

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

Virginia G. Balanon  
University of Eastern Philippines  
Cataraman, Northern Samar  
Philippines

## 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. This study attempted to determine the role of the implementers and the beneficiaries in the program implementation; find out the relationship between them as reflected in their discourses; and ascertain the role 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, through the workings of social cognition.

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

It was found out from the implementers' discourse that they had elaborate constructs. The constructs development, participation, poverty, and influence showed their being powerful and more knowledgeable between the two communication participants. Under the construct development are minor constructs: economic, technological, people-centered, sustainable, comprehensive, and certain linguistic style showing intentionality, jargon, and structure of the language that also show power. Participation has coordination and leader-initiator as minor constructs. Poverty, the third minor construct has sub-constructs: lack of access to opportunities, sustainable problem, slow economic growth, and low preference for farming enterprise. The fourth major construct, influence, has minor constructs: experts, fund sourcing, and language.

From the beneficiaries' end, the constructs that emerged from the analysis are: development, technology, sustainable agriculture, and participation, each having minor constructs under them. Development for them is basically economic. The construct agricultural technology covers modern farm equipment and machinery, and basic farming techniques. Sustainable agriculture has subconstructs - stable economic benefit, training, and language. The construct participatory development primarily means cooperation to them.

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 reflected diversity of constructs of the person involved in text production. For the implementers, they reflected the pressure felt by the university in keeping its expected role to alleviate the living condition of the people. The beneficiaries' constructs reflected the role of the implementers which was more of a service-provider.

It is concluded then, that the implementers' discourse being more elaborate than those of the beneficiaries is due to their having better command of the language. This also showed the former's wider range of constructs and reflected their being more powerful between the two communication participants. The beneficiaries' discourse, on the other hand, showed their being inferior both in expressing their ideas and their role in the program, which is said to be for their benefit.

**Keywords:** social cognition, discourse analysis, textual analysis, intertextual analysis, sociocultural practice, role relationships

## Introduction

### The Problem and Its Setting

Communication studies face changes. This study focused on the people-factor to account for both the program implementers and the recipients or beneficiaries of a development program implemented by the University of Eastern Philippines in Northern Samar, Philippines.

Practitioners of the participatory approach to development consider the top-down approach of program implementation as a factor to most unsuccessful programs. It implies 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 each other. 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. This statement led 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 foregoing discussion points to the role that social cognition takes between the communication participants: in this context, the program implementers and the beneficiaries. The extent to which social cognition affects the participants' 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.

### The Assumptions of the Study

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 (Van Dijk as cited by Shane, 1996). 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 people to be able to understand his 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).

It is contended that to understand a person takes one to understand his processing system which is best reflected in his 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.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative research was anchored on Van Dijk'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.

It utilized a combination of informal interview method and group discussion method to draw out the beneficiaries' discourse and their construction process. For the written documents the textual and the intertextual analyses, the discourse practice, and the sociocultural analyses were done to draw out the participants' constructs.

The criteria adopted in the selection of texts are: relevance of the documents to the study and availability of the documents. The textual or narrative reports of the annual accomplishments of the program were considered because they reflect the implementers' discourse. They met the criteria of discourses which Parker (1992) suggested. 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 provide answers to the objectives set; if it furnished significant insights into the discourses of the program participants; and if they reflect similarity or diversity of constructs.

The linguistic analysis took into account the vocabulary, semantics, and structure of the sentence which were taken to reflect beyond the surface level analysis, instead they were used as a means to draw on 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 was for familiarity. In the second reading of the documents constructs that can be deduced from the texts were noted, whether implicit or explicit. This enabled the researcher to tentatively identify some constructs and find more minor constructs that can be embraced by the major constructs. However, the analysis whether the constructs were major or minor ones was not final yet.

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 went through the entries identified under each construct label. Those which were decided to belong to one construct were lumped together.

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 context was made.

### **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 is holistic. More references, however, were recorded under economic – one minor construct under development. Other minor constructs, which further contained minor sub constructs are: technological, people-centered, sustainability, comprehensive, and linguistic.

For the program implementers economic development means an improved quality of life, access to opportunities, and profitability. The indicators for an improved quality of life are livelihood, productivity, and entrepreneurship, with subconstruct – profitability.

For the program implementers, farm implements or modern farming equipment complement with modern farming methods to constitute technological development. This is the second minor construct under development.

When development is not addressed to improve the lives of the people, it is not development at all. Thus, for UEP, development must be people-centered. People centeredness is made up of social and educational components. Under the educational components are the subconstructs 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.

Development is 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 is 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 are geared towards profitability and social welfare.

The construct that emerged from the analysis were expressed through certain linguistic style that the implementers employed. This showed intentionality, jargon, and structure. Many minor constructs were reflected under intentionality, they are: expectancy, purposive, conditionality, blame, metaphor, descriptions, and assurance, being further subdivided into possibility and certainty.

Jargon is made up of technical terms, buzzword, and advocacy, which is characterized by change, education, and commitment.

The documents exhibit particular linguistic style that mirrors how UEP views development. The documents show repetitions, voice, nominalizations, and modality. Statements are written in the passive and active forms. Somewhere in the text nominalizations occur; other usage makes the meaning of the statement obscure. Modality is either weak or strong and is reflective of the implementer's stand about the issue.

Participation is another construct deduced from the documents. Under this are coordination, which includes 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 is poverty; the main reason why the program is implemented. Smaller constructs under poverty are: lack of access to opportunities, sustainability problem, slow economic growth, and low preference for farming enterprise.

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

The constructs deduced from the discourses of the beneficiaries shared some semblance with those of the implementers. However, they are not as comprehensive as the constructs of the implementers. Development to the beneficiaries is basically economic in nature manifested in the form of food, 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 is always associated to expenses and modern farming equipment and machinery. Reference is also made along farming techniques gained through experience. Their concern is more on the economic benefit that agricultural technology can bring.

Agricultural technology is felt in relation to economic benefits and trainings leading to sustained farm practices. Their language made reference to their recognition of the implementers' efforts in helping the people through the program.

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

Discourse practice from the implementers' end is more complex as influenced by the official functions of staff concerned in the program implementation. The final discourse is representative of the many minds working on the accomplishment report of the program. There is no one author; 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 the others in the group were evident in the beneficiaries' discourse. For their part, there was no official format of 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 range of available linguistic resources.

The sociocultural 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 jargon abound. References were made to the program as a solution to the poverty problem faced by the people, especially in the rural areas.

The beneficiaries' discourse also reflected in 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 is their role relationships were taken into consideration. In the words of Vallacher, Nowak, and Zochowski (1996), people are often motivated to adjust their own internal state to match that of their interaction partners, presumably in service of facilitating smooth interaction. Research has shown that people sometimes prepare for social interaction by changing their internal state to match the anticipated state of the interaction partner.

## Conclusions

One of the biggest criticisms thrown against qualitative research is the non-generalizability of its findings. Discourse analysis being one of the approaches under the qualitative methodology is not spared from this disparagement. Apparently, such comments show the influence of the qualitative tradition. With discourse analysis, however, the researcher does not contend herself with the traditional counting of the occurrence of certain words and phrases that content analysis does. Working into the construct and construction system of the research subjects or "participants" is beyond what the quantitative methodology can offer. Thus, the conclusions outlined herein came from the analyses made from the participants' discourses and are reflective of their constructs and construction system, as well as the influences in carrying conversations with other participants of the communication event. Inasmuch as the researcher worked from "naturalistic records and documents where there was an almost complete

absence of the researcher's influence on the data" (Webb as cited by Potter and Wetherell, 1989) results reflected the participants' constructs and construction process.

The three levels of analysis led to the following conclusions:

UEP's discourse was classified by the language they used to express constructs. They are discourses which described their role in the program as experts or authorities, discourses which maintained their influence on the program co-participant, and discourses which showed 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 found application in the discourses where references were not strictly limited to context. Analysis of the language structure revealed that some ideas were better expressed in the passive form while the active form of the verb rightly took on some utterances to give clearer meaning and to give emphasis to the doer of the action.

The discourses of the beneficiaries took the following categories: they were full of references particularly of the implementers' role; they were discourses reflecting their construct of key terms which also came out as constructs of the implementers; and discourses revealing dependence on the program implementers for sustainability in farm development and productivity as a proof of the influence of the implementers.

The discourse practice of both the implementers and the participants revealed the beneficiaries' role in program implementation, mainly as performers of the activities designed for the program by the implementers. It can be concluded that, while both parties talked of "participation," to the beneficiaries this is primarily and largely "cooperation" to mean doing what they were instructed to do based on the plan 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 standard. The discourse of the program beneficiaries showed dependence and insecurity.

Analyses revealed the role of the beneficiaries which were limited to carrying out of 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 each other played in the partnership where the implementers were the leader-initiator and the beneficiaries were the "follower."

The text production and text consumption of the participant largely depended on the system one party is within. In the case of the implementers of the university, there was more of a fixed system as determined by the official function of each personnel 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 participants exhibited different schemes. The implementers processed information easily compared to the processing done by the beneficiaries. It follows that the main factor in the relationship is one's facility of language use, and 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. 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 comes as part of the communication process where both parties should interpret the other party's interpretation of things going on or involved in their communication exchanges to be able to foster mutual understanding. For Greenwald, et al. (1995), persuasive arguments tend to be accepted as valid to the extent that their conclusions agree with one's existing opinions.

The above discussion pointed 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 they do not share a common cognition of the events or phenomena; thus, there is a 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 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 one has grown into. The practices which are within their cultural system are easier to process and adopt than those that are totally new to them or outside what their culture would allow them to. 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 which take the form of a schema, a guide, which shapes their acceptance or rejection of the events they are 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 in turn shaped the many factors: the linguistic repertoires available to the individual, the cultural system s/he grew by and which s/he apprenticed early in life, and the product of socialization as a member of the society or group. Taking consideration of these aspects would arrive to recognition of the different linguistics styles that the program documents should follow, which is viewed to be appropriate to the different programs takeholders.

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

### Recommendations

Discourse analysis being among the unpopular approaches can also find applications in policy studies and formulation, informal litigation system, argumentation behavior of communication participants in different settings. They are potential areas of research which communication scholars should consider investigating.

Conduct studies on oral communication to comprise the text or discourse. More than the written texts, oral texts offer rich accounting practices. Gestures, tone of voice, body language and facial expressions all contribute to the meanings the speaker intends to convey. Discourse obtained from oral communication combined with written records and documents are substantial sources of information about the individuals involved in communication process and the relationship established between them.

Owing to the ability of the naturalistic method of inquiry to get into the essence of the subject of investigation, discourses can very well represent the people's constructs if done through participant observation. With this methodology, one's discourses will not be influenced by the presence of a researcher who may be viewed as an 'intruder' to the affairs of the 'observed' which may hold back their expressions and ideas about certain things. Hence, naturalistic inquiry is recommended.

### About the Author

Dr. Virginia G. Balanon holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Development Communication from the University of the Philippines at Los Banos. 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 chaired Languages and Communication Department of the University and served as Special Technical Assistant to the University President prior to her designation as the University Director for Graduate Studies of the University of Eastern Philippines, Catarman, Northern Samar, Philippines.

### References

- Baron, R. and Bryne, A., 1987. *Social psychology: understanding human interaction*. Mass: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Burman, E. and Parker, I. 1993. *Discourse analytic research*. London: Routledge.
- Casson, R. ed., 1981. *Language, culture, and cognition*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
- Chomsky, N. 1996. *International encyclopedia of communication, Vol I*.
- Cook, G. 1990. *Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fairclough, N. 1995. *Media discourse*. New York: St. Martin Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1992. *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1995. *Critical discourse analysis, the critical study of language*. Singapore: Longman Group Ltd.
- Forgas, J. ed. 1981. *Social cognition, perspectives on everyday understanding*. London: Academic Pres.
- Gee, J. 1995. *The social mind: language, ideology and social practice*. New York: Bergin and Garvey.
- Greenwald, A.; Mahzarin R.; and Banaji. "Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Stereotypes," Psychological Review 1995, Vol. 102, No. 1,4-27.  
[http://faculty.washington.edu/agg/pdf/Greenwald\\_Banaji\\_PsychRev\\_1995.OCR.pdf](http://faculty.washington.edu/agg/pdf/Greenwald_Banaji_PsychRev_1995.OCR.pdf).
- Infante, D. et al. 1990. *Building Communication Theory*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Javier, T. 1997. *Personal social cognition, communication, and participation levels in an agricultural resource management program*. PhD Thesis, University of the Philippines, Los Banos.

- Kelly, G. 1955. *Personal construct theory*. New York: Norton.
- Kincaid, L. 1979. *The principle of convergence in the convergence model of communication*. Hawaii: East West Center.
- Lindlof, T. 1995. *Qualitative communication research methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Littlejohn, S. 1989. *Theories of human communication*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- McCarthy, M. 1994. *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M. and Carter, R. 1994. *Language and discourse*. England: Longman House UK Limited.
- Mc Quail, D and Windahl, D. 1993. *Communication models for the study of mass communication*. New York: Longman Group Limited.
- Parker, Ivan. 1992. *Discourse dynamics: critical analysis for social and individual psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Potter, J and Wetherell, M. 1989. *Discourse and social psychology: beyond attitudes and behavior*. London: Sage Publications, Ltd.
- Ragoff, B. 1990. *Apprenticeship in thinking: cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rosenthal, T. and Zimmerman, B. 1978. *Social learning and cognition*. New York: Academic Press.
- Van Dijk, T. 1991. *Racism and the press*. London: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1994. *Discourse and cognition in society in communication theory today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Discourse in Society*. Research in critical discourse studies - Website Teun A. van Dijk. <http://www.discourses.org/resources/journals/>.
- Vallacher, R; Andrzej N.; and Zochowski, M. *Dynamics of social coordination: The synchronization of internal states in close relationships*. Florida Atlantic University / Warsaw University / University of Michigan. [http://psy2.fau.edu/~vallacher/pdfs/articles/Vallacher\\_et\\_al\\_\(2005\)\\_Dynamics\\_of\\_Social\\_Coordination.pdf](http://psy2.fau.edu/~vallacher/pdfs/articles/Vallacher_et_al_(2005)_Dynamics_of_Social_Coordination.pdf).
- Wegner, D. and Vallacher, R. 1977. *Implicit psychology: an introduction to social cognition*. USA: Oxford University Press.