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Recursive Frame Analysis

Recursive frame analysis¹⁾ is a method for studying the relationship between frames and the events or issues they help to construct. The term “recursive” refers to the idea that frames and events/issues are mutually constitutive, meaning that they both shape and are shaped by one another in an ongoing process.

The roots of Recursive Frame Analysis can be traced back to the work of [Gregory Bateson](#) and Erving Goffman and his book *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* ([Goffman, E., 1974](#))²⁾. Bateson and Goffman understood frames as being our conceptual or cognitive views of particular situations. For instance, do we perceive a story we hear from a client to be a tale of problems or of solutions? Our choices of frames help us to hear certain aspects of the talk, while not helping us to hear other parts of the conversation.

In other words, the use of frames helps to construct the meaning of events or issues, while those events or issues in turn provide evidence that supports or challenges the frames being used. This recursive relationship means that frame analysis cannot simply focus on the frames themselves, but must also consider how they are used in the context of events and issues.

The goal of recursive frame analysis is to understand the ways in which frames are used to shape our understanding of events and issues, and how this process of framing can influence public opinion, political action, and other aspects of social and cultural life.

In summary, recursive frame analysis is a method for examining the dynamic relationship between frames and events/issues in order to understand the ways in which meaning is constructed and how frames shape our understanding of the world.

For an example please refer to :

[Recursive Frame Analysis One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest Recursive Frame Analysis at 23nlpeople.com](#)

and the paper³⁾ describing the process with additional examples.

RFA Practice

RFA Practice as described by Ronald J. Chenail:

With RFA, researchers listen or watch a recording of a conversation while reading and re-reading a transcript of the discourse in question. As mentioned above, RFA is a type of sequential analysis which helps researchers note semantic shifts in a conversation. In RFA, observers listen or watch a recording of a conversation while reading and re-reading a transcript of the discourse in question. They discuss (a) how they observe the subject matter of the conversation being developed (i.e., an emphasis on content or what is being said) and (b) when they observe that there are shifts from one subject to another in the course of a conversation (i.e., an emphasis on process or how are things being said by the speakers). This method is especially useful when

there is an interest on the part of researchers to chart observations of how they see the talk of an interaction unfold.

Both of these practices are based on the notion of difference. As we listen to someone we discern that the speaker is saying a variety of words. We can identify one word from another word in many ways. There are phonetic differences (i.e., differences in pronunciation), semantic differences (i.e., differences in meaning), and pragmatic differences (i.e., differences in how words are used). As we listen and mark differences between the words we hear, we are creating patterns in the talk. In RFA terms, a basic pattern of meaning created by a listener is called a frame, a bit of talk marked as being distinctly different from its surrounding words. An RFA analysis proceeds as follows: After the recording had been perused numerous times, the team members noted instances when there were repetitive use of certain words on the parts of the speakers and then the team began to “chunk” these instances into informal groupings. In RFA, chunking is the process by which an observer or team of observers makes sense of a collection of data by gathering together those discourse examples which seem to the observer(s) to have some characteristics in common with each other. In RFA lingo, we say that we chunk these frames into galleries.

For example, in a therapy conversation, one gallery that can usually be constructed is a Problem Gallery. A problem gallery is a chunking that would contain all those frames uttered by the client(s) that the therapist or researcher understands as “problems.” Another gallery commonly chunked by therapists would be a Solution Gallery. Again, this gallery would be a chunking of frames all understood as being solutions or possible remedies by the therapist or researcher. In both cases, the therapist's or researcher's chunking of the frames may or may not be the same as how the client understands the conversation. In addition, other therapists or researchers may also differ on how they chunk the talk.

With RFA, researchers can also conduct pragmatic analyses (Haslett, 1987; Nofsinger, 1991). Pragmatic analysis with RFA is when researchers focus on how speakers used their language in an attempt to shift the flow of the talk. In listening to the talk, recursive frame analysts become sensitive or curious to differences in the conversation. For example, where and when does the content being discussed by the participants change and who helps to make that shift? Are questions being answered? Are answers being questioned? How does it make “sense” that one speaker says “X” after another speaker says “Y,” or how does it make sense that after one speaker says “Y,” that another speaker does not say “X”?

Somehow, in some way, recursive frame analysts have to try to make sense of the “what” and the “how” of conversations. What text seems to go with what context? What new meanings are generated if the text becomes the context and vice versa? As these musings take shape, recursive frame analysts draw their re-presentations or figures of speech to visualize how the conversation is taking shape.

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Frame analysis

Frame analysis⁴⁾ is a method used in the social sciences, particularly in sociology and communication studies, to analyze how individuals and groups construct meaning and understand events and issues. The basic idea behind frame analysis is that people do not simply respond to events and issues

objectively, but rather they understand and make sense of them through the use of frames, or frameworks of interpretation.

Frame analysis is usually done in regard to news media. However, framing is inevitable, as everyone does it. It can speed up the process of interpretation as well as writing and presenting the news. People just may not realize they are using frames. Used as a tool there are several techniques that are described as framing metaphor, stories, tradition, slogan, jargon, catchphrase, artifact, contrast or spin.⁵⁾

Framing techniques per Fairhurst and Sarr (1996)⁶⁾:

- Metaphor: To frame a conceptual idea through comparison to something else.
- Stories (myths, legends): To frame a topic via narrative in a vivid and memorable way.
- Tradition (rituals, ceremonies): Cultural mores that imbue significance in the mundane, closely tied to artifacts.
- Slogan, jargon, catchphrase: To frame an object with a catchy phrase to make it more memorable and relate-able.
- Artifact: Objects with intrinsic symbolic value – a visual/cultural phenomenon that holds more meaning than the object it self.
- Contrast: To describe an object in terms of what it is not.
- Spin: to present a concept in such a ways as to convey a value judgement (positive or negative) that might not be immediately apparent; to create an inherent bias by definition.

Frames provide a cognitive structure for understanding events and issues by highlighting certain aspects and deemphasizing others. This can result in different interpretations and understandings of the same event or issue, depending on the frame being used. For example, in the context of a political debate, one frame might highlight the need for individual freedom, while another frame might emphasize the importance of social equality.

Frame analysis is an interpretive method that seeks to understand how frames are used to structure meaning and influence the way people understand events and issues. It is used to analyze the ways in which frames are constructed and communicated, and to examine the power relationships and cultural assumptions that underlie different frames.

It can be conducted at both the macro and micro level. At the macro level, it can be used to examine the dominant frames used in a given society or culture. For example, it can be used to examine the frames used in news media, political discourse, and other forms of public communication. At the micro level, frame analysis can be used to examine how individuals use frames in their everyday lives to make sense of the world around them.

Frame analysis is a useful tool for understanding how meaning is constructed and how frames can be used to shape public opinion, mobilize political action, and influence the way people understand the world. By examining the frames used in different contexts, frame analysis can provide insight into the ways in which power and cultural assumptions are embedded in our understanding of events and issues.

^{1), 3)} Recursive Frame Analysis [Recursive Frame Analysis by Ronald J. Chenail](#)
DOI:10.46743/2160-3715/1995.2062

²⁾ Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience by Erving Goffman - Full [Bookarchive.org](#)

⁴⁾ Frame analysis [Wikipedia](#)

⁵⁾ What's in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World's Leading Communication Journals, 1990-2005 journals.sagepub.com/

⁶⁾ The art of framing: managing the language of leadership by Fairhurst, Gail Theus - Full Book archive.org

1. ^ Goffman, E., 1974. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience..* Harvard University Press, ISBN 093035091X.

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Last update: **2023/03/06 10:11**

