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Speech Codes Theory

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Speech codes theory background

Speech codes theory (SCT) is a *communication studies theory* that grew out of the ethnography of communication research tradition. Briefly, the *ethnography of communication* (EOC), formerly the ethnography of speaking, is a theoretical-methodological approach to studying human communication practices and the cultures that such practices instantiate (Hymes, 1962, 1972). EOC is closely related to, but distinct from, *ethnography*, another social scientific research tradition rooted in the discipline of anthropology. Where ethnography is used to detect patterns in a group's social life in general, EOC focuses specifically on language and communication patterns. The term *communication* is used here comprehensively to include movement, gestures, and other nonverbal communication, as well as written/textual communication and even silence.

As a communication studies theory, SCT is a tool for closely examining communication itself and the ways in which people utilize communication to develop shared understandings and coordinate their activities (Philipsen, 1992). SCT provides the researcher with both a framework and various conceptual and methodological resources for exploring and making sense of situated communication and interaction, and for explicating the connection between communication and culture. Again, note that the terms *speech* and *speaking* are shorthand for a wide range of communication modes, including spoken, written, nonverbal, technology-mediated, and so forth. Like any communication theory, SCT has certain built-in assumptions about the nature of human communication; its key assumptions are that speech is *structured, distinctive, and social* (Philipsen, 1992).

To say that speech is structured means that it is discernibly patterned, organized, systematic, and therefore (to a significant extent) predictable. That is, the ways in which people communicate are not random; rather, people tend to follow their group's guidelines on when to speak, to whom, and how, given the particular settings, circumstances, and goals at hand. Members of a speech community know and can identify their group's patterns, particularly when these are violated in some way. A group's speech patterns can be observed and described by researchers, and learned by new community members. This is not to say, however, that the structured nature of speech predetermines people's communication. On the contrary, people can and do choose not to follow their group's rules for speaking, a point that will be discussed in greater detail further on.

To say that speech is distinctive means that it varies between locales and communities. It varies in the means and modes in which it is carried out, the rules guiding it, and the meanings associated with it. Therefore, there will be some unique qualities in the

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ways that a particular group communicates, and in the beliefs and values that a group associates with communicative acts, styles, and rules. By studying the distinctive qualities of a group's speech, an ethnographer of communication can understand something about that group's particular culture.

Finally, to say that speech is social is to recognize that communication is about much more than simply transmitting information. In fact, communication accomplishes a diverse and powerful range of outcomes relevant to communal life. Communication can be used to express solidarity, hierarchy, intimacy, or other types of relationships. It can be used to reify social boundaries, norms, and/or rules. It can mark a speaker as a member or nonmember of a group. In short, communication serves to constitute, organize, and give meaning to social life.

Definition of a speech code

With these baseline assumptions in mind, we turn now to the *definition of a speech code*, accompanied by a close scrutiny of each component of this definition. A speech code is defined as "a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). Again, as with EOC the terms *speech* and *speaking* as they pertain to SCT refer to all means of communication, including spoken, written, nonverbal/gestural, technology-mediated, and so forth. Therefore, to say that a speech code pertains to *communicative conduct* means that it relates specifically to communication and its attendant behaviors.

A *symbol* is a means of conveying or expressing something; it is a thing (a term, mark, gesture, etc.) that stands for something else. Symbols pertaining to communicative conduct typically provide code users with names for communicative or social phenomena. For example, the term *communication*, a common enough term in the English language, symbolizes different things within different groups in North America; for some it denotes the simple and straightforward transmission of messages, while for others it represents a particular type of speech that enhances feelings of closeness and intimacy with the speaking partner (Philipsen, 1992). Sometimes symbolic terms are unique to a given speech community or culture. In other cases symbolic terms may exist, with or without some variation, across multiple communities. For example, many languages have multiple second-person pronouns symbolizing the concept of *you*. The ways in which these terms are used, however, and what precisely they communicate to and about their users, can vary between languages, regions, cultures, and other group types.

The *meaning* of something is its significance, whether implicitly or explicitly stated. When we ask about meanings pertaining to communicative conduct in a particular community, we are effectively asking what communicative and social phenomena go together, and what this signifies to the community's members. One example of a meaning is that of the term *communication*. When used by some North Americans in the context of interpersonal relationships, this term can connote "close, supportive, and open speech ... [as] contrasted with 'mere talk,' which is relatively more distant, neutral, and routinized" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 74). Meanings are an important component

of a speech code because they can express crucial information about the experience of being a member in a particular cultural group.

In argumentation, a *premise* is a statement or affirmation used to support a conclusion. Similarly, in SCT a premise pertaining to communicative conduct “express[es] beliefs of existence (what is) and of value (what is good and bad)” vis-à-vis speaking and social life (Philipsen, 1992, p. 8). Examining a group’s key premises can reveal a great deal about its culture. For example, a side-by-side analysis of two particular North American speech codes, the Teamsterville code of honor and the Nacirema code of dignity, revealed very different, even competing, premises (Philipsen, 1992). The code applied in Teamsterville, a white working-class neighborhood in the US Midwest, is founded on the premises of *hierarchy* (ranking, i.e., things have differing values); *memory* (respect the past and use it as a model for the present); and *status* (each person has their own fixed role and/or identity in life). In contrast, the code used by the Nacirema (in Philipsen’s study, middle-class Americans living on the West Coast) rests on the premises of *equality* (everything has its own value, nothing is inherently better than the rest); *presentism* (evaluate and decide by reflecting on what works best for the given circumstances); and *process* (each person journeys through life rediscovering their continually evolving roles and identities).

In SCT *rules* are defined as “prescription[s] for how to act, under specified circumstances, which [have] (some degree of) force in a particular social group” (Philipsen, 1992, p. 8). Rules express instructions or strong recommendations; they tell us what to do and how to behave, respond, perform, appear, and so forth. Rules are context-specific, guiding us according to the place and the conditions we find ourselves in, as well as who we are interacting with, and why. Finally, rules have force, that is, they are compelling. What’s more, rules have varying degrees of force, meaning that they differ in just how compelling they are. Rules might be strong requirements (prescriptions), strong condemnations (proscriptions), things that are liked but not required (preferences), or things that we simply allow without strongly liking or disliking them (permission). Like other parts of a speech code, rules are a helpful resource to code users, and may be drawn upon to evaluate, interpret, and select communicative conduct behaviors and strategies. Examples of rules include the following: If boys are disrespectful to men, then men should not use talk to discipline them (Teamsterville code of honor); if a female linked to you is insulted by someone, then you should, in turn, insult that person (Teamsterville code of honor); don’t interrupt anyone speaking at the dinner table, not even a child, because each person is equal and has something to say (Nacirema code of dignity) (Philipsen, 1992).

To identify a speech code as a *system* is to emphasize that it is not comprised of just a few rules, a meaning or two, one key premise, and so forth. Rather, a speech code is a complex configuration of interconnected symbols, rules, premises, and norms that all work together. As a system pertaining to communicative conduct, a speech code offers its users a holistic framework for being active participants in communal life.

Finally, calling a speech code *socially constructed* means that it is developed over time through social interaction, that is, through sustained negotiation and renegotiation of meanings, and coordinated human activity. Although speech codes, like other social constructs, are stable and enduring, they are not monolithic, and speech code

theorists do not take a deterministic view of them. On the contrary, speech codes can be flouted, ignored, challenged, adapted, and even radically changed over time by their users (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005).

While speech codes exist in all speech communities, they are not necessarily obvious to the people who use them. Therefore it is part of the work of an ethnographer of communication to go into the field and observe what symbols and meanings, premises and rules, and so forth, guide the communicative conduct there. In doing this research, the ethnographer of communication synthesizes the findings into a systematic description, interpretation, and explanation. As part of this process the ethnographer gives a name to the local speech code(s). Examples of named speech codes explored by ethnographers of communication include the *Nacirema code of dignity* and the *Teamsterville code of honor* (Philipsen, 1992), former US Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's *code of rationality* and the opposing *code of spirituality* (Coutu, 2000), and the *codes of respeto* and *confianza* (Covarrubias, 2002).

The six propositions of speech codes theory

SCT has six propositions, each of which was developed through careful analysis of extant data. Together these six propositions present a foundation from which ethnographers of communication explore not simply speech codes, but, more significantly, the links between communication, contexts/social settings, and culture. What follows is a brief summary of the propositions as they appear in Philipsen et al. (2005).

Proposition 1: "Wherever there is a distinctive culture, there is to be found a distinctive speech code" (p. 58). Speech codes vary from one cultural group to another, and every cultural group has its own unique system of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct, that is, speech codes. Communication researchers use SCT to study distinctive codes used in cultural groups around the world (Covarrubias, 2002; Winchitz, 2001), including online communities (Hart, 2016; Milburn, 2015).

Proposition 2: "In any given speech community, multiple speech codes are deployed" (p. 59). A body of EOC work has demonstrated that even in one community or cultural group, more than one speech code can operate. What's more, a community's multiple speech codes can be contradictory or conflicting, as in Philipsen's (1992) and Coutu's (2000) treatises on some North American speech codes.

Proposition 3: "A speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric" (p. 61). A speech code reflects more than a group's ways of communicating; it also reveals important information about what it means to be a competent and effective individual and member of society. Here, *psychology* refers to ideas about personhood, including notions about what a "proper" person is, and how such persons should conduct themselves. Similarly, *sociology* refers to the parameters by which people define their group and/or other groups, and it also encompasses beliefs about how people should interact with or relate to others within the group, and/or those outside of it. Finally, *rhetoric* refers to the ways in which group members use (or feel they should use) communication strategically to achieve the desired ends. See, for example, Hart's (2016) analysis of the psychology, sociology, and rhetoric associated

with a speech code, *the code of English logic*, used in an online language-learning community.

Proposition 4: “The significance of speaking is contingent upon the speech codes used by interlocutors to constitute the meanings of communicative acts” (p. 62). That is, the ways in which a person hears, interprets, understands, and/or acts upon communication are shaped by the speech codes under which they operate.

Proposition 5: “The terms, rules, and premises of a speech code are inextricably woven into speaking itself” (p. 62). To discover a group’s speech codes, one must examine situated communication in whatever form is natural to that locale, because that is precisely where evidence of the group’s unique symbols, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct will be located. Note that situated communication is not limited to live, face-to-face speech, but may take a variety of forms, including asynchronous, online, and/or text-based communication, as in Edgerly (2011).

Proposition 6: “The artful use of a shared speech code is a sufficient condition for predicting, explaining, and controlling the form of discourse about the intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communicative conduct” (p. 63). When people make use of a mutually shared and socially approved speech code, and when this use is strategic and skillful, then the use of this speech code can shape interlocutors’ conduct, their interpretation of said conduct, and the outcomes of that conduct. Group members predicate their selection of communication tactics on the basis of a speech code, that is, the shared criteria by which the group evaluates whether or not communication is appropriate and/or effective. Moreover, speech codes involve shared beliefs about the effectiveness of certain communication tactics in producing the desired results, including the actions that others will be prompted to take. Similarly, group members will refer (whether directly or indirectly) to a shared speech code to explain, justify, or condemn communicative actions, including the understandability, wisdom, and ethics of those actions. In short, speech codes, artfully used, influence communicative behavior. This is not to say that speech codes are deterministic; on the contrary, people can and do resist socially validated speech codes. Nevertheless, speech codes influence perceptions as well as actions, which is why they are such an important area of study for communication scholars.

How “culture” is approached with speech codes theory

At this juncture it is important to address how the concept of *culture* is operationalized in SCT. The EOC and SCT theoretical/methodological frameworks developed out of the view that communication is “an activity that is radically cultural—something practiced and formulated distinctively across speech communities and cultures” (Philipsen, 1997, p. 124). Identifying communication as a cultural activity calls out two of its key aspects. First, communicative conduct is *idiosyncratic*, meaning that there are ways in which it will be unique to a given group. Similarly, types of speech activities (public speaking, giving formal presentations, apologizing, offering, arguing, etc.) may be common across groups, but the guidelines for these communicative behaviors will vary according to

locale, era, situational context, and other factors. Second, communication has a *performative* function, that is, it serves to “constitute[e] the communal life of a community and [provides] individuals the opportunity to participate in, identify with, and negotiate that life” (Philipsen, 2002, p. 51). In other words, through their communication, people can both establish themselves as members of the group and participate in the co-creation of that group’s larger culture.

Critically, SCT does not operationalize culture as a locale, a nationality, an ethnicity, a race, a gender, and so forth. While these variables do indelibly shape a person’s identity, SCT engages with the concept of culture by operationalizing it as a *code*, that is, a system of parts (symbolic terms, norms, premises, rules) that, taken holistically, influences people’s communicative practices, as well as how they evaluate those practices (Carbaugh, 2005). By engaging with culture as a code, SCT becomes a powerful tool for analyzing not just a code’s components but, even more interestingly, the ways in which people draw upon codes and effectively use them as a resource for social activity. To explain, people use codes to construct—oftentimes strategically, that is, with forethought to desired outcomes—and interpret, evaluate, and respond to communication. Codes are also used, oftentimes strategically, to establish, challenge, maintain, and so forth, relations within and without the group. “Codes of speaking are, from this vantage point, rhetorical, interpretive, and identificative resources” (Philipsen, 1992, p. 16). Analyzing a code involves identifying and examining a group’s norms, values, beliefs, rules, terms, and key concepts as they pertain to communicative conduct, and the linkages between all of these. By analyzing a group’s speech code(s), you are therefore effectively analyzing its culture.

Applications of speech codes theory in communication research

This leads us to the value of SCT, and its utility for scholars and practitioners in communication studies and other disciplines. As this entry has already described, SCT is a useful theoretical/methodological tool for examining situated communication in whatever locations, times, and environments the researcher selects. SCT can be used first to *describe* such local communication practices. A rich description of local communication practices would include detailed, in-depth information about communication characteristics, qualities, events, participants, activities, and so forth (Carbaugh, 1995, 2005; Philipsen et al., 2005). Having generated a detailed description of local communication practices, the SCT researcher is in a position to *interpret* those practices, exploring and revealing their underlying meanings and/or significance. From this interpretation, the researcher could then make *emic claims*, or claims about that particular community and its communication practices (Carbaugh, 1995).

Besides enabling a researcher to make discoveries and claims about particular communities and their communicative practices, SCT also affords ethnographers of communication the potential to make *etic claims* about speaking, communication, and culture (Carbaugh, 1995; Philipsen, 1992). Unlike emic claims, which are restricted to one

particular setting, etic claims are general and could pertain to any community or environment. Etic claims could include statements about speech codes in general (their characteristics, force, origin, use, etc.); reports about how researchers could use SCT to study any community; and/or observations on the connections between speech codes and communicative conduct in general (Carbaugh, 1995; Philipsen, 1992; Philipsen et al., 2005). In making an etic claim, an ethnographer of communication therefore becomes part of a much larger research venture, one that explores communication in general, and the way that it operates—and is operated—across societies. Key research areas in which SCT offers significant contributions like these are cultural communication, intercultural communication, and applied communication.

As noted earlier in this entry, the concept of *cultural communication* pertains to the ways in which communication itself is cultural. Not only is communication a cultural *artifact*, one that reflects a group's or society's unique cultural mores, but it is also a cultural *process*, and by engaging in it people produce and reproduce their own cultures (Carbaugh, 1995; Philipsen et al., 2005). Much of the extant work in SCT explores these two distinct but interrelated aspects of communication as a cultural artifact and a cultural process. An example of EOC/SCT research on local communication artifacts and the ways in which they are used to accomplish cultural/relational work is Covarrubias's (2002) study of the Spanish language second-person pronouns *tú* and *usted*. Covarrubias's research described the local meanings attached to *tú* and *usted* in one particular speech community: a construction company with multiple branches in Mexico. Then, moving beyond description to interpretation, Covarrubias demonstrated how the speech codes operating in that community (the codes of *respeto* and *confianza*, that is, of respect and trust) were used by interlocutors to simultaneously index and make strategic use of the relationships that they held with one another.

Intercultural communication research examines real communication processes as they occur between members of different cultural groups. From an EOC/SCT perspective, intercultural communication processes could just as easily be characterized as *intercode interactions*, and are prime opportunities for examining, describing, interpreting, and comparing the speech codes employed by the different parties, as well as the ways in which these different codes work—or don't work—together (Carbaugh, 2005). Applying an EOC/SCT approach to intercultural communication research can be an effective way to reveal the underlying beliefs, values, and rules held by the different parties. This, in turn, can lead to the productive examination, and perhaps readjustment, of cultural practices. See, for example, Carbaugh's (2005) comparative discussion of public speaking in two communities (Blackfeet and "Whiteman"), and the tension that arose when one group was expected to perform this type of communication activity according to the other group's social mores.

Applied communication research is the process of taking communication concepts, theories, and methodologies and using them to investigate issues with the aim of applying some aspect of the research process, findings, and/or outcomes to the real world. Applied research is held in contrast with pure or basic research, which is research conducted solely for an enhanced scientific understanding of an issue. Whereas pure research may not reach beyond the academy, applied research is intended for actual use, whether to solve problems, improve people's lives, produce commercial

results, or for some other practical ends. SCT is recognized as having significant practical applications. It can be used to identify and analyze local speech codes, including conflicting ones. This puts SCT researchers in a position to develop, design, and implement tailor-made communication strategies and solutions to effectively address local norms, expectations, needs, and goals. One powerful example of this was the Security Needs Assessment Protocol (SNAP) project, which ran under the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). Co-developed by an ethnographer of communication, SNAP incorporated EOC and SCT mores in its three-step approach: *diagnose, design, and deliver* (Miller & Rudnick, 2012). For the diagnosis phase, research teams would go into the field to collect data directly from local community members on their perspectives, beliefs, values, rules, and so forth. Using these data, the team then designed strategies that would be locally appropriate. In the final step, the research team could then deliver “blueprints” for action that fit local needs and expectations.

A related development is the applied use of SCT in the realm of *technology-mediated communication*. EOC and SCT are amenable to use in all types of settings, and in recent years have been successfully used to study and design for interactions in virtual communities and other online spaces. This type of research feeds naturally into user experience (UX) and user-centered design (UCD), where a critical focus is the intended users of the design or build (Milburn, 2015). With UX and UCD the users—their needs, desires, preferences, and situated realities—drive all aspects of design processes and outcomes, including data collection, analysis, design conceptualization and execution, and redesign. SCT can be applied as a theoretical/methodological approach first for understanding the users’ needs and expectations. SCT can also be used to examine the ways in which the technology itself figures in the cultural communication artifacts and processes of an online community. Following that, the findings from an SCT-based study can be used to inform the strategic design and/or redesign of the build.

Finally, SCT has significant practical value for cultural *sojourners*, that is, those who find themselves in new and potentially unfamiliar cultural environments. A (new) cultural environment, broadly defined, could include a school, university, company or other organization, community (whether online or offline), city, country, and so forth. For sojourners in such new environments, SCT offers tools and strategies for navigating how things work, including local ways of doing things, local rules and expectations, values, and so forth. This insight can then be used by the sojourner not only to decode activity in the new cultural environment, but to make strategic choices about her/his own communicative behavior there.

Using speech codes theory in a research project

Like any theory, SCT points researchers in particular directions throughout the research process, from formulating questions, to designing the research project, collecting and analyzing the data, all the way to presenting the findings.

In terms of guiding questions, researchers applying SCT generally seek to discover *what* local codes of communicative conduct are within a speech community, *how* those

codes function within the community, *what* community members use codes to achieve and *how* they do this, *how and why* these codes are meaningful to the people who use them, and *how* the findings are significant within the researcher's relevant discipline, whether that is language and social interaction, intercultural and/or cultural communication, education, or something else.

Naturally a researcher employing SCT must identify a speech community to study. A *speech community* is a group of people who are affiliated with one another in some way, whether by organization, profession, language, locale, habit, identity, and so forth (Hymes, 1972). Speech communities can exist in virtual and/or online spaces just as easily as in the physical or natural world, and communication may occur through many possible combinations of modes and media, whether in person or online, technology-mediated or mass-mediated, synchronous or asynchronous, and so forth. The key thing is that regular in-situ (that is, situated, in that place) communication is occurring between speech community members.

Once a speech community is identified, its boundaries must also be determined. To say that a speech community is *bounded* means that the researcher is able to discern, articulate, and abide by its boundaries over the life of the research project. Without distinct boundaries it can become difficult, even impossible, to identify members of the community. Likewise, if the community has very wide or no boundaries, it can be challenging to conduct representative research on it.

Sometimes an SCT researcher begins a project because they are curious about a particular speech community. Other times an SCT researcher begins a project with a specific phenomenon of interest in mind, and subsequently identifies a speech community (or multiple communities) within which to study it. Regardless of how a speech community is selected, the SCT researcher must have regular and reliable access to it; this is a critical requirement for EOC/SCT studies, which are socially grounded and very much focused on people's interactions with one another in natural, real-life settings. Put differently, EOC and SCT are used to examine interactions *in context*; they are tools for making sense of interactions and the ways in which interactions and contexts are mutually informed. Furthermore, true to their alignment with other interpretive approaches, EOC and SCT require the researcher to seek out how members of the selected speech community make sense of their own communication and their own social worlds. That is, the SCT researcher is charged with documenting and analyzing the participants' own perspectives and interpretations.

Given these requirements, it's logical that SCT research almost always involves *fieldwork* of some kind. Indeed, fieldwork is perhaps the best way for ethnographers to study local, quotidian life and real, situated communication practices. Naturally, fieldwork requires reliable access to the selected community such that the researcher will be able to conduct *observations* on the interactions taking place there. And, while it is not an absolute requirement, the design of many SCT studies benefits from *participant observation*, in which the researcher goes beyond merely observing to actually participating in the social scene as local members do.

While engaging in focused observations or participant observations, SCT researchers use their primary research questions to guide their activities in the field. EOC/SCT

researchers may also apply the *SPEAKING heuristic* to help guide their observations in the field. The *SPEAKING heuristic* helps researchers categorize different facets of communication situations, with each letter of the mnemonic representing different communication-related variables or categories: setting, participants, ends or goals, act sequence, key or tone, instrumentalities or mode, norms, genre (Hymes, 1972). Additionally, EOC/SCT researchers are attentive to a variety of other communication-related phenomena, including the communicative work that participants are getting done; communication routines and/or habits; ceremonial events; styles and types of communicative activities; social norms and rules; and other features of the settings that the researchers are spending time in. Other things that they might examine while in the field include the following:

- *Metacommunicative vocabularies*, that is, words, phrases, and expressions about communication and communicative conduct, including what these terms mean locally, and how they are used (Carbaugh, 2005; Philipsen, 1992). See, for example, Katriel and Philipsen (1981) on the definition of *communication* in North American culture.
- *Key symbolic terms*, including their local significance and use in the larger cultural context, and (in particular) how these terms are used in important cultural moments. A good example is Edgerly's (2011) analysis of the terms *citizen* and *refugee* in public dialogue about Hurricane Katrina.
- Local definitions for and expectations about *communicative competency*, including what it takes to be judged a good and competent speaker in the community under study.
- Local *rules* for communication, including the local degree of force that these rules are considered to possess. A good way to discover rules is to observe what happens when they are violated. See, for example, Philipsen (1992) on rules for speaking in Teamsterville culture.
- *Social dramas*, or situations in which "cultural codes are violated, negotiated, and revised, or reasserted" (Carbaugh, 1995, p. 283; see Philipsen, 1992). One example of the analysis of a contemporary social drama is Edgerly (2011).
- *Totemizing rituals*, or "structured sequence[s] of symbolic actions, the correct performance of which pays explicit homage to a sacred object of a group or culture" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 133). See, for example, Philipsen's chapter in that volume on the North American communication ritual on how to proceed when someone has hurt another person's feelings.
- True *stories*, in which the tellers reveal characters, actions, things, and/or other phenomena of local import, including how these things are connected, what outcomes they result in, and what takeaways they involve for community members.
- *Myths*, or fictitious accounts of local import, used to help community members make sense of themselves, their group, and/or their lives (Carbaugh, 1995; Philipsen, 1992).

As they engage in their fieldwork, ethnographers of communication carefully and consistently document what they are seeing, doing, and learning in the field; that is, they

actively *collect data*. Data collection can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including any combination of the following:

- Jotting down observations while in the field, then transforming jottings into fully developed field notes, which can then be added to the data set.
- Video- and/or audio-recording activities in the field, and then transcribing these recordings. Recordings as well as transcripts can then be added to the data set.
- Photographing environments, settings, participants, and/or activities in the field. Photographs can be added to the data set.
- Collecting any type of relevant textual artifacts from the field (reports, correspondence, newspaper articles, signage, posts, brochures, meeting minutes, training materials, etc.), any of which could be added to the data set.
- Conducting interviews and/or focus groups with members of the community, and then transcribing these interviews. Recordings and transcripts can be added to the data set.
- Creating surveys or questionnaires for community members to complete. These can then be added to the data set, and the results can be incorporated into the findings.

Regardless of what data collection approach the SCT researcher takes, it is critical to collect instances of actual interactions, in whatever format those interactions naturally occur in the setting under study. This is because SCT is a tool for analyzing situated communication practices. To clarify, researchers using EOC and SCT explore a very broad range of situated communication practices, and are not limited to researching face-to-face interactions. While it is highly beneficial, even necessary, to collect supplementary data on people's perceptions, thoughts, past experiences, desires, and so forth, this type of information cannot replace the requisite data for an EOC/SCT research project; namely, data on natural, situated human interaction.

As with traditional ethnography, analyzing the data for an EOC/SCT-based project is an iterative process during which the researcher collects data in the field and simultaneously examines it, reformulating and refining fieldwork strategies as the project continues. This process continues until clear patterns have emerged through the process of *qualitative data analysis*. Consistent with social scientific demands for empiricism and rigor, scholars applying EOC/SCT carefully scrutinize the data that they have collected on their study participants, the field site, and the situated communication activities taking place there. As with other qualitative approaches, this is typically achieved through carefully sorting and coding the data, identifying emergent themes and patterns, making inferences, and testing (or validating) those inferences, often through member checks.

Most critically, the EOC/SCT data analysis approach falls under the interpretive paradigm and requires observing, exploring, understanding, and documenting local communicative means and meanings from participants' perspectives (Philipsen et al., 2005). That is, the EOC/SCT researcher is charged with revealing how local community members communicate and what this communication *signifies to them*. EOC/SCT researchers do not search for or test a priori variables (positivist approach), nor do they set out to uncover relations of power and/or oppression (critical/cultural approach).

Many a priori variables could be present in data, of course, and there could well be relations of power and/or oppression operating in the speech community; neither EOC nor SCT negates this. However, EOC and SCT are tools for understanding how communication works in the field site, and what this communication means to the people who are engaging in it.

To come to their research conclusions, EOC/SCT researchers carefully identify recurring patterns in the data, including patterns in how people speak and when, what topics are spoken about and how, what it takes to be a competent and/or strategic speaker in the community under study, and what it means to be an effective member of the group. EOC/SCT researchers use these patterns to identify the local speech codes and to articulate how community members utilize their speech codes to get things done within their community. Finally, EOC/SCT researchers interpret and explain their findings, making *claims* (usually inductive) about what the local speech codes signify about personhood, social life, and strategic communication (Philipsen et al., 2005). Sometimes EOC/SCT researchers conclude their projects by publishing a case study or a series of case studies on one community. Other times they expand their projects to compare and contrast the speech codes of multiple communities. And, in some cases, EOC/SCT researchers use their work to modify, improve, and build upon a given communication theory, thereby contributing to communication scholarship in an even more profound way.

SEE ALSO: Conversational Norms across Cultures; Cultural Communication, Overview; Cultural Discourse Analysis; Culture in Conversation; Culture, Definitions of; Discourse of Difference; Emic and Etic Research; Ethnography of Cultural Communication; Sociolinguistic Approach to Intercultural Communication

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Further readings

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