Rhetorical Analysis of the Discourse Community of Army ROTC

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There are thousands of discourse communities all across the world. Almost everyone is a part of at least one discourse community even if they don’t know it. Discourse communities can range from very complex communities, such as the medical discourse community, to very simple discourse communities, such as a church softball team. One such complex discourse community is Army ROTC. Army ROTC is a very well know discourse community.“The Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), as it exists today, began with President Wilson signing the National Defense Act of 1916”(“Histoy”).Essentially what ROTC is is an organization in colleges and universities that trains college students to become officers in the United States Army. Army ROTC, when it comes to swales definition, is a very sound discourse community. Although it is a very sound discourse community there is one niche that makes it unique. That niche being that Army ROTC is a mushfaked discourse community.

Army ROTC is a rather spread out discourse community, when you look at in the context of the land area it covers, but accordance with swales definition of a discourse community it is a strong discourse community.Swale states that to be a discourse community there must be a public goal (220). This discourse community exists and is so uniformed because of the public goal it serves. That public goal of ROTC is stated in a portion of the mission statement of the U.S. army Cadet Command, which is the branch of the Army whose job is to be the instructing body of ROTC; the statement is as follows “The U.S. Army Cadet Command partners with universities to recruit, educate, develop, and inspire Senior ROTC Cadets in order to commission officers of character for the Total Army”(“Mission”). Army ROTC, being essentially a part of the U.S. Army, shares many of the same characteristics as the larger discourse community of the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army’s goal, which in return becomes ROTC’s goal, when it comes to the organization of units, is to have complete uniformity. Uniformity is very important to some discourse communities and it is the main puzzle piece that holds Army ROTC together. Swales states “A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims” (221). This concept of uniformity provides the capability for Army ROTC to have many effective genres of communication to achieve its goals. All Army ROTC cadets around the nation are learning the same material through many different genres of communication. These genres include a common army curriculum displayed through PowerPoints, a communication platform in the form of an online website called Blackboard, CLC, and a common text which includes many Army pamphlets and handbooks. One genre that was stated in the previous sentence, Blackboard, is a great genre of communication. Blackboard allows both members of the discourse community, cadets and Army cadre, to communicate with one another. A post from an Army captain on Blackboard is as follows “Ladies and Gentlemen, A simple reminder -- your record APFT is next week -- though I am certain you were all tracking this as you read the POI every week. Sections 1, 2, 4, and 6 will take their APFT's at PTT 9 November -- form up in the normal place at the regular time. Sections 3, 5, and 7 will take their APFT during their regularly scheduled class. Form up for class on the track. Anyone needing to schedule a make up will do so with Sergeants First Class Nevin or Lilly. That is all” (Seitz). This post shows how effective Blackboard is as a communication tool. This one post alone reached over 200 ROTC cadets and gave those cadets the ability to come together and continue their pursuit of that common goal of becoming officers of character for the total army. Another major genre of communication that was stated before is CLC (Cadet Leadership Course). CLC is a 6 week Army course where all Army MS3’s (ROTC juniors) gather at Fort Knox Kentucky and are brought up to speed and assessed on their leadership skills. This course allows all ROTC cadets to communicate and share ideas which again will help the members of Army ROTC to continue their pursuit of that common goal. Another characteristic of Army ROTC that makes it such a strong discourse community is the mind boggling amount of lexis’s that is used by the communities’ members. Swale states “In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis” (222). There are hundreds of lexis’s that are used in Army ROTC. Some are ORP (Objective Rally Point), LOA (Limit of Advance), and FA (Field Artillery). If you went and sat in on a Military Science One lecture you would be so lost on what was going on not because the information was hard to comprehend but because you did not understand all of the verbiage and acronyms that were being used. Army ROTC has hundreds if not thousands of acronyms. If there is something which has two words to its name the Army will abbreviate it.

As stated before the discourse community of Army ROTC has a lot of lexis’s and traditions that make it a very strong discourse community, but these complicated traditions and the large amount of lexis’s make Army ROTC a very hard discourse community to become truly a part of. Army is truly a Discourse community with a big D as Gee would say which means not only do have to walk the walk and talk the talk but you also have to dress the part to. So if Army ROTC is a Discourse community with that big D, and it has complicated traditions and lexis’s, how are so many college students members of the community especially when most college students arrive in ROTC with little to no military experience or understanding of the military? The answer to this dilemma is another concept which Gee explains in his article “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics” that concept being mushfaking or making a mushfake discourse. Gee defines a mushfake discourse as “partial acquisition coupled with metaknowledge and strategies to “make do”” (490). This idea of a mushfake discourse community is what Army ROTC is built around; no member of ROTC will ever say they know it all because no member of ROTC will ever know it all, but they try to portray as if they do. This is because, as stated before, Army ROTC is designed to teach college students how to become officers in the United States Army and officers in the U.S. army need to know it all and if they don’t know it all they need to be able to at least portray to the men that they are leading that they are the most military educated person in that unit.

How I came to this discovery of ROTC being a mushfake discourse community is by actually being a member of the community and by analyzing the genres and lexis’s that Army ROTC has. I imagined my first years ROTC classes and training would go something in the realms of an instructor who would be spoon-feeding exact information to me, like who to salute when and where, how to address ROTC cadre instructors, what to if this happens, or what to do if that happens, and I would take that information and apply it and be fine. In a sense that is exactly what happened, but what I failed to understand though is that there is no definite answer to many situations that you face in Army ROTC. Just in the last three months I have been put in many situations where maybe I did not know exactly what to do but I took what I had learned and what I did know to do and made it work. Essentially I mushfaked through the situation and from talking and observing my peers in (MS1) Military Science 1 (MS1) and my superiors in Military Science 4 (MS4) I have realized that almost all ROTC cadets have to mushfake through situations from time to time. An example of a time where I specifically had to mushfake my way through a situation was when my platoon got attacked on our fall field training exercises (FTX). As the commander of the unit at the time I had to react and even though I didn’t know exactly what to do I mushfaked through the situation and everything turned out fine. After being put in that situation and many situations like it where I had to mushfake through I came to the realization that ROTC being a mushfake discourse is not a flaw of ROTC but a strength. It is a strength of ROTC because nothing in the actual Army ever goes perfectly and not every leader knows everything, but when things do not go perfectly it is the job of the leader to figure out solutions and make things work.

When analyzing the genres and the lexis’s that Army ROTC uses you can really start to understand why ROTC is mushfake discourse community. One genre that really shows the overwhelming amount of knowledge that ROTC cadets must have an understanding of is the ranger handbook. One part of the ranger handbook, which involves Army’s lexis’s, can get quite confusing, this part being the glossary section. There are over two hundred terms and acronyms that are defined in this section. The overwhelming number of the terms and acronyms and the closeness and uniqueness of many of the acronyms can make memorizing what all these lexis’s mean almost impossible. Looking at the first 5 terms on the first page of the glossary can really show how complicated it gets. The first 5 terms are as follows 1sg (first seargant), 5-C’s (Confirm, Clear, Call, Cordon, Control) 5-W’s (Who, What, Where, When, Why), 5-S’s (Searh, Silence, Segregate, Safeguard, Speed to the rear), AA (Avenues of Approach) (“The Official Army Ranger Handbook” Glossary-1). Those five terms alone may take some one twenty or thirty minutes to learn and memorize, so imagine having to memorize all 200 terms and having to be able to apply the terms on the fly. Even though most cadets know a lot of these terms it would be almost impossible to know them all, which again shows how Army ROTC is a mushfake discourse. Another genre that shows how extensive Knowledge can get is Army PowerPoints. Even basic MS1 PowerPoints can get in to the nittiest grittiest details. One bullet point from a PowerPoint titled “Military Ranks Customs and Courtesies” explains when to salute and is as follows “Saluting is obviously inappropriate. (Example: A person carrying articles with both hands, or being otherwise so occupied as to make *saluting* impracticable, is not required to *salute* a senior person or return the *salute* to a subordinate.) In any case not covered by specific instructions, the *salute* is rendered” (“US Army Ranks, Customs & Courtesies” ). Once again even though most cadets know when to salute and when not to there are still some instances where there is some grey area like if an officer comes at weird angle and you don’t see him, if an officer passes you from behind, or even if you turn a corner the same time an officer does. As a cadet you again must have the ability to mushfake your way through the situation.

As stated before Army ROTC is a very strong discourse community. It has the characteristics that swale says all discourse communities should have. Some of its characteristics like the extensive amount of genres and lexis’s show how sound this discourse community is. With it being a very sound discourse community there is one niche that makes it unique. That niche being that Army ROTC is a mushfaked discourse community. Even though Army ROTC is a mushfaked discourse community, which as stated before is not such a bad thing, it achieves its public goal year in and year out and produces some of the best officers in the armed forces. Without the discourse community of Army ROTC the United States Army would not have that core group of educated leaders and would not be able to function at the high level of autonomy which it does. Essentially the discourse community of Army ROTC is one of the essential parts of the army which allows the U.S. Army to be the highly productive, organized, and elite fighting force that it is today.

XCommissioned Officers are the managers, problem solvers, key influencers and planners who lead Enlisted Soldiers in all situations.

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