everyday life.

In its application in everyday life, these various language functions overlap each other. It certainly cannot be considered that an utterance has merely one language function, given that it is often realised in dynamic spatiotemporal circumstances. As someone has a conversation, surely there are several goals to achieve—whether as a means of conveying information or merely making small talk. Ergo, in addition to taking into account the linguistic elements contained in an utterance, it is of importance to consider other elements surrounding it. These other elements beyond linguistic aspects are generally categorised into two major parts, viz. situational context – cultural context (borrowing Malinowski's term in Halliday, 1989, p. 5–7) or situational context – intertextuality context (Ibid., p. 47). Instead of being considered objectively, the context surrounding these discourses or texts often, if not necessarily always, depends on the communal collective interpretation by the members of society—otherwise known as intersubjectivity (Dijk, 2008, p. 17). In other words, the production of single discourse with the same context can be interpreted differently by one community group to another.

In conversational discourse, the element of context, either situational or cultural one, becomes crucial and salient to exist so as to capture the essence of the meaning intertwined within (Deppermann & Pekarek Doehler, 2021; Raclaw, 2010)—relating to what is discussed, who is involved, and what kind of media is used in the conversation. These three, in a simple elaboration, are summarized in a set of configurational systems commonly known as contextual configuration³. To date, there are still relatively small number of research related to contextual configuration (Al-Shara'h, 2021; Lukin, 2008), especially in the context of introductions. Nevertheless, as mentioned previously, conversational discourse relies heavily on this concept. A study set in the context of mobile phone conversations (Arminen & Weilenmann, 2009) complexly illustrates how shifting forms of social interaction can be recognized through an in-depth analysis of

contextual configurations—the action responses shown by a caller are strongly influenced by the context of the situation and the verbal clues indicated by the interlocutors. Furthermore, in another study, the contextual configuration of a text is a key element in building the consistent construction of the text as well as providing access to the readers to grasp the coherence (Ali & Laila, 2015).

Departing from the assumption that the concept of contextual configuration has a substantial share in shaping a deeper understanding in a conversational discourse—especially those focusing on 1) the elements of *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*; and 2) the elements forming the text structure—and considering that such concept is still minimally explored, a study on the concept of contextual configuration in the context of doing formal and informal introductions is necessary. This study aims to examine two primary aspects related to the practice of formal and informal introductions, *viz.* 1) situational context, including *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*; and 2) text structure incorporating obligatory elements and optional elements in formulating a potential common/general structure. By considering these two, the findings are expected to provide a deeper understanding—both in the theoretical and factual-empirical fields—of the concept of contextual configuration in pragmatic discourse. They are also expected to be a reference or teaching materials for pragmatics and conversational discourse analysis, especially that of systemic functional linguistics.

1.1 Situational Context: An Approach to Discourse Structure

In studying a discourse, not only does it require the internal linguistic elements, it also demands an intertwining meanings derived from the surrounding environment of the discourse—in other words, the construction of the text behind the creation of the discourse or otherwise referred to as discourse's *raison d'être* (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, 2009; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; van Leeuwen, 2005). In general, this (con)text construction is divided into two major parts, *viz.* the situational context and the cultural context (Halliday, 1989, p. 6). The former refers to aspects of the immediate environment surrounding the discourse while the latter refers to a broader range of values passed down from generation to generation, e.g., traditions, ways of life, mindsets, normative values, customary values, to name a few. In the early stages of its development, such situational context is rarely used or applicable for a general discourse analysis, given that it was formulated by Malinowski as an additional explanation in describing that “language as function in context” as observing the Kiriwinian language (Eggins, 2004). It was the dominant contribution of Firth (1957) and Hymes (1972) promoting and developing the concept of situational context—the former focused more on general linguistics with his four famous formulations: participants, actions, other relevant environmental elements, and discourse influence while the latter is more on the communication science with his eight formulations: message content and form, setting, participants, purpose and influence, key elements, intermediaries, genre, and interaction norms (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Lón, 2007). From these three figures, Halliday then brilliantly summarized all these elements into three components, i.e., field, tenor, and mode.

- *Field*, or often referred to as the concept of *ideational meta function*, incorporates two elements of meaning, namely experiential and logical meanings. Experiential meaning is reflected in the form of transitivity of agency in sentences, the process or flow of discourse, participants, and the dynamic environment around discourse. This concept is also commonly known as the ‘lexico-semantic system’ focusing on the element of “what is going on in the discourse”.
- *Tenor*, or often referred to as the concept of *interpersonal meta function*, consists of two elements: system of mood and modality. Therefore, this concept explores the intertwining meanings related to 1) what roles are played by the discourse participants; 2) how these roles are interconnected in the discourse; and 3) how the system of power relations works between one participant and another. In other words, the concept of tenor simply focuses on the element of “who is involved in the discourse”.
- *Mode*, or often referred to as the concept of *textual meta function*, highly focuses on the textual system building the discourse structure, including textual aspects such as cohesion (both grammatical and lexical), lexical chains, and lexical tokens. In this component, the form of linguistic expressions becomes the major element: 1) whether the discourse is delivered by means of oral or written expressions; 2) how the delivery process is performed; and 3) how the structure (genre) of discourse is developed. In short, it leads to “how the discourse is constructed”.

(Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)

In addition to the three components elaborated above, Hasan (1989, pp. 53–55) in her elaboration also offers an approach to analyzing a discourse in terms of its context. Albeit somewhat similar to Halliday's concept of situational context, her contextual configuration scheme rather focuses on the structure of the text; ergo, the main purpose of its elaboration lies in the process of formulating the structure of a text which is then commonly known as the ‘a potential common/general structure’.

1.2 Contextual Configuration: Formulating a Potential Common Structure

The theory of contextual configuration emerges as an approach to analyzing the structural integrity of a text or discourse. Discourse necessarily has an element of impartial coherence in its structure (Dijk, 2019; Jiang et al., 2021). Certainly, the structure in this regard leads to the sequence or syntagmatic relation of discourse units or parts—e.g., in the Aristotelian tradition, the discourse structure is divided into three major parts, *viz.* opening, content, and closing incorporating *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* (Abusalim et al., 2022; Tan & Al-Rikaby, 2022). The elements outside these three can thereby be said to be optional; they may exist or not. As for this structure, the concept of contextual configuration postulates at least five maxims necessarily be considered in scrutinizing a discourse, namely:

1. **What** elements are **obligatory**.
2. **What** elements **might** occur.

3. **In which part** the elements are **obligatory**.
4. **In which part** the elements **might** occur.
5. **How often** the elements are likely to occur.

(Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 56).

Employing the five maxims, contextual configurations are able to predict the obligatory elements (number 1) and optional ones (number 2) in a text, the order in which such elements (number 3 and 4) occur in the text, and the possible repetition (reiteration) of such elements (number 5). So as to understand in detail these five maxims, it is necessary to present the following illustration of a conversation:

Figure 1. Discourse of Trade (Sale and Purchase)

SR	→	C: Can I have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please?
SC	→	V: Yes, anything else? C: No, thanks.
S	→	V: That'll be dollar forty.
P	→	C: Two dollars.
PC	→	V: Sixty, eighty, two dollars. Thank you.

Note:

- SR = Sale Request
- SC = Sale Compliance
- S = Sale
- P = Purchase
- PC = Purchase Closure

The sequential or syntagmatic order of the five elements is transcribed as $SR \wedge SC \wedge S \wedge P \wedge PC$, where the sign \wedge signifies the order of each element.

Table 1. Discourse Situational Context (Sale and Purchase)

Field	:	Economic transaction; purchase of goods; fruits
Tenor	:	Transaction agents; hierarchical relationship; the power relation of buyer is higher than that of seller; social proximity—rather distant
Mode	:	Language role—complementary; channel—voice/sound; medium—spoken accompanied by visual contact

(Halliday & Hasan, 1989, pp. 59–60)

Based on the elaboration above, the sale-purchase discourse in Text 1 has at least five mandatory elements including SR, SC, S, P, and PC. Given that all elements are mandatory components in any sale-purchase discourse, it can be inferred that the potential common structure of any sale-purchase discourse must involve all five elements. Shall one of the elements be missing—meaning that it does not occur within the discourse, the interaction process, thus, does not fulfil the elements of sale-purchase discourse. For instance, once we remove one element from Text 1, e.g., SC (sale compliance), the interaction then seems very rigid and cold. Meanwhile, the role that should be fulfilled by a seller is to provide the best and friendliest service possible to a buyer. Albeit the possible occurrence in real life, omitting the SC element in a sale-purchase transaction is highly unlikely. In short, to grasp and comprehend a discourse or text as a whole, the two aforementioned paradigms are of necessity, namely 1) the situational context embodied in the form of *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*; and 2) contextual configuration postulating four maxims: obligatory elements, optional elements, element sequence, and the possibility of element reiteration.

1.3 Formal and Informal Parameters

In conversational discourse, formal and informal parameters can be measured by means of both the situational context and the discourse structure. Firstly, the lexico-semantic preferences in the *field* can be used to distinguish between formal and informal discourse. In formal discourse, language variation is generally technical whereas in informal one it is more general and casual (Leech & Svartvik, 2013). Some examples of word choices (diction) presented hereinafter may further illustrate the difference between formal and informal contexts, e.g., *aid* formal – *help* informal, *commence* formal – *begin* informal, *conclude* formal – *end* informal. The use of interrogative modifiers—either negative modifiers as in *we have met before, haven't we?* or positive modifier as in *we haven't met before, have we?*—is also prevalent and often found in informal contexts, not in formal ones (Collins & Hollo, 2016; Oresnik, 2007). Secondly, in terms of *tenor*, formal contexts tend to show hierarchical interpersonal relationship, i.e., the role and social status of one participant is higher than another; hence, politeness is automatically prioritized (Culpeper & Gillings, 2018). Meanwhile, informal contexts tend to show equal and dynamic interpersonal relationship. The element of politeness is indeed considered important albeit not a top priority—especially as the social closeness between the participants is high. Finally, in terms of *mode*, formal and informal contexts tend to be determined by the sentence structure. In formal context, the sentence structure used tends to be more complex and complete (Anthony, 2018; Flippo et al., 2021) whereas in informal context it tends to be simpler (Brown & Miller, 1991).

2. Method

This study used two texts of formal and informal introductions derived from the book *Everyday Conversation* (U.S. Bureau of International Informational Programs, 2000). The sentences in each text were numerically labelled to ease the identification process. Considering that the main objectives of this study focused on two approaches, viz. situational context and contextual configuration, the stages of data analysis were set into two parts. Firstly, for the purpose of identifying the situational context surrounding the texts, the data were analyzed based on the three components, i.e., *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*, ultimately leading to the identification of the differences between the two texts. Secondly, in relation to the contextual configuration, the four maxims in each text were classified, namely the obligatory elements, optional elements, element sequence, and the possibility of element reiteration. The texts were then extracted into several structural units so as to classify their elements. After obtaining the element classification, a formulation overview was created for each text based on its contextual configuration. Finally, the potential common structure of the two texts was formulated. The data are presented into two sections, i.e., the perspective of the situational context and that of the contextual configuration.

3. Results

3.1 The Situational Context of Formal Interaction

Prior to scrutinizing the situational context of formal introduction, it is of necessity to present the following text:

Text 1. Formal Introduction

- Margaret : Mr. Wilson, I'd like you to meet Dr. Edwin Smith. (01)
- Mr. Wilson : It's nice to meet you, Dr. Smith. (02)
- Dr. Smith : Pleasure to meet you, too. (03)
- Margaret : Dr. Smith is an Economist. He just finished writing a book on international trade. (04)
- Mr. Wilson : Oh, That's my field, too. I work for the United Nations. (05)
- Dr. Smith : In the Development Program, by any chance? (06)
- Mr. Wilson : Yes. How did you guess? (07)
- Dr. Smith : I've read your articles on technical assistance. They're excellent. (08)

(Everyday Conversation, p. 8)

Table 2. Situational Context of Formal Introduction

Field	:	Professional interaction; introduction; colleagues; sharing common interests
Tenor	:	Participants—three colleagues; relationship—equal respect; social proximity—rather distant
Mode	:	Language role—primary, formal; channel—voice/sound; medium—spoken; tenses—present, past, and perfective

This formal introduction text covers two main topics. Firstly, the text describes the process of introduction between Mr. Wilson and Dr. Smith through their colleagues Margaret. The realization of this introduction process is manifested in sentences (1), (2), and (3) through the use of the word *meet*. The interpersonal relationship between the two is rather distant given that they have just met in person and become acquainted on this occasion; ergo, it is of necessity to emphasize the element of politeness between them—manifested in Mr. Wilson's use of the vocative greeting Dr. in sentence (2). The greeting followed by a first-name vocative term appears to be a hallmark of politeness (Creelman, 2022). Furthermore, the interaction between Mr. Wilson and Dr. Smith is friendly, warm, and welcoming; the open acceptance of both parties can be seen from the use of the mood systems *nice* and *pleasure* in sentences (2) and (3). Secondly, after describing the introduction process, the narrative built in the following sentences talk of the common interest in world trade shown by both parties—considering that they are in the same field and discipline: Dr. Smith is an economist (sentence 4) while Mr. Wilson works in the Development Program (sentence 6). Such a narrative can be seen from the selection of lexico-semantic systems such as *economist*, *international trade*, *Development Programme*, and *technical assistance*. The preference of dictions (professional registers) shows that both parties share the same understanding so that the interactions can be maintained. The construction of interpersonal functions in this discussion remains based on mutual respect and appreciation. It is evident in the praise given by Dr. Smith to Mr. Wilson regarding his technical assistance articles—see sentence (8) in the clause *they're excellent* in which the personal reference *they* [plural pronoun] refers anaphorically to the phrase *Mr. Wilson's articles on technical assistance* in sentence (7). The language used in this text is a formal one enriched with technical economic registers. The tense of the text varies from present, past, and perfective.

3.2 The Contextual Configuration of Formal Interaction

Prior to analyzing the contextual configuration of formal introduction, it is of necessity to present the following formulation overview:

Figur 2. Overview of the Contextual Configuration on Formal Introduction

IR	→	M: Mr. Wilson, I'd like you to meet Dr. Edwin Smith. (01)
IG	→	W: It's nice to meet you, Dr. Smith. (02)
		S: Pleasure to meet you, too. (03)
IE	→	M: Dr. Smith is an Economist. He just finished writing a book on international trade. (04)
		W: Oh, That's my field, too. I work for the United Nations. (05)
		S: In the Development Program, by any chance? (06)
		W: Yes. How did you guess? (07)
		S: I've read your articles on technical assistance. They're excellent. (08)

Note:

IR = Introductory Request

IG = Introductory Greeting

IE = Introductory Enquiry

The sequential or syntagmatic order of the three elements is transcribed as IR ^ IG ^ IE, where the sign ^ signifies the order of each element.

As seen in the overview, there are three obligatory elements building the text structure. The first is the IR (Introductory Request) realized in sentence (1). In formal contexts, this IR is generally formed from the expressions such as *I'd like you to...* or *I'd like to introduce....* This IR element is obligatory in introductory interactions given its role as an opener of the introduction process. The response given by the interlocutor to this introductory request appears in the form of the second element, i.e., IG (Introductory Greeting). The structure of the IG element is manifested in sentences (2) and (3) through the expressions *It's nice to meet you, Dr. Smith* and *Pleasure to meet you, too*. These two expressions uttered by the involving parties are a must in the introduction process—as these introductory greetings are evidence that both parties are willingly and happily opening up to each other. The third element is IE (Introductory Enquiry). This element is a form of expressing a deeper openness between the parties by using propositional statements or questions related to both parties. The element of IE can vary greatly depending on the context surrounding the introduction process. In Text 1, the Introductory Enquiry takes the form of a discussion of the common interests shown by the two parties by exploring explanations regarding the field of economics. In a formal context, this IE element is essential since information related to each party is needed, especially as the context of the conversational discourse is that of professional.

From the perspective of the text's narrative flow, the sequence of these three elements can be considered fixed and cannot be changed, e.g., the IE element precedes the IG one, or the IG element precedes the IR one—considering that it is highly unlikely for someone to offer a greeting (Introductory Greeting) before the introductory interactions take place. In fact, shall we look at Text 1 closely, the discourse concludes somewhat abruptly and can even be considered as interrupted. Therefore, two other elements should be present in the introduction process, which are not found in Text 1, namely the elements IC (Introductory Closure) and FG (Farewell Greeting). Both IC and FG elements are often present in any form of a conversation—as they are markers for parties involved to end the conversation immediately.

3.3 The Situational Context of Informal Interaction

Text 2. Informal Introduction

- Jim : Who's the tall woman next to Barbara? (01)
- Charles : That's her friend Mary. Didn't you meet her at Steve's party? (02)
- Jim : No, I wasn't at Steve's party. (03)
- Charles : Oh! Then let me introduce you to her now. Mary, this is my friend, Jim. (04)
- Mary : Hi, Jim. Nice to meet you. (05)
- Jim : You, too. Would you like a drink? (06)
- Mary : Sure, let's go get one. (07)

(Everyday Conversation, p. 8)

Table 3. Situational Context of Informal Introduction

Field	:	Casual interaction; introduction; friends; enquiries regarding Mary, Steve's party, and drink offering
Tenor	:	Participants—three friends; relationship—equal with a focus on friendliness; social proximity—close (Charles – Jim), rather distant (Jim – Mary)
Mode	:	Language role—primary, informal; channel—voice/sound; medium—spoken; tenses—present and past; sentence structure—declarative, negative interrogative

Text 2 is built on two major arguments or discussions. Firstly, the text talks of Jim’s curiosity regarding one of Barbara’s friends, Mary. The conversation related to the first discussion is realized in sentences (1), (2), and (3)—Charles assumes Jim has met Mary at Steve’s party which is subsequently denied by Jim by asserting *no, I wasn’t at Steve’s party* (sentence 3). The use of negative interrogative marker in sentence (2) by Charles to Jim indicates that the context of the conversation between the two takes place in casual or informal circumstances (Banda, 2005; Bella & Moser, 2018; Heritage, 2002). It also indicates that the social relationship between the two is fairly close, probably close friends or even best friends. After knowing that Jim does not know Mary, Charles in sentence (4) starts to make initiations to introduce him to Mary. Secondly, after shifting from the first discussion, *viz.* Jim’s curiosity regarding Mary, the meaning construction in sentences (4) to (7) is formed on the basis of the same argument, namely the introduction process between Jim and Mary through Charles. This introduction process begins in sentence (4) with the typical expression of an introductory request *let me introduce you to her now*. Based on its contextual configuration, it is a typical expression of the IR element. The use of accusative-dative sentence structure in the expression reaffirms that the context of the conversation between the three interlocutors is fairly fluid and casual. Therefore, the sentence structure used tends to be less rigid than that of formal context. As for the interpersonal meaning, both participants tend to explore the use of mood system in the form of *nice* [adjective] (sentence 5) and *too* [clause substitution] (sentence 6) in response to Mary’s introductory greeting in sentence (5)—relating to the concept of clause substitution categorized into the concept of grammatical cohesion (see further in Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 130). Based on the construction of such mood system, it can be inferred that both parties are trying to build a condition or situation that is friendly and welcoming through the foundation of mutual openness and pleasure to get acquainted. Such this condition is reinforced through the construction of the succeeding sentences (6) and (7) in which Jim tries to politely invite or ask Mary to have a drink together. The use of modality *would* in the request sentence indicates that Jim tries his best to be friendly and polite to Mary.

3.4 The Contextual Configuration of Informal Interaction

Figure 3. Overview of the Contextual Configuration on Informal Introduction

	J: Who’s the tall woman next to Barbara? (01)
OE →	C: That’s her friend Mary. Didn’t you meet her at Steve’s party? (02)
	J: No, I wasn’t at Steve’s party. (03)
IR →	C: Oh! Then let me introduce you to her now. Mary, this is my friend Jim. (04)
IG	M: Hi, Jim. Nice to meet you. (05)
IG^R	J: You, too. Would you like a drink? (06)
RC	M: Sure, let’s go get one. (07)

Note:

- OE = Opening Enquiry
- IR = Introductory Request
- IG = Introductory Greeting
- R = Request
- RC = Request Compliance

The sequential or syntagmatic order of the five elements is transcribed as $OE \wedge IR \wedge IG \wedge R \wedge RC$ where the sign \wedge signifies the order of each element.

As shown in the overview, the discourse of informal introduction involving three participants (Jim, Charles, and Mary) is built on five elements that are sequential to each other. The first element, i.e., OE (Opening Enquiry), is realized in the intertwining sentences (1), (2), and (3). This element is used to trigger the IR element (Introductory Request) in the next sentence. Unlike the context of formal introduction tending to use modality of politeness, such as *would like*, the IR element is embodied in a straightforward and clear manner *let me introduce you to her now*. It indicates that the context of formal and informal introductions contributes greatly to the form of modality found in the sentence. The straightforward form of the IR element, to some degree, illustrates that the introductory request in the informal context tends to highly emphasize casual elements rather than those of politeness. The next element is the IG (Introductory Greeting) conveyed by both parties involved in the process of introduction—in this case, referring to Jim and Mary. In sentence (6), the IG element is joint by another element, i.e., R (Request), which is made by Jim to Mary. The combination of these two elements is considered a way to create a warm and friendly atmosphere. The last element, namely RC (Request Compliance), is expressed by Mary as a form of her approval to fulfil Jim’s request for drinking together.

3.5 Coda: Formulating a Potential Common Structure

In this last section, the elements occurring in both texts are formulated so as to draw out a potential common structure of the discourse of introduction. In so doing, it is necessary to present the following formulation of a potential common structure.

Figure 4. Potential Common Structure of Introduction

$$(OE) \cdot [IR \wedge IG_1 \wedge IG_2] \cdot (IE)^{(\text{context-dependent})} > [(R) \wedge (RC)]$$

Note:

Obligatory Element*IR = Introduction Request**IG₁ & 2 = Introduction Greeting***Optional Element, marked by ()***OE = Opening Enquiry**IE = Introduction Enquiry**R = Request**RC = Request Compliance*

The formulation above highlights some key points related to the potential common structure of introduction, namely 1) the obligatory elements of the introduction include $[IR \wedge IG_1 \wedge IG_2]$. The sign \wedge indicates the sequence or syntagmatic order of the three elements while the sign $[]$ indicates that the order is in a fixed form that cannot be reversed. In other words, the discourse of introduction can only occur insofar as the introduction process involves the process of Introductory Request followed by that of Introductory Greeting expressed by both parties implicated—the sequence of these obligatory elements is unchangeable; 2) optional elements include the elements of (OE) . (IE) ^(context-dependent) > [(R) \wedge (RC)]. These four elements are optional and thereby may or may not be present in the introduction process. Once the Opening Enquiry exists in the process of introduction, it must be located at the beginning of the discourse. Meanwhile, if the IE element is present in the process of introduction, it must appear after the mandatory elements—bearing in mind that the IE element is highly dependent on the context (whether formal or informal). In the formal context, the IE element is treated as a semi-obligatory element which means that its occurrence in the discourse of introduction is rather necessary; however, it is not considered likewise in the informal one. The sign > indicates that the IE element can also incorporate the R and RC elements therein.

4. Closing Remarks

The discourse of introduction is a discourse full of contextual meanings—considering that its forming elements always depend on aspects of the surrounding circumstances or ‘co-text’ in Malinowski’s term. By employing two contextual approaches, *viz.* the situational context embodied in the components of *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*, and the contextual configuration manifested in the form of the three main maxims of OOI (*obligatory*, *optional*, and *iteration*), the interpretation of introductory discourse, both formal and informal, can provide another paradigmatic overview of situating the function of language in human life. Ultimately, through such paradigmatic overview, it arrives at an understanding that the relationship between language and its contextual use is that of mutuality; if language requires context in the interpretation process, it is also true that context requires language to manifest itself.

5. End Notes

1. Borrowing Malinowski’s term *phatic communion* emphasizing the element of interpersonal communication without informative propositions in the form of ideas thereby its goal is to strengthen the social closeness between one member of a society and another. This concept is then increasingly explored in linguistics, especially in the field of conversational discourse.
2. The term systemic-functional linguistics was used by Halliday to create a new approach to linguistics. Halliday borrowed the word systemic from his teacher Firth as distinguishing systems and structures. He also owes a lot to Saussure’s linguistic epistemology, especially regarding syntagmatic and paradigmatic categories (Halliday, 1966, 2010; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In its development, the SFL approach focuses more on systemic categories and linguistic functions from the perspective of social-semiotic aspects (Matthiessen, 2015). In lieu of being viewed as a structure—as viewed by structuralism (e.g., Chomsky 1965; 1957), language in SFL is viewed as a system of ‘word choice’ or ‘linguistic resource’ (Wang & Ma, 2022) that is able to activate *the power of language* (see further in Halliday & Webster, 2009, pp. 1–3).
3. The term contextual configuration (Halliday & Hasan, 1989) is used as a means of another manifestation of the concept of context of situation proposed by Halliday. Fundamentally, contextual configuration relates to this concept, except that her approach to the concept of field, tenor, and mode postulates the integrity of text structure through the concept of OOI (Obligatory, Optional, and Iteration) referring to obligatory elements, optional elements, and the repetition of these two.

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Authors contributions

Drs. Agus Riyanto, M.Ed. was responsible for study design, data analysis, and interpretation. Ardik Ardianto, M.A. drafted the manuscript and Drs. Agus Riyanto, M.Ed. revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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