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Discourse Community: How I Deal With My Family and Friends

Communication is a fundamental element in any society. We are social beings and need to communicate to manage different aspects of our lives. Communication is a gradual process that we learn from a tender age until we are old enough to communicate in various ways. For instance, as small children, we yell or cry when hurt or need something but as adults, we can communicate both verbally and non-verbally. At this point, we adapt to different discourse communities in our lives. A discourse community is a group of people with similar customs, experiences and goals. An individual may belong to several discourse communities, which may often overlap. Each discourse community has its rules, language, topics of interest and other facets that make it unique.

The three groups that I can associate with include college student, family and friends discourse communities. The broadest of the three groups is the college student community. The members are students currently enrolled in my school. Communication between students who do not know each other well is limited and perceived negatively when a student randomly engages another in a personal conversation. In some cases, there are detailed conversations, and they are mainly about school related matters such as assignments, sports, or recent events. In most cases, students use formal language, with a few exceptions of close friends.

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In contrast, my family discourse community comprises individuals born, married, or adopted into the family. Communication topics and authority vary from one family member to the other depending on which particular members are involved. For instance, when conversing with senior members of the family, the choice of words and tone are more respectful than when those used when interacting with my age mates (brothers, sisters and cousins). More so, conversations are more personal when interacting with my immediate family as opposed to when conversing with my extended family. The variation results due to lack of familiarity with some members of the extended family. Most topics of discussions include school experience, food, holidays as well as family happenings. Communication mostly takes place through the phone and social media and only in person during rare family visits. Communication within my immediate family varies from in-person conversations, to phone calls, to texting. My family mainly converses in Spanish and semi- formal verbal and non-verbal communication. We can determine the mood and sensitivity of what the other member is saying depending on the tone or non-verbal expression. Written communication is in letters, mainly lists of what to do or buy - things that are not of great importance. This group has some rules and standards of communication, for instance, family secrets and private matters are not to be shared publicly, cursing is not permitted in the presence of adults or young children, as well as respect to adults is mandatory. The general topics discussed in my immediate family include family concerns, sports, the news, jokes, fashion, school, religion, friends, politics, recent life experiences, just to mention a few. Personal opinions are easily accepted, as the family members are not judgmental. I like this discourse community because of the friendly environment, ease in communication, and it makes me feel comfortable.

My friends discourse community is the most diverse with respect to conversational topics and genres of communication. This group is made up of my close friends, who are people who care about school, care for each other, share similar interests, are not party people or rebels. In addition, we neither smoke or drink and are honest with each other. Discussion subjects include life problems, homework/schoolwork, movies, current trends, professors, and videogames, among many others. The main forms of communication media used are Twitter and Facebook, e-mail, and a few cards for special occasions such as birthdays. Our conversations may be in-person, via text messages, social media and over the phone, depending on the urgency of the matter, to establish a meeting point. Although we mainly communicate in Spanish, occasionally we use a mix of Spanish and English. We use semi-informal language and rarely curse, but use sarcasm a lot. In most occasions, less attention is paid to grammar and spelling as we use short forms that sometimes only we can understand.

This exercise has been an insightful one since prior to it I barely paid attention to the various discourse communities around me. This realization has given me the opportunity to reflect on the ways of communication with different people and thereby with this knowledge I can improve my communication skills in varying discourse communities. Being conscious of the rules, topics, and characteristics of each community allows me to express myself with ease and efficiently. I have learnt to establish priorities in various aspects of my life, civic, academic, family, and personal, among others. Discourse communities make an important part of life, and learning to communicate effectively in the various communities is just as important.