

DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

- from Swales, J.M. (1990), *Genre Analysis. English in Academic and Research Settings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2nd chapter).

1) A discourse community has a **broadly agreed set of common public goals.**

“In a Senate or Parliament, there may well exist overtly adversarial group of members, but these adversaries may broadly share some common objective as striving for improved government”.

The objective not the object...

“students of the Vatican in history departments, the Kremlin, dioceses, birth control agencies and liberation theology seminaries” may share a common object of study, but are not a discourse community” (1990:25).

2) A discourse community has **mechanisms of intercommunication** among its members.

“These mechanisms will vary according to the community: meetings, telecommunications, correspondence, newsletter, conversation and so forth” (1990:26).

Members act as a point, their respective location (workplace) doesn't matter.

Members have to recognize that such community exists.

- Ex. - Trade Unions are discourse communities, but being a worker doesn't mean that you are part of a discourse community.

3) A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to **provide information and feedback**.

It's the difference between **a formal** and **a real** membership to a discourse community

- Ex. - You can pay the annual fee to be an ATA member, but if you are never involved in its discursal exchanges/mechanisms, you cannot be said to be part of that community

4) A discourse community uses and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.

“A discorsal community has developed and continues to develop discorsal expectations. These may involve the appropriacy of topics; the form and the function of discorsal elements; and the role texts play in the operations of the discourse community” (1990:27).

Ex. – The academic community (abstract, research article, preface, book, book review, paper at meetings, poster, etc.)

“One of the purposes of this criterion is to question discourse community status for new or newly-emergent groupings. Such groupings need, as it were, to settle down and work out their communicative proceedings and practices before they can be recognized as discourse communities. If a new grouping 'borrows' genres from other discourse communities, such borrowings have to be assimilated" (1990:27).

5) In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired **some specific lexis**

“It is hard to conceive, at least in the contemporary English-speaking world, of a group of well-established members of a discourse community communicating among themselves on topics relevant to the goals of the community and not using lexical items puzzling to outsiders” (1990:27).

- Ex. Discourse communities within the IT world.
- Ex. The role played by abbreviations and acronyms in teachers’ communities (ELT, ESP, TOEFL, TESOL, CEF etc.) .

6) A discourse community has a **threshold level of members** with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise. (1990:28).

There are usually different membership criteria (more/less binding) and degrees:

- Ex. Black power movement: ethnic, to be black (binding membership criterion).
- Ex. Environmental group: love for nature and lobbying activities (less binding membership criterion).
- Ex. Academic communities: researchers, lecturers, professors (discoursal expertise).