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

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 “[r]eveal 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