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Chapter 12
Speech Codes Theory as a Framework for Analyzing Communication in Online Educational Settings

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ABSTRACT

Knowing how best to assess and evaluate the communication that takes place in online educational settings can be a challenge, especially when the features of educational platforms continue to develop in their complexity. This chapter will discuss Speech Codes Theory, which is grounded in the Ethnography of Communication, as a theoretical and methodological framework for conducting qualitative, interpretive research. It will show how Speech Codes Theory can potentially be used to analyze and understand communication in a range of online educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

New communication technologies such as Web 2.0 and Voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) [1] continue to rapidly increase the potential for effective teaching, training, and learning in online environments. These technologies help students and teachers from different continents, different time zones, and different cultural settings, to connect with one another. They link students and teachers in meaningful ways, making it possible to chat in real time and share knowledge and information without ever meeting face-to-face. Through these media, students and teachers can exchange information both synchronously and distantly, and these powerful communication technologies can

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facilitate learning between people with diverse cultural identities who are physically located half a world away from each other.

As this edited volume argues, there is an ever-increasing need for instructors, students, trainers, and other professionals involved in education and training to better understand and better address teaching and learning in online environments. Online educational settings must be evaluated, and their challenges and opportunities identified, to make sense of the communication that is going on within them. Educators must continue to explore how to adapt their teaching approaches and communication methods to online environments (St.Amant, 2002). Towards that end, this chapter will discuss the theoretical and methodological framework of Speech Codes Theory (SCT), which is grounded in the Ethnography of Communication (EC), as a means of studying, evaluating, and making sense of communication in online educational settings. It will begin by showing the relationship between ethnography in the traditional sense and the Ethnography of Communication (two distinct but related approaches). Next, it will give an overview of Speech Codes Theory. After that, it will provide an overview of some extant EC/SCT work on online communication, identifying gaps in the field. Finally, it will highlight potential questions for research into communication in online educational settings using the EC/SCT framework.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

It is useful to precede a description of Speech Codes Theory with a brief introduction to the Ethnography of Communication, in which it is grounded. The Ethnography of Communication is distinct from, but closely related to traditional ethnography. While ethnography is commonly equated with ethnographic methods, it is best understood as its own branch of anthropological research, traditionally associated with the following features. It is geared towards the study of human behavior and culture, and seeks to "[reveal that culture] through discerning patterns of socially shared behavior" (Wolcott, 1999, p. 67). Ethnographies are naturally driven by research questions that are fitting to an ethnographic approach, such as "descriptive questions as to how, and underlying questions... as to meanings imputed to action" (Wolcott, 1999, p. 69). Since ethnographies are intended to produce highly contextualized accounts of human behavior and culture, they necessarily involve immersion in a setting, i.e. the continuous and attentive presence of a researcher in a place of study (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001; Smith, 2001; Wellin & Fine, 2001; Wolcott, 1999). While in that place, the researcher may use a variety of ethnographic methods to collect data, such as observation, participant observation, and interviews. The data collected are primarily qualitative, but may be quantitative as well (Gordon, et al., 2001). In either case, "the researcher [is] a major instrument of research" (Gordon, et al., 2001, p. 188; see also Wolcott, 1999) in the sense that a researcher's analysis is based on experiences, observations, and interactions in the field. An ethnographic analysis produces an ethnographic account, which is not only a highly detailed description but also an interpretation of cultural processes, "out of which cultural patterning can be discerned" (Wolcott, 1999, p. 68). Many successful ethnographies of educational settings have been produced, a partial account of which may be found in Gorden et al. (2001).

The Ethnography of Communication, developed by Dell Hymes (1962, 1972, 1977), combines "ethnography, the description and analysis of culture, with linguistics, the description and analysis of language" to show "relationships between language and culture" (Keating, 2001, p. 285). True to the epistemology of ethnography, the EC approach contextualizes a study of

communication by including detailed information on what happens in, around, and through speech, and does not simply look at speaking alone – divorced from context – as an object of study (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005). This is so because the EC approach sees speech and human behavior as intertwined. Together, speech and human behavior merit studies on "the situations and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right" (Hymes, 1962, p. 101). The ethnographer of communication seeks to discover the structure inherent to the context of participants' socio-cultural worlds, believing that there are patterns and rules (socio-cultural ones) shaping communication. These patterns and rules will guide, for example, what speech interlocutors consider to be appropriate in what settings and when, and will inform what speech (and its many local varieties) signifies to speakers, and so on.

Significantly, Hymes calls for ethnographers of communication to examine not only socio-cultural structure, but also "pragmatic meaning" (1962, p. 104), i.e. meaning in practice, or everyday, real-life meanings attached to speech. Here again the EC approach stresses the importance of context, since accounts of pragmatic meaning must necessarily look at the larger situations (of activity, of human relationships, of shared histories and experiences) in which speaking takes place. For example, an utterance itself has meaning, but contextual factors play a role in how an utterance is understood. A statement such as "You'd better complete that assignment on time or face the consequences," may have intrinsic meaning (in what Hymes terms its "form") but its meaning also depends on the relationships between the speakers, the situation in which they find themselves, their shared experiences, their ideas about how they may speak to each other under what circumstances, and so on. Again, the EC approach emphasizes the pressing need for descriptions of speaking as well as the relationship between the speech and its contextual factors. It allows one to better understand the connection between "social structure and linguistic form," (general), as well as "the ways in which speakers associate particular modes of speaking, topics or message forms, with particular settings and activities" (specific) (Hymes, 1972, p. 36).

The EC approach has a heuristic value in that it helps researchers tease apart how elements of speaking differ from one group to another, thus allowing for a comparative approach that can be useful not only for understanding ways of speaking but also for developing theories about them. Like ethnography, the Ethnography of Communication is thus not simply a descriptive endeavor, but a method of generating theories about human behavior. Through describing and interpreting speech in context, we may work through its subtleties and complexities in order to understand and make predictions about the social world. A rigorous examination of speaking-in-context can produce not merely descriptions of what is (in terms of human behavior), but also informed projections about what may be. EC accounts can serve to "give rise to a comparative study of the cross-cultural variations in a major mode of human behavior" (Hymes, 1962, p. 102). In other words, a rigorous body of descriptive speaking-in-context research will help scholars to compare different socio-cultural systems. In this way, EC work may help with "prediction and inference about behavior" (Hymes, 1962, p. 114), including speakers' motives, responses, and other actions.

Just as ethnographers have a distinct "way of seeing" (Wolcott, 1999), so do ethnographers of communication. Ethnographers of communication are engaged with "the systematic, comparative knowledge of phenomena and systems..." (Hymes, 1977, p. 170). They do not merely describe context, but demystify it, making informed inferences about it, analyzing it rigorously and systematically while still open to new discoveries, rather than trying to fit data into a predetermined model. Identifying patterns and discovering structure that is present but not obvious, requires skill and the proper mindset to make sense of it. Finally, the end goals of the Ethnography of

Communication are to produce insight on this discoverable structure of speaking and context, and not (as with linguistics) to merely make sense of "language organization."

In terms of doing Ethnography of Communication, Hymes explicitly states that "the concern is, first of all, with the attitudes and knowledge of the members of the community" (1972, p. 36). Knowledge and truth are located in the social world and in the research informants (i.e. what is the significance of speaking as interlocutors themselves understand it?) rather than in a mechanical, non-social system (syntax, grammar, etc.) In other words, the search is for meaning that is co-created between speakers in the social world. Ethnographers of Communication focus on groups, not languages or dialects, as the unit of analysis, and often study "speech communities," which "differ significantly [from one another] in ways of speaking, in patterns of repertoire and switching, in the roles and meanings of speech. They indicate differences with regard to beliefs, values, reference groups, norms, and the like..." (1972, p. 42). The idea of studying speech communities again highlights the difference between language/dialect (a focus of linguistics) and ways of speaking (associated with beliefs, relationships, traditions, social life – the focus of the ethnographer of speaking).

As with ethnography, presence in the field (typically through fieldwork) is an important part of the EC approach (Keating, 2001; Saville-Troike, 1982). Specifically, in order to learn about the structure in speaking, an ethnographer of communication would typically look at naturally occurring speech in the settings in which it occurs, considering how contextual factors such as the features of the settings, the relationships between participants, the goals of the speech event, and norms and rules pertaining to the event, were implicated in or constitutive of the communication. The order in which speech acts, or the components of speech acts, occur, as well as their tone or manner might also be considered (See Hymes, 1962 for a complete description of his SPEAKING model.).

The situated, highly contextualized, richly descriptive ethnographic approach applies equally to online as well as offline settings. In fact, there is already substantial historical precedence for using the Ethnography of Communication methodology to study traditional offline educational settings. See, for example, Keating's (2001) excellent summary of the Ethnography of Communication, which details key studies that have used EC methods to look at, among other phenomena, how educational frameworks impact student performance and achievement, particularly among minority children. Other helpful resources on EC studies are Duff (2002), Gordon et al. (2001), and Philipsen & Carbaugh (1986b). Duff's work, in particular, is a good model for how to organize and carry out EC research in a traditional school setting. While there are few published studies that use EC methods to look specifically at online education, the general use of ethnography to study online communities and communication has been widely embraced. See, for example, Goodfellow & Lamy (2009), Hine (2000), Mann & Stewart (2000), and Miller & Slater (2001).

SPEECH CODES THEORY: A METHOD FOR STUDYING CMC IN EDUCATION

In this chapter, I am proposing the theoretical and methodological framework of Philipsen's Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005), which is grounded in the Ethnography of Communication, as a useful heuristic for studying computer-mediated communication (CMC) in online teaching, training, and learning settings. As the Ethnography of Communication presupposes, speaking can reveal a great deal about people, their histories, ways of living, and notions of self and society. It is just this belief on which Speech Codes Theory is founded.

SCT provides ethnographers of communication with a framework as well as conceptual and methodological tools for exploring and making sense of situated communication and interaction, and for explicating the connection between communication and culture (Carbaugh, 1995, 2005; Philipsen, 1992, 1997; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005).

As already noted, ethnographers of communication subscribe to a belief in deep, inextricable "relationships between language and culture" (Keating, 2001, p. 285; cf. Philipsen & Coutu, 2005). Here, "language" is "all forms of speech, writing, song, speech-derived whistling, drumming, horn calling, gesturing, etc." (Keating, 2001, p. 287), and "speaking" is "the use of language, in all its modes and including those manifestations and derivations of language for which speaking can be a surrogate term... includ[ing], but not necessarily limited to, systems of body movement, gestural expression, music, graphic communication, and drum and chanting systems." (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 355). The relationships between language, speaking, and culture are "[suggestive of] the possibility that there are, in any given place and time, locally distinctive means for, and ways of organizing, communicative conduct, and that these ways implicate a culturally distinctive system of meanings pertaining to communicative conduct itself" (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 355).

Speech codes make up "a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). That is, speech codes are part of a larger culture (historically transmitted, socially constructed); they provide code-users with names for communicative or social phenomena (symbols and meanings); they specify what communicative or social phenomena go together (premises); and they specify what should/shouldn't be done (rules). Speech codes are a resource that speakers can draw on in three important ways. First, they comprise "a rhetorical resource" that aids speakers in constructing persuasive speech appropriate to the situation at hand, useful in achieving the social goals mentioned above. Second, speech codes are "a system of interpretive resources" that help speakers decode (or encode) the meanings of social interaction. Third, they form an "identificative resource" that "answer[s] questions about why [speakers] exist and where they fit in a scheme of sense and meaning..." (for all 3 points see Philipsen, 1992, p. 16).

Underlying SCT are three important assumptions about speaking: that it is structured, distinctive, and social (Philipsen, 1992). First, to say that speaking is structured means that there are patterns in when and how to speak, and to whom. Speaking is organized, consistent and systematic; ways of speaking are not random or haphazard, but have a "systemic order" to them (Carbaugh, 1995, p. 273; Philipsen, 1992, pp. 9-10). Furthermore, because speaking is structured, it can be discovered, described, and analyzed by ethnographers of communication. Second, speaking is distinctive, i.e. linked to its social, historical, and cultural contexts and unique from setting to setting. Rules and meanings, the beliefs about speech and the norms regulating it are not uniform across groups, thus understanding a given group's way of speaking is to understand something unique about them and their culture (Philipsen, 1992, pp. 12-13). Because this speaking is distinctive, SCT provides a very useful framework for analyzing and then comparing different groups' speech codes. Finally, to say that speaking is social implies that it is a means of accomplishing goals in the social world, such as indexing membership in particular groups, or reinstantiating beliefs about identity. As such, speaking "shapes and constitutes social life" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 13). Researchers and educators may ask what social goals interactions accomplish, what ideas of self and other they involve, and what means of carrying them out are socially sanctioned. Because speaking is social, the discovery, description, and analysis of it can generate insights on the "culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric" of particular communities (Philipsen,

et al., 2005, p. 61). In other words, to understand a group's way of speaking is to understand their social life – notions of personhood, the social categories by which members define one another, how people are linked in social units, what they perceive strategic communication use to be, and so on (Philipsen, 1992; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005).

Speech codes reveal the strong connections between communication and culture. Whether in employing them (as speakers do) or in identifying and articulating them (as ethnographers of communication do) speech codes "[mark] off a universe of meaning and [supply] a system of interpretive resources" that may be "rhetorical, interpretive, and identificative" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 16) in nature. They are a useful heuristic for analyzing culture and communication, as well as for cross-cultural (or cross-group) comparisons.

Speech codes exist in all speech communities and, because they are part of a larger structure of speaking, they may be identified and described (in some fashion) by local speakers and ethnographers alike. To identify a community's speech codes, an ethnographer of communication first goes into the field to observe the communicative conduct of members of a speech community, being careful to explicate this as members themselves enact and see it (Carbaugh, 2005; Hymes, 1977; Philipsen, 1992; Philipsen, et al., 2005). The ethnographer focuses her attention on one or more of these key elements of a speech code: ideas of personhood and the social categories used to define people in the community; ideas of social relations and the ways in which people are connected to one another in the community; ideas of how people in the community may use communication strategically to achieve desired outcomes; metacommunicative vocabularies (words, phrases, and/or expressions about communication and communicative conduct); and symbols, meanings, premises and rules that shape or regulate communicative conduct in that community. (Philipsen, 1992, 1997; Philipsen, et al., 2005) While learning about and makes sense of the community's communicative conduct, the ethnographer tries to synthesize the findings into a systematic explanation of how this community operates. In so doing, a name is given to the "system of resources that these participants use to [enact, name, interpret, and judge communicative conduct]" (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 57). This name is a speech code. Classic examples of speech codes are the Nacirema code of dignity and the Teamsterville code of honor (Philipsen, 1975, 1992).

In terms of how "culture" fits in with speech codes, it should be noted that the SCT perspective does not equate culture with nationality, ethnicity, class, or religion. From this view, people do not act in a particular way because they are Canadian, or Asian, or working class, or any other ethnicity, class, or religion (Philipsen, 1997). Rather, culture is defined as a code or a system, "a socially constructed and historically transmitted pattern of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 7). This system is rooted in traditions and developed through social interaction; it endures but also shifts and changes over time (Carbaugh, 1995). While culture influences how people communicate, it is not monolithic. It has some degree of force on people's behavior, but people may choose to keep, modify, or flout cultural norms (Carbaugh, 1995; Philipsen, 1992; Philipsen, et al., 2005). The important thing here is that the ethnographer of communication starts and ends with practices, and not nationalities, ethnicities or other features associated with a culture. As Carbaugh puts it, "to conceptualize culture, then, as a system of expression, is to emphasize that one explores how a symbol or form (like the choice of last name upon marriage) functions within a larger communicative situation; what the symbol or symbolic form is like and unlike in this system; on what various occasions it is used and to what ends; what are its limits of expression; and what ideas and ideologies go along with it or are refracted by it?" (1995, p. 285). Rather than starting with nationalities or cultural dimensions and correlating them with behaviors, SCT starts

with practices (actions, behaviors, knowledge), assuming that their analysis will reveal a great deal about the larger codes, or systems, or cultures of the people who engage in them.

APPLYING SPEECH CODES THEORY TO STUDIES OF ONLINE SETTINGS

Using Speech Codes Theory, the speech and the lived experience of speech communities in online educational settings for evidence of a code or codes in operation there can be explored. For researchers interested in questions of determining the effectiveness of online communication, or its challenges and opportunities, or its implications, SCT can be a very useful tool. SCT can help researchers to discover what norms, rules, and expectations shape interlocutors' interactions with one another, and this can be of great assistance in diagnosing why and how communication in particular situations succeeds or fails.

Since its inception, the first order of business with the Ethnography of Communication has been to generate hundreds of detailed studies that successfully analyzed local ways of speaking/codes of communicative conduct (see both Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986a; & Philipsen & Coutu, 2005 for extensive bibliographies; see also S. O. Murray, 1993, p. 331-332) There is also precedence for looking at speech codes in such technology-mediated environments (Hanna & De Nooy, 2004; Keating & Mirus, 2003; Murray, 1988; Wick, 1997). Additionally, hundreds of new media studies have explored the notion of "community" in online environments (Baym, 2000 is one popular exemplar) and have successfully shown that members of these groups certainly do have shared ideas about how to conduct themselves in and through shared speech. Internet spaces have been proven to be social spaces (Baym, 2006; Danet, Rudenberg-Wright, & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1997; Donath, 1999; Miller & Slater, 2001; O'Brien, 1999; Sterne, 1999; Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1995) where online community may unfold through text-only communication, both within and across cultural groups (cf. Baym, 2000; Bretag, 2006; Cassell & Tversky, 2005). That is, online groups constitute their own social world, and most certainly involve social rules, structures, and norms that influence how people interact and the meanings assigned during that interaction. As previously described, the EC approach used in combination with SCT can help researchers discover the rules for speaking/communicating in online educational environments.

Hanna & De Nooy (2004), for example, did an EC/SCT-style study in which they compared posts on French news discussion boards to posts on British news discussion boards. Through an analysis of participants' key symbolic terms (like "debate" "forum" and "talk"), Hanna & De Nooy showed that message posters from the two groups had quite different approaches to communication in their online communities. On the British sites, users expected "conversation" modeled on offline talk, and informal talk and digressions were accepted. On the French sites users characterized their posts as formal "debate" and discouraged digressions. In the SCT framework, symbolic terms express something crucial about the experience of membership in any given community, so one effective strategy for discovering a community's speech code is to explore the meaning of its symbols. (See Philipsen, 1992, chapter 4.) Thus, while Hanna & De Nooy did not explicitly utilize speech codes theory in their analysis, their examination of prominent symbols and meanings pertaining to communicative conduct provides us with a useful example of how research can be conducted using the SCT approach.

In addition to the symbols mentioned above, Hanna & De Nooy look at premises and rules shaping their participants' communicative conduct. Exploring a community's premises and rules is another an effective way of discovering its speech code(s). In the speech codes theory framework, premises "express beliefs of existence (what is)

and of value (what is good and bad)" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 8) in regards to speech and communicative conduct. In other words, a community's premises convey assumptions about what is right or wrong, helpful or unhelpful, positive or negative about speaking. Rules, which are closely interrelated with premises, are "prescription[s], for how to act, under specified circumstances, which [have] (some degree of) force in a particular social group." (Philipsen, 1992, p. 7) Put differently, a community's rules (whether spoken or unspoken) are in place to help guide and shape members' communicative behavior, including how to act, how to feel, and how to evaluate and make sense of speech under particular circumstances. By exploring symbolic terms, premises and rules, Hanna & De Nooy's work reveals cultural aspects to Internet-based communication by showing how the individuals taking part in their particular discussion board communities were indeed guided by "codes" of communicative conduct (cf. Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen, et al., 2005) specific to the sites they posted on.

For researchers looking at online educational settings, identifying an online community's rules of communicative conduct can be a powerful step towards understanding participants' communication successes and failure. It can also help researchers understand how (or if) these rules, structures and norms are transferred over from face-to-face (FTF) interaction, how (or if) these rules are created over time, or how codes of communicative conduct compare across online groups.

In terms of identifying speech codes, SCT recognizes that there may be multiple speech codes at play in a given community (Philipsen, et al., 2005), a claim well supported by Coutu (2000). Given this, speech codes theorists must necessarily be able to delineate these codes from one another, describing (in some fashion) where one code begins and another ends. This also raises the question as to where and how codes might overlap. There are cases where speech codes are clear-cut (Coutu, 2000) but it is likely not so straightforward in other situations where multiple and even contradictory codes co-exist (cf. Swidler, 2001). Related to this is the question of how individuals or groups who hold multiple and conflicting codes determine what code (of several, or many) to employ in any given situation. This is mentioned in, for example, in Carbaugh (2005), in his treatment of conflicting codes on public speaking. It is also addressed in Swidler (2001), whose work examines how people make use of cultural resources on love, and the complicated ways in which they do so. In Swidler's work, informants draw from quite conflicting codes in order to make sense of, explain, and/or justify their life worlds. It is a complicated process, particularly when people have competing frames of reference as to the activity, communication, or interaction in question (cf. Manning, 2008).

Understanding how context plays into online communication in educational settings continues to be a challenge for researchers, but is one that may successfully be addressed by using Speech Codes Theory. As described, in the Ethnography of Communication framework, discovering a group's speech codes actually requires contextualizing the particular and the local in studies of speaking. Again, this is because of "[the Ethnography of Communication's concern] with discovering and describing, rather than taking for granted, the means of communication that are used in a given speech community. Means are not... considered independently of use in the life of a particular social group" (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 368, see also Keating, 2001, p. 285-286) because the EC/SCT framework rejects the traditional sociolinguistic/conversation analytic focus on pure talk for a more rounded, comprehensive analysis of talk-in-context. Researchers using EC/SCT to look at communication in online educational settings would therefore be sensitive to how the speech codes in a particular environment were connected with contextual factors such as particular educational traditions, teacher/student roles,

and/or participants' identities as technology users and consumers.

For example, Hewling (2005) looked at text-only discussion board message exchanges shared among a group of English Language Learners of different cultural backgrounds. As with Hanna & De Nooy, Hewling's study shows that the meaning and significance attached to message composition and posting varies among participants. However, although Hewling speculates that this meaning and significance may well be tied to multiple contextual factors, such as the context of the message, the perceived role (i.e. student, teacher) of the person posting it, and even classroom norms in participants' home or local educational settings, she does not present data to support this speculation. Rather, she suggests the value of more nuanced approaches to studying online communication, and the importance of going beyond posted messages when analyzing what users put into and take out of their online talk. With its emphasis on holism and accounting for contextual factors, EC and SCT can be used to help researchers identify how context plays into online communication in educational settings.

Just as social factors influence communication and speech codes, so too do technological ones (Barley, 1986; Danet, et al., 1997; Fischer, 1992; Keating & Mirus, 2003). Researchers utilizing SCT might therefore analyze how students and teachers negotiate their speech codes to suit the affordances and constraints of the online space where their interactions take place. A researcher might look at the ways in which participants adhere to, breach, or enforce the rules in that environment, as well as what aspects of the environment influence their choices to do so. Keating and Mirus' study, for example, examined how American Sign Language (ASL) users drew on both text and live video streaming to chat with one another online, illustrating how communication tools themselves influenced users' communication, and how communication norms and conventions may be adapted to the affordances and constraints of the tools supporting them.

One method of discovering a speech community's codes is to look for patterns of communicative conduct in how people speak and when, what topics are covered, or what sequence talk falls in. All of these factors are bound with ideas about and rules pertaining to communicative competence. Briefly, communicative competence involves "what speakers need to know to communicate appropriately in a particular speech community, and how this competence is acquired" (Keating, 2001, p. 287). Rules tell interlocutors how to act and what to do in particular places and times. To have communicative competence in a community is to know what rules (e.g. who is permitted to speak at what times and how; what form speech is expected to take; what words, tone, and speed should be used; what content speech may have; and other similar considerations) are appropriate there. To understand a speech community's rules is thus a way of revealing operative codes. Though rules have force, they may be broken, and so "are subject to all the whims of social life, including their legislation, transgression, remediation, and negotiation" (Carbaugh, 1995, p. 273). One potential question for those examining communication in online educational settings is therefore what speech codes (i.e. rules of engagement or cultural codes of communication, cf. Philipsen, 1992, 1997; Philipsen, et al., 2005) are negotiated, developed, and/or drawn upon in the environment under study? On a more micro level, one might look at what rules of conversation are established in the online interactions, as well as how participants negotiate turn-taking, or decide how much talk is appropriate from whom? One could look at who typically controls the flow of conversation and how are such conversations are begun and ended.

It is important to note that in keeping with Speech Codes Theory, no a priori codes are used. Researchers using the Ethnography of Speaking and SCT typically collect information on speaking-

in-context without preconceived hypotheses as to what they will find. This is consistent with the ethnographic approach, since forming hypotheses in advance of discovery can potentially blind researchers to important contextual information in the field or setting of study.

CONCLUSION

While there are many potential approaches to analyzing teaching and learning in online educational environments, the theoretical and methodological framework of Speech Codes theory is a particularly strong one. It provides researchers with a particularly powerful heuristic for evaluating online educational settings, identifying their challenges and opportunities, and making sense of the communication that takes place there.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Communicative Competence: The state of being a skilled or able communicator in a particular situation or context. It requires being able to understand and also formulate communication, and typically involves social knowledge of communicative rules, norms, beliefs, etc.

Culture: A socio-historical construct that involves beliefs, values, ways of expressing information, local meanings, and rules for how to conduct oneself.

Ethnography: A branch of study that involves the description and analysis of human social life.

Ethnography of Communication: An approach to the study of situated human communication.

Speech Code: A construct designated by a researcher to describe and explain the ways of speaking of a particular group in particular contexts.

Speech Codes Theory: A theoretical and methodological framework, grounded in the Ethnography of Communication, that helps researchers to understand situated speaking and communication.

Speech Community: A group of people who share a speech code.

ENDNOTE

[1] VoIP, which is defined as "the routing of voice conversations over the Internet or through any other IP-based network," (Wikipedia, 2007) can be understood as internet-enabled telephony. There are a number of variants of VoIP, including those which have analog or digital telephone hardware as their endpoint (cf. Goode, 2002; Valdes, 2001). A third variant has computers as its endpoints. Skype is an example of a popular web-based communication platform that uses VoIP.