

Recipient Design in Students' Speaking and Writing: Some Practical Suggestions for Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper aims to review the role of recipient design in interaction (speaking and writing) in second language classrooms and how the review can be used to offer some practical applications in second language classrooms will be discussed. Context and language are in a reflexive relation in communication (Vaez-Dalili, Morsagh, & Shirzade, 2017). The role of shared knowledge and the organization of information in a context are indispensable parts of meaningful interaction. Accordingly, in this study recipient design, as a part of context, will be introduced via a literature review. Then, considering pedagogical goals, some suggestions will be made regarding how to incorporate context and the recipient design in second language classrooms and three pedagogical activities that can be used in second language classrooms will be provided.

Keywords: context, the recipient design, pedagogy, shared knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Discourse Analysis as a field has challenged the treatment of language and communication in terms of isolated sentences. Pioneer researchers such as Harris (1952) and Hymes (1974) argued that a written or spoken text cannot be understood solely depending on sentences and what is included in them. Traditional sentence grammarians would analyse each sentence and claim that the meaning of a sentence is dependent upon the grammatical structures and the words used in it (Chin, 2006; McCarthy, 1991). Via the research after the 50s, the problems with sentence analysis were recognized. Sentences do not stand alone and they are linked to other sentences in a text by formal links such as parallelism, verb form and cohesive devices (Vaez-Dalili et al., 2017). A better account of discourse was achieved by this approach for interpreting a text, but this was not the full account either. Accordingly, the studies of researchers such as Hymes (1974), Gee (2005), Cook (1989) and Widdowson (2007) have demonstrated that no text can be interpreted regardless of its context. Context and language are in a reflexive relation and they mutually affect each other. So, there is no way that a text can be given meaning without the help of context. Then what is context?

Halliday (1978) defines context as the environment in which a text gains meaning. In the same vein, Widdowson (2007) defines context as a conceptual representation of all the relevant factors in a given text. He further suggests that the context of communication consists of a first-person party, the sender and a receiver who share an assumed context. Similarly, in his seminal work, Hymes (1974) suggests that communicative competence depends on how a learner uses language in accordance with context. Hymes offers eight sub-components to explain the term context in communicative competence. These components are: setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms and genre.

Looking at these definitions, firstly, it can be observed that context consists of the situations and circumstances which surround and affect the interpretation of a text. Secondly, the participants constitute a significant part of a context. The reason is while speaking or writing, a text is always constructed in accordance with the other participants' contributions. Interlocutors design their conversation in ways which are sensitive to the receivers and this is called the recipient design (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). For instance, telling the same story to two different people may require the senders to use a completely different style and structure. Therefore, without having the knowledge of the receiver of a text, the register of that text is in a vacuum and the appropriate style and register cannot be chosen (Leckie-Terry, 1995). Leckie-Terry further claims that even in monologues, the sender answers some questions which s/he thinks will be relevant to the receiver and the register is dependent on it.

Having considered the significant role of context and the recipient design in the discourse of communication, in the next section, an eclectic account of the role of participants in context will be given through a literature review which takes the study of different researchers into consideration.

PARTICIPANTS: THE SENDERS AND RECEIVERS IN A CONTEXT

As mentioned in the previous section, participants hold a significant role in a context as they usually assume an imaginary receiver while speaking and writing. Senders always have some 'ghost questions' in their minds and whenever someone produces a text, a possible receiver is assumed (Cook, 1989). Consequently, while explaining the nature of the effect of participants on a context, the role of shared knowledge and the organization of information are of great importance. Moreover, the social aspects of communication such as identities, relationships and sign systems are significant determiners. Accordingly, these issues will be reviewed from the view point of several researchers below.

Goffman (1981) suggests that the orientation taken by receivers and senders towards each other in a context is largely affected by the way they frame events. He also claims that context is highly affected by the mutual characteristics of the participants. Various factors in an event or context affect the way a text is designed in communication. One factor which has an important effect on context is the shared knowledge. The shared knowledge between participants has immense consequences on the discourse of a text

as each context has to be structured in accordance with each individual's unique background (Heritage, 2012; Nofsinger, 1989). The shared knowledge entails mutual understanding of the interlocutors.

Mutual understanding is also referred to as *intersubjectivity* by several researchers studying the qualitative aspects of interaction (e.g. Heritage, 2012). As Schegloff (1991) suggests, intersubjectivity is the central framework by which all talk-in interaction and social actions are built between/among interlocutors. Intersubjectivity is the mutual understanding between the participants in a talk which is jointly accomplished as a social phenomenon (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). The underlying view of intersubjectivity regarding interaction, as Seedhouse (2004, p. 5) puts it, is that: "People must make normative use of a number of principles in order to display their actions to each other and allow others to make sense of them". In other words, a turn produced by a speaker shows how the speaker has understood the prior turn and the next action s/he does is both in response to the prior turn and it also projects next actions to be understood and processed by the other speaker(s). This means that interlocutors make sense of the talk at a specific moment by making reference to the previous turns and by assuming that turns at talk are connected to the turn(s) which precede them. Accordingly, participants must assess the shared knowledge in a context in a moment by moment fashion as it affects every level of discourse from grammar to lexical choices (Heritage, 2012). For example, the usage of articles is highly affected by this phenomenon. Definite or indefinite articles are chosen depending on the shared knowledge and mutual understanding between the interlocutors. Similarly, deictic expressions (Carter & McCarthy, 2006) and ellipsis also specifically depend on the knowledge shared by the sender and the receiver.

Another point affected by the background of events is the information quantity and ordering. The maxim of quantity is closely related to using the right amount of information in a spoken or written text (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). For a conversation or writing to be smooth and appropriate, participants should be able to make correct assessments of the degree of existing knowledge between the participants. Otherwise, the discourse may be either too boring with too many details or it may lack the necessary background information and it proves to be incomprehensible (Cook, 1989). As for the ordering of information, it also results from the need to adjust the communication between the sender and the receiver. The basic logic behind ordering in a context is that familiar information should be given first in a text followed by the new information. Communication is in a sense adding new information to the already known to ensure intersubjectivity. Hence, while setting out the structure of a text, what is known and what is unknown about the frame of an event is evaluated by the sender and the discourse is set accordingly. To exemplify, when somebody is asked to tell what s/he did yesterday, depending on the receiver, what is told and how it is told will be different. If the person asking the question is a university friend, then, the person will probably talk about events such as going to the courses or doing assignments in an informal way. However, if it is a judge who asks this question, then s/he has to tell only

relevant events and the conversation will be ordered in a way that related topics will be foregrounded and the other details are excluded.

Another determining factor in the way interlocutors construct their interaction is the social relations. Language itself is the most significant tool that people utilize in communication to make their social relations and roles clear. It is thanks to language that humans signal many different social relations, identities and sign systems (Gee, 2005). Identities of the participants in a context hugely affect the way how discourse is organized. As Gee (2005) puts it, people use language to express themselves by taking on different identities or roles in different encounters in relation to others. This makes identities of participants a very significant part of the context as each participant should position themselves according to the other participant(s). For example, a teacher has the role of a teacher in a class and this gives the teacher some kind of an authority and the discourse in this class is designed accordingly. However, with other teachers this teacher will have the role of colleagues which requires an equal status. Finally, when this teacher is communicating with a school principle, the teacher's identity turns into being an employee or a subsidiary role. All of these different identities and roles certainly affect the way people construct their discourse while communicating.

Another aspect of the participants is the relationships. People use language to signal different social affiliations in a context. In a community people have different types of relationships and these affect the discourse they use. Cook (1989, p. 88) divides social relationships into two main categories:

-Friend to friend

-Stranger to stranger.

He also adds two dimensions to these main roles which are private/official person and patient-doctor kind of relationships. These dimensions put participants under circumstances which require them to use a specific kind of register and discourse. In other words, talking or writing to an official person or an institution requires a much more different discourse than an informal one. So, the relationships and hierarchy between the participants in a society greatly affects the discourse senders and receivers use (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

Finally, the office, status and subculture of participants affect the use of different sign systems and the presumed knowledge in a context (Daneshvar, Kargar, & Zareian, 2017; Gee, 2005). In each society, there are different types of groups and these groups have some kind of a sub-culture. Language is one of the fundamental parts in constructing these subcultures and specific discourse types are used by different groups. Biologists, lawyers and hip hop artists all have their own types of discourses which are different than everyday language. This difference in discourse creates a specific in-group atmosphere and using it provides privilege to its members (Leckie-Terry, 1995). On the other hand, the outsiders such as second language learners may not be aware of these differences in the contexts of these sign systems. Hence, they should use an appropriate style and register while communicating with the members of different sub-groups.

To sum up the argument, shared knowledge and the social relationships among interlocutors have a significant effect on the way a context is structured. In order to teach students a more successful and realistic language, teachers should also have activities focusing on the effects of context -specifically the recipient design- in addition to the conventional grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation activities as context is also an indispensable part of communicative and interactional competence (Walsh, 2011).

DISCUSSION OF THE REVIEW

Considering the arguments in the previous sections, it is clear that the study of context has revolutionized not only the field of Discourse Analysis itself, but also the understanding of language in a general sense. The surrounding factors in a conversation -from gestures to the relationships between participants- immensely contribute to the understanding of interaction.

As suggested by Heritage (2012) and Goffman (1981), shared knowledge and achieving intersubjectivity is a very significant aspect of participants in a context. This can be understood from the changes in article choice, use of ellipsis, deictic terms (Carter & McCarthy, 2006) or the ordering of information in a text depending on a sender's assumption of what the receiver knows. The implication of this is two-fold. First, language teachers should prepare activities taking the role of shared knowledge in communication into consideration in order to contribute to the communicative competence of students as this issue is a significant part of it. Secondly, the activities on this aspect of language can also put grammar topics such as the definite-indefinite article choice or the use of ellipsis on a more meaningful and context-specific base. In this way, second language learning is situated in a real-life context that has practical uses in daily life. This will most probably contribute to the learning of students (Walsh, 2011).

As for the social relationships and their effect on the role of participants in a context, Cook's (1989) suggestion that friend to friend and stranger to stranger conversations are the main social relations in a communication is true, but this may have some flaws in real life. Cook also adds two more dimensions: official/private status and doctor-patient type of relations to account for different situations in real life. However, Scollon and Scollon's (2001) claim about the social relationships and the language use depending on these factors seems to be more plausible. They claim that friend to friend and stranger to stranger relationships are important factors, but it is not sufficient to account for real life contexts especially in terms of 'stance' of the participants. They claim that the terms *involvement* and *deference* also determine the formality level of a conversation. For example, two professors in a seminar who are strangers may be expected to use a formal style while talking to each other during the seminar, but after the seminar depending on their choice of either involvement or deference strategy, they may use a more informal language. If they choose to use involvement strategy and see each other as equal colleagues, there is no need to use a formal language although they are strangers. So, shortly the argument here is that the relationships in social life depends on not only familiarity with each other, but also the 'stance' of the participants.

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Considering the review and discussion above, it can be argued that utilizing the issues around context is beneficial for second language learners as these issues help the learners attain a more real-life-like language competence (Walsh, 2011). Consequently, in this part three pedagogical activities that have the potential to improve second language teaching will be offered. This will be a valid contribution for the professional practitioners in the field of second language teaching.

The first activity focuses on the recipient design in context and it is based on a real activity I used while I was teaching English at a state university in Turkey. This activity will be examined and how it failed because of the recipient design issue will be demonstrated. Then, how this activity can be designed in a way to improve its pedagogic value via taking the recipient design into consideration will be demonstrated.

The aim of the activity was to teach expressions of asking for clarification. In fact, this was not just a simple activity; rather it was a real lesson which had a warm-up, main activity and a follow up. This paper will only talk about the warm up and the main activity as they were related to the focus this paper. In the warm up, students watched a video in which two people were talking, but they had communication problems because of the noise in the street. So, they use clarification questions such as 'Sorry, I could not get what you said, can you repeat it please' or 'Would you mind repeating what you have said please?'. The aim here was to raise the awareness of the students about the clarification questions. However, the problem was that the people in the video used both very formal and informal types of questions. The underlying aim for preparing this warm up activity was to have as many clarification question types as possible. So, this video was chosen, but it was an educational video and as a result, it did not have an authentic communication. As a result, there was an inconsistency about the social relationships of the participants as the speakers both used very formal and totally informal structures at the same time although they were close friends.

After this warm up, in the main activity, the students were grouped into groups A and B and they were given two different maps about London (Appendix I). The maps of the groups had different parts of London (they have some information in common, though) and students were expected to meet at a place and get some information from their friends which was mentioned on their hand outs (Appendix II). So, they had to ask each other questions to find out where the meeting point was and how to find it by giving instructions from other places. To make the activity more challenging, some of the names of the places on the map were made up and they were difficult to pronounce. In this way, they would have problems and be forced to use expressions of asking for clarification. In addition, the groups A and B were positioned on the opposite corners of the class and they were asked to speak simultaneously. In this way again, the noise would be a problem and they would have understanding problems. While they were doing the activity, everything seemed to be going fine since they were really having problems in communication and asking for clarification. However, there was an

unexpected problem. The problem was that they were using only the informal ones, which was very natural indeed as they were speaking to their close friends. I was expecting them to use both the very polite forms and informal ones thinking that they had to learn all the types.

Now, having looked at the role of participants, it is clear to the researcher why this problem occurred. Firstly, the problem was that the warm up had problems in terms of the social status of the speakers. Secondly, the researcher had expected the students to use formal structures too, but they were speaking to their friends and as a result, they used only the informal ones. Indeed, this was not a problem at all considering the context, but my assumption that they had to use all the expressions in the same context was wrong.

So, what kind of an activity can be designed out of this lesson to improve students' abilities about the role of participants in communication? The solution activity is designed for the first grade university students whose English level is upper intermediate. The aim of the activity is teaching specifically the informal expressions of asking for clarification as they will be asked to do the activity in friend contexts. In order to have a successful lesson, the warm up in the lesson explained above may still be used in order to raise the students' awareness about the expressions of asking for clarification. However, unlike the unsuccessful lesson, the warm up should include participants from the same social status in order to have the correct register which is the friend to friend conversation (Cook, 1989) in this activity.

Having done the warm up activity, the main activity will follow. The purpose of the main activity is to make students aware of the role of 'shared knowledge' (Heritage, 2012) which is one of the most important factors in the recipient design. In this activity, students will be given the maps in Appendix I and the information sheet in Appendix II which tells them what their situation is and what they are expected to do. In addition, this time only the informal type of expressions will be included as they will be talking to their friends. Consequently, while they are trying to negotiate where to meet in London, students will have to understand which places and information are available to their receivers first. Then, they are expected to construct the new information on the existing one and they will try to find the meeting place using the shared knowledge in order to achieve intersubjectivity. While they are speaking, they will have to use definite or indefinite articles depending on the mentioned or new information. Moreover, they will have to use deictic terms (Carter & McCarthy, 2006) like 'there, that place, and this street and so on' and ellipsis structures while communicating. In this way, they will come to realize how articles, deictic terms or ellipsis may change depending on the information the recipient has. Shortly, this activity will supply a context in which students have to take the shared information and mutual understanding in the recipient design into consideration and this is a fundamental part of communicative and interactional competence in second language classrooms (Atar, 2017, p. 22).

Having introduced an unsuccessful classroom activity from real-life and how it can be improved via the recipient design, now two more activities that may be used by second

language teachers to apply the recipient design in their classes will be provided. The first activity aims at showing the effect of changing the audience on register shift and information ordering. In this activity students are given a handout which has a letter and some information about the sender and the receivers of it (Appendix III).

In this activity, students are asked to read the letter first and then, they are asked to write a letter to both the family and the ministry of education in pairs or groups of three. The students in the class should be at least intermediate level to be able to do this activity as it requires the use of different registers and grammar structures. In addition, they should be at least at high school as younger learners will not be cognitively ready to do this activity as it features higher education.

This activity will prove useful for students as they will recognize that different recipients require a different register and information ordering. To exemplify, while writing a letter to the ministry of education, they will realize that they have to change not only the register as it is a formal institution, but also the information ordering dramatically. The reason is they have to remove some information such as the personal life and comments of the writer as they will be totally irrelevant and inappropriate in case of a formal institutional discourse. In this way, while doing a hands-on activity, students will learn how important it is to choose the correct register and information structure depending on different contexts.

As mentioned in the first part, the social roles, identities and status of participants also have a very important role in a context (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Seedhouse, 2004). When writing or speaking, people should know who they are writing for or who they are speaking to. Knowing the details about the *office, status* and *role* of the people affects what is said and how it is said. Therefore, the last activity will focus on this aspect of communication.

As Cook (1989) claims, role plays are excellent at assigning students different roles and creating an atmosphere in which a teacher can have students act in many different contexts. Thanks to role plays, students can be given imaginary roles and they may be expected to act out different roles. So, using a role play, the aim of this activity is to make students aware of how social roles in a society can have an effect on the register and formality level of communication. Students' English should be at least upper-intermediate level to be able to implement this activity.

In this activity, the background and context of the event is given in detail in the handout (Appendix IV). To summarize the main points, the handout explains that there is an athlete who is anxious for winning a race and the people around him, the trainer, the friend and the consultant, have different perspectives on the idea of using drugs in Olympics. Consequently, the athlete visits all of these people one by one and discusses about this issue. So, the students should prepare a role play depending on this event and the handout also warns them about the effect of different social relationships on the language and register used.

As for the benefits of this activity, role plays are really effective in second language classroom settings (Dorathy & Mahalakshmi, 2011; Kuśnierek, 2015) as it provides teachers with the chance to create various different types of contexts in a class. In this particular activity, there is the context of an athlete discussing the issues around drug use in Olympics. The interlocutors are people from different social status and roles. Students have to deal with the use of different registers since the athlete will have to speak to all of the other people. As the other people have different social relationships with the athlete, the students will have to adjust their language according to the participants. Consequently, it can be argued that this activity will raise students' awareness about the importance of the social relations of the participants and they will have the chance of producing and practicing the structures in an authentic context which has the potential for an increased uptake of language forms (Dehkordi & Talebinejad, 2017; Walsh, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In this study, the aim was to review the literature on the effect and significance of context and the recipient design in second language classroom teaching and learning. The review of the literature has demonstrated that context is an indispensable aspect of students' second language knowledge as it is the context that has a decisive role in the register used in a given situation. Then, it can be argued in this paper that the relationship between context and language use should be embedded in second language classrooms which constitutes the second aim of this paper: Suggesting potential pedagogic activities that highlight the role of context which in turn helps students improve their appropriate use of registers in various contexts. This has the potential to increase students' language production and proficiency (Walsh, 2011). Accordingly, three activities that take the issues discussed throughout this paper into consideration is designed and suggested for second language teachers. In the future research, an experimental study maybe designed in which a control group and a study group are compared and contrasted to see if the use of context-informed activities has a significant effect on language acquisition.

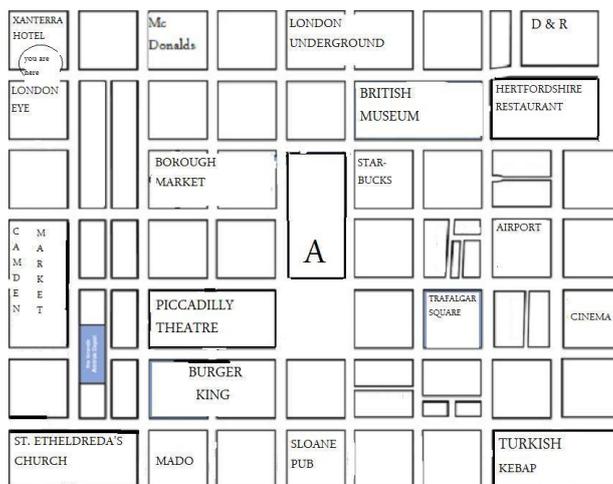
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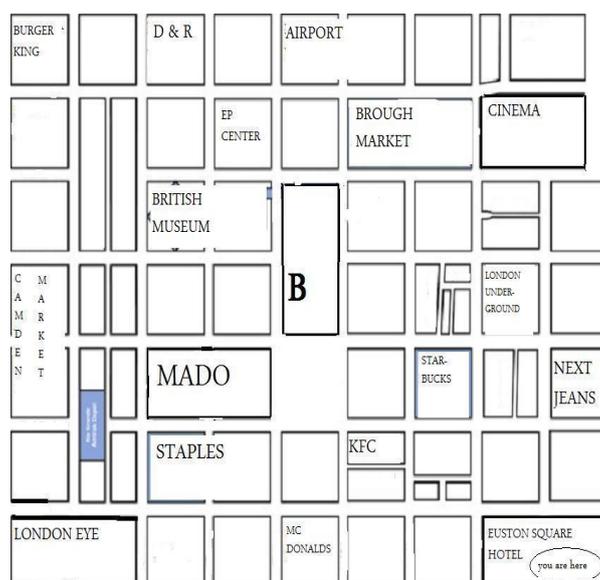
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APPENDIX I

Group A



Group B



APPENDIX II

A

You and your friend want to meet in London, but there is a problem. Both of you don't know the city. You are staying at Xanterra Hotel. The telephone number of the hotel is (236 - 6709)

You can meet at the following places:

- Sloane Pub
- Trafalgar Square
- Hertfordshire Restaurant
- Piccadilly Theatre
- St Etheldreda's Church

Appointment place:

Appointment hour:

The hotel at which your friend is staying:

Telephone number of his/her hotel:

B

You and your friend want to meet in London, but there is a problem. Both of you don't know the city. You are staying at Euston Square Hotel. The telephone number of the hotel is (236 - 7654)

You can meet at the following places:

Sloane Street

Trafalgar Square

Hertfordshire Restaurant

Piccadilly Theatre

St Etheldreda's Church

Appointment place:

Appointment hour:

The hotel at which your friend is staying:

Telephone number of his/her hotel:

APPENDIX III

Ayşe is a Turkish student who has graduate education in the UK with a government scholarship. As a requirement of the scholarship, each term she has to write a letter to the Turkish ministry of education about what she is doing in the UK about her education. Ayşe also misses her close friend Leyla and her family whom she likes a lot. So, she decides to write a letter to her close friend and another one to her family in addition to the ministry of education. Here is her letter to her close friend:

Hi dear, how is it going? I really missed you a lot. I am doing quite fine here in the UK. Newcastle is a cool city, dude! You gotta see it! I go to cafes frequently with other guys from the department and we have a lot of fun. We also try different types of food and we hang around Newcastle whenever we have time. Everything is quite lovely here, but you know, I must also study for my modules and there are a lot of tiring assignments. If it were not for the assignments and exams, everything would be just perfect (!) as assignments and exams sometimes become a pain in my neck. But anyway, I like living in Newcastle.

Why don't you come here! We two can have a wonderful time here and we talk about the good old days!

Take care! Looking forward to seeing you in summer vacation.

Ayşe

Now imagine that you are Ayşe. In groups of two or three, looking at the first letter above, write letters to your family whom you like a lot and another one to the ministry of education which is a formal institution. Try to use an appropriate style as much as possible.

APPENDIX IV

The Olympics of 2012 is coming closer and our athlete is very anxious about it. The people around him have different ideas about the use of performance drugs and they are trying to affect the attitude of the athlete. In the following part, each person in the conversation states his/her ideas about the use of performance drugs. In your groups, assign a role to each member and depending on the explanations below, prepare a role play. Be careful about the type of language used by people, depending on their social relationships and status.

THE ATHLETE

You are an athlete who has a good chance of making it to the Olympics. You know that many of your friends and competitors use performance drugs on a regular basis, but so far you haven't used any, because you are afraid of what might happen to you. Ask your trainer and a friend for their advice.

THE TRAINER

You are an athletics trainer for your country. You think that student A has a very good chance of going to the Olympics, but you would like him/ her to use steroids. You know that if he/ she doesn't, there is very little possibility of qualifying. You don't disagree with drug use, it is perfectly safe and all the other athletes do it.

THE FRIEND

You are an athlete like Student A, but you are not as good as he/ she is. You think your friend could go to the Olympics if he/ she took steroids, but you are against drug use. You think that using drugs is cheating, and that it is also dangerous.

THE CONSULTANT

You will comment on the moral and ethical side of the argument by participating in the program according to the character which was assigned to you.