Culture as a dynamic product of socially and historically situated discourse communities: A review of literature

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Abstract:

This article delves into the intricate and multifaceted relationship between culture, discourse communities, and their profound entanglement within the rich tapestry of social and historical contexts. At its core, culture is not a monolithic entity but a dynamic amalgamation of myriad components, practices, and ideologies. These elements are not static but continually evolving, shaped by the interactions and exchanges within discourse communities. Discourse communities are fertile ground for nurturing, contesting, and disseminating cultural elements. Within these communities, language, beliefs, values, and norms are not merely transmitted but actively negotiated and transformed. This ongoing process contributes to the resilience and adaptability of culture, enabling it to respond to the ever-changing social and historical landscape. Central to our analysis is recognising culture as both "socially situated" and "historically situated". The former underscores the embeddedness of discourse communities within broader socio-cultural contexts, highlighting their interconnectedness with power dynamics, social hierarchies, and institutional structures. The latter emphasises the dynamic nature of culture, acknowledging its responsiveness to historical events, cultural exchanges, and shifts in collective consciousness. Through this scholarly exploration, we seek to offer a comprehensive understanding of how culture evolves within the intricate web of discourse communities, reflecting and shaping the world around them. By unpacking the complex interplay between culture, discourse, and their socio-historical contexts, we aim to illuminate the profound implications of these dynamics on individuals, communities, and societies at large.

Keywords: culture, discourse communities, historically situated, socially situated.

Classification numbers: 9.3, 12

1. Introduction

This article explores the complex relationship between culture and discourse communities, considering their deep entanglement with social and historical contexts. We examine the various facets of culture, including its smaller components and practices, which are nurtured, shaped, and transmitted within discourse communities. Our emphasis is on the socially situated nature of culture, highlighting how discourse communities are not isolated entities but are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural milieu. Additionally, we acknowledge the historically situated aspect of culture, recognising its dynamic response to historical events, societal transformations, and shifts in thought. This scholarly analysis aims to comprehensively understand how culture evolves within discourse communities, reflecting and shaping the world around them.

2. Understanding the terms

2.1. Define critical terms

Culture: Culture is a complex concept studied over 140 years by anthropologists and sociologists. Despite this extensive research, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of culture [1, 2]. Culture can be seen as central to human sociality, enabling coordination of social actions and cooperation in large-scale groups [3]. It is a unique characteristic of human beings, allowing for transmitting and accumulating knowledge, skills, and

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technologies [4]. Different definitions of culture exist, with some emphasising a society's shared knowledge and values, while others focus on the behaviours and characteristics of specific social groups [5].

Moreover, culture can be defined as the knowledge, values, beliefs, behaviours, and institutions shared by a society [2]. It encompasses the patterns of human behaviour and the attitudes that characterise a particular social group or organisation [5]. Culture is unique to humans and is based on symbolic communication, social interaction, and the cumulative quality of human interaction [4]. It allows material culture and technology accumulation within human groups [1]. Culture is essential to human sociality, enabling the coordination of social actions and cooperation in large-scale groups [6]. Culture is an intricate and multifaceted aspect of human cognition and conduct that profoundly impacts our comprehension, conduct, and principles. Even though it has been studied for years, there is still no universally accepted definition of what constitutes culture. However, it is widely acknowledged that culture is a fundamental part of human society, encompassing everything from language and communication to customs, traditions, art, and social norms. It is a complex and dynamic concept that plays a crucial role in shaping our perceptions and attitudes towards the world around us.

Socially situated: Socially situated refers to the understanding that learning and cognition are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they occur. It recognises that human action and language use are shaped by the social, cultural, material, and sequential structures of the environment in which they occur [7]. This perspective emphasises the importance of considering the specific contexts and broader social practices in which literacy and learning occur [8]. It also highlights the role of the workplace as a site for both cognitive and social activity, where learning takes place through interactions with others and the environment [9]. Furthermore, situated simulation suggests that the brain's computational mechanisms are influenced by the situated character of experience in the environment, leading to representations that reflect this situatedness [10]. Socially situated approaches recognise individuals' interconnectedness, actions, and environment in shaping cognition and learning.

Historically situated: Historically situated can be defined as a concept that recognises the influence of historical circumstances on various phenomena. It acknowledges that how these phenomena are interwoven and shaped is not universal but varies with historical context [8]. This concept applies to different fields of study, such as literacy, self-identity, and design. In literacy, Historically Situated emphasises the link between literacies in specific contexts and broader social practices [11]. The study of self-identity highlights the historical shift from the Victorian self to the post-World War II empty self and the impact of historical antecedents, economic constituents, and political consequences on the formation of the self [12]. In the design field, the concept recognises the dynamic character of the context in which designing takes place and the recursive interrelationship between different environments, leading to a situated framework for understanding the design process [13].

Discourse communities: Discourse communities are groups of people who share common ideologies and ways of speaking about things [14]. These communities can be sharply or loosely defined, and individuals can be members of multiple discourse communities [15]. Discourse communities are characterised by colonising members' thoughts through ideology, which can have positive and negative effects [16]. Being trapped within the discourse of a particular community can hinder the ability to communicate across different discourses and limit opportunities for heteroglossic discourse [17]. However, privileging critique as a mode of discourse may define an ethical community that counters the constraining effects of conventional discourse communities [18].

2.2. Interrelation between the terms

Culture is a multifaceted concept that defies simple definition. It is not a monolithic entity but a rich tapestry woven from numerous smaller components and practices. These components are not isolated; instead, they are intricately intertwined within discourse communities. This essay explores the dynamic interplay between culture, discourse communities, and the crucial role of both social and historical contexts in shaping this intricate web of shared knowledge, values, and practices.

Language, customs, traditions, art, rituals, values, and norms are all part of culture, a complex concept that creates a collective identity for different groups. Culture

is not a static concept but a dynamic one, constantly shaped and sustained by discourse communities. These communities unite around shared interests, goals, or activities and exchange ideas, beliefs, and practices, ultimately contributing to creating and disseminating cultural knowledge. Individuals within these communities communicate and interact, shaping and reinforcing cultural norms within their context. Discourse communities, such as academics, share a common interest in research, scholarship, and knowledge dissemination and form a community through shared communication, such as conferences, journals, and academic discourse. Through these exchanges, they advance their field and contribute to the broader culture by shaping intellectual paradigms and norms.

The concept of "socially situated" culture emphasises that discourse communities are fundamentally products of social interactions and constructions. They are not independent entities but somewhat shaped by individuals within a particular social context. The broader dynamics of society inevitably impact these communities' interactions. Therefore, the culture within these discourse communities is inexorably linked to the social context in which they exist. For instance, the culture within a political discourse community is heavily influenced by the larger society's prevailing political climate, societal values, and power structures.

Culture is not only socially situated but also historically situated. This aspect of culture reminds us that cultural practices and discourse communities evolve. Historical events, societal changes, and shifts in thinking all play crucial roles in developing and transforming discourse communities and the culture they create. For example, the feminist discourse community has evolved over the years, shaped by historical events such as the suffrage movement, women's liberation movements, and legal changes affecting gender equality. These historical factors have significantly impacted the community's values, language, goals, and, as a result, the broader cultural discourse surrounding gender and equality.

3. Culture as a product

The concept of culture is intricate and multifaceted, stemming from the interactions and actions of individuals within their social and physical surroundings. It is learned and shared and can be defined as a set of concepts, values, beliefs, and behaviours passed down through generations [19]. It is shaped by a community's shared history, traditions, and beliefs, influencing how they view and interact with the world around them. Culture is not static but a dynamic and adaptive system that evolves [20]. Cultural knowledge, values, and practices are passed down through everyday community interactions, such as sharing stories and participating in ceremonies. These collective experiences become woven into a culture's fabric, shaping its members' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. It is closely intertwined with society, as society and culture mutually shape and influence each other [21]. Culture is not only about intellectual and aesthetic development but also encompasses the way of life of a particular group or period [22]. It includes material elements, such as objects and technology, and non-material elements, such as beliefs and values [23].

As a result, culture plays a pivotal role in coordinating social actions and fostering collaboration within large groups. By providing a shared framework for communication, decision-making, and problem-solving, culture enables individuals to work together towards common objectives. With culture, the practical cooperation of large groups and the ability to achieve complex tasks would be easier.

Culture encompasses shared beliefs, practices, values, and norms. A shared value system shapes agents' normative reasoning and behaviour [24]. Culture is a group's shared beliefs, attitudes, and artefacts [25]. These shared values and beliefs contribute to developing a strong culture within a group, fostering similarities and ensuring that participants have many self-similar neighbours to observe [26]. On the other hand, norms are the appropriate, culturally varying behaviours defined by meta-norms in different relational contexts [27]. Individuals' cultural norms and values are relevant when assessing a breach of the statutory unconscionability test in financial services transactions [28]. Culture plays a role in student retention and academic success, comprising shared values and beliefs.

Shared beliefs, practices, values, and norms significantly impact people's behaviour in different cultures. These cultural factors shape individuals' behaviour within their social groups and broader society. They influence the public's willingness to support

restoration efforts for European riverine biodiversity [24]. Cultural, socioeconomic, political, and religious considerations influence individual and collective values, affecting behaviour [29]. The extent to which individuals are aware of their cultural norms and values is debated, but it is clear that culture plays a role in determining behaviour [30]. Cultural beliefs and practices also influence medical attention-seeking behaviour and infant care during the postnatal period [31]. Understanding the variety of cultural beliefs and practices is essential for midwives and healthcare professionals to provide culturally sensitive care [32].

The historical human sciences see culture as dynamic and constantly changing, with self-reflexive operations that develop over generations [33]. Research into watermelon cultivation has shown that different methods and techniques can lead to increased production and adaptation to changing market demands [34]. Convergent transformation, where one item causes the production of another item with directed deviations from the original, can contribute to cultural stability without copying or selection processes [35]. Like firms and markets, culture is an institution that evolves and changes in response to external shocks [36]. As seen in Muslim culture, the interaction between faith and knowledge demonstrates the creative use of ideas and concepts to shape behaviour and create new patterns [37]. Therefore, culture is not static but evolves.

4. Socially situated discourse communities

Discourse communities are groups of people with an ideology and a common language. They provide benefits but also impose constraints. An ethical community is open to others' discourse and committed to critique, countering the limitations of discourse communities. The notion of discourse communities has been widely adopted and applied in healthcare and beyond [38]. Personalisation algorithms in the digital age learn users' behaviours and tailor content to individual interests. These algorithms categorise and represent users back to society, perpetuating bias. The relationship between personalisation algorithms and racial bias can be examined using racialised discourse communities within algorithm audits [39]. Online communities are essential in obtaining health information and sense-making during viral outbreaks. The co-evolution of online communities in response to a rapidly developing public health crisis needs to be understood [40]. Online programming communities have different discourse patterns, with some focusing more on task-specific discussions while others foster a sense of bonding and camaraderie among members [41]. Collaboration and information flow are crucial in the aerospace industry, and collaborative writing plays a role in the professional lives of engineers and scientists [42].

Socially situated discourse communities communicate and interact within specific social contexts. These communities are characterised by shared norms, practices, and values that shape how discourse is produced and understood [43, 44]. They can be oral, written, or online and may involve multiple languages and modes of communication [45]. Socialisation in these communities consists of learning and adopting the appropriate discourse practices and identities associated with them [46, 47]. Communities are multifaceted social environments where individuals must navigate complex power dynamics and conform to or question established norms. Within these groups, personal development and transformation are also possible. How individuals communicate, and their cultural backgrounds significantly impact how conversations are structured within these communities. Academic writing programs strive to provide learners with the necessary skills to actively engage in future discourse communities by introducing them to genre-specific tasks that reflect the practices of those communities. This approach enables learners to understand better the socio-pragmatic features of discourse and cultural references that shape communication within these specialised groups.

Language and communication play a crucial role in shaping culture. The relationship between language and culture is reciprocal, with language acquiring meaning and value when integrated with cultural elements [48]. Language is not just a means of communication but also reflects various aspects of society, such as social class, ethnicity, nationality, and geographical location [49]. Cultural understanding is essential for effective cross-cultural communication, as miscommunication and misunderstandings can occur without understanding

the culture [50]. Language also impacts healthcare accessibility and outcomes, with language status influencing treatment engagement and disengagement [51]. Moreover, language is a fundamental aspect of globalisation, enabling mass communication and cultural interactions between people from different cultures [52].

Discourse communities play a crucial role in forming and transmitting cultural norms. These communities are groups of people who share a common discourse or way of communicating [53]. In a broad sense, discourse refers to creating, recognising, representing, and exchanging meaning in a social context [54]. Within a discourse community, social events, practices, and structures unfold, and the transmission of culture occurs through various means, such as folk narratives [55]. Informal education, which involves transmitting knowledge through discourse, is deeply embedded in society's cultural performances, beliefs, norms, rituals, and social rules [56]. Discourse shapes and reshapes the thought and practice of the speech community, acting as an agent of social change [57]. For example, online communities have a crucial influence on forming and transmitting cultural norms. Through interactions and the dissemination of ideas, these norms endure even as new users join the community, thanks to the distinctive network structure that propagates them. The cultural norms in these online communities reflect the members' values and beliefs and are frequently reinforced through social cues and interactions. Moreover, the norms that spread through these networks can have a profound, enduring impact on society, shaping how individuals behave and interact on the internet and in real life.

5. Historically situated discourse communities

Historically situated discourse communities are shaped by specific historical and cultural contexts. These communities are characterised by shared rules and practices for communicating and interpreting speech or writing [43]. They are organised forms of knowledge within a community, established and legitimised through communicative practices [58]. The study of historically situated discourse communities has been traditionally focused on speech communities, but more recently, the term "discourse communities" has also been used to include written communication [39]. These communities play a significant role in socialisation processes, such as academic discourse socialisation, where individuals learn the norms and practices of specific discourse communities [59]. Understanding historically situated discourse communities is essential for analysing the complex processes that shape culture and identity and for preparing learners to participate effectively in these communities [47].

The impact of historical context on culture is significant. Different historical events and interpretations have shaped the understanding and definition of culture over time [60]. Scholars like E.B. Tylor and Matthew Arnold have played a crucial role in interpreting and defining culture in their works [61]. Cultural relativism has emerged as a response to social Darwinism, viewing each culture as valuable [62]. The historical context also influences the manifestation of cultural traits in various organisational processes, such as the acquisition of companies [63]. Context and culture are interconnected, with context as one [64]. Understanding the historical context is essential for considering contextual and cultural variables in instructional design and learning environments. Historical context shapes viticulture in various domains, from individual interactions to organisational practices.

Different historical periods give rise to distinct discourse communities. Between 1870 and 1950, new religious understandings and practices emerged, creating various religious communities incorporating scientific language into their worldviews [65]. In healthcare, "discourse communities" have been widely adopted and applied, providing benefits and constraints to those with an ideology and common language [58]. Additionally, discourse communities discussing the sensation of pain vary in their motivations and ways of discussing and describing pain [38]. Furthermore, discourse structure evolves, with lexical diversity, graph size, long-range recurrence increasing and short-range recurrence decreasing as individuals mature and receive education [66]. These findings suggest that historical periods shape the formation and characteristics of discourse communities, influencing their language, beliefs, and practices.

6. Conclusions

As we end this discussion, we must acknowledge that culture is not a static or singular entity but rather a multifaceted and ever-changing phenomenon. It is a complex web woven from individuals' interactions, communication, and shared experiences within discourse communities. These communities are not isolated but rather deeply embedded in their social and historical contexts, shaping and being shaped by the social dynamics of the larger society. Furthermore, they evolve in response to historical events and shifts in thinking, creating a rich and diverse tapestry of human experience. Appreciating culture in this context allows us to recognise its complexity and richness and understand how it influences and is influenced by the world around us.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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