

# COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE at work

## The ‘dark side’ of the LEAP CCT programme in Ghana: A critique of the proxy means test (PMT) targeting mechanism

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### Abstract

Studies of social transfer targeting practices and mechanisms, including the proxy means test (PMT) instrument, have often assumed that the essential purpose of these mechanisms is to ensure fairness, cost-effectiveness and efficiency, yet there is limited consensus on their optimal performance. This article builds on recent studies of social transfer targeting practices in developing countries by providing a better interpretation of the power dynamics involved in ‘translating’ the PMT instrument at the intersection of official, public and cultural discourses. It is a Foucault-based study that combines ethnography and discourse studies to analyse the everyday actions and practices of programme officials and caregivers. This study demonstrates that officials legitimise and translate the PMT instrument, separate individuals from families, and constitute them as objects for governmental intervention to achieve efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The re-categorisation of family members into households ‘outside’ of everyday sociocultural relations and practices is contested and resisted, creating a complex system of power relationships around the PMT.

### Keywords

Social protection, power relations, culture, discourse, ethnography

### 1 Introduction

Social protection policies and programmes, particularly cash transfer programmes, in developing countries (Barrientos and Hulme, 2009) employ several methodologies for dividing or reconstituting populations into eligible and ineligible categories (Devereux et al., 2017). These methodologies include means testing, proxy means testing (PMT), categorical targeting, geographical targeting, community-based targeting, self-targeting and multiple mechanisms that combine targeting methodologies (Devereux et al., 2017). The use and translation of these mechanisms lead to a re-categorisation of families into households contingent on specific forms of knowledge for the production of certain subjects in these households (Foucault, 1980). Translation is the ‘transformational movement between technologies of government

(*technes/assemblages*) and subjectified actors' (Lassen & Horsbøl, 2016, p. 79) in a way that connects the aspirations of a governing body to the governed subjects. A technology in this context refers to 'an assembly of forms of knowledge with a variety of mechanical devices and an assortment of little techniques oriented to produce certain practical outcomes' (Rose, 1999, p. 52). Thus, translation involves multiple processes and procedures by which social transfer programme officials use targeting mechanisms to identify so-called poor individuals and households within families and communities.

Recent studies have investigated the effectiveness of targeting methodologies, practices and instruments in reaching so-called poor populations in the developing countries through social transfer programmes (e.g. Devereux et al., 2017). These studies have largely focused on measuring the quantitative accuracy of targeting instruments and practices to reduce errors and improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness. In taking this approach, they take for granted the power relations between the governing bodies (public officials) and the governed subjects (local people) embedded in the targeting mechanisms, the everyday life, cultural values and practices of the local people, and the western technical governing practices in the societies and communities in which the social transfer programmes are implemented (Puorideme, 2018). The communicative and political importance of social transfer targeting practices are thus downplayed, and the forms of knowledge and communicative practices accompanying social transfer programmes and targeting mechanisms remain under-researched. Specifically, how social transfer programme officials translate targeting mechanisms and constitute forms of knowledge and subjects for these programmes, and how these subjects conduct themselves in sociocultural contexts, remain under-researched areas.

This study explores the communicative accounts of programme officials' and caregivers' everyday practices of targeting. It focuses on the PMT instrument used in the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty conditional cash transfer (LEAP CCT) programme in Ghana, which is one of the key social protection programmes of the government of Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2015). The PMT is a key instrument of LEAP CCT's targeting practices. The LEAP CCT programme was established in 2008 to provide cash grants to extremely poor households. These cash grants are tied to co-responsibilities and soft conditionalities (Puorideme, 2018), which include 'household participation in education and health services' (Devereux et al., 2017, p. 167). The programme receives both technical and financial support from transnational agencies, including the UK Department for International Development, the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and the World Bank (Puorideme, 2018).

The data for this article were generated from two separate in-depth interviews with a technical officer (TO) at a transnational agency and a LEAP CCT programme officer (PO). In addition, a focus group discussion with eight female caregivers (FEMs) was conducted within a local community in the Ashanti region. All participants were members of the same community, but each participant represented a different household and family. Foucault's notions of discourse and governmentality, with a specific focus on power relations and technologies, are the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis, which takes an ethnographic approach. The next section of this article presents a review of studies of relevant social transfer targeting mechanisms and practices, while sections three and four describe the theory and methodology, respectively, and section five presents the analysis, discussion, and conclusions.

## **2 A review of social transfer targeting practices**

Many developing countries have adopted social protection as a development policy (Merrien, 2013). Social protection includes social transfer programmes, which in turn encompass non-contributory welfare grants, conditional cash transfers and in-kind transfers (Devereux et al., 2017). Social transfer programmes use various targeting methodologies and mechanisms to select poor individuals and households instead of promoting universal schemes to guarantee all so-called poor people basic economic security (Standing, 2007). While there is continuing debate among scholars and practitioners about the relative merits of targeted and universal social transfer approaches, some scholars have concluded that the targeted approach is better in countries with higher inequality (Coady, Grosh and Hoddinott, 2004). However, targeting remains a highly contentious facet of social transfer programmes (Handa et al., 2012) and, to date, 'no optimal mechanism exists' (Devereux et al., 2017, p. 198). The scope of this review is limited to targeting practices and mechanisms. Any targeting in social transfer programmes, particularly cash transfer, involves categorizing people, which undoubtedly shapes the way the local people interact and how the governing body or government officials relate to those being categorized. Thus, the review of relevant studies in the following section discusses social transfer targeting mechanisms, practices, and rationales.

### **2.1 Social transfer targeting mechanisms, rationales and practices**

The fundamental goal in the implementation of targeting mechanisms is to minimise errors of inclusion and errors of exclusion (Handa et al., 2012). In a recent review of studies on targeting mechanisms, Devereux et al. (2017, p. 162)

argue that the practice of targeting as a component of social transfer programmes is ‘motivated by ethical notions of fairness, as well as by pragmatic considerations such as cost-effectiveness’. In contrast, a recent study of the LEAP CCT programme in Ghana demonstrates that the implementation of social transfer programmes does not necessarily support social justice; rather, these programmes promote governmental rationality and efficiency (Puorideme, 2018). Other studies have similarly criticised targeting methodologies for their failure to achieve accuracy and their neglect of ethical considerations, including social justice (Bhatia & Bhabha, 2017; Devereux, 2016; Kidd, 2017; Ravallion, 2009). Consequently, some studies have found that social transfer targeting mechanisms and instruments are ‘deficient in reaching the poorest’ individuals and households (Brown, Ravallion and van de Walle, 2018, p. 109); however, for Stoeffler et al., 2016, the PMT instrument is the best targeting technology so far in social transfer programmes. The LEAP CCT programme in Ghana uses the PMT instrument to differentiate individuals and households by ‘marking those which are poor or not’ (Puorideme, 2018, p. 102) alongside community-based targeting (Wodon, 2012). Poverty incidence maps are used to select poor communities, and community representatives are tasked with identifying poor and vulnerable households. Subsequently, researchers administer the PMT questionnaire to the heads of these households using electronic devices to determine these households’ eligibility for cash grants (Puorideme, 2018; Wodon, 2012). The information captured by the PMT questionnaire includes housing conditions and the demographic characteristics of individual members of the household (Wodon, 2012), including the head of the household, who signs a consent form to agree to participate in the programme on behalf of the household (Puorideme, 2018). The PMT questionnaire is organized into four sections. The questions in sections A and B concern the identity of the household and the demographic information of one household member, respectively. Section C gathers information on the housing characteristics and asset ownership of the household. Section D relates to household members’ participation in social services and programmes in the local community.

The PMT mechanism, which is the focus of this study, is ‘based on a weighted combination of characteristics that are believed to be highly correlated with well-being or deprivation’ (Devereux et al., 2017, p. 166), but it is ultimately the creation of technocrats and experts at the level of policy formulation, programming and translation. Consequently, the communicative aspect of PMT technology appears to be entangled in power relations in the sense that an ‘expert’ administers the PMT questionnaire to local community members in English, but these local people neither speak, understand nor write in English. However, the communicative aspect has not been explored from a critical perspective as relations and communicative practices between experts and local people are generally taken for granted or unproblematised. Thus, this study explores how power relations are involved in the communicative aspect of the PMT technology.

The fundamental goal of social transfer programmes is to achieve efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the allocation of resources; thus, these programmes must select and implement targeting mechanisms that maximise efficiency (Stoeffler et al., 2016). Unfortunately, there are no optimal targeting mechanisms for social transfer programmes (Brown et al., 2018; Devereux et al., 2017). However, few studies have explored the power dynamics of social transfer programmes’ governing practices or discourses in which experts appear to control the process (Foli, 2016; Puorideme, 2018). Rather, existing studies have often focused on measuring the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of targeting mechanisms, which provides limited understanding of the power dynamics and relations inherent in targeting mechanisms and practices such as the PMT instrument. This article contributes to improving understandings of the power dynamics of social transfer programme targeting practices in developing countries by exploring the PMT targeting mechanism in Ghana at the nexus of the concrete everyday cultural practices of female caregivers and LEAP CCT programme authorities. The central argument of this article is that PMT technology is a concrete surface of power relations between public officials and local people, complicated by technical communicative practices; thus, it is a programmatic tool for mathematical calculations that objectifies and subjectivizes the local people in the discourse of state social protection programmes. The next two sections present the relevant theoretical and methodological approaches of this study.

### **3 Theoretical framework**

Foucault’s concepts of discourse and power (Foucault, 1980, 2002a) remain relevant to critical studies, including critical discourse studies (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). However, defining discourse is not a straightforward task. In *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1973, 2002a) described discourse as encompassing the rules, practices and statements within certain historical periods that produce subjects and objects of knowledge. The importance Foucault places on these elements of discourse suggests that discourse is not limited to language as a transparent medium (Foucault, 1973) or ‘a place where previously established objects are laid one after another like words on a page’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 47); rather, it is contextually determined. Thus, discourse needs to be described in its historical context in the sense that ‘discourse is knowledge arranged in accordance with the unique order laid down for it by its origin’ (Foucault, 1973, pp. 84-85). Discourses are not only groups of signs for the purposes of signification

or representation; they are also ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 54). Language and practices are central elements of discourse insofar as they play key roles in producing subjects and objects in certain social domains and a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980). In the context of this article, practice is understood ‘as a social action, what is done in a particular time and place, and as what is hardened into relative permanency – a practice in the sense of a habitual way of acting’ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, pp. 21-22). Practices and a regime of truth (discourse and power) serve one another.

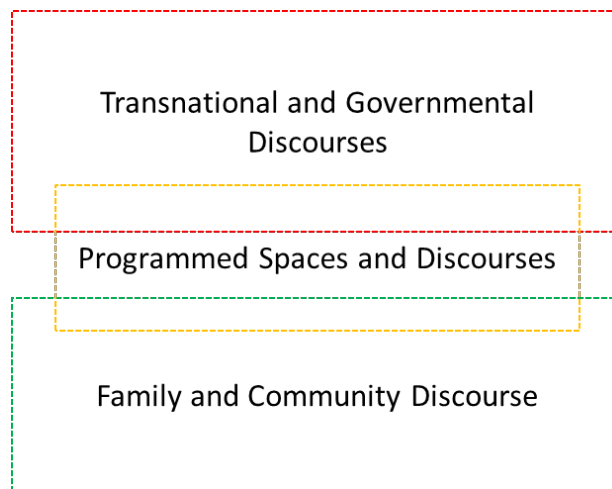
Power, for Foucault (1980, 1995), is not a universal substance that is accessible to a privileged individual or social class. Rather, power is ubiquitous and must be understood in terms of power relations; thus, power manifests in social relations that are not necessarily domination or repression but are rooted in mechanisms, techniques and strategies (Foucault, 1995). Power is productive, so the ‘notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). The exercise of power requires definite knowledge and ‘overlapping subjection and objectification’ techniques as well as individualisation processes, to be productive (Foucault, 1995, p. 305). In this way, ‘power and knowledge directly imply one another’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 27). Foucault argued that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new form of exercising power emerged to ‘obtain productive services from individuals in their concrete lives’, and in doing so, the new technology of power gained ‘access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behaviour’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 125). This new technology of power involves ‘a whole range of techniques and practices for the discipline, surveillance, administration and formation of populations of human individuals’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 239). Resistance is embedded in power relations insofar as ‘the human material’ on which the technologies of power operate is ‘inherently a resistant material’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 255).

It is important to note that discourse is not limited to language as a medium of representation, but is also a social practice. Similarly, discourse is both an effect and a resource of power relations in the production of subjects and objects of knowledge with a regime of truth. Thus, discourse, power, and knowledge are intractably linked. Power is relational rather than substantial, and it ‘does not itself give birth to actual people, but neither does it dream subjects into existence’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 239). Thus, Foucault discarded the absolute and privileged position of the subject and rejected the essence of power in accessing and utilising the ‘pure’ knowledge of individuals (Foucault, 1980).

## 4 Methodology

The primary methodological approach of this article is a Foucauldian interdisciplinary discourse analysis that combines ethnography and discourse studies approaches to explore the everyday actions and practices of social actors, namely programme officials and caregivers (Puorideme, 2018). Ethnography is not limited to investigating the essential cultural properties of a group; it also involves exploring the everyday actions and practices of social actors. Thus, relevant ethnographic methods for this study include in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Two programme officials were interviewed – a programme officer (PO) and a technical officer (TO). The main question around which the in-depth interview conversations with these officials developed was ‘How is targeting done and what role do transnational agencies play in the domain of the LEAP CCT programme?’ In addition, a focus group discussion was conducted in a rural community with female caregivers of programmed households. ‘Programmed households’ refers to households that are eligible to receive cash grants from the LEAP CCT programme. The main question for this discussion was how the female caregivers were selected to participate in the programme. While the PO and TO spoke in English, the participants of the focus group (female caregivers) spoke in their local language (Asante Twi). Thus, the utterances of the participants are first transcribed into their local language before being translated into English for analysis. Participants’ speech was transcribed without glossing to reduce the complexity of transcripts for comprehension and analysis (Puorideme, 2018). Thus, the study adopts a two-line transcription method with the original utterance of the local people appearing first, followed by a pragmatic translation into the English language. The analytical model of this study draws relevant discourse features from conversation analysis (Schegloff, 2007), critical discourse studies (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) and cultural discourse studies (Shi-xu, 2014).

**Figure 1: Analytical model**



*The model above indicates the analytical levels and intersecting discourses within the LEAP CCT programme, in which the targeting mechanism and practices are entangled. The dotted lines indicate the openness and permeability of these discourses.*

The first discourse domain comprises transnational and governmental discourses, which encompass the strategies, techniques and programmes (Foucault, 1980) of the LEAP CCT programme at the nexus of the transnational agencies and the government, represented by the programme secretariat. Official decisions are made at this level; thus, the focus of the analysis is the ‘official story’ (Scott, 1990, p. 1) or the ‘official discourse’ (García Agustín, 2015, p. 91) of targeting practices as manifested in the accounts of officials. The second level comprises programmed spaces and discourses, wherein the transnational and governmental discourses are made visible in local communities. Here, the PMT comes face to face with the heads of programmed households. Thus, the strategies, techniques and programmes (Foucault, 1980) of transnational agencies and the government are made public and the PMT becomes a ‘public discourse’ instrument (García Agustín, 2015, p. 91) at the intersection of the programme secretariat and the programmed households. In the context of this article, the programmed spaces and discourses form the arena of performance (Scott, 1990). At this level, the analysis focuses on the everyday actions and accounts of caregivers in relation to the materiality and communicative aspects of the PMT technology. The third level comprises the discourses of local families and communities, which are not part of official or public discourses. They are the hidden discourses (García Agustín, 2015; Scott, 1990) or cultural discourses (Shi-xu, 2014) of local communities. Here, the analytical model combines the features and properties of discourse studies approaches, such as critical discourse studies, conversation analysis and cultural discourse studies, to explore the everyday actions, accounts and practices of programme officials, technical officers and programme caregivers in relation to the LEAP CCT programme targeting practice. Thus, the communicative aspect of the PMT instrument is the focus of an analysis which takes into account the perspectives of the technical officers of transnational agencies participating in the LEAP cash transfer programme, of the programme officials, and of the caregivers at the intersection of the practices in translating the PMT technology and the everyday life of local people in the community.

## **5 Translating the PMT instrument in social domains**

This section explores the translation of the PMT technology in social domains by focusing on the ‘orders of discourse’ (Foucault, 1971) outlined in the model above in relation to the targeting practices of the LEAP CCT programme. ‘Orders of discourse’ refers to the established practices and forms of knowledge in each of the domains of the model within which the implementation of the PMT programmatically accomplishes the practice of targeting. Thus, the practices of technical officers, programme officers, and caregivers in these domains are the focus of analysis. In addition, this analysis takes into account the power dynamics and cultural discourses entangled in the PMT technology and the interconnected domains. The analysis is divided into three key themes: *the legitimisation of the PMT instrument in the official domain*, *the PMT instrument in the public domain*, and *the PMT instrument in the cultural domain*. These themes follow from the theoretical and analytical framework presented above, which suggests that the practice of translating the PMT technology does not occur in a vacuum but in social domains as the centres of exercising power,

which are dependent on the manifestation of truth, i.e. discourses (Foucault, 2014). The manifestation of truth in this study refers to the discourses and meaning-making practices of the programme authorities and local people in interconnected social domains, which make the exercise of power and power relations intelligible. Hence, excerpts of the transcripts of two in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion are presented and analysed in relation to these themes in the following subsections. These excerpts appear to unpack the power relations between the governing bodies (public/programme officials) and the governed subjects (local people) embedded in targeting mechanisms as well as the everyday life and cultural values of the local people.

### **5.1 The legitimisation of the PMT instrument in the official domain**

This section focuses on the legitimating practices and actions of a TO at a transnational agency in the official domain of the LEAP CCT programme. ‘Official domain’ refers to the domain of the transnational and governmental discourses outlined in the analytical model above. This domain is responsible for policy formulation, programming and translation, as well as the accompanying practices, technologies and forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1980). The transcript presented and analysed in this section is an excerpt of a conversation from an in-depth interview between a TO at a transnational agency and the researcher (R). The conversation arose in response to a question the researcher asked concerning the role of the transnational agency in the LEAP CCT programme.

#### *Transcript Excerpt 1:*

1 TO: the main thing in the case of ( ) is not money  
2 the main thing is what we usually call  
3 the technical support that you offer to government  
4 R: in in what areas  
5 TO: so the technical support could be in the area of research  
6 R: okay  
7 TO: the technical support could be in the area of(.)  
8 helping them to develop appropriate too:ls  
9 R: okay  
10 tools such as  
11 TO: tools such as er: mm:=you have a too:l for er:h (.)  
12 to guide payment  
13 R: tool to guide payment(.)ok  
14 TO: you know you are doing payment(.)and what are  
15 the processes that you should use to do payment  
16 in a manner that provides a quality service to the er:  
17 to the household  
18 R: is there one such tool in place  
19 TO: we have a manual=which is-  
20 R: okay  
21 TO: the leap has got an operation manual and  
22 what for example( )has been doing over the period  
23 is to try and update that manual because  
24 a lot of the processes in the manual were manual  
25 haha[ha ]  
26 R: [hahaha]  
27 TO: and one way of improving efficiency is  
28 to take advantage of technology  
29 so one of the areas in which( )has been working is  
30 to try and get TECHNOLOGY introduced into their processes  
31 so(.)first the targeting processes  
32 the process of identifying which households  
33 need to be supported  
34 R: okay  
35 TO: this was a very manual process( )supported them  
36 to: er:m use †tablets in the process of data collection  
37 and also to take advantage of technology in order to  
38 reduce errors in data collection(.)increase speed  
39 etcetera(.)so that is one process=key process=

40 R: yeah  
41 TO: =that you know we help to put technology  
42 (0.7) ((TO talks about technology for payment))  
43 the areas that you want to help them  
44 improve their efficiency by using technology and  
45 to improve the quality of the services also  
46 by using technology †so i was explaining to you(.)  
47 why or what we are interested in leap  
48 R: yes  
49 TO: we are interested helping them to build systems

Discourses, technologies and programmes are always entangled in forms of knowledge and power in social domains, and they play key roles in meaning-making and in constituting subjects and objects of knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Thus, subjects and objects in social domains are products of official discourses or institutionalised practices insofar as the ‘official story’ or ‘official discourse’ is not power-neutral (García Agustín, 2015; Scott, 1990). In the transcript above, the official story of the LEAP CCT’s ‘targeting processes’ (line 31) revolves around efficiency and quality as the programme rationale (lines 27, 44 and 45). It is obvious in the TO’s account that the transnational agency plays a key role in determining the appropriate technologies and tools for the LEAP CCT programme, including the PMT instrument (line 8). The TO legitimises the PMT targeting technology (lines 30, 31 and 32) by rationalising the involvement of the transnational agency (lines 3, 8 and 49) in the domain of the LEAP CCT programme. The TO’s epistemic statement (line 21) and legitimation and rationalisation of social practices (from line 22 to line 25) suggest that the PMT instrument guarantees efficiency and quality of service. In addition, the TO asserts that the translation of the PMT instrument in terms of electronic data collection reduces errors and increases speed (lines 36, 37 and 38). Overall, the TO’s statements suggest that the design and translation of the PMT instrument are not neutral with regard to power dynamics in the domain of the LEAP CCT programme. Consequently, it appears that the design and translation of the instrument are meant to fulfil the rationale of the government.

PMT is a technology of power, and its design and translation engender certain subjects and objects of knowledge in social domains (Foucault, 1980), as evident in lines 32 and 33. The PMT targeting instrument is applied to ‘families’ in local communities and serves to individualise people and detach them from families, reclassifying them into poor programmed households on the basis of statistical scores. However, in Ghana’s society, families are more than programmed households and housing conditions or a collection of individuals grouped into these categories. Families in Ghana comprise a network of lineage and kinship relations and practices (Nukunya, 2016; Puorideme, 2018). Thus, the implementation of the PMT instrument highlights a shift of power dynamics in social relations in the sense that individuals are detached from family and kinship relations and placed in a new form of power relations, backed by a specific regime of truth (Foucault, 1980) – the LEAP CCT programme. The LEAP CCT programme recognises the Western concept of the household as the domain of everyday life. Furthermore, the PMT questionnaire is in English and is electronically administered to family heads and potential caregivers who do not understand, speak or write English. Thus, both the PMT instrument itself and the practice of administering the PMT questionnaire (line 36) are detached from the people in local communities. It appears that the instrument primarily extracts statistics about the local people through the distant gaze of technocrats or experts (Foucault, 1973) without reference to the everyday sociocultural practices and discourses of local people (Shi-xu, 2014).

## **5.2 The PMT instrument in the public domain**

The focus of this section is on practices in public spaces and domains, i.e. the households in local communities in which the PMT instrument is translated. In these spaces and domains, the official stories, technologies and instruments come face to face with the local population. The ‘statistical gaze’ through which families and households in local communities are viewed does not appear to take a holistic view of the everyday actions and cultural discourses of families or local people (Shi-xu, 2014). By statistical gaze, I mean the ways in which the programme apparatus uses the PMT instrument to extract statistics from individual family members and problematises a certain population for governmental action or intervention. The transcript below is an excerpt of an in-depth interview with a PO at the LEAP CCT programme secretariat. The PO was responding to a question from the researcher (R) about the LEAP targeting processes.

### *Transcript excerpt 2:*

1 R: i will want to know just the step=by=step processes  
2 PO: ok so the first step is er

3           deploring enumerators into the field  
4           to collect data using the pmt on the tablet  
5           initially we use to go with paper questionnaires=  
6    R:   mm  
7    PO:  =on paper(.)you fill the questionnaire  
8    R:   but now they go with tablets  
9    PO:  we go with tablets=electronic data collection  
10          it started the last two years ok so  
11          we are fully running automated data collection  
12    R:   okay  
13    PO:  now when the enumerators go to the field  
14          they administer the questionnaires on  
15          the potential beneficiaries  
16          we call them potential because they are not yet  
17          on the programme  
18    R:   yeah  
19    PO:  ok so when we interview them with the pmt  
20          the response to the questions that we ask  
21          is computed now each question has a weight or score  
22          ok(.)so all the questions are weighted  
23          households responses(.)response to  
24          the household characteristics           and then  
25          the community type and all that(.)so all  
26          these peoples responses are computed into a score  
27    R:   okay  
28    PO:  ok so we have( )a mathematical formula  
29          to compute the score for each household(.)  
30          ok now there is a threshold that you need to attain  
31    R:   per individual  
32          **(.05)** ((PO does self correction))  
33    PO:  uhu=uhu=per household  
34          so when you attain the score then we come  
35          and look at the individuals in the household  
36          ok so that is when(.)if you reach that score  
37          and you qualify to be on the programme(.)we come back  
38          to look at the individuals in the household ok  
39          now individuals we are looking at the criteria  
40          by which you were interviewed  
41          **(05.08)** ((PO explains the computation process))  
42          ok so what happens is that is a threshold  
43          anything above the score you qualify  
44          anything below you don't qualify so there is a thin line  
45          hahahaha  
46    R:   yea=because they were telling me  
47          they brought computers and then  
48          the computer ask the questions  
49    PO:  yes  
50    R:   and at the end of the day some got some didn't get  
51          and they didn't understand  
52    PO:  they wouldn't understand  
53          **(1.20)** ((PO explains how some do not qualify))  
54          the pmt itself like i mentioned earlier has a few issue  
55          but it's the best tool to use now  
56

This conversation demonstrates the centrality of statistics (lines 3, 4 and 5) in exercising power and governing populations in the discourses of contemporary non-Western societies (Foucault, 1980; Shi-xu, 2014), and the LEAP CCT programme in particular. The excerpt incorporates a statistical discourse in the sense that the PMT instrument is a statistical apparatus (lines 9 and 11) for individualising family members in local communities (lines 36 and 39). The PMT instrument thus appears to take control of individuals in families and extract statistics from the heads of families



(from line 13 to line 17) and insert them into the domain of politics and governmental programmes. Responses to the PMT questionnaire (lines 19 and 20) enable programme authorities to classify individuals into programmed households and subjects and objects of knowledge (Foucault, 1980). In this way, the 'lifeworld' of the local people is reduced to mere statistical scores and population aggregates for programming and decision-making processes (lines 20 and 21). The term 'lifeworld' here refers to the holistic cultural discourse (Shi-xu, 2014) of the local people, including the everyday intelligible actions and social practices of families.

These categorisations and classifications shape the actions, practices and social relations of individuals and families in local communities (Fairclough, 2003) and the governing body, namely the public or programme authorities. The programme authorities detach these individuals from families using the PMT tool and other mathematical formulas, making them objects of knowledge for government intervention. The practice of separating these individuals is visible in the public domain, as evidenced in the excerpt above (from line 23 to line 34). The account of this practice observed in the transcript suggests that certain individuals and households are discursively categorised as qualified for the cash grants, while others are not. The practice of qualifying and disqualifying family members without regard for their lifeworld appears to create antagonistic tendencies (lines 51, 52 and 53) that do not engender coexistence and harmony (Shi-xu, 2014). In Ghana, it is difficult to reduce social life to statistical scores or averages as 'family membership and relations are important to individuals as they openly express their affiliations' in social domains and public discourses (Puorideme, 2018, p. 22). It is therefore difficult to grasp attempts to disaggregate, categorise or reclassify individuals and families into programmed households and individuals as objects of knowledge in contemporary Ghanaian society (line 45 and 46). Thus, PMT as a programme technology is only intelligible in public discourse domains, like the LEAP CCT programme, in which efficiency and effective programme design and translation are the primary goals. In the account of the PO, the primary objective of applying the PMT instrument is to ensure the disaggregation and quantification of individuals' demographic and housing characteristics for the effective management of the population in local communities. The explicit building of sociocultural relations, networks and harmony in families and communities appears to be less relevant to the programme apparatus (Foucault, 1980; Puorideme, 2018; Shi-xu, 2014). However, the PO's statements in lines 55 and 56 are clear indications that the PMT instrument has limitations in the cultural context in which it is applied. The analysis of the following section sheds more light on such inadequacies through the accounts of caregivers at the intersection of discourses in the official, public and cultural domains.

### 5.3 *The PMT instrument in the cultural domain*

In this section, the accounts of family members who are caregivers in programmed households are the focus of analysis. The cultural domain is the arena of hidden discourses or hidden transcripts (García Agustín, 2015; Scott, 1990) and the episteme of the local families and communities (Foucault, 2002a; Shi-xu, 2014). The transcript below is an excerpt of a focus group discussion with eight female caregivers (FEMs) in the Ashanti region. The interaction between the participants and the researcher centred on the ways the caregivers and the households they represent participate in the LEAP CCT programme. Specifically, they were responding to a question the researcher (R) asked about how they were selected to participate in the programme.

#### *Transcript Excerpt 3:*

- 1 R:       **ok(.)seesei mepe se mebisa**  
          *ok(.)now i want to ask*
- 2           **se mose nnipa bebre wo honom a**  
          *you said there are many people there*
- 3           **wope se won din-**  
          *they want their names*
- 4 FEM7: **eba mu**  
          *come in*
- 5           **((obo ne tiri nko))**  
          *((nods))*
- 6 R:       **eba mu**  
          *come in*
- 7 FEM2: **↑woyee na won-**  
          *they did it but they*
- 8           **((oka ne nsa gu ne bo))**  
          *((folding hands))*
- 9 R:       **↑na eye deen na mo din tumi ba mu**  
          *and how did your name come in*



understand the PMT instrument only as an apparatus for dividing and individualising (Foucault, 1995) families (lines 12, 14 and 16), and for categorising them into deserving and non-deserving members (lines 17 and 20). The embodied actions of FEM3 and FEM2 in lines 7, 11 and 15 are cultural expressions of antagonism toward the re-categorisation and ‘dividing practices’ of the PMT instrument in the cultural domain (Foucault, 2002b, p. 326; Puorideme, 2018). The actions of these caregivers are clear manifestations of the cultural contestation (Shi-xu, 2014) of the translation of the PMT instrument (lines 22 and 24). These contestations are equally visible in the ways FEM3 constructs hierarchical relations (Fairclough, 2003) between the actions of programme authorities in the public domain and the practices of families, and in how she attributes the division and separation of family members to the PMT instrument and the apparatus of the programme (lines 28, 29 and 30). The caregivers’ actions and accounts suggest that the understanding of the cultural domain lies ‘outside’ both the official discourses of transnational agencies and the government and the public discourses – the programme spaces in which subjectivized individuals and official discourses and technologies intersect.

Discourses of local families and communities comprise complex social networks, relations, values and practices promoting sociocultural coexistence and harmony (Shi-xu, 2014) that are irreducible to the goals of the LEAP CCT programme apparatus and appear to be ‘hidden’ from the statistical gaze of the PMT instrument. The construction of hierarchical relations is a clear manifestation of the PMT’s inability to access the cultural domain, as the caregivers present a clear distinction between the programme’s rationale and the cultural practices of local communities (lines 29, 30 and 31). Of course, ‘the whole town’ (line 31) is a complex cultural domain which is outside the official or public discourse domain. The cultural discourses in the sociocultural domain engender contestations or resistance to the dividing practices of the PMT instrument and the programmatic goal of the LEAP CCT programme. Clearly, the actions and accounts of the caregivers in the excerpt above (lines 31, 34 and 36) are manifestations of cultural contestation and resistance through hidden family and community discourses. These contestations suggest that the division and re-categorisation of family members in local communities into deserving and undeserving is unintelligible and unacceptable to these caregivers (lines 31 and 34).

## **6 Discussion of findings**

Based on the analysis presented above, this section presents three key findings. First, transnational agencies legitimise social transfer targeting practices and technologies (e.g. the PMT instrument) through the official discourses of national social protection programmes to achieve efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Second, the translation of the PMT technology to families and local communities separates individuals from these families and constitutes them as objects of knowledge for governmental programming and intervention. Third, the translation of the PMT instrument in the cultural domain of local families and communities is problematic and unintelligible. The following is a systematic discussion of these findings in relation to the existing literature.

Debates regarding ‘efficient’ and ‘cost-effective’ social transfer targeting mechanisms and technologies are pervasive in the social protection landscape of developing countries, including Ghana. Unfortunately, there are no optimal targeting mechanisms, technologies or instruments in social transfer programme regimes (Devereux et al., 2017) because targeting is highly contentious (Handa et al., 2012) in developing societies where citizens are unable to hold governments accountable. In spite of the apparent challenges, the idea that targeting practices and technologies can promote fairness and cost-effectiveness remains relatively uncontested (Devereux et al., 2017). This study demonstrates that transnational agencies legitimise targeting practices, and the PMT instrument in particular, through official discourses of social transfer programmes to promote the government’s approach in a transnational market regime and the economic development discourses of developing societies, where notions of fairness and social justice are less relevant. A recent ethnographic study of the LEAP CCT programme in Ghana (Puorideme, 2018) and other studies of targeting instruments, including the PMT technology, revealed that the translation of these instruments focuses on promoting programme efficiency and ensuring cost-effectiveness (Bhatia and Bhabha, 2017; Kidd, 2017), as demonstrated above. Consequently, programme authorities translate the PMT instrument in local communities without reference to the everyday sociocultural realities of the families in these communities.

The systematic outline process of targeting (Devereux et al., 2017) and the translation of the PMT technology in the public domain are prescriptive and top-down (Puorideme, 2018; Wodon, 2012). Thus, social transfer targeting practices and the translation of the PMT instrument in local families and communities at the intersections of discourses are not power-neutral. The communication of the LEAP CCT programme displays power-led practices and evidence of language asymmetry. The translation of the PMT instrument in the public domain is a practice of statistical gaze that enables the extraction of statistics from families for programming. Through this practice, family members are separated into ‘qualified’ and ‘unqualified’ categories, creating tensions and contestations that imperil harmony and cooperation between local communities and the government. Moreover, programme authorities design and implement the PMT

instrument in English in the public domain, which increases and emphasises the power asymmetry in targeting practices, in which families in local communities are only objects of knowledge within a regime of practice.

In line with arguments for fairness, cost-effectiveness and programme efficiency, social transfer targeting mechanisms, including the PMT instrument, are designed and translated to select poor individuals and households (Coady et al., 2004; Devereux et al., 2017; Stoeffler et al., 2016) for social transfer programmes, such as the LEAP CCT programme. The legitimisation, rationalisation and prescriptive targeting practices of social transfer programmes and the translation of the PMT instrument are not power-neutral. This study demonstrates that the legitimisation and rationalisation of the PMT instrument in official and public discursive domains are problematic and that its translation in the cultural domains of local families and communities is unintelligible. The cultural discourses (Shi-xu, 2014) of families and communities are complex in terms of sociocultural relations and kinship networks (Puorideme, 2019), and are irreducible to the statistical gaze and the division and re-categorisation practices of the PMT instrument. Consequently, the sociocultural domain affords the caregivers of programmed households a 'hidden space' to discursively contest and resist the PMT technology and the targeting practices of the LEAP CCT programme, which detaches individuals from everyday local families and communities practices and re-categorises them into programmed households to ensure cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

## 7 Conclusion

In the social protection landscape of developing countries, studies of social transfer targeting practices often focus on measuring the quantitative aspects and effectiveness of targeting instruments, taking for granted the sociocultural domain and the dynamics of power in which these targeting mechanisms are entangled. Thus, these studies fail to provide a situated or holistic understanding of the everyday practices of implementing targeting mechanisms in sociocultural contexts or the practical consequences thereof. This study critiques the ways the technical officers and programme officers of transnational agencies and governments, respectively, translate social transfer targeting mechanisms and constitute subjects for social transfer programmes, and examines how these subjects act within these mechanisms and practices in sociocultural contexts. This article foregrounds the dynamics of power and culture and the practice of constituting individuals and households for CCT programmes in which targeting mechanisms and practices intersect with the everyday practices and actions of families in the local communities of developing countries. It is a Foucauldian, interdisciplinary discourse study that combines ethnography and discourse studies approaches, such as critical discourse studies and conversation analysis, to explore the targeting practices of technical and programme officers and the everyday actions and practices of caregivers of the LEAP CCT programme in a local community in the Ashanti region.

Through this approach, this study demonstrates that transnational agencies legitimise targeting practices and the PMT instrument in the official discourses of the LEAP CCT programme to achieve efficiency and cost-effectiveness. It also reveals that LEAP CCT programme authorities translate the PMT technology in local communities to separate individuals from families and constitute them as objects of knowledge for governmental programming and intervention. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the translation of the PMT instrument in the cultural domain of families and communities to divide and re-categorise family members into programmed households 'outside' the everyday sociocultural relations, kinship networks and practices is problematic and unintelligible, and highlights contestations and resistance tendencies.

Ultimately, these findings contribute to the understanding of the translation of the PMT instrument in the LEAP CCT programme and, more broadly, to a holistic, situated understanding of social transfer targeting practices and the translation of the PMT instrument in developing countries. Social transfer targeting practices and mechanisms, including the PMT instrument, need to be understood as situated social practices that are open to interpretation and contestation and do not represent universally applicable approaches. However, this study is limited in that the LEAP CCT programme in which the translation of the PMT instrument occurs is only one of many social transfer programmes in numerous cultures in many developing countries. Thus, this study is unable to present a comprehensive account of targeting practices in all developing countries in which these social transfer programmes, targeting practices and instruments are implemented. Similar studies of social transfer programme targeting practices and the translation of the PMT instrument in other national and cultural contexts could contribute to the findings presented above. In addition, a critical discourse study of the 'efficiency', 'cost-effectiveness' and 'quality' principles and concepts embedded in the PMT mechanism could contribute to exposing the pervasiveness of the neoliberal art of governments in so-called developing societies and contemporary Ghana's society and build on the findings of this study.

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## APPENDIX:

### Jeffersonian Transcription Notation

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
[[	: Utterances are simultaneously linked.
[text]	: The start and end of overlapping utterances.
=	: Latching utterances without noticeable pause.
(.)	: A micro pause of less than 0.2 seconds.
(number of seconds)	: A timed gap of utterance in tenths of a second.
–	: A short untimed pause within an utterance.
:	: An extension of a sound or syllable.
:::	: A prolongation of an utterance.
↑	: A rising shift in intonation.
↓	: A falling shift in intonation.
Underline	: Emphasis on an utterance.
Capital letters	: An utterance louder than surrounding talk.
°	: An utterance quieter than surrounding talk.
((text))	: A description of non-verbal activity.
(text)	: A transcriber's doubt of an utterance.
( )	: A space mark of an indecipherable utterance.
>text<	: A more rapid utterance than surrounding talk.
<text>	: A slower utterance than surrounding talk.