

“Saudi Students as Potential Members of the Discourse Community of Applied Linguistics”

Researcher:

Ahmad Abdu Ali Asey

A discourse community is a group of people who share a set of discourses, understood as basic values and assumptions, and ways of communicating about those goals. Use of the term 'discourse community' testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups. The pedagogies associated with writing across the curriculum and academic English now use the notion of 'discourse communities' to signify a cluster of ideas: that language use in a group is a form of

social behavior, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge. (Herzberg, 1986:1). Members of the discourse community include experts and novices. Persevering novices often manage to move within the discourse community and reach expert status. However, such transition can not be attained facily. Novices are to abide by the attributes of academic discourse within a particular discourse community. The same applies to

students, be they Saudis or of other affiliation. Therefore, this paper will concentrate on the utilization of genre in three traditions in both written and spoken discourse and its role within the discourse community, the correlation of local and international discourse community, and Kaplan's early position on writing across cultures and how

it can be utilized by Saudi students.

Genres can be defined as types of written or spoken discourse that are recognizable by the discourse community, and that meet the needs of the rhetorical situations in which they function. However, there are inherent difficulties in the

definition of genre such as inclusion, overlap, and variation. The American school considers genre a social action, a macro-speech act typified by its recurrence in particular recurrent situations. Situation is not material; it is a writer/speaker and

audience construal. As for the Australian school, genre is staged goal oriented social process. It is staged because it has phases of meaning; it is goal oriented because the unfolding phases accomplish a goal. It is social because readers/listeners engage interactively with others (writer/speaker, people/characters in text, present or potential readers/listeners). The British school views genre as a shared purposeful social activity in which members of a discourse community engage. It may be helpful to think of genres as textual tools used by groups of people as they work toward their desired

ends; genres and the conventions that guide them change as the community discovers more efficient adaptations, as group membership changes, or as the group's desired ends change. Being conscious of genres will aid your understanding and interpretation of a text.

Genre is also a useful concept when writing – look for inspiration in the texts you have read.

Discourse community local or international includes experts and novices. They have a set of common public goal, share certain norms of communication, including rhetorical patterns and specialized lexis, use certain genres of communication to share information and get feedback and to achieve specific goals, employ scientific terminology, and have a

threshold level of discourse expertise. However, local discourse communities are groups of readers and writers who habitually work together in companies, colleges, departments, neighborhoods, government agencies, or other groups defined by specific demographic features; whereas international discourse communities are groups of writers and readers

defined exclusively by a commitment to particular kinds of discourse practices and preferences, regardless of where and with whom they work. Academic discourse communities, in particular, live from discussion, criticism and academic competition for the purpose of knowledge creation. However, hegemony is exercised by a dominant group in

society. It behaves within a particular ideology. The group has its spokespersons who explain and defend that ideology. Their hegemonic discourse may be challenged by a competing discourse.

Robert Kaplan claimed that English followed a linear path in writing (mainly at the levels

of exposition and argumentation) while Semitic languages (Jewish, Arabic, Armenian) present the argument in parallel propositions, or embedded in stories, and does not in hierarchical progression (Kaplan, 1966, 21). This view has been criticized as being ethnocentric and unfounded. Researchers who were influenced by Kaplan's early writings found that Arab writers' work: lacked proper organization of ideas; contained parallelism; included repetition

of the same idea in different words; contained overuse of linkers; included direct questions and directives addressed to the reader. Kaplan has revised his position. The current position among many researchers today is that native speakers' oral mode may have the above characteristics. They may be found in unplanned spoken or unplanned written discourse.

Researchers in academic writing have shown that novice Arab writers' essays have the above listed weaknesses. Some Arab academics fail to get their work published in international journals because they have not developed sufficient expertise in academic writing.

Undergraduate Saudi students' essays in English contain language errors at the levels of spelling, word choice, syntax, and punctuation. Students do not follow a process of drafting and redrafting (Rouissi, 2015).

To conclude, for Saudi students to become potential members of the discourse community, an embodiment of the above-mentioned criteria is crucial. Genres are constantly changing, evolving, and appearing in new forms. Saudi students need to be able to distinguish and use genres. Awareness of text structure and genre are

metacognitive skills that all students need to develop. Thus, students may effectively be able to use the language for specific purposes. Furthermore, Saudi students need to be familiar with the characteristics of the discourse community. This may enable Saudi students to switch registers to be appropriate to the situation, time, and place.

Ultimately, Saudi students should regard criticism as constructive and strive to gain a writing style that avoids needless repetition and redundancy.

References:

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