

THE CONVERGENCE MODEL OF DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL COGNITION IN ANALYZING ROLE RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract: *This is a qualitative study of analyzing role relationships through the discourses of the communication participants in one of the development programs of the University of Eastern Philippines called the Agricultural Productivity Enhancement Program. Specifically, it attempted to determine the constructs of the implementers and the beneficiaries in the program implementation; find out the role relationship between the implementers and the beneficiaries as reflected in their discourses; and ascertain the function of social cognition in the process of text production and text consumption.*

It was anchored on the tenet that understanding and mutual understanding, between and among the communication participants is the fundamental concept of communication as espoused in the convergence model of communication. It was assumed that social cognition helps them construe the construction process of the other party which would lead to better understanding of their roles in the program.

Written documents representing the participants' discourses were analyzed using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework of text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice. It also utilized informal interview and group discussion method to draw out their discourses and their construction process.

It was found out from the implementers' discourse that they had elaborate constructs. The constructs development, participation, poverty, and influence and sub-constructs which reflected their being powerful and more knowledgeable than the beneficiaries were deduced. They showed certain linguistic style indicating intentionality, jargon, and structure of the language that also suggest power.

From the beneficiaries' end, the constructs that emerged from the analysis were: development, technology, sustainable agriculture, and participation, each having minor constructs under them. Their language was suggestive of the simplicity of their construction process and their role of being "followers."

Discourse practice reflected the style and linguistic preference of the writer who finalized the documents for the implementers. The texts from the oral interaction with the beneficiaries showed freer expressions because the medium was in the vernacular. Turn-taking in the group discussion reflected the influence of other group members' constructs on one's utterances.

Sociocultural practice analysis indicated diversity of constructs of the persons involved in text production. For the implementers, they reflected the pressure they felt in keeping the role expected of them to alleviate the living condition of the people. The beneficiaries' constructs denoted their reliance on the implementers who were considered as service-providers.

It is concluded then, that the implementers' discourse being highly structured than those of the beneficiaries is due to their deeper understanding of the program and having better command of the language. This also showed their wider range of constructs and reflected their being more knowledgeable and more powerful than the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries' discourse, on the other hand, showed their being inferior both in expressing their ideas and their role in the program. While people empowerment and participatory development were espoused by the implementers and claimed by the beneficiaries, their discourses reflected that they were far from the realization of these principles.

Keywords: convergence, social cognition, discourse analysis, textual analysis, discourse practice, socio-cultural practice, role relationships

Introduction

The Problem

This study takes into account the program implementers and the beneficiaries of a development program implemented by the University of Eastern Philippines in Northern Samar, Philippines.

Practitioners of the participatory approach to development and the Development Support to Communication contend that people do not greatly support programs which they do not propose or which they have not been consulted about. The assumption extends to the effects of communication between and among the program implementers and the beneficiaries. While communication participants are involved in information exchanges, there is no assurance that both parties understand each other along the context meant by the other party. It is postulated that differences in perceptions lead to differences in information processing system and there is something in language, which makes the communication meaningful or not. In Potter and Wetherell's (1989) words, "a large part of our activities are performed through language; our talk and writing do not live in some purely conceptual realm, but are mediums for action." Yalden (1987) also joined other authorities in saying that language is a means used by human beings to enter into, establish, develop, and maintain relationships. The importance of perception in one's behavior is highlighted by Wegner and Vallacher (1977) who posed that a person behaves not on the basis of what the world is like, but rather on the basis of his perception of what it is like. They went on to say that perception is an orderly and structured system. These statements lead to the discussion of how one constructs social reality. Since none lives in this world alone, everything that s/he says, does and thinks is a product not only of his/her individual processes of construction, but also of his/her interaction with other people.

The Assumptions of the Study

The foregoing discussion pointed to the role that social cognition took between the communication participants, in this context, the program implementers and the beneficiaries. The extent to which social cognition affects one's understanding of a message or information can be studied through the discourse of the individual. Discourse, according to Gee (1993) involves one's way of talking, acting, interacting, valuing and believing, as well as the material props the group uses to carry out its social practices.

Working from the assumption that the essence of social cognition is man's effort to understand (Forgas 1981), it serves as the interface between discourse and society. Discourse, in turn, is essential for the acquisition and change of social cognition (Van Dijk, 1994). He argued that it takes one to observe the social behavior of a person to be able to understand his/her construction system and much of what one knows and believes about the other person is acquired through discourse and communication.

In sum, any approach to study how relationships are established between and among individuals must account for social representation, but it must also account for discourse as a major means whereby social representations are acquired, shared, and confirmed (Van Dijk 1994).

The researcher contended that to understand a person it takes one to understand his/her processing system which is best reflected in his/her discourse. Hence, both the communication participants should have access to the discourses each other produces; discourse being reflective of how each one constructs social representations.

This study had the following assumptions: the discourses of the communication participants suggested role relationships between them; there was an underlying relationship between the discourse that the communication participants share and their social cognition; and the interface in the social cognition of the communication participants suggested the degree of convergence between them.

The figure below illustrates this concept.

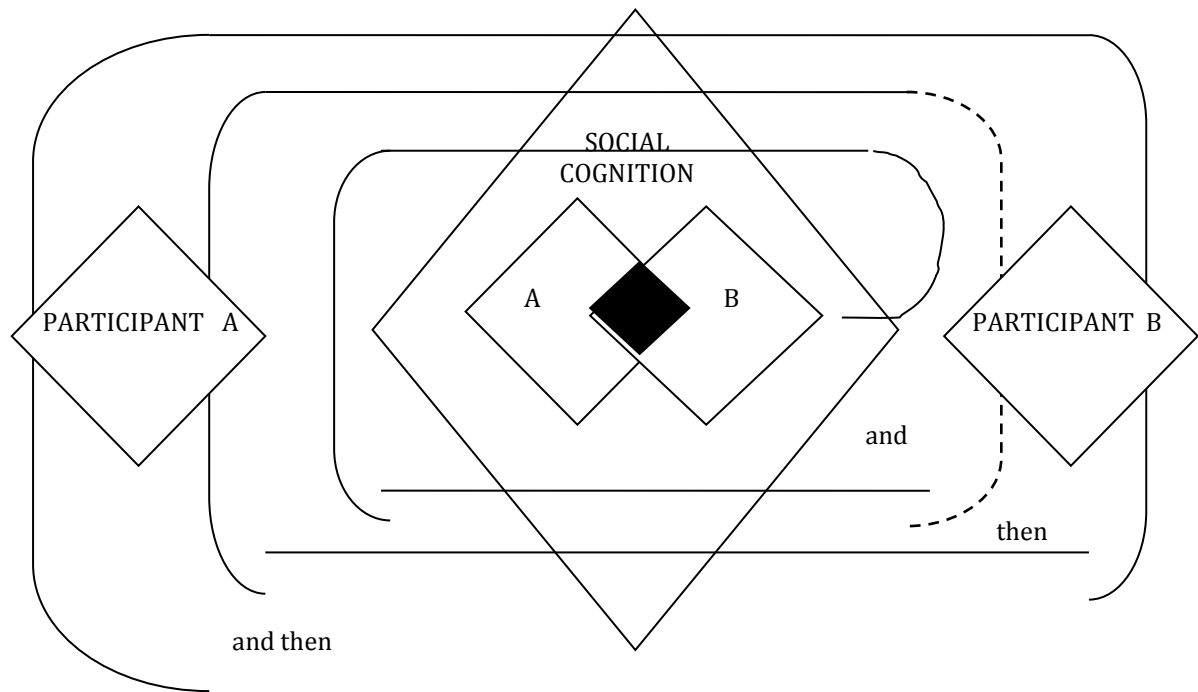


Figure 1. The convergence model of discourse and social cognition

Body of paper

Methodology

This qualitative study was anchored on VanDijk's (1994) socio-cognitive model as an approach to discourse analysis and Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework of text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice.

For the written documents the textual analysis, the discourse practice, and the sociocultural analyses were done to draw out the participants' constructs. Triangulation was done through an informal interview and group discussion method to draw out the participants' discourse and their construction process.

The criteria adopted in the selection of texts were relevance and availability of the documents. The textual or narrative reports of the annual accomplishments of the program were included because they were considered to reflect the implementers' discourse. They met the criteria of discourses which Parker (1992) outlined. On the part of the beneficiaries, the transcripts of the group discussion and informal interview constituted the texts for analysis.

The data analysis process started with the textual analysis. It was guided by whether the process provided answers to the objectives set-- if it furnished significant insights into the discourses of the program participants and if they reflected similarity or diversity of constructs such that role relationships between them were deduced.

The linguistic analysis took into account the vocabulary, semantics, and structure of the sentence which were taken to reflect beyond the surface level analysis but more on how they were used in context. They were used as a means to draw out the constructs and the construction process of the communication participants.

There were seven (7) documents, numbered Doc. 1 – Doc. 7. Each document was then marked for the paragraph number for ease of reference in the coding process and in the analysis proper. The first reading of the documents was for familiarity. In the second reading constructs whether implicit or explicit, which were drawn from the texts, were noted. This enabled the researcher to tentatively identify some constructs and find more minor constructs belonging to the major constructs. The analysis was temporary until reading and re-reading of the context suggested that they really belonged there.

Coding was excessive and all-inclusive to ensure that all constructs in the documents were included to avoid going back to the entire process. After all the documents were coded and constructs identified, the researcher reviewed the entries under each construct label. Related ideas were lumped together to constitute one construct and those whose meanings were not within the previously identified ones were considered as another construct.

The constant comparative method was employed in the analysis such that those items which were drawn out and assigned to a certain category were compared to others belonging to such category, which was not final until after a thorough analysis of the context was made. The researcher settled on placing the constructs and sub-constructs to certain categories, which were considered final and the best representation/placement of constructs.

Findings of the study

In the first level of analysis, the textual analysis of the documents representing the project implementers' discourse, four major constructs emerged: development, participation, poverty, and influence.

Development for the implementers was holistic. More references were recorded under economic, a minor construct under development. Other minor constructs, which further contained sub-constructs were technological, people-centered, sustainability, and comprehensive.

For the program implementers, economic development meant an improved quality of life, access to opportunities, and profitability. The indicators for an improved quality of life were livelihood, productivity, and entrepreneurship, with sub-construct – profitability.

The second minor construct under development was technological development, which for the implementers meant the use of farm implements or modern farming methods.

Under the educational components are the sub-constructs functional, responsive, and relevant. In the social components are capability building, reforms, and services. Services covered information dissemination, financial support, and welfare services. Empowerment and independence fell under capability building. These suggest that for the implementers, development if not addressed to improve the lives of the people is not development at all. Thus, for UEP, development must be people-centered, which is made up of social and educational components.

The implementers considered development as sustainable only if the following conditions are met: there must be agricultural sustainability, sustained manpower to do the activities outlined in the program implementation, and environmental sustainability, ecological soundness with productivity as its component.

The program implementers came out with the construct development being comprehensive. This was reflected in the two major components of the Agricultural Productivity Enhancement Program for Samar Island: the Agricultural Education cum Livelihood and Development and the On Farm Technology and Development Program. These two program components geared towards profitability and social welfare.

The constructs that emerged from the analysis were expressed through certain linguistic style of the implementers. This showed intentionality, jargon, and structure. Many minor constructs were reflected under intentionality, they were: expectancy, purposive, conditionality, blame, metaphor, descriptions, and assurance, being further subdivided into possibility and certainty. Jargon was made up of technical terms, buzzword, and advocacy, which is characterized by change, education, and commitment.

The documents exhibited particular linguistic style that mirrored how UEP viewed development. The documents showed repetitions, nominalizations, and modality. Statements were written both in the passive and active forms. Somewhere in the text nominalizations occurred and their usage made the meaning of the statement obscure. Modality was either weak or strong and was reflective of the implementer's stand about development issues.

Participation was inferred from the documents. Under this were coordination, which had in it support, policy formulation, and shared responsibility; involvement of the rural folk in deciding things for themselves; and leader-initiator to describe the implementers' role in dealing with the beneficiaries.

The third major construct reflected in the discourse of the implementers was poverty. Primarily it was the main reason why the program was implemented. Smaller constructs under poverty were: lack of access to opportunities, sustainability problem, slow economic growth, and low preference for farming enterprise.

Influence, the way the project implementers related themselves to the project stakeholders was another major construct reflected in the discourse of UEP. Minor constructs under influence were experts and fund sourcing.

The constructs derived from the discourses of the beneficiaries shared some semblance with those of the implementers. However, they were not as comprehensive as the constructs of the implementers. Development to the beneficiaries was basically economic in nature manifested in their utterances of food and other basic needs, income, and good health to be able to work. A more general statement, "advancement of the place and the people" also came out in the context of economic development.

Technology, to the beneficiaries was always associated with expenses and modern farming equipment and machinery. Reference was also made along farming techniques gained through experience. Their concern was more on the economic benefit that agricultural technology can bring.

Agricultural technology came out in relation to economic benefits, particularly trainings leading to sustained farm practices. Their language made reference to their recognition of the implementers' efforts in helping the people improve their living condition through the program.

Participatory development came out in the discourses of the beneficiaries. Minor constructs were assistance from concerned agencies, people cooperation, and certain linguistic style reflective of their participation in the program. Participatory development was often equated to cooperation, expressed with reference to the presence of the program in the area.

Discourse practice from the implementers' end was more complex as influenced by the official functions of the staff concerned in the program implementation. The final discourse was representative of the many minds working on the accomplishment report of the program. The documents were not authored solely; however, the final writer had more influence in the final text. On the part of the beneficiaries, discourses represented the individual views of the participant-beneficiaries. Moreover, traces of influences from others in the group were evident in the beneficiaries' discourse. For their part, there was no official format or structure in producing their discourse. It was observed that some adjustments on their views about important issues were made by some participants in order to conform to others' ideas to have some unifying stand on some issues.

Like the discourse practice, the sociocultural practice that shaped the implementers' discourse was more elaborate than that of the beneficiaries. The range of the construction system of the implementers was influenced by the available linguistic resources they had at their command and something that was more limited on the part of the beneficiaries as far as the program is concerned.

The sociocultural practice analysis of their discourses reflected the situational conditions prevailing in their own social group. On the part of the implementers, the academic tenor prevailed in the documents. Being so, the language was more technical and abounded in jargon. References were made to the program as a solution to the problem of poverty faced by the people, especially in the rural areas.

The beneficiaries' discourse also reflected the implementers' superiority in terms of knowledge on modern farming techniques. As such, dependence was reflected in the beneficiaries discourse. It was brought about by the

relationship between them which showed imbalance of power, where the implementers were in the superior position and the beneficiaries were the inferior ones if their role relationships were taken into consideration.

Conclusions

The analyses drawn from the communication participants' discourses are reflective of their constructs and construction system, as well as the influences in carrying conversations or communication exchanges with other participants of the communication event. The three levels of analysis led to the following conclusions:

The implementers' discourse is classified by the language they use to express constructs. They are discourses which describe their role in the program as experts or authorities, discourses which maintain their influence on the program co-participant, and discourses which show dominance.

It is worth citing what Burman and Parker (1993) said, "...language does more than it represents, with the corresponding implications, that meanings are multiple and shifting, rather than unitary and fixed." This finds application in the discourses where references are not strictly limited to context. Analysis of the language structure reveals that some ideas are better expressed in the passive form while the active form of the verb rightly takes on some utterances to give clearer meaning and to give emphasis to the program implementers, which also reflects authority.

The discourses of the beneficiaries are full of references particularly of the implementers' role; they are discourses reflecting their construct which are also part of the constructs of the implementers; and discourses revealing dependence on the program implementers for sustainability in farm development and productivity.

The discourse practice of both the implementers and the beneficiaries reveal the latter's role in program implementation, mainly as performers of the activities designed for the program by the implementers. It implies that while both parties talk of participation, to the beneficiaries this is primarily and largely "cooperation" to mean doing what they were instructed to do as planned by the implementers. This is evident in the beneficiaries' continued reference to "the program" in the texts, which by implication is very important to them because of what it does to uplift their living condition. The discourse of the program beneficiaries showed dependence and insecurity, where the success of the programs primarily lies in the hands of the implementers.

Analyses revealed the role of the beneficiaries which was limited to carrying out the program according to the implementers' design. As revealed in the texts, the partnership of the implementers and the beneficiaries did not show the same or equal roles and obligations. The implementers were, by and large, the major participants, and the beneficiaries were the minor participants. This relationship came out of the role that each other played in the partnership where the implementers were the leader-initiator and the beneficiaries were the follower-receiver.

The text production and text consumption of the participant largely depend on the system one group is within. In the case of the implementers or the university personnel, there was more of a fixed system as determined by the official function of everyone involved in the program. From the beneficiaries end, there was no rule to follow in the production of text. Getting deeper beyond the surface account of text production and text consumption, the two parties exhibited different schemes. The implementers processed information easily compared to the processing done by the beneficiaries. Ostensibly, the main factors are the person's facility of language use and his/her access to the construction process of the other participant. This is not to say however, that the beneficiaries lacked the proper constructing mechanisms; only that they were not conscious of getting into the other person's construction process to be able to understand the other person's ideas and most likely predict his/her future action. This is expressed in the classic personal construct theory of Kelly (1955), "the person's behavior is channelized to be able to predict future events." The function of predicting becomes part of the communication process where both parties should interpret the other party's interpretation of the things going on and involved in their communication exchanges to be able to foster mutual understanding.

The above discussion points to the role of social cognition in the processes of text production and text consumption. When one's construct does not include the other participant's construct the participants do not share a common cognition of the events or phenomena; thus, there is loose social cognition. The bigger is the interface in the social cognition of communication participants, the bigger is the chance for mutual understanding. The effort may come from either of the parties involved and adjustment may be towards any of the two poles. In the workings of the

convergence model of communication (Lawrence and Kincaid 1986), perfect understanding is not possible but deliberate effort on either or both parties would lead to convergence of ideas or mutual understanding. As to who will give in or reach out depends on the two parties and the agenda they have in the communication exchange fostered.

Discourse and discourse system are not independent in themselves; they are the product of many factors the individual is confronted or equipped with. Of significant influence is one's language repertoire. The wider the range of language repertoire, the richer is the linguistic expression; the more communicatively competent a person is, the more s/he can advance his/her ideas and the more powerful s/he is.

In the sociocultural analysis, differences in the processing system are partly determined by the culture or the organizational culture one has grown up on. The practices which are within their cultural system are easier to process and adapt than those that are totally new to them or outside what their culture would allow them to. This contention finds support in the ideational theory of culture, particularly culture as a system of knowledge, being "the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them" (Casson, 1981). It is not surprising to note that there are things which, to some are simple and worth emulating, but to others are complicated and they despise. While these things or practices are significant to some, they may not be so to others. This is because they have a mental model of what is proper and what is not and this belief came out in the discourse, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. Here, culture takes the form of a schema, a guide, which shapes the person's acceptance or rejection of the events s/he is confronted with.

In totality, the discourses of the implementers and beneficiaries are not mere utterances which they themselves create. Instead, they are products of the processing system of the person, which is shaped by many factors: the linguistic repertoires available to the individual, the cultural system they grew by and which they have apprenticed early in life, and their product of socialization as members of the society or group. Taking consideration of these aspects would bring to recognition the different linguistics styles that the program documents should follow, which should be made appropriate to the different program stakeholders. Discourse obtained from oral communication combined with written records and documents are substantial sources of information about the individuals involved in communication processes and the relationship established between them.

Putting together the findings led to the confirmation of the theoretical underpinnings which framed the structure and approaches of the investigation.

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Dr. Virginia G. Balanon holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Development Communication from the University of the Philippines at Los Baños. She teaches Communication, Curriculum Development, Literature, and Research courses in the tertiary and the graduate programs. She lectures in seminars about Communication and Qualitative Research among others. She was former Chair of the Languages and Communication Department of the University and served as Special Technical Assistant to the University President prior to her designation as Director of the Graduate Studies of the University of Eastern Philippines, Catarman, Northern Samar, Philippines

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