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Discourse Community

The concept of discourse community is an interesting chapter of a book written by Swales that goes into depth on what classifies a discourse community and whether it is simply a scholarly group or people working in a coffee house. As a college student myself I have never heard of the term discourse community. In this chapter it goes into depth and argues what makes a discourse community in the reading it stated the following “A speech community typically inherits its membership by birth, accident or adoption; a discourse community recruits its members by persuasion, training or relevant qualification.” I believe this statement shows that a discourse community can involve anyone by accident or not and does not necessarily have to be a scholarly or an academic group who speak and write the same way. I believe a question should also be raised and asked that if people intentionally choose there “discourse community”. I think it is important to note many choose who they talk to whether they are in school, at home, or in a public outing, and it is essential to take note that people segregate themselves. Therefore, just because I am a college student and talk and write like many college students it does not mean we should be considered in the same discourse community. As well as, many scholars may speak like the following quote “The use of these (ESL, EAP, WAC, NCTE, TOEFL, etc.) is, of course, driven by the requirements for efficient communication exchange between experts” but does not mean when they go home and communicate in the same one to friends and family. So again, I raise the question can one be a part of multiple discourse communities or is the term just used

scholarly and many people do not group themselves in this way linguistically even if they meet a certain criterion. Relating back to genre when it states the author assumes everyone knows the meaning I think this also raises question of just because one can recognize a certain genre or way of writing does not mean they are able to communicate in such a manner as they can write. One can recognize biblical writing, read biblical writing, and not be able to communicate biblical or discuss what they just read. Discourse community is so broad and that is why there is not a good definition of what it means at a scholarly level.

Another article about discourse communities is written by Erik Borg that gives us another look at the meaning of a discourse community. Borg does not necessarily say discourse community is nonsense but he does show with evidence even the highest scholars who said discourse community is a factual community that exists and is a form of communication but Borg also writes how Swales himself the author above changed his definition “In 1990, Swales described a discourse community that was united only by written communication. However, in 1998 he revisited the question and differentiated between discourse communities and place discourse communities’ which were united by both written and spoken communication”. I think it is also to note the following which may answer the question on which I asked above “Unlike a speech community, membership of a discourse community is usually a matter of choice; unlike an interpretive community, members of a discourse community actively share goals and communicate with other members to pursue those goals.” I think it is important to concentrate on this, that being in a discourse community is a choice like above when I stated people segregate themselves even within a job that multiple people share training and relevant goals. I believe the question on what classifies and defines a discourse community is an open-ended question and

neither of the papers can decide on one definition which can be confusion for new learners whether a student or a scholar who is trying to learn about the topic. Borg also writes the following “discourse community’ is being displaced by ‘community of practice’, a term from sociocultural theory rather than linguistics, even in contexts where a linguistic term might seem appropriate”. This in closing shows that the term is loosely used and the choice of who you communicate with spoken or written even if you are a scholar, student, or family one chooses who they communicate with and how to get goals achieved.