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(Re)negotiating Speech Codes in an Online Language Learning Community

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ABSTRACT

(Re)negotiating Speech Codes in an Online Language Learning Community

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This dissertation examines the local, situated speech within the Eloqi community of practice. Eloqi is a pseudonym for an organization that built an online, voice-enabled, interactive learning platform connecting English language learners in China with trainers in the United States. The learners and trainers connect for regular 15-minute conversation lessons designed to help the learners successfully pass the oral component of IELTS, an internationally recognized English language proficiency exam. Using the theoretical and methodological framework of the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory, I analyze the significance of participants' speech as well as the technological platform on and through which this speech occurs. I find that there is one predominant speech code deployed in this community – the Code of Logic. The Code of Logic, which community members associate with native English speech, is comprised of 6 interrelated norms, premises and rules pertaining to communicative conduct. These are: (1) the speech of the learners should be clearly organized; (2) the learners should speak succinctly; (3a) the trainers should be open and honest in their feedback to the students; (3b) it is an added benefit if the learners are open and honest in their communication with the trainers; (4) the learners should be proactive; (5) ideally the speech produced by the learners in this community should be spontaneous rather than “canned”; (6a) the trainers should be positive and supportive towards the learners; and (6b) the learners should frame themselves in a positive light. In addition to analyzing the Code of Logic, I also examine the ways in

which this speech code (i.e. the Code of Logic) and the talk in this community are shaped by the technological medium. I demonstrate the ways in which a particular script, or interaction order, is encoded into the user interface connecting the trainers and learners. Finally, I reflect on a subset of problematic interactions, ones in which speech does not go smoothly by the community members' standards. I find that confusion about procedure is at the root of participants' misunderstandings in these problematic interactions.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family

Hannes

Lucinda

Barry

Ralph

James

Heather

William

Penelope

Virginia

Heidi

Hartwig

Peter

Gaye

&

Vince

with all my love and affection

PROLOGUE

It is 6:30 am on a cold winter morning, and outside it is dark and misty. My alarm has woken me from deep sleep and it is with reluctance that I groggily get up and start getting ready for work. I pad quietly around the apartment, turning on the heater, switching on lights and making tea. By the time I sit down at my computer, boot it up, and get my system running it is close to 7:00 am – time to clock in at Eloqi¹. I hurriedly enter the chat room and am quickly welcomed with a chorus of “good mornings” from the 15 other trainers and our supervisor, who are already on duty. Right behind me is Gloria², who enters the chat room just a few moments after I do. There are already several streams of conversations going, and I scan the incoming messages in order to get my bearings when suddenly Reena, a popular trainer widely liked for her fast wit and good sense of humor, addresses me: “Tabitha – didn’t see you sneak in lol³!” I answer back with a joke, saying, “I came in totally silently, opened and closed the doors without a noise!” Reena laughs out loud at this, “Oooo... you are GOOD! LOL.” Cara, another trainer, joins in our conversation. “Wouldn’t it be funny if the chat room made that door opening and closing sound that AOL⁴ used to have every time a friend came online? Do they still do that? It used to drive me crazy!” she muses.

Keen on continuing the talk with Reena and Cara, I am already composing a response when suddenly I’m interrupted by the sound of a phone ringing. A window pops up on my screen telling me urgently that I have an incoming call. With a quick adjustment to my headset and volume I press the button prompting me to establish the connection with the next student in the queue. There is a momentary hush as the interaction screen opens up on the monitor before me. It flickers to life

¹ “Eloqi” is a pseudonym, used here to protect the privacy of the company’s employees and clients.

² All names have been changed to protect the privacy of Eloqi community members.

³ Laughing out loud

⁴ America Online, one of the first Internet service companies in the United States.

and suddenly I can hear crackling and breathing on the other end of the line. I scan the interaction screen and see that I'm connected with a student named Charity. "Hello, Charity?" I ask. "Charity are you there?" Just a few seconds later Charity's voice comes through, hesitantly at first and then with increasing confidence as the line proves itself to be clear and stable. After a polite greeting we get down to the business at hand, which is to complete a 15-minute English conversation lesson designed to prepare Charity and others like her to successfully pass the oral component of the IELTS, an internationally recognized English language proficiency exam.

These are the moments – when our connections (technological, social, organizational, interpersonal) are established – that I pause to reflect on this work with astonishment and wonder. I am sitting in my apartment in Seattle, Washington. Reena is in Texas, and Cara is on the East Coast, while Charity (like all of our students) is somewhere in the vast People's Republic of China. None of us will ever meet face-to-face, and I will never know what my colleagues and clients look like. The interactions between my fellow trainers, my students and I are all mediated by new communication technologies. Using Internet connections, an interactive web-based user interface (UI), and Voice-over IP (VoIP) we connect with one another in real time. We are physically located in different states, continents, time zones, and socio-cultural settings. The unique configuration of tools that supports our interactions is all in service of facilitating teaching and learning between people located half a world away from one another. While our scenario is becoming more and more commonplace, it would have been unimaginable a few decades ago, hence my sense of astonishment when I consider the parameters of this online work.

Our interactions are just a sampling of the thousands routinely supported and recorded by Eloqi, a U.S. American company based in Beijing, China. Eloqi has created an interactive web user interface coupled with VoIP that connects native English speakers in North America with English Language Learners (ELLs) in China. The aim of Eloqi's online, one-to-one, voice and text-based lessons is to prepare its

clients to successfully pass the oral component of IELTS exam. I first learned about the Eloqi community in the summer of 2006, when the company was just getting started. As a communication researcher in training my curiosity was piqued.

Where once Internet communication meant text only (Mann & Stewart, 2000) now it has advanced to something much more complex and richly layered: online social networks, images, voice, video, hyperlinks, tweets, and so on. Where once voice connections were only possible using traditional telephony, now they are a seamless part of our computer-based existence. Eloqi is part of a new wave of online work, learning, and communication platforms that make geographical location irrelevant. If you have a computer and can connect to the Internet, and if you have money to pay for services, then the world is your oyster – regardless of where you happen to be planted.

Many communication studies have examined technology-mediated communication and the multifaceted ways in which people live, work, and socialize in online environments (Baym, 2006; Cassell & Tversky, 2005; Danet, Rudenberg-Wright, & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1997; Donath, 1999; Miller & Slater, 2001; O'Brien, 1999; Sterne, 1999; Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1995), but few have examined communities in which members connect to one another using both text *and* voice. In this dissertation, I will use the theoretical/methodological framework of the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory to study one particular text and voice-based community: the Eloqi community of practice. I use the term “community of practice” here to foreground “the shared practices and beliefs of [community] members... Community in this sense is defined by what people do, not by who belongs.” (Wolcott, 1999, p. 262) In this dissertation I set out to understand this community of practice from the inside out, i.e. from the perspective of community members themselves. Here I will explore the local significance of speech; the ways in which the technological platform shapes communication; and what it means to be engaged in online, intercultural service communication work.

The plan for this dissertation is as follows: In Chapter 1 I present my synthesis of the literature and my research questions. In Chapter 2 I lay out my methods of

data collection and analysis. Next, in Chapter 3, I set the scene for my readers by describing the online environment of this particular community of practice. Chapter 3 also achieves some of the work of answering my research question on the connection between a speech code and larger contextual factors. Next, in Chapter 4 I describe and explain the community's predominant speech code, which I name the Code of Logic. In Chapter 5 I analyze the connections between the community's speech and the technological platform on and through which they communicate with one another. In Chapter 6 I share my findings on the nature of online service interactions. Finally, in Chapter 7 I discuss the larger implications of this study.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To make sense of the communication that took place in the Eloqi community of practice I drew on four areas of interdisciplinary scholarship: (1) speech codes theory (2) the Ethnography of Communication; (3) theories of social technology and (4) research on service interactions, each of which I will describe briefly below.

SPEECH CODES THEORY

Speech is so much a part of the human condition that it is easy to take it for granted as a mundane human behavior; yet speaking can reveal a great deal about people, their histories, their ways of living, and their notions of self and society. It is just this belief that speech codes theory (SCT) is grounded in. Specifically, SCT holds that human speech has three very significant qualities: it is structured, distinctive, and social (Philipsen, 1992). The first quality – that of being structured – means that speech 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). In other words, there are patterns in when and how we speak, and with whom. In researching a community’s speech we can discover this structure, as well as describe and analyze it. The second quality, i.e. distinctiveness, means that speech is linked to its social, historical, and cultural contexts and unique from setting to setting. In other words, the social rules and meanings that we attach to speech, as well as the socio-cultural norms we use to regulate it, are not uniform across groups. Because of this, the analysis of a particular group’s way of speaking actually has the potential to reveal unique features about the group itself (Philipsen, 1992, pp. 12-13), whether its composition, modus operandi, values, beliefs, etc. Finally, to say that speaking is social means that speech is used to accomplish relational work, such as establishing, challenging, or reconstituting group membership, status, or identity. In other words, speaking “shapes and constitutes social life” (Philipsen, 1992, p. 13).

Speech codes theory is a theoretical and methodological framework used to reveal and analyze the structure, distinctiveness, and sociality of a community's speech. To this end, researchers identify and investigate a community's speech codes. Speech codes are defined as "system[s] of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126). Let us look at each part of this definition in turn.

Speech codes are systems; in other words, speech codes are comprised of interconnected components, which interact with one another. These components are symbols, meanings, premises, and rules.

A symbol represents something; it is a means of conveying or expressing an idea, a value, or a meaning. Examples of symbolic terms include *gibush*, a word used in Israeli society to represent "emphasis on group solidarity; [a] strong egalitarian orientation; and the issue of inclusion versus exclusion" (Katriel & Nesher, 1986, p. 222); and the German language term *Schadenfreude*, meaning pleasure at another person's misfortune. Symbols may be specific to one particular group, but they don't have to be. Oftentimes they express something essential about social life in the groups in which they are utilized.

Premises are "beliefs of existence (what is) and of value (what is good and bad)" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 8). An example of a premise identified in the Teamsterville society is that using discussion to control a boy's misbehavior is disadvantageous because it is a sign of weakness. (Philipsen, 1975)

Rules 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). In other words, rules tell us what we should or should not do in particular situations. These rules can shift and change over time, being "subject to all the whims of social life, including their legislation, transgression, remediation, and negotiation." (Carbaugh, 1995, p. 273) Some of the rules identified in a study on Starbucks cafes in Berlin, Germany were the following: baristas should engage in small talk with customers; baristas should address customers in the familiar form of "you" (*du*); and

baristas should display friendliness to customers by smiling, making eye contact, and engaging in small talk with them. (Hart, 2005)

The symbols, meanings, premises and rules that comprise a speech code are those that pertain to speech. In other words, speech codes shape how social actors engage in, make sense of, and regulate their communication with one another. The examples cited above (gibush, how Starbucks baristas in Berlin should talk to customers) are all potentially elements of speech codes.

The symbols, meanings, premises and rules that make up a speech code are socially constructed; that is, they arise from our social interactions, which are ongoing, dynamic, and part of a larger cultural history.

Taken as a whole, speech codes reveal fundamental aspects of communication at both emic (individual, local, particular) and etic (group, global, general) levels. Speech codes also help us to understand the myriad behaviors attached with communication acts; the underlying meanings of those behaviors; and the various ways in which social actors interpret those behaviors.

It is important to note that while speech codes exist in all speech communities, those who use them do not necessarily name them. Rather, speech codes “are constructs that observer-analysts formulate explicitly in order to interpret and explain communicative conduct in a particular speech community.” (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005, p. 57) These observer-analysts are typically ethnographers of communication, who go 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). As she discovers and reveals this communicative conduct, the ethnographer does her best to synthesize her findings into a systematic explanation of how this community operates. In so doing, she gives a name 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), as well as the codes of rationality and spirituality identified by Coutu (2000).

Studying a community's speech codes can yield insights that are beneficial to researchers in various ways; in the present study, however, I have selected the SCT framework for two specific reasons. First, SCT holds that "a speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric." (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 61; cf. Carbaugh, 1995; Philipsen 1992) In other words, the analysis of a community's speech code can tell us about the concepts of personhood, social categories, social life, and strategic communication that are utilized and/or valued in that community. Analyzing a speech code thus helps us to gain deep insight into how a community operates, and can further reveal how a community's means of operation are part of a larger cultural-historical trajectory. (Carbaugh, 1988; Katriel, 1986) For example, Edgerly (2011) uses SCT to unpack the citizen and refugee personae in North American discourse on the Hurricane Katrina disaster, effectively revealing speakers' associations with the psychology, sociology, and rhetoric of these personae. Among other things, Edgerly finds that citizens are agential beings who engage in action and can use their relationship with the government to strategically improve their lot. Refugees, on the other hand, are passive beings who are acted upon and who have few, if any, rights to engage with those in power. At a larger level, Edgerly's analysis demonstrates speakers' "deeply held beliefs about the rights and obligations of citizenship, about the obligations of the government, and about the proper behavior of the media in American public discourse" (p. 320). Again, Edgerly's work is a strong example of how SCT can be used to understand the ways in which people's communication implicates person-to-person and person-to-community relationships within a social group. For my own purposes, SCT will be valuable by attuning me not only to the symbols, meanings, premises, and rules of the Eloqi CoP, but also to the ways in which these undergird larger ideas about how to be, how to socialize, and how communication can and should be used effectively to achieve particular ends (be they immediate or long-term, local or global).

The second reason that I have selected SCT as my theoretical frame is that SCT highlights how "the significance of speaking is contingent upon the speech codes used by interlocutors to constitute the meanings of communicative acts." (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 62; cf. Swidler, 2001) In other words, how a person intends and also interprets speech and/or communicative acts depends upon the speech codes that they employ. To understand a community's speech code(s) is thus an excellent way of diagnosing any potential disagreements, miscommunication and/or conflict that occurs in the community. For example, in her study of US American discourse on the Vietnam war, Coutu (2000) does a close reading of written accounts regarding the U.S. government's decision-making. Coutu finds two very different speech codes at work. The first is a "code of rationality," characterized by debate and open discussion, which interlocutors must be compelled to engage in if needs be. This code of rationality is used not only to explain but also to justify the U.S. government's decision-making vis-à-vis the Vietnam War. The second code Coutu identifies, which is shared by the public at large, is the "code of spirituality." This code is characterized by faith and morality, with an underlying emphasis on decency and virtue. The community at large draws upon this code to critique the administration's attitude and approach towards decision-making vis-à-vis the Vietnam War. At a larger level then, Coutu uses SCT to go beyond simply describing the speech codes of two different (but related) communities – the U.S. government decision-makers on the Vietnam War and the U.S. American public. Namely, she locates the source of contention between these two groups, essentially explaining how and why they interpret one another's speech (negatively, in this case) the way that they do. (See also Huspek & Kendall, 1991)

Because using SCT to identify and analyze the speech codes utilized in the Eloqi community of practice (CoP) will be an effective and valuable means of understanding the communication that the Eloqi trainers, students, and administrators engage in; the social relations they share; their notions of strategic communication; and (potentially) the reasons for any miscommunication,

misunderstandings, or conflicts they experience; my first research question for this project is the following:

Research Question 1

As the members of the Eloqi community (students, trainers, administrators) interact with one another through their technological platform, what speech codes do they negotiate, develop, and/or draw upon?

In using the SCT framework to study the Eloqi community of practice (CoP), I will examine essential symbols, meanings, premises and rules in the community and consider how these make up a system, or a speech code. I will use this information to make sense of community members' notions of self, relationships with one another, and ideas about what it means to communicate effectively in this location, and in the world at large. At the same time, I hope to add to the further advancement of SCT, either by providing new confirmations of its value, or by discovering ways in which it could be improved.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

Speech codes theory is firmly grounded in the Ethnography of Communication (EC). 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. The Ethnography of Communication, developed by 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 traditional 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).

EC scholars are highly sensitized to contextual factors in several key ways. For example, EC researchers work to uncover the structure inherent to the context of participants' socio-cultural worlds, guided by the belief 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. Additionally, EC researchers take into account 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 "A native English speaker wouldn't say it that way," 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. Because of this, the EC approach emphasizes the pressing need for descriptions of speaking as well as the relationship between the speech and its contextual factors.

In terms of doing an Ethnography of Communication, "the concern is, first of all, with the attitudes and knowledge of the members of the community." (Hymes, 1972, p. 36) Knowledge and truth are located in the social world and in the research informants rather than in a mechanical, non-social system (syntax, grammar, etc.) Ethnographers of Communication focus on groups, not languages or dialects, as the unit of analysis, and 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) To this end, presence in the field (typically through fieldwork) is an important part of the EC approach (Keating, 2001; Saville-Troike, 1982) during which the researcher typically examines naturally occurring speech in the settings in which it occurs. The EC researcher considers 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, are implicated in or constitutive of the communication taking place. She might also consider the order in which speech acts or their components occur; their goal(s); and/or their relationship to particular settings. (See Hymes, 1962 for a complete description of his SPEAKING model.)

The situated, highly contextualized, richly descriptive ethnographic approach of the Ethnography of Communication naturally applies to online as well as offline settings. There is already substantial historical precedence for using EC methodology to study traditional offline educational settings⁵; and, 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. (Boczkowski, 1999; Boellstorff, 2008; Goodfellow & Lamy, 2009; Hine, 2000; Keating & Mirus, 2003; Kendall, 2002; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Markham, 1998; Miller & Slater, 2001)

In summary, the Ethnography of Communication framework requires the deliberate contextualization of speech, since "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 I wish to deliberately and transparently highlight the contextual factors influencing my participants' speech codes, my second research question is the following:

⁵ 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.

Research Question 2

How are the speech codes that are used by the members of the Eloqi community (students, trainers, administrators) connected with contextual factors, such as Eloqi's service protocols, educational goals, etc.?

Again, some might argue that such a question must be implicit in any SCT/EC study. I do not contest this. Rather, I include this research question in my project as a means of emphasizing my attentiveness to the dynamic interplay between context, speech, and lived experience, just as any ethnographer (whether an ethnographer of communication, an ethnographer in the anthropological school, or otherwise) would do.

TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATION & CULTURE

Just as social factors influence communication, so too do technological ones (Barley, 1986; Boczkowski, 1999; Danet, et al., 1997; Fischer, 1992; Keating & Mirus, 2003). To better understand how they do, we need “nothing less than an inquiry on a global scale into what happens in praxis as CMC technologies are taken up in diverse cultures. Such an inquiry...requires and intersects directly with the full range of methodologies, approaches, and insights of multiple disciplines, beginning with communication theory and cultural studies.” (Ess & Sudweeks, 2001, p. 19) Scholars have long been grappling with the question of how technology shapes, is indexed by, and is implicated in our socio-cultural worlds. In joining this conversation, I draw on research utilizing a perspective called social technology. Social technology is a “soft-line” deterministic perspective which holds that “technology has structures in its own right but that social practices moderate their effects on behavior.” (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994, p. 125) In other words, the social technology perspective assumes a dynamic relationship between technology and society in which each shapes – and is shaped by – the other.

In the social technology perspective, the ways in which people use technologies are not predetermined, but nor are they totally random. Rather, there is a constant

push and pull between the technological and the social. On the one hand, we “actively select how technology structures are used, and adoption practices vary. Groups actively choose structural features from among a large set of potentials.” (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994, pp. 129-130) People have “human intentionality;” they aren’t just nodes in a system, but engage in activities to “fulfill needs,” goals, and desires. (Kaptelinen & Nardi, 2006) What’s more, users have the opportunity and the flexibility to shape, modify, and challenge the technologies in their lives. (Boczkowski, 1999; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006; Neff & Stark, 2004; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Star & Griesemer, 1989) Social struggles lead to new technological developments (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Yates, 1989), and technological artifacts themselves may become sites for achieving social goals and/or negotiating knowledge, authority, and legitimacy (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2006; Fischer, 1992; Kellogg, et al., 2006; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Star & Griesemer, 1989; Yates, 1989). On the other hand, technologies can and do exert force on our social worlds. For example, “ubiquitous technology... rearranges our thinking apparatus so that different thinking just is,” (Stone, 1995, p. 168) while computers “don’t just do things for us, they do things *to* us, including to our ways of thinking about ourselves and other people.” (Turkle, 1995, p. 26) From a bird’s eye view then, technologies are not simply static objects, but are implicated in the social interactions that develop in and around them, whether smaller level social processes or larger level social systems and structures.

The social technology perspective is a logical middle ground between the extremes of technological determinism on the one hand, and social constructivism on the other⁶. It holds that we cannot look at technologies in isolation, given that they are inextricably linked with the social world. There are four important

⁶ Technological determinism maintains that technologies must necessarily result in particular (social, cultural) outcomes. On the other end of the scale, social constructivism finds that “technology does not determine behavior; rather, people generate social constructions of technology using resources, interpretive schemes, and norms embedded in the larger institutional context.” (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994, p. 124)

implications here for social technology researchers. First, we must look at the social contexts of which technologies are a part, taking heed of the “social, emotional, cultural and creative dimensions of human actors.” (Kaptelinen & Nardi, 2006, p. 6) Second, we must recognize that the ways in which technologies evolve relate to their socio-cultural contexts. (Barley, 1986; Baym, 2006; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Fischer, 1992; Marvin, 1987; O'Brien, 1999; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994) Third, we must look at the historical/social development of technology over time (Barley, 1986; Fischer, 1992; Foot, 2001; Latour, 1991; Manovich, 2001; Miller & Slater, 2001; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Sterne, 1999; Yates, 1989), or at least acknowledge that our particular studies reflect not isolated technological incidents, but rather snapshots of ongoing technological trajectories implicating a history of "cultural traditions" (Manovich, 2001, p. 73). Fourth, we must recognize that it is not *only* technology that shapes interactions and social structures; technology is certainly an important factor, but it is only one part of a constellation of influences, including institutional structure, member knowledge, social hierarchies, social rules and traditions, and so on. (Barley, 1986; Baym, 2006; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Kaptelinen & Nardi, 2006)

Taken as a whole, the theoretical approach social technology perspective encourages a dual approach: look for the ways in which we as agential beings utilize tools/technologies to shape our worlds and achieve particular outcomes; simultaneously, be attentive to the potential for technologies to influence and shape our actions, our realities, and us. Because of this, my third research question is the following:

Research Question 3

How are the speech codes used by the members of the Eloqi community (students, trainers, administrators) linked to the affordances and constraints of the medium of communication, i.e. the technological platforms supporting the interactions?

With this question I aim to experiment with the social technology perspective for myself, against my own data set. Furthermore, I will essentially test its utility for working in combination with the SCT/EC framework. Given that both the social technology perspective and the SCT/EC framework emphasize deep contextual analyses, I anticipate that it will be a fruitful combination. Furthermore, although there is precedence for combining SCT/EC with other theories for the purpose of studying technology-mediated communication (see Wick, 1997, for example), such work is still relatively scarce. In this sense, I hope that my answer to this particular research question will help advance the field not only of social technology research, but also SCT research in general.

INTERCULTURAL SERVICE INTERACTIONS

Besides being examples of online intercultural communication, the exchanges between Eloqi's trainers and students can also be categorized as "service interactions." A service interaction is any "interaction between a server who is 'officially posted' in some service area and a customer who is present in that service area, that interaction being oriented to the satisfaction of the customer's presumed desire for some service and the server's obligation to provide that service" (Merritt, 1976, p. 321). Here in this case study Eloqi's trainers are servers in that they are "officially posted" on the company's learning platform, where they provide the service of English language instruction to the students, who are paying customers.

On a very practical level it is worthwhile to study customer service interactions simply because they are interconnected with customer satisfaction and retention, and therefore directly impact a company's financial profit and success. (Czepiel, Solomon, & Surprenant, 1985) Although communication scholars do not study customer service interactions as frequently as one might expect, service interactions are certainly well suited to our analyses, given that they are jointly produced social moments to which all of the parties involved (service workers, customers/clients, and even the service designers/organizers) bring expectations, experience, attitudes, and standards (Albrecht & Bradford, 1990; Czepiel, et al., 1985;

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Schneider, 1990). That is, service interactions "are first and foremost social encounters. As such, they are subject to all of the structural and dynamic factors that influence social interaction in general." (McCallum & Harrison, 1985, p. 35) Like any other social encounters, customer service interactions are shaped by participants' ideas, norms, and expectations in regards to etiquette, or rules of communication, and are therefore perfectly suited to analyses done through the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory framework.

There is precedence for utilizing an Ethnography of Communication approach to look at service encounters; namely, a now-classic study conducted by Bailey (1997), who analyzed service interactions between Korean Americans and African Americans in Los Angeles, California. Using ethnographic methods of data collection (in-person observation, recordings of interactions, fieldnotes, interviews) Bailey detailed how and why misunderstandings occurred between members of these two speech communities during service interactions. In essence, the two groups studied by Bailey differed in terms of how they communicated and read "respect". Furthermore, they had different ideas about how a service encounter could and should proceed. This ultimately led to misunderstandings as well as misinterpretations of one another's meanings and intentions.

Bailey's analysis is thought provoking for four reasons. First, it reveals how the meanings attached to particular moves in a service interaction can differ between speech communities. Second, it shows how speaking is linked to its social, historical, and cultural contexts: rules and meanings are *not* uniform across groups. Third, Bailey's research shows how speech is actively used to accomplish goals in the social world (see also Philipsen, 1992). Engaging in a service interaction in an "appropriate" way can be a tool for showing respect and maintaining a harmonious relationship. Fourth, it nicely illustrates how subtly and powerfully people's underlying "rules" for service interactions may differ. When they do, the resulting service interactions can range from dissatisfying to downright offensive (see also Hart, 2005; Packman & Casmir, 1999). Bailey's work is thus a good model not only

for using EC/SCT methods to examine service interactions, but also for diagnosing how and why miscommunication in service situations, particularly intercultural ones, occurs.

In terms of how “culture” fits into this picture, it should be noted that the SCT perspective does not equate culture with nationality. People do not act in a particular way because they are Chinese or American (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 over the ages 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 (in this case, service interactions) and not nationalities. 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, we start 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.

Because I am interested in what my data might reveal on the nature of online intercultural service interactions, and because the EC/SCT framework is so well suited to analyzing service interactions, my fourth and final research question is the following:

Research Question 4

What do the data reveal about the nature of online intercultural service interactions in general?

In answering this question I hope to break new ground in applying communication theories in general, and the EC/SCT framework in particular, to the analysis of service interactions. At the same time, I will be adding something new to extant work on customer service, most of which currently comes from marketing, HR, retail, and service research; takes national culture and/or Hofstede's (1980, 1991, 2001) cultural dimensions as independent variables; uses quantitative analysis to establish correlations between culture and service-related behaviors and impressions (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Furrer, Shaw-Ching Liu, & Sudharshan, 2000; Mattila, 1999; Ployhart, Wiechmann, Schmitt, Sacco, & Rogg, 2003; Sultan & Simpson, 2000; Winsted, 1997); or uses conversation analytic methods to examine speech alone, outside its larger social, cultural, and institutional contexts (see Cameron, 2008 for a treatise on this topic). Making a theoretical and methodological departure from these studies, I will work from an EC/SCT framework to produce a qualitative analysis that looks at communication from the ground up, rather than starting with a priori categories or assumptions about how it will, or should, or could proceed.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

With studies utilizing traditional ethnography, the Ethnography of Communication (EC) and/or the speech codes theory (SCT) framework, it is generally expected that the researcher will be involved in the community to a certain degree. This is the case for four key reasons, which I will outline here briefly as a preface to the larger description of my methods of data collection and analysis for this project.

First, ethnographers believe that to understand the communication under study, the researcher must understand the context in which it is situated, and do so on the speakers' terms. That is, she must look at the "orientations, meanings, interpretations, understandings" of the participants themselves as they "constitut[e] socio-interactional reality" (Schegloff, 1997, pp. 166, 167) This is accomplished by examining speech (micro level) and simultaneously understanding what it means for the speakers (meso level) as well as how larger social, cultural or organizational structures are implicated in this process (macro level). This is in direct opposition to the tendency of some research approaches to impose pre-existing views of reality onto informants and their worlds. (Schegloff, 1997) For ethnographers then, long term, thick descriptions of people's interactions are de rigueur, ideally collected in cooperation with informants. Lindlof and Taylor note that "decisions must be made with (not for) cultural members...Ultimately, the documentation of social life can be realized only through negotiation with the people being studied." (2002, p. 17)

Second, inherent in the EC framework is the assumption that to understand situated communication, the researcher *must* be involved – she cannot hope to make sense of informants' view of the world just by standing outside their community (Hymes 1977).

Third, speech codes theorists, in keeping with their epistemological roots in ethnography and EC, believe that "in order to learn the local terms, meanings, rules, and premises with which people plan, enact, interpret, and evaluate communicative conduct, you must first observe that conduct, in all its modalities, in situ."

(Philipsen, 2010, p. 164) Such in situ observations are geared towards any of the following:

(1) patterns of communicative conduct that can be observed in the local scene; (2) the terms that the people themselves in a particular social world use for talking and thinking about communicative conduct; (3) the local use, rhetorically, of indigenous meta-communicative vocabulary; and (4) the use of a local meta-communicative vocabulary in various forms of communicative activity, including but not limited to, rituals, myths and stories, social dramas, and aligning actions. (Philipsen, 1992, 2010, p. 164)

Fourth, and even more to the point, speech codes theorists place great value in examining speech in context because "the terms, rules, and premises of a speech code are inextricably woven into speaking itself." (Philipsen, 1992; Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 62) That is, speech codes are only discoverable and knowable through analyses of speech and communicative conduct itself. Since one is better positioned to interpret contextualized speech when one is conversant with (or a member of) the community in which it takes place, involvement in the community is ideal. It is in keeping with these principles of ethnographic communication research and, in particular, the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory, that I planned and executed the methods of data collection and analysis described in this chapter.

My contact with Eloqi began in early 2006, when Eloqi was just starting up its office in Beijing, China. The company's co-founder and Chief Technology Officer (CTO), who was an acquaintance of mine, contacted me for informal input on producing content for online English as a Foreign Language lessons⁷. Over the

⁷ Prior to entering the PhD program at the University of Washington, I had spent many years teaching English as a Foreign Language in Japan, the Czech Republic, Germany, and the United States. My acquaintance was aware of this and hoped that I could draw on my experience to offer ideas on the kinds of topics, functional language, and vocabulary that might interest an English language learner.

course of these few early conversations, I became intrigued by Eloqi's aims of supporting online language learning and bridging one-to-one connections between learners in China and trainers in the United States. I asked the CTO if he would entertain the possibility of me studying the company at some unspecified point in the future, to which he agreed. I maintained only sporadic contact with the CTO and some of his administrative staff over the next few years, during which time I enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of Washington, completed my coursework, and passed my exams. Finally, when I began drafting my dissertation proposal, I reestablished my connections with Eloqi in earnest.

The CTO and the key members of Eloqi's administrative team (the Service Director and the Content Developer in particular) were supportive of this project. Not only was I given unrestricted access to the archive of trainer-learner interaction recordings, but I was also recruited (after passing the preliminary tests) onto the trainer team and permitted to work shifts, just as the other trainers did; invited to attend the weekly online administrator-trainer meetings; and allowed to contact the trainers, students, and administrators with requests for interviews; and allowed to contact the administrators with questions and requests for information. In this way I became a functioning member of the Eloqi community, a "trainer with benefits."

In this capacity, I was able to collect my data using a combination of methods. Multiple methods are valuable in all research (Brewer & Hunter, 1989) but are especially important in international, intercultural, and cross-cultural projects, where one's cultural assumptions can hinder analysis of the findings, and extra measures may be needed to fully test and validate interpretations (Johnson & Tuttle, 1989, p. 471). Multiple methods are also beneficial in qualitative research, where they help investigators "collect rich, descriptive, contextually situated data in order to seek understanding of human experience or relationships within a system or culture" (Mann & Stewart, 2000, pp. 2-3) as well as "examine different levels of the same situation or to focus on different aspects of the same phenomenon." (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 95) The usefulness of multiple methods applies to both online and offline settings.

For my purposes, multiple methods were essential. As an ethnographer of communication, I subscribe to the belief that the examination of speech requires the examination of socio-cultural structure as well as "pragmatic meaning" (Hymes, 1962, p. 104), i.e. meaning in *practice*, or everyday, real-life meanings attached to speech. Put differently, 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. Rather than just analyze the lessons between the Eloqi trainers and learners, I engaged in a long-term (nearly one year) study of Eloqi's bounded community of practice. The fact that this community exists in a virtual online space made the selection of online research methods "a practical way to interview, or collect narratives from, individuals or groups who are geographically distant." (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 17)

THE DATA SET

The data set for this project was comprised of five separate but interrelated parts: (1) a sampling of spoken one-to-one interactions between the Eloqi ELLs and their North American trainers, along with screenshots recording the in-lesson trainer-student chat and trainers' written feedback to students; (2) recorded one-to-one interviews conducted with a sampling of Eloqi ELLs; (3) recorded one-to-one interviews conducted with a sampling of Eloqi trainers; (4) recorded one-to-one interviews conducted with Eloqi team members representing HR (Human Relations), lesson design, trainer training, and the platform design and maintenance; (5) fieldnotes and other materials (screenshots, Campfire chat records, forum discussion threads, Weekly Trainer Conference Call minutes) from my participant observations as an Eloqi trainer.

Data Set Part 1: The Eloqi ELL-Trainer Interactions

I began the data collection phase of my project by focusing on the Eloqi trainer-learner lessons, reasoning that, since these intercultural interactions were at the heart of my project, it made sense to start by looking at them. Eloqi routinely

informs all of its trainers and learners that the English lessons they participate in are recorded for quality assurance purposes, and the company records the audio data for every single interaction as a matter of course. At the conclusion of any lesson, an audio recording of it (about 2.7 megabytes each) is instantly stored as a compressed digital audio (mpg) file on the company server. To date there are more than 19,000 interactions stored in the Eloqi archive.

In September 2009 Eloqi granted me password-protected access to the archive. Since that time I have been able to enter the archive by opening a web browser, navigating to the company website, and then logging in with my username and password. Once I have logged in to the archive I see a list of all the audio files to date, with the newest ones at the top of the list. The list of audio files is divided into columns, which can be used to sort the list. These columns include the following: interaction number (each interaction is assigned a unique identification number); the date on which the interaction took place; the time at which the interaction took place; the trainer name; the student name; and the name and type of the lesson. There is also a search feature, which can be used to locate a particular recording, or a series of recordings, according to any of these criteria.

If I click on one of the audio files in the list, a new page opens in my browser. On that new page I can play the audio recording, and can pause, rewind, or fast-forward the audio recording as necessary. I can also opt to download the recording to my computer by clicking the “download” feature on the page. In addition to the actual recordings, I can view additional information pertaining to each trainer-learner interaction, such as the final note that the trainer wrote to the learner at the conclusion of the interaction; a list of the scripted prompts that the trainer used during the interaction; a list of the corrections (called “mark spots” in this community) that the trainer made for the learner; and a record of whatever words the trainer typed into the “chat box” during the lesson.

Exploring the archive of audio recordings was my first exposure to Eloqi’s trainer-learner interactions, of which there were already thousands to select from in September 2009. As mentioned, I could utilize the built-in search feature to sort

though the interactions by various criteria, but at that early stage I was undecided as to how to begin the process of choosing particular interactions to focus on. My situation was analogous to that of wanting to study books, and being shown courteously into a library with a vast collection of them. Eloqi's Service Director suggested that I begin by looking at particular lesson types; specifically, a lesson series called "Core English Logic I". The Core English Logic (CEL) series was launched in March 2009, and is comprised of 20 individual lessons. Each CEL lesson aims to teach learners how to answer a particular type of question, such as "Is it difficult to do ~?" "How would you improve ~?" or "What do you like most about ~?" When I began exploring the archive, there were already over 5000 complete recordings (i.e. recordings of 15+ minutes) for the CEL course. The CEL course was, and continues to be, one of the most popular courses with Eloqi's learners.

For my purposes, beginning with the CEL course was a good choice in that it is arguably one of the most well-used and representative courses of the company's offerings, drawing the largest number of subscribers and the most attention from the lesson content development team. Given this, I commenced by collecting the most recent CEL recordings, randomly selecting five that had been archived within the last 1-3 days. Next, with each subsequent transcription, I spontaneously branched out into new directions: sometimes I became interested in hearing more interactions from a particular student or trainer, and sometimes I wanted to hear more iterations of a particular lesson. Later on in the online ethnography phase of this project, when I was working as a certified Eloqi trainer, I searched for and transcribed particular interactions that were referenced in the trainer chat room. These interactions were typically mentioned by trainers because of technical issues (an early disconnect, sound problems, etc.); compliance issues (the learner was not at a computer, the learner asked to do something "off topic", the learner seemed unprepared for the lesson, etc.); or simply because something there was something especially memorable about the interaction (the learner made an amusing remark, or was doing remarkably well, or was particularly enjoyable to work with, etc.). One important point that quickly became clear during this process was that, in order to

understand this community's speech codes, I needed to be inclusive rather than exclusive in selecting recordings for analysis, and to pay close attention to "imperfect" and "incomplete" interactions. On the one hand, the approach of collecting only "perfect" recordings (i.e. complete 15+ plus minute interactions in which there were no technical, comprehension, or compliance issues) was perfectly feasible, since I had a vast amount of recordings to choose from. However, I quickly realized that leaving the "imperfect" recordings out would not present a full picture of the speech codes within this community of practice, since technical, comprehension, and compliance issues continue to be part of the day-to-day training and learning experience on the Eloqi platform. In the end, I collected approximately 130 recordings, dated from September 2009 to July 2010. Conveniently, these interactions were all in English, so no translation was needed. Though the level of the Eloqi students' English varies, they make every effort to speak only English when they connect with their trainers online; this is a necessity, as none of the trainers are able to understand or speak Chinese.

Of the 130 recordings I collected, all of which I listened to in their entirety, I ended up fully transcribing 60 with some paid assistance from one professional transcriber in Beijing and another in the United States. All of the trainer-learner interaction recordings were transcribed verbatim, whether by the paid transcribers or me. For all transcriptions I took responsibility for personally inserting Jeffersonian notations (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) in order to preserve and visualize audible paralinguistic information. An explanation of these notations is provided in Appendix A.

Data Set Part 2: Interviews with the Eloqi ELLs

The recorded interaction data described above provided substantial leads as to what codes of communicative conduct the members of Eloqi's trainer-learner community of practice employed in their interactions with one another. However, to adequately answer my research questions, and in keeping with the epistemological underpinnings of speech codes theory, it was important to hear

directly from the Eloqi students (and trainers, as I will discuss in the next section) on their views and perceptions of the communication that they take part in as members of the Eloqi community of practice. For this reason, I arranged to hold individual interviews with 9 Eloqi students. The interviews were informed by my readings of the trainer-learner recordings, and were conducted after 25 interaction recordings had been transcribed and preliminarily analyzed.

Through support from the University of Washington Graduate School as well as the Department of Communication, I was able to fund a three-week trip to Beijing in December 2009, during which time I held all of the learner interviews. In advance of my trip to Beijing, I contacted members of Eloqi's customer service team for assistance in creating a pool of potential interviewees who met certain criteria, which I imposed because of time, cost, language, and other practical limitations. Specifically, my criteria for student interviewees was the following:

- they had to live in (or at least be willing to meet in) Beijing, since it was not practical for me to travel outside the city for interviews;
- they had to speak a relatively high level of English, since I speak no Chinese and couldn't afford a translator to accompany me;
- they had to be 18 years or older, and thus responsible for their own informed consent to participate in my research project;
- they had to be a current or recent (within the last month) client of Eloqi, such that they would have the communication experience relatively fresh in their minds.

In this way I built an interviewee pool that was both purposive (in that interviewees all met the key criteria mentioned above) and convenient (based on their accessibility and language ability) (Lonner & Berry, 1986).

Eloqi's customer service team emailed students who matched my criteria, explaining to them in Chinese that I, an independent third party, was conducting research for my doctoral dissertation on online intercultural communication. The

email asked the students to write back to the customer service team if they were interested in meeting with me. The implicit attraction of meeting me for an interview was that it would allow the students to practice their English language skills face-to-face with a native speaker for about one hour at no monetary cost, an experience that was, as I later learned, both rare and highly valued. After just a few days, Eloqi's customer service team was able to provide me with the email addresses of 10 students who had responded positively to these initial queries. I followed up by writing to each of these 10 students, providing more details about my project, including the dates that I would be in Beijing. Some of the students asked me if I would send them the interview questions ahead of time, which I did. I strongly felt that having the questions beforehand would help the students to develop more thoughtful and detailed answers. Furthermore, since the Eloqi students would be communicating with me in a second language (English), I reasoned that having the questions ahead of time would remove some of the inevitable pressure of them having to quickly process, translate, consider, and answer questions in a foreign language on the spur of the moment. Ultimately, of the 10 students I met online through Eloqi, 9 scheduled interviews with me, which I successfully carried out during my stay in Beijing.

Over the duration of my three-week stay in Beijing I met the 9 Eloqi students one time each for a face-to-face interview. Using email and telephone calls to get in touch, we arranged to meet in public teahouses, cafes, and restaurants around the city. It was important to me to hold the interviews in locations convenient to the interviewees as a means of decreasing the inconvenience of taking part (see chapter 3 of Marin & Marin, 1991). However, as I quickly learned, Beijing is incredibly large (the city has a total area of nearly 7,000 square miles) and it was often unrealistic for me to schedule more than two interviews per day, particularly when I was meeting the students in different parts of the city. What's more, while some of the interviewees were university students on winter break and were thus able to meet in the morning and afternoon, others had full time jobs, and needed to meet in the evening after work. Luckily, on two occasions I was able to arrange back-to-back

interviews in one set location, the first time in a Starbucks café and the second time in a restaurant with a quiet back room. At one interviewee's request, I met her at her office and conducted the interview during her break.

For each interview, English was the only language we used to communicate with one another. All of the interviews lasted at least one hour, and some extended to ninety minutes. With the interviewees' permission, I recorded 7 of the 9 interviews, using a highly portable iPod Touch fitted out with an external microphone (a MityMic) and loaded with Apple's Voice Memo software. In all cases, I also took copious hand-written notes, which were useful later on when I transcribed the material. The interviews lasted, on average, one hour each.

Each interview took shape in the following way: after we greeted each other I offered to buy the interviewee a drink. Some agreed straight away, some politely declined, and some insisted on treating me to the drink instead. Once that was settled, I gave each interviewee my business card and an IRB-approved informed consent form. I explained the informed consent form section by section, and asked if there was anything that needed further explanation. After that, I asked each interviewee to sign the form if they agreed to its terms and conditions, which all of them did. I gave copies of the informed consent forms to each interviewee for their own records. I then asked if I could have permission to record the interview, simply for my own use. Seven of the 9 interviewees granted this, while two declined. I then began the interview. In all cases, I was greatly impressed by the candor and earnestness with which the interviewees responded to my questions. What's more, at the conclusion of the interview, many wished to continue talking, and shared with me their aspirations for immigrating and studying abroad. Some asked me for advice about pursuing their educational goals, and others offered to meet with me again to show me around the city. Taken as a whole, the interviews were a very positive and rewarding experience.

The interview questions that I used were based on my preliminary analysis of the learner-trainer interactions that I had already transcribed (see previous section) and addressed address what norms, rules, premises and expectations of

communicative behavior interviewees employed in their interactions with the Eloqi trainers. I had begun to formulate the interview questions in summer 2009, since I had submit them to the University of Washington's Human Subjects Committee in order to apply for and receive IRB approval in advance of my fieldwork. However, I made small changes to the questions between September 2009 and my arrival in Beijing in December 2009, informed by my examination of the Eloqi trainer-learner interactions. Once I had arrived in Beijing, I submitted the interview questions to my key contacts at the Eloqi headquarters to get feedback on whether the English-language terms and concepts I used made sense and had some equivalence in the target cultural context (see Harkness, Van de Vijver, & Johnson, 2003 on referential meaning vs. pragmatic meaning, p. 46-49; also T. W. Smith, 2003). I also agreed to ask the student interviewees a few marketing questions in order to collect information that was of immediate value to the company, such as how each student had learned about Eloqi's services, and what exactly had prompted them to sign up for a course. Once the questions had been vetted and approved by my cultural informants, I began meeting the students for the interviews. Later, as the student interview phase proceeded, I made small changes to the language and wording of my questions as necessary, using the process of "decentering" to continually improve the quality of the questions I was asking (Marin & Marin, 1991, pp. 93-95).

The interviews that I conducted with the Eloqi students were semi-structured in that I did have pre-prepared questions which I asked each interviewee, but also freely pursued interesting leads and spontaneously asked additional questions. As an ethnographer of communication "I [was] not really trying to get a set of answers to a standardized set of questions. I just want[ed] to get people to talk about their experiences, to tell me stories." (Markham, 1998, p. 78)

At the end of each working day, I downloaded the interview recordings from my iPod to my laptop, and after I had returned to the United States I transcribed the interviews verbatim. I created my transcripts by using QuickTime Player to play the audio recordings on my laptop, while simultaneously typing the transcription into a Word document. For some portions of the student interviews where I felt it was

particularly important, I transcribed the talk using Jeffersonian notations (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) to preserve audible paralinguistic information.

Data Set Part 3: Interviews with the Eloqi Team

As previously mentioned, the recorded interaction data provided substantial evidence as to what speech codes participants use in their interactions. However, to adequately answer RQ1-4, and in keeping with the epistemological underpinnings of speech codes theory, it was important to hear from the people who create, maintain, and market Eloqi's communication product – the user interface and lessons it supports. For this reason, during my three-week trip to Beijing in December 2009, I held a series of informal one-to-one interviews with members of the Eloqi team, including the Chief Technology Officer, the Service Director, and the Content Production Manager. These interviews were informed by the preliminary analysis of the trainer-learner interaction data, as well as the student interviews that I conducted during my stay in Beijing. Since I maintained regular email and phone contact with these members of the Eloqi team previous to my visit to Beijing, the informal interviews that I conducted with them there were essentially an extension of our ongoing conversations.

During my trip to Beijing I made an effort to spend time at the Eloqi office, where I was kindly given a desk as well as an Internet connection for the duration of my stay. When the Eloqi team members were working, I sat at my desk and prepared transcriptions and reports of the data that I had collected. Sometimes I participated in a meeting or work session, and once I joined a voice recording session for a new lesson. During lunch breaks and at the end of the working day I was frequently invited to join the team members for meals in nearby cafes and restaurants, and during these opportunities I was able to chat with them about their work, as well as their interpretations of the rules, norms and expectations amongst the trainers and the learners. Whenever possible, and when permission was granted, I recorded these conversations. Otherwise, I took copious hand-written notes, which I later transcribed. Because the Chief Technology Officer, the Service

Director, and the Content Production Manager are all native English speakers, and because the rest of the Eloqi employees are fluent in English, I did not require the assistance of an interpreter for these informal interviews.

At the end of each working day, I downloaded the interview recordings from my iPod to my laptop. After I had returned to the United States I transcribed the interviews verbatim. I created my transcripts by using QuickTime Player to play the audio recordings on my laptop, while simultaneously typing the transcription into a Word document. For some portions of the interviews where I felt it was particularly important, I transcribed the talk using Jeffersonian notations (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) to preserve audible paralinguistic information.

Data Set Part 4: Interviews with the Eloqi Trainers

Just as I had conducted one-to-one interviews with Eloqi students and staff, so too did I wish to interview Eloqi trainers in order to learn about their views on and experience with the communication taking place in the Eloqi community of practice. At the end of January, 2010 I thus began this next phase of the data collection.

To help me recruit trainers for the interviews, Eloqi offered to send out a general email on my behalf, using its internal email system to quickly and easily contact all of the trainers employed at that time (about 20 people). This approach was beneficial in that it showed company endorsement of the project. At the same time, it was stressed that my project was academic in nature (i.e. I wasn't conducting corporate research) and that trainers could choose for themselves whether to contact me or not. As an incentive to get trainers to participate, I decided to offer \$10.00 Amazon gift certificates to anyone who did an interview with me. (One trainer ended up doing two separate interview sessions with me, so I gave her two \$10.00 certificates.) The email that the company sent out, which I helped to compose, contained the following information:

- That I was a doctoral student conducting academic research independently of the company;

- That my research topic was intercultural communication in online educational settings;
- That I wished to interview trainers about their experiences and impressions of working in an intercultural online setting;
- The proposed date range for the interviews (February 8th-28th, 2010);
- That I would offer a \$10.00 Amazon gift certificate to each interviewee;
- That each interview would last approximately 60 minutes;
- My contact (email, Skype, phone) details.

After this email went out, I quickly received email responses from 13 individual trainers. Since it was not my intention to restrict the trainer interviewee pool in any way (I would interview anyone, provided that they were currently working as a trainer with Eloqi) I wrote back to all of them. From that point on I communicated directly with them, without additional mediation by the company. Of those who originally contacted me, 12 ended up scheduling and completing interviews.

Because the trainers were spread out across the continental United States, and because I was working within a restricted budget that wouldn't have allowed me to travel to any of them, I decided to conduct my interviews by using a combination of inexpensive and free technologies that were easily accessible to me and to the trainers themselves. Specifically, I selected Skype as the primary medium of communication.

Skype is a "free PC-to-PC phone service" (Bertolucci, 2005, p. 105) that utilizes VoIP. When using Skype computer-to-computer, there are no restrictions on where in the world users can be located. Skype's good sound quality is one of the features which makes it so popular (Max & Ray, 2006). Using Skype is free of charge when users are simply connecting their computers over the Internet. The basic software can quickly and easily be downloaded from the Skype website. An additional benefit of Skype is that it includes an instant messaging (IM) function, whereby callers can text each other before, during, or after the call. This feature proved to be very useful on

the occasions when the sound quality of the call degraded (more on this below). Other features of Skype which I did not end up using (but which would come in handy in a project like this) are that it supports live video (if one or more of the callers has a webcam they can activate it, allowing the other callers to see them while chatting) and file transfer (callers can send files such as photos and word documents to each other using the platform).

To use Skype computer-to-computer, each party needs to have some sort of device on which the platform is loaded (a laptop, a PC, an iPod Touch, etc.) as well as an active Internet connection. For most of my interviewees this wasn't a problem, since they either already had Skype installed, or were open to downloading it and using it with me. In these cases, we used the free version of Skype to connect computer-to-computer.

Some of my interviewees, however, either wanted me to call them on their cell/home phones or preferred to call me themselves. Neither of these scenarios posed a problem using Skype. To accommodate them, I subscribed to two of Skype's additional, for-cost services. First, I purchased a subscription to Skype's "Unlimited US and Canada" service, which lets you place an unlimited number of calls to landlines in the United States and Canada. At only \$2.95/month, I could log in to Skype, select the "call phones" function, and easily call the cell phone or landline number that my interviewees had given me. For those interviewees who wanted to call me themselves, I set up an online Skype number. With an online Skype number you essentially buy a phone number from Skype. The phone number can be "in" one of 25 countries. I bought a US American number, meaning that the international code of my number was "1" and I had a three-digit area code, just like any phone number in the United States. To receive calls placed to my online Skype number, I needed to have the device on which Skype is loaded switched on (in this case, my laptop), and I needed to be connected to the Internet with the Skype software running. (If any one of these conditions was not met and someone attempted to call my online number, they would not have been able to connect with with. Instead,

their call would have gone to my Skype voice mail account, which came with the service.)

It may sound as if I was going to complex lengths to set up a channel of communication with my interviewees, but using Skype was actually very easy. A challenge of using Skype or other computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools can be the degree of computer literacy that you and your participants need to have. (Mann & Stewart, 2000) However, since members of Eloqi's trainer pool are quite accustomed to using computers and Internet-based tools to connect with Eloqi and the Eloqi students, I felt that it would be appropriate to conduct the interviews through similar channels. Many of my interviewees were already veteran Skype users, and those who were not were already familiar with Eloqi's VoIP + Web-based user interface platform, and so downloading and using Skype was a simple matter for them. For those interviewees who either wanted me to call them or wanted to call me themselves, Skype became an invisible (to them) platform supporting our calls. What's more, "CMC is user-friendly in terms of making rapid connections between individuals in an environment of their own choosing." (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 24) That is, the trainers had a large degree of flexibility in terms of choosing their physical locations for the interviews, provided they had a computer and internet connection there (when we used Skype for computer-to-computer calls) or at least a phone line (when we used Skype-to-phone or phone-to-Skype calls).

In all cases, the greatest payoff to using Skype was that I could easily record the interviews (with the trainers' permission, of course) using some additional third-party software. For this project the additional software that I chose was Audio Hijack Pro. There are numerous software choices for recording Skype calls, but I opted to buy Audio Hijack Pro, a Mac-compatible program that can record any sound file that is being played on or generated by the computer on which it is loaded. Once Audio Hijack Pro was installed, I simply opened it up and selected the application that I wanted to record from (in this case, Skype). During interviews I could click "record" and "pause", much as I would with a physical recording device.

At the end of each interview, the recording was saved to my hard drive as an MP3 file, which I could then play back on my laptop using VLC media player⁸, and transcribe using Word.

It must be admitted that using Skype was not entirely problem-free. As Markham (1998) noted in her ethnography of an online community, technology is not always a pure boon, but can potentially complicate data collection. In my case, I found that during peak hours (typically the late afternoons and early evenings, after people across the United States had finished work) the sound quality of Skype was at risk of noticeable degradation. Skype does have an instant messaging (IM) feature that allows users to exchange text messages with one another instantaneously, and these text messages are automatically recorded on a users' profile, allowing you to go back and read them (or analyze them) after the fact. However, relying on text messages was not ideal for my purposes in the trainer interview context. Therefore, when Skype's sound quality became too poor to continue, I was forced to either re-establish the connection using Skype-to-phone (which could also have poor sound quality) or reschedule the interview altogether (which I had to do on occasion). On the whole, though, Skype proved to be a convenient and cost-effective means of conducting the trainer interviews, and I would utilize it again for future projects.

As mentioned earlier, trainers opted to contact me directly via email if they were interested in getting more information about the possibility of doing an interview or if they wanted to set one up. Of the 13 who originally contacted me, 12 ended up scheduling an interview, all of which were completed. The online interviews proceeded in the following manner: Once we had scheduled a date and time for the interview, I emailed each trainer a copy of the IRB-approved oral consent form that I was using for the study. I reasoned that the trainers would like to be able to look this over before the interview, and that this would save us time. Next, I made arrangements to be in a quiet place with an Internet connection (either my home or, if it was after working hours, in my shared office) for the duration of

⁸ See <http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>

each interview. Shortly before the scheduled start time I logged into Skype and tested Audio Hijack Pro to make sure it was working. Next, I looked for the interviewee on Skype and, if they were there, I sent them a short text message to say that I was ready to begin. If the trainer had asked to be called, then I used Skype's "call phones" function at this point to place the call to them. If the trainer had arranged to call me, I simply kept Skype running and waited for the call to come in. Once we were connected I referred to the oral consent form (which I had already emailed each interviewee) and asked if they had any questions about it. I then asked each trainer if she agreed to be interviewed, which all of them did. Finally, I asked if I could have their permission to record the call, which all of them granted. At this point, I began recording using Audio Hijack Pro and started the official interview. Since I had told trainers at the outset that the interviews would last no longer than one hour, I stayed within that time limit. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked the trainers for their mailing addresses so that I could have the Amazon gift certificates, which I purchased online through the Amazon website, sent to them.

The trainer interviews were necessarily informed, but not wholly determined by, the data that I had already collected (lesson recordings, student interviews, staff interviews, online ethnography), transcribed and preliminarily analyzed. As with my other interviews, I wanted to get my informants' views on what norms, rules, premises and expectations of communicative behavior interviewees negotiated or utilized in their interactions in the Eloqi community of practice. As with the round of Eloqi student interviews that I had done in Beijing, I also offered to ask a few questions on the company's behalf, so that I could collect some data that was of immediate use to them.

After I had finished the last trainer interview, I began transcribing them one by one. I created my transcripts by using VLC, which was installed on my laptop, to play back the audio recordings, while simultaneously typing the transcription into a Word document. I transcribed the trainer interviews verbatim, and for some portions of the talk where I felt it was particularly important, I used Jeffersonian

notations (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) to preserve audible paralinguistic information.

A note on transcriptions

There were three key reasons why I collected audio recordings of speech whenever I could for this project. First, although I took copious notes during interviews, I could not accurately jot down all of what my interviewees said. Even on my best days I estimate that I lost a good thirty percent or more of the exact words my interviewees uttered. Having recordings of the talk therefore ensured that every valuable word shared by interviewees was saved. Second, my handwritten notes could not capture paralinguistic cues such as interviewees' volume, pitch, inflection, intensity, speed, or silence. Because such nonverbal cues can convey as much meaning as actual words, it was vital to have an accurate recording of them. Finally, the recordings allowed for the possibility of transcription support. I was able to send a select number of them to a professional in Beijing, who transcribed them for me for a small fee. This saved me a good 15-20 hours of work.

As previously mentioned, I created transcriptions of all my audio-recorded data: the trainer-learner interactions, the interviews with the Eloqi students, the interviews with the Eloqi staff members, and the interviews with the Eloqi trainers. For the trainer-learner interactions I used Jeffersonian notations (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) throughout the transcriptions to preserve paralinguistic data since I was especially interested in analyzing interlocutors' talk-in-interaction. With the interview data I used Jeffersonian notations only selectively, since I was most interested in the content of their speech, rather than the relational aspects of our talk.

Transcribing talk is an arduous, time-consuming task, particularly when including additional notations (such as Jeffersonian notations). To create a basic transcription without notations, I generally needed about four times the amount of actual talk time. That is, for 15 minutes of talk I needed roughly one hour to

transcribe it. Of course, the advantage of transcribing the data is that you are simultaneously engaging in a close reading of it, which is a useful precursor to the analysis phase of the research.

In all cases, however, I acknowledge that no transcripts provide a truly complete record of speech and/or interaction. Transcription itself is an interpretive, “theory laden” business, as it influences how researchers see and analyze the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), in part because the representation of speech in writing is meaningful (Tedlock, 1983). There is necessarily information that gets lost, even with audio-recordings and verbatim, detailed transcripts, because “each researcher makes choices about whether to transcribe, what to transcribe, and how to represent the record in text.” (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 66) We choose, for example, what “characteristic speech patterns (umm-ing and err-ing; stopping and starting)” (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 22) to transcribe, as well as “what paralinguistic and nonverbal information should be included, and what conventions should be used to symbolize or present it” (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 67). Transcribing talk causes meaning to get lost, meaning that speech would convey in tone, pauses, affect, silence, volume, gesture, contextual information (it's getting dark, the speakers are sitting in a café) etc. (Tedlock, 1983) Furthermore, transcripts of talk do not typically convey much information about the actual setting or the speakers themselves (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

Because all of these factors inevitably impact the interpretation of the data, EC researchers must pay careful attention to how they go about transcribing their data (phonetically or orthographically), what information they include (in the transcript, in the research report), and how they represent speech visually (format, layout), and whether or not/how they speculate on the speakers' inner state (feelings, motivations). (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Tedlock, 1983) In my particular project, which utilizes an EC approach, I have attempted to examine the Eloqi trainer-learner interactions as they are embedded in a larger community of practice. In engaging in online fieldwork (my participant observation) and in coupling this with in-depth interviews with various members of the community, I have been better

able to make sense of participants' talk-in-interaction. In this way, while my transcripts may not necessarily be an objective, value-free or "neutral" (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 69), they are balanced out by being part of a larger data set that attempts to create a holistic picture of the community of practice.

Data Set Part 5: Participant Observation

The final phase of data collection which I engaged in for this project was online participant observation of the Eloqi community of practice. Participant observation is that in which the researchers themselves are a part of the community under observation, and participate in the community's activities, thus learning about the community by doing, not only by watching. The benefit of this is that one can better make sense of situated meanings, learning more deeply about the experience of the people you are studying. (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000; Saville-Troike, 1982) Participant observation is "founded on firsthand experience in naturally occurring events." (Wolcott, 1999, p. 46)

Although EC studies generally promote participation in the activities of the groups under study (Hymes, 1977; Saville-Troike, 1982), they do not necessarily require traditional *in situ* observations. Two model studies that analyze distal, online communication are Hanna and De Nooy (2004) and Manning (2008). The key thing about these studies, whether they take a traditional participant observation approach or look at text-based communication, is that they engage in "systematic, comparative knowledge of phenomena and systems" and that the researcher has the training and ability to make inferences, ask questions, and utilize the data to make sense of situated communication, with no pre-determined answers in mind. (Hymes, 1977, p. 170) Regardless of what technologies or means of communication the informants are using, the corpus must provide information on speaking *in context*. (Hymes, 1962, 1972, 1977; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; McDermott, Gospodinoff, & Aron, 1978) That is, the corpus should contain not merely transcripts of speech, but data on the place, time, and circumstances in which that speech took place, and its cultural, social, and historical layers.

My primary goal for the participant observation phase was to learn firsthand about the contextual factors influencing communication in the Eloqi community of practice, including the ways in which the technologies supporting the interactions influenced the development of participants' speech codes. For my purposes, participation observation helped me to gain enough of a highly contextualized, in-depth understanding of the community such that I could adequately answer RQ2-3. Indeed, as an ethnographer of communication, I strongly felt that it would not even be possible to answer RQ2-3 without some participation in the community that I was studying. Since "[to] participate is to know enough about the rules for interaction and movement so that movement and interaction with and within this space is possible" (Markham, 1998, pp. 23-24), my own participation allowed me to learn (sometimes through trial and error) the appropriate rules for interaction (i.e. the code of communicative conduct) in Eloqi's community of practice. I did my participant observation for this project by working as a Eloqi trainer from October 2009 to August 2010.

My status as a researcher/guest meant that I was not required to complete the entire formalized process of applying for a Eloqi trainer post. I did, however, willingly go through select parts of it at the company's request. Specifically, I completed a series of online trainer training modules on Eloqi's platform; I took (and passed) a series of online multiple choice tests associated with training modules; and I satisfactorily completed a "live trial call," i.e. a practice call in which I taught an Eloqi lesson to a staff person. Once I had completed these steps, I was invited to begin working shifts. At the same time, the Coordinator of Trainer Operations posted an announcement in the trainer forum, saying that I was the latest trainer to be hired. This announcement, which is made whenever a new trainer joins the group, prompted a series of messages from other Eloqi trainers, welcoming me warmly into the group. (This too, I learned, is a tradition in the community.) In this way, my entry into the community was very similar to any other trainer's.

During my tenure as a trainer I made every attempt to integrate myself into Eloqi's community of practice. I regularly attended the weekly trainer conference calls and initially I tried to fulfill at least the minimum required number of shifts per week and per month, even though my special status meant that I could work as few or as many shifts as I liked. During the conference calls and while working shifts I actively followed the talk going on in the Campfire, and I often joined in the discussions there by posting questions and comments. I followed the discussion threads in the trainer forum and occasionally posted comments and questions in that space as well. I also stayed up to date on the trainer training modules, completing new ones as they were released so that I could qualify to teach the lessons associated with them. The main things that set me apart from the "real" trainers were that I was working unpaid (at my own suggestion) and I could work as few or as many shifts as I wanted. To the best of my knowledge, I followed the rules and norms of the community in all other respects. In so doing, I wished to understand the community from a worm's eye view, so to speak.

The timing of my participant observation also impacted my integration into the community because my work as a trainer overlapped with the trainer interviews that I conducted. During a few intensive weeks in the winter of 2010 I was contacting trainers one-to-one for in-depth interviews and also interacting with them in the Campfire during our common shifts. I felt that this helped us to build rapport as well as a mutual sense of trust with one another, simultaneous to me establishing myself in the Eloqi community. What's more, at the same time that I was asking trainers about like rules, norms, rewards and challenges of working in this environment, I was learning them firsthand. This was an excellent way to learn about the codes of communicative conduct in this particular community of practice, as well as the rules, policies and procedures promoted by the company, and the ways in which the trainers responded to them.

During my nearly one-year long online participant observation phase, I taught 30 individual lessons over 17 separate shifts (lasting 30-120 minutes) with about 25 different students. Initially I signed up for "committed" shifts, just as a regular

trainer would. At Eloqi, working committed means that you are prioritized on the call queue, and this was appealing to me because I wanted to increase my chances of getting calls from learners, and thus being able to experience teaching the lessons. After a few months, however, I decided to work only uncommitted shifts, since I didn't want to indirectly take away the opportunity of guaranteed pay from other trainers. To clarify, there only are a limited number of committed shifts per day, for which trainers are not only prioritized in the queue but also guaranteed a certain sum of money, even if they don't receive any calls. Any trainer can work any shift "uncommitted", but doing so means that the trainer is only paid if they receive a call.

I carried out each of my participant observation sessions in the following manner: Once I had decided upon a shift to work, I made arrangements to be in a quiet place with a stable Internet connection (either my home or, if it was after working hours, in my shared office) for the duration of the shift. About fifteen minutes before the start of my shift I would sit down at my laptop, switch it on, and open up a virtual machine using VMWare. (The Eloqi platform runs on Windows but not on Mac OS. Since I use a Mac, I needed to install a virtual PC – essentially a computer inside a computer – on my laptop.) Once inside the virtual machine I used a web browser to navigate to the Eloqi trainer portal, where I logged in using my unique username and password. Inside the portal I navigated to the Campfire, or chat room, which I entered. Inside the chatroom I could see and exchange instant messages with the supervisors on duty as well as all the other trainers working the shift. In addition to being inside the chat room, I also initiated a version of the company's special software tool, called the Trainer Client (TC), which I kept on my virtual desktop. The TC is the platform for the lessons between the Eloqi trainers and the learners. In a way, it is the virtual classroom where the trainers and learners meet one another during a call. To clock in for a shift, trainers must have the TC up and running, and set to "working." If you get it running after your shift officially begins, or if you have it running but have not clicked the "working" button, you would be considered late.

Once inside the chat room with my TC running and my status set to “working,” which officially put me in the queue for learners’ calls. At that point, I simply waited for calls to come in. In the meantime, I followed, and often participated in, the discussions going on in the chat room. Whenever a call came in, my TC would make a ringing sound and I’d click the option to accept the call. After that, the lesson window would immediately open, and I’d greet the student and proceed with the call, following the lesson prompts and guidelines and providing feedback as per the company’s guidelines. At the conclusion of the lesson, once I had finished the call with the student and had written up my personalized feedback, I’d close the lesson window and return my attention to the chat room. At the end of each shift, or sometimes during the shift when things weren’t too busy, I jotted down my observations. The following day I would typically type up and expand my jottings into full fieldnotes, using the guidelines of Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). When necessary, I went back and listened to the recordings of my lessons, which I could easily access through my user account on the trainer portal. (All trainers are given access to the recordings of their lessons so that they can go back and review them if they wish to.)

For the first few months of my participant observation phase I worked, on average, one shift per week. After the conclusion of the trainer interview phase, I worked only intermittently. Shifts were unpredictable in the sense that I was never able to predict if, or how many, calls I would receive. On some shifts, when there were a lot of trainers and only a few students logged in, I received few calls, and sometimes none at all. During these slow shifts there was more opportunity to chat with the other trainers, and I could jot down more information on the spur of the moment. On other shifts, when student demand was very high, I received calls back-to-back right up to, and sometimes beyond, the platform’s closing time. Understandably, when things were busy there was little time to chat with the other trainers, much less jot down notes.

For the entire period of my participant observation phase, I managed to attend the weekly trainer conference calls fairly regularly, logging in for them even when I

wasn't working shifts. By logging in for the conference calls I had regular opportunities for engaging in live, synchronous chat with the other trainers and staff members present for the calls. I also continued to log into the trainer portal several times a week to keep up to date on the discussion threads in the forum. In this way I maintained a connection with the community even when I wasn't teaching lessons.

A note on research ethics & online ethnography

Studies of online communities and their communication present relatively new and sometimes murky "issues of self-regulation and responsibility for the online researcher," (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 39) particularly when it comes to questions of what is public and what is private. In my particular study, it was clear from the outset that I was researching a community that could be classified as "a private online environment" because it is "hidden or unavailable to most people and...access [was] restricted." (Sveningsson Elm, 2009, p. 75) Only other Eloqi staff members could access the archive of trainer-learner interactions; only other Eloqi trainers and staff could enter the trainer portal (where the discussion forum and the chat room were located); and only Eloqi trainers and students utilize the TC, the platform on which the lessons take place. In that sense, my project could be likened to studying any private organization (whether a company or a school), albeit a virtual one.

One of the most pertinent questions facing me was that of informed consent. With all of the interviews that I conducted, it was a simple matter to obtain informed consent, whether written (with the face-to-face interviews) or oral (with the Skype interviews). The trainer-learner interactions, however, were a different matter. Eloqi considers all trainer-learner interactions, which are recorded and archived for quality control purposes, to be proprietary. Since Eloqi granted me permission to examine the recordings stored in the archive, I did not feel it was necessary to obtain individual informed consent from the individuals represented in the recordings that I looked at, and this decision was backed the University of

Washington's Human Subjects Division. As a means of protecting the trainers represented in these data, I removed any details that could be used to identify individuals; specifically names and other personal information that came up in the conversation (hometowns, pets, siblings, universities, etc.) Likewise, I removed all student names, although I was less concerned with them being recognized, simply because literally hundreds of learners have utilized Eloqi's services, and the likelihood of any one of them being identified in any of the excerpts was slim.

For the trainers especially, there were other privacy issues at stake. The Eloqi trainers are accustomed to working in a space where they control, to a large extent, their private identities, as well as the type and amount of information that they share with one another. Inside the trainer portal, trainers go by company names of their own choosing, typically nicknames or first names. They communicate with one another through an internal email system and post on an internal forum, and they are visually represented avatars of their own creation. While trainers may be well known within the community through their participation in discussions (whether in the forum or the chat room or both) there is actually no need for them ever to share information with one another unless they choose to. Furthermore, each interviewee spoke with me on the condition that what they said would be totally anonymous. For these reasons, and to thoroughly protect the trainers' identities, I therefore decided to remove all individual markers from the excerpts in this study. To clarify, I did not want to label data even with pseudonyms, since doing so might allow excerpts from communal spaces (the forum, the chat room) to be linked with excerpts from private communication (interviews), and hence to specific individuals by members of the Eloqi community. This should prevent members of the community from recognizing one another in the interview excerpts.

CODING & ANALYZING THE DATA

True to Mann and Stewart's observations, I found that "qualitative research projects usually require a great deal of organization of data. Keeping track of participants' personal information, making fieldnotes of ideas in progress and

managing the data collected prior to and during analysis are paramount concerns.” (2000, p. 23) Once I had completed the data collection for this study, I had amassed a sizable quantity of data: 130 digital audio recordings and 60 complete transcripts of trainer-learner interactions; 7 digital audio recordings and 9 transcripts of learner interviews; a series of informal interviews with Eloqi staff members; 12 digital audio recordings and transcripts of trainer interviews; and nearly one-year’s worth of fieldnotes (including notes on discussions in the weekly trainer conference calls, trainer forum, and chat room) on my participation observations in the community. I saved all of these data on my laptop and backed it up onto an external drive. I also used a data analysis tool called TAMS Analyzer (Weinstein, 2008) to archive, sort, and code the textual (transcripts, fieldnotes) data I had collected. TAMS is a free open source data analysis tool written for Mac OSX, and it supports complex qualitative coding. To use it, you must first convert your digitized textual data into rtf format. You then upload your rtf files into the program, where you can code them. Once you have coded your files, you can use TAMS to things like sort through data excerpts by code categories; refine, rename, and merge code categories; identify connections between code categories; and analyze the data for patterns and themes. Like any other qualitative data analysis tool, TAMS does not “provide ‘answers’ for qualitative researchers but, used judiciously, [it] can assist research processes....” (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 23)

Even faced with a large, rich and varied data set, my key assumption was that there would be discoverable order, or structure, in my participants’ communicative activities (McDermott, et al., 1978) and in their speaking (Philipsen, 1992). To bring this structure to light, I engaged in analytic induction, which involves “inferring meanings from the data collected, rather than imposing such meanings on the data from another source...[looking] for emerging patterns in the data and [revising one’s] tentative formulations as [you] proceed to collect and analyze more data.” (Frey, et al., 2000, p. 281) “Emerging patterns” implies that structure is discovered organically, as it presents itself in the data and in the informants’ reports on what they do and why.

In keeping with the EC/Speech Codes Theory framework, I did not use any a priori codes. A priori codes are frequently rejected in qualitative, ethnographic analysis, because of the ethnographer's commitment to avoid "...preconceived categories [which] can blunt the keen edge of observation, ignoring differences important to those in the scene while giving undue importance to categories of less consequence." (Wolcott, 1999, p. 134) Put differently, an EC researcher does not generally test predetermined concepts. This is in contrast to analytic deduction, in which researchers test "whether the data conform to theoretical expectations." (Frey, et al., 2000, p. 281) As Philipsen emphasizes, "[You] should leave unspecified, as objects of exploratory inquiry the particularities of the phenomenon in a given social field, and the adequacies of the descriptive framework used." (1982, p. 45) This does not mean that EC work is not rigorous, however, as it requires rigor in "the descriptive framework [use] to study the phenomenon selected. (Philipsen, 1982, p. 45) With ethnographies of communication, the expectation is that the researcher focuses on understanding and then reporting on the situated realities of the people being studied. In my case, my aim was to describe the situated, contextualized communication as participants experienced it. (Hymes, 1962, 1972, 1977; Philipsen, 1975, 1992, 1997; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005; Wolcott, 1999)

It has been observed that qualitative data analysis is a messy, non-linear process, (Markham, 1998), and indeed I analyzed my data simultaneous to processing. That is, as I transcribed recordings, conducted interviews, and developed jottings into fieldnotes, I was already scrutinizing the data for inductive "fuzzy" (i.e. high-inference) categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) that pertained to my research questions. Once I had completed data collection and converted all of my material into texts, this process continued and a concentrated coding phase, for which I used TAMS Analyzer, began.

I started my coding with first-level (also called open) coding. In this phase, I did a close reading of all of my source materials until gradually I developed high-inference categories of communicative behavior, which I subsequently named and identified throughout the data (see Berg, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) Over 80

categories arose in this phase, such as the following: feedback, rules, customer service, relationships, scripts, problems, procedural knowledge, atmosphere, nervousness, self disclosure, sense of place, goals, communication strategies, politeness, impact, advantages, encouragement, asking questions, monitoring, multitasking, terminology, friendliness, professionalism, native, patience, status, and misunderstandings. In identifying, interpreting, and refining these categories, I continually scrutinized the data for the presence of the components of speech codes, i.e. "symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct." (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126) (More on this to follow in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.)

The next step in the coding process was the second-level (also called axial) coding. For the second-level coding I looked at the categories generated in the first phase and refined, developed, described, and explained them (see Berg, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Some categories dealing with multiple aspects of the same subject were combined, and others deemed irrelevant to this study were abandoned. At the end of this phase, the 80 categories mentioned above had been condensed into about 45 major categories and sub-categories. My examination and analysis of these categories, always guided by my research questions and the tenets of speech codes theory, aimed to "bring discrete observations together in a way that [made] it possible to discern cultural patterning." (Wolcott, 1999, p. 255) The patterning that I identified formed the basis of my findings.

For my case study it was very important that the trainer-learner interactions be examined within the context of the larger community of practice, partially because speech codes are not necessarily "visible", comprehensible, or verifiable in only a turn of conversation, or out of context of the interaction in which they are employed. Indeed, an ethnographic analysis of a community's speech codes is very similar to a traditional ethnography of a culture in that

the study of culture is formulated out of the patterned behavior of individuals interacting with other individuals, albeit in ways that they themselves typically perceive as personal and idiosyncratic - to

whatever extent they are aware of them at all. The ethnographer looks at such instances in order to discern recurring themes, behavior suggestive of underlying templates for action. So it is to groups that the ethnographer attends, or, if to individuals, to individuals as standing for the group, in some ways like all of its members, in some ways like some of its members, and in some ways like no other member. (Wolcott, 1999, p. 260)

To answer my research questions, therefore, I found it essential to collect as much data as I did, from the various quarters that I did. This methodological triangulation was my means of contextually “pinpoint[ing] the values of a phenomenon more accurately by sighting in on it from different methodological viewpoints” (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, p. 17). Ultimately, I drew upon all of the data to some extent in answering each of the research questions that I posed.

CHAPTER 3: SETTING THE SCENE

In this chapter I set the scene for my main findings chapters by providing a description of the Eloqi community of practice and the virtual work/learning setting in which I studied it. Such a description is generally considered to be *de rigueur* in ethnographic reports, because they are intended to produce highly contextualized accounts of human behavior and culture. (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001; V. Smith, 2001; Wellin & Fine, 2001; Wolcott, 1999) I hold that this description is equally important in ethnographies of communication. Recall that “the situated use of the means of speech as communicative conduct is the central focus and practical starting point of an inquiry into the ways of speaking of a speech community” and further that “acts of speaking always occur in the context of a larger situation of which the act is a constituent part and which the act in part constitutes and shapes.” (both quotes from Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 368) This is important because it sums up a central tenet of the Ethnography of Communication; namely, that for purposes of understanding its situated significance, speech cannot and should not be divorced from the larger context in which it occurs. This principle was repeatedly borne out over the course of this research project, during the early stages of which I discovered that it would be nearly impossible to understand any speech code present in the trainer-learner interactions without having a larger understanding of the Eloqi’s community, its organizational culture, and the technological platform on which it operates. To reiterate, the task of an ethnographer of communication is to explore and explain a community’s “locally distinctive means for, and ways of organizing, communicative conduct, and... [the] culturally distinctive system of meanings pertaining to communicative conduct itself.” (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 355)

To accomplish this task, “the ethnographer of speaking observes and records that a particular act occurred, the circumstances of its occurrence, and the ways in which those who produced and experienced it oriented to it. Such observation and examination of the particularities of acts and their situations provides a way to

discover and formulate local ways of speaking....” (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 363) To understand the phenomena and systems shaping a community’s speech, ethnographers of communication must be highly attentive to the nuances of the contexts in which speech occurs. This includes, for example, considering how factors such as the features of the settings, the relationships between participants, the goals of the speech event, and the norms and rules pertaining to the speech event, are implicated in or constitutive of communication. (See Hymes, 1962 for an outline of the SPEAKING model.) Thus I posed these two research questions:

Research Question 2: How are this community’s speech codes connected with other contextual factors, such as the service protocols developed by Eloqi for its trainers and/or students’ identities as technology users and consumers?

Research Question 3: How are this community’s speech codes linked to the affordances and constraints of the medium of communication, i.e. the technological platforms supporting the interactions?

Some might argue that these research questions are redundant, since they must necessarily be answered, however directly or indirectly, in order to produce an or a speech codes theory report. I have included them in my dissertation as a way of emphasizing the methodological approach that an ethnographer of communication and, even more specifically, a speech codes researcher undertakes.

With this chapter then, my intention is to both describe and provide some initial interpretation of the communicative context that my informants inhabited, bearing in mind that the speech code I found them to use, which I will present in Chapter 5, would not fully make sense without it. Just as ethnographers working in the fields of anthropology or sociology must produce reports that “bridge the gap between participant and reader understandings” (Kendall, 2002, p. 234), so too is an ethnographer of communication charged with contextualizing her study and helping the reader to understand what happens in, around, and through the speech that she studies.

ELOQI, LQ ENGLISH, AND THE IELTS

Eloqi is an online learning and education start-up company. Two Stanford graduates, one from the United States and one from Hong Kong, founded it in 2006. Eloqi's main creation is an interactive, web-based, VoIP-enabled platform that is designed to support one-to-one language instruction through synchronous (i.e. real time) voice and text communication⁹. This technological solution could potentially be applied to any number of different learners, languages, or subjects. Currently, however, Eloqi focuses primarily on a product that I will call LQ English. LQ English uses Eloqi's proprietary e-learning technologies to connect English language learners (ELLS) in China with native English speaking trainers in the United States for short, one-to-one English conversation lessons.

To run the LQ English product, the Eloqi employees must perform a variety of operational tasks, such as promotion and marketing (spreading the word about the LQ English service), sales (of LQ English services to individual Chinese customers), content creation (of the LQ lessons), instructor recruitment, instructor training, instructor management, customer relations (to ensure that the LQ customers are getting what they need out of the service), and information technology-related work (designing, engineering and maintaining hardware and software, troubleshooting, etc.). Because of this, Eloqi has a growing team of employees beyond its trainer team, including content writers, sales representatives, customer service representatives, engineers, and other information technology developers. All of these employees, except for the trainers, are housed in the company's main offices in Beijing, China. The company's customers, all of whom are native Chinese speakers who pay to use LQ English, are located all over China. In this sense, we

⁹ 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). Eloqi, however, uses a third variant – that which has computers as its endpoints.

may consider Eloqi a virtual organization since some of its employees and all of its clients are physically dispersed, and only make contact with one another in the virtual world. (cf. Mowshowitz, 2002; Pang, 2001)

Since its creation by Eloqi, the LQ English platform has been used to bring live, one-to-one English conversation training with native speakers to clients in China. The focus of the language training offered on LQ English, however, has changed. In Eloqi's early days, the lessons presented on LQ English were not limited to a particular type; they were conversational lessons that covered a wide range of non-specialized, miscellaneous topics. Then, during a weekly trainer conference call (a weekly online meeting between company administrators and trainers) in January 2009, Eloqi's CEO announced that the company would be making a concerted shift. This shift was summarized thusly:

In 2009 we will mainly focus on the IELTS exam market because we are very competitive in this sector and we can make a breakthrough. If students want to get a higher IELTS oral score, they need to speak like a native. To achieve this, they need to learn and use English logic. They can learn English Logic through 1:1 instruction with our LQ trainer by natural questions and speaking. When interacting with trainers they can learn all Core English Logic therefore be able to answer any questions in a test. Thus, we can help students get a higher score in an IELTS exam. (WTCC¹⁰ meeting minutes)

Eloqi would henceforth concentrate its efforts on making LQ English a platform dedicated to helping Chinese students prepare for the speaking component of the IELTS exam.

The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam is a standardized, internationally recognized English proficiency exam. There are two varieties of the IELTS – an academic version and a general version – and each has

¹⁰ Weekly Trainer Conference Call

four components: listening, reading, writing and speaking. The speaking portion of the IELTS, which Eloqi helps its clients to prepare for, is structured as a face-to-face interview between the test-taker and an IELTS examiner. It lasts for approximately 14 minutes, and is composed of three distinct parts: an introduction, a “long turn,” and a discussion, summarized in Table 3.1. (“University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations: About the paper,” 2008)

Table 3.1. Components of IELTS Oral Exam

Part 1 Introduction		
	Task Type & Format	The examiner introduces him/herself and checks the candidate’s identity. Then the examiner asks the candidate general questions on familiar topics such as home, family, work, studies, interests. Questions are taken from a scripted examiner frame.
	Task Focus	This part of the test focuses on the candidate’s ability to communicate opinions and information on everyday topics and common experiences or situations.
	Length	4-5 minutes
Part 2 Long Turn		
	Task Type & Format	Part 2 is the individual long turn. The examiner gives the candidate a task card which asks the candidate to talk about a particular topic, including points to cover. Candidates are given 1 minute to prepare, and are given a pencil and paper to make notes. The examiner asks the candidate to talk for 1 to 2 minutes, stops the candidate after 2 minutes, and asks one or two questions on the same topic.

	Task Focus	This part of the test focuses on the candidate's ability to speak at length on a given topic (without further prompts from the examiner), using appropriate language and organizing their ideas coherently. It is likely that the candidate will need to draw on their own experience.
	Length	3-4 minutes, including preparation time
Part 3 Discussion		
	Task Type & Format	In Part 3, the examiner and the candidate discuss issues related to the topic in Part 2 in a more general and abstract way and – where appropriate – in greater depth.
	Task Focus	This part of the test focuses on the candidate's ability to express and justify opinions and to analyze, discuss and speculate about issues.
	Length	4-5 minutes

At the conclusion of the IELTS speaking test, candidates receive a numerical grade on their performance ranging from 1 ("non user" of English) to 9 (expert English user). The examiners issue the grades based on criteria such as the examinee's speaking fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, summarized in Table 3.2. ("How it's marked," 2008)

Table 3.2. IELTS Grading Criteria

Fluency and Coherence	The ability to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech. The key indicators of fluency are speech rate and speech continuity. The key indicators of coherence are logical sequencing of sentences, clear marking of stages in a discussion, narration or argument, and the use of cohesive devices (e.g. connectors, pronouns and conjunctions) within and between sentences.
Lexical Resource	The range of vocabulary the candidate can use and the precision with which meanings and attitudes can be expressed. The key indicators are the variety of words used, the adequacy and appropriacy of the words used and the ability to circumlocute (get round a vocabulary gap by using other words) with or without noticeable hesitation.
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	The range and the accurate and appropriate use of the candidate's grammatical resource. The key indicators of grammatical range are the length and complexity of the spoken sentences, the appropriate use of subordinate clauses, and the range of sentence structures, especially to move elements around for information focus. The key indicators of grammatical accuracy are the number of grammatical errors in a given amount of speech and the communicative effect of error.
Pronunciation	The ability to produce comprehensible speech. The key indicators will be the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of the speech which is unintelligible and the noticeability of L1 [Language 1, i.e. first language] influence.

As indicated in the table above, the IELTS oral exam tests candidates' grammar, vocabulary, and accent, as well as their ability to "logical[ly] sequenc[e]" their speech, clearly delineate stages in the conversation, and smoothly express themselves even when they lack adequate words to do so. The IELTS does not explicitly purport to test candidates' ability to speak English "like a native;" nevertheless, speaking like a native is something that Eloqi sees as essential to a successful test taker. In a weekly trainer conference call soon after the company's shift to IELTS preparation, a senior administrator said: "We know now that [the IELTS] is not testing how many words the student knows, it's not testing how fast they can talk... What it's actually testing for is how closely the student uses the language features, how closely they sound like a native speaker." (WTCC recording)

With Eloqi's shift to IELTS speaking exam preparation came the rollout of two revamped lesson suites: first Core English Logic in March 2009, and then its replacement, "Proven Formulas," in December 2009. Both of these lesson suites were modeled on the IELTS speaking test, and both include components intended to help clients improve the IELTS-targeted elements of speaking listed above in Table X (fluency and coherence, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation). With these lessons then, Eloqi began offering services especially dedicated to supporting clients preparing for the IELTS speaking test. Today, Eloqi continues to offer interested clients lessons on broad topics such as job interviews, business English, and American culture. However, the value of Eloqi's general English lessons, as calculated by client subscription rates, has been outstripped by the new lesson suites geared towards the IELTS.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING INDUSTRY IN CHINA

Although a comprehensive summary of the English language learning industry in China is beyond the scope of this project, it is worthwhile to consider how Eloqi positions itself in China's highly competitive market of English courses and IELTS test prep. First, there is no denying that, as an internationally recognized assessment tool, the IELTS exam has a very real and powerful impact on people's

lives. IELTS scores are used by universities in the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand to cull students from their pools of applicants; specifically, many universities demand that applicants achieve a minimum IELTS score in order even to be considered for admittance. People applying to immigrate to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom must also obtain minimum IELTS scores as proof of their ability to communicate successfully in English. The Eloqi students who I met and interviewed in Beijing were all motivated to succeed on the IELTS, driven by powerful aspirations to immigrate, study abroad, or secure desirable jobs in China. As one of my student interviewees told me, citing a conversation she had recently had with her boyfriend, “If you have learned English and your English is good, you can have many golden opportunities.” (Student interview, Terri)

Given its importance, it is unsurprising that so many people in China (not to mention other countries around the world) take the IELTS every year. At the same time, and in a curious inverse relationship to this high demand, the options for getting quality English conversation and speaking practice in China are reputed to be extremely limited. In Eloqi’s internal communication, as well as in my interviews with Eloqi’s staff and clients, the pressing needs of English language learners in China were a common theme. Through such communication I learned that English language classes in China, which are expensive by local standards, are often very crowded and have a high ratio of students to teachers. The teachers are mostly non-native Chinese speakers of English who focus primarily on reading and writing skills, rather than on speaking or conversation. Even when speaking practice is offered, students do not get much individual attention, since class sizes are large and time is limited. In Eloqi’s online trainer training, which is required for all new and continuing trainers, the situation is summed up like this:

Many students choose to become LQ learners because their rate of progress in learning English has previously been slow. They realize there is something wrong with their current method of learning. Classes in China are usually very large and there’s very little

opportunity for most students to speak with a native speaker or an English teacher who has training, time, and opportunity to deliver high quality lessons on a more one to one, individual basis.

Syllabuses are often geared towards writing and reading, with little opportunity for students to open their mouths and actually speak the language they are learning. Tight schedules make it quite difficult for students to benefit from registering for courses at private language schools, and it's often inconvenient to arrange private lessons with a native speaker students can trust and rely on to prepare a proper study syllabus and carefully monitor student progress professionally. (Eloqi trainer training module, "Welcome to Eloqi")

This challenging picture of acquiring English language speaking skills was borne out by the students whom I met and interviewed in Beijing, who confirmed that – at least in their experience – speaking practice and access to native speakers was a rare and precious thing. As one student told me, "I don't have enough opportunities to contact with foreigners, so in order to prepare for the test I have to book some special training course." (Student interview, Winson) I had the following exchange with another student during an interview:

Jack You know in China most students speaking is uh...is bad ((laughs)) so I practice uh practice speaking anytime, if I have any chance.

Tabitha In your day-to-day life what opportunities do you have to speak English?

Jack Uh, I don't speak English in my workplace, and there are some English foreign in the universities but I have no time to go there.

Tabitha So you don't have foreigners in your daily life that you would talk to?

Jack No, not at all.

Consistent with what Eloqi reports in its trainer training materials, even when the students have access to courses, the cost can be prohibitive:

You know, in China maybe you think that it's convenient to meet some foreigners or you can connect- you can communicate with them in English but they will not correct your mistakes, and you can't talk with them twice or three times a week.... If you go to some training organization to meet a foreign teacher for IELTS speaking it's very expensive – one hour, maybe 400 or 500 [yuan].... There are lots of IELTS courses in China, but if I want to talk with a foreigner it's very expensive, and I think to improve speaking English talking with foreigners is best. (Student interview, Ming)

And, as one student interviewee told me, even when students do have periodic access to foreign English teachers, lack of regular practice can stymie their efforts to improve:

I have rarely opportunity to speak with native speakers, and actually it's a bad circle, because if you can't speak very good English you are shy and embarrassed to speak openly and in the public place. We have many classes in my university where we can speak English, but I rarely attend this class because I'm afraid I can't catch up with other classmates who are good at English or I can't completely understand what my teacher said. I know if I attend this class I will make some progress but you know maybe I lack enough courage to do this. It's a bad cycle. (Student interview, Terri)

In this way, one may state without exaggeration that Eloqi is providing its clients with a precious communication service that many, if not most, of them are otherwise unable to obtain.

What's more, Eloqi's learning service is unique in a number of important ways. First, Eloqi facilitates online rather than classroom-based instruction, so its clients can access their lessons from any location they choose. Indeed, all of the students I met praised this convenient aspect of the service, since it enabled them to more easily fit their lessons in with their daily lives. Second, Eloqi's LQ services are focused on helping students to develop their English speaking (rather than reading or writing) skills, which (as the quotes above illustrate) is something that they don't otherwise have assistance with. Third, through LQ English Eloqi offers purely one-to-one (rather than group) lessons, an uncommon opportunity that the students value highly. Fourth, unlike many of the face-to-face English courses offered in China, all of the LQ lessons are with native English speakers. Fifth, with each lesson that they take, LQ students are guaranteed to receive both oral and written feedback on their speaking. Sixth, as of January 2010, Eloqi offers a money-back guarantee if its clients do not achieve their target IELTS speaking exam score. Factors taken into account when calculating the guarantee for each student would be the student's target score, previous scores received, and the amount of time the student had to prepare (i.e. how long before their test date). Students taking the money-back guarantee option would also have to agree to follow the company's study methods very closely (more on this later). Finally, Eloqi holds that its LQ lessons are unique in their communication tone, style, a point that I will address at length in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

THE LEARNERS

The Eloqi students, or "learners" as they are known in the Eloqi community of practice, are on average 18-22 years old. Currently LQ English is offered solely to people living within national/geographical boundaries of China; all that a client needs, besides the cost of a subscription fee, are a working Internet connection and a computer. Indeed, according to Eloqi its clients are dispersed all across the country, from villages to multi-million person metropolises.

Eloqi's learners study English and, more specifically, prepare for the IELTS exam because they are motivated to achieve life-changing goals that depend upon them getting good scores on the exam. These learners hope to study abroad, immigrate, get hired for well-paid jobs, get promoted, and/or create comfortable lives for themselves and their families. Eloqi states in one of its trainer training modules that "the scores [that learners] receive on English tests and the abilities they demonstrate in the workplace directly impact their job opportunities, salaries, promotions and futures." (Eloqi trainer training module, "Welcome to Eloqi") Certainly the Eloqi learners who I met and interviewed in Beijing confirmed this, telling me that they wanted to score well on the IELTS so that they could immigrate and/or get into universities abroad in countries like Australia, Canada, Germany, Singapore, Sweden, and United States. Others wanted to develop their English skills to improve their job and promotion opportunities, especially in Beijing's high profile, international companies. Motivated by this desire, the Eloqi students who I interviewed chose to try online learning and register for Eloqi's LQ English services, citing cost, convenience, and the unique opportunity to speak English one-on-one with a foreign teacher.

At the time of my study, most of Eloqi's students were signed up to have unlimited access to coursework for one month. With this subscription students could log in to use LQ English as frequently as they wished during their month-long membership. In this way the average "lifetime" of Eloqi's students is limited, but sometimes, after taking a course and not doing well on the IELTS, students will return for additional lessons. Most of the Eloqi learners, however, finish their coursework with the company and leave the community for good.

THE TRAINERS

The Eloqi trainers are all native English speakers living in the United States. They are geographically dispersed, representing all of the country's time zones, and at least a dozen states. They are not required to have any formal background in instruction, English or otherwise, since the company's in-house training and its

highly structured lessons rely on the trainers to mostly follow explicit instructions and prompts. In fact, most of the trainers whom I interviewed were not formally trained as English language teachers, but had work experience in areas like public school substitute teaching, tutoring, and customer service. They were motivated to apply for work at Eloqi mostly because they wanted stay-at-home employment. Indeed, all of the trainers I interviewed discovered Eloqi through work-at-home job websites¹¹. The one exception was a person who had been directly recruited for Eloqi by another trainer.

To get hired by Eloqi, potential trainers must go through a series of steps. First, they fill out an application form on the Eloqi company website, answering questions about their previous work experience, their familiarity with different web-based technologies, languages, and their home computer equipment. Applicants also complete a typing test and a computerized, phone-based “voice audition,” for which they recite a passage into the phone, listen to pre-recorded questions, and then speak their answers out into the receiver. Eloqi reviews completed applications and their accompanying recordings and invites qualified applicants to complete the next phase of the application, which is to complete a series of six online certification modules about the company and the LQ English teaching work. Applicants have one week to successfully complete these modules, after which they are invited to do a final “qualifying interaction” or mock lesson with an Eloqi learner. This mock lesson is recorded (as all the trainer-student interactions are) and evaluated by the hiring staff against such criteria as compliance with Eloqi’s training rules, speaking manner, amount and quality of feedback, and timeliness. If applicants pass this final phase, they are offered work with Eloqi¹².

¹¹ One website frequently mentioned by the trainers was Money Making Mommy, <http://www.moneymakingmommy.com/>

¹² For the participant-observation portion of this project, during which I worked as an Eloqi trainer, I completed most – but not all – of these steps myself. Specifically, I skipped the initial application

All of Eloqi's regular trainers work as independent contractors and are responsible for acquiring and maintaining the equipment needed for their work, as well as the system requirements that Eloqi requests. As listed on the company's website, these include high speed internet; a PC running the Windows¹³ operating system (2000, XP, 7, or Vista) and a web browser (Internet Explorer or Firefox); a sound card; a computer headset with built-in microphone; and PDF-viewing software. Trainers must also download and install Eloqi's "Trainer Client" (TC) software, through which the students' calls are routed and answered. The TC removes the need for any telephone (mobile or land line), and trainers are not required to have one for this job.

As independent contractors, the trainers are held accountable for all technical issues stemming from problems in and around their tools and workspaces. If, for example, a trainer loses her Internet connection (whether because of a glitch in her Internet provider's system, or because the cables under her street are being repaired etc.), Eloqi will still hold her responsible for starting her shift on time, and completing it without interruption. If the trainer's monitor burns out or her computer breaks down, or her cat chews up the wires on her headset, the liability is hers. On the other hand, if something goes wrong with the Eloqi system (such as the platform breaking down or a power outage in Beijing), then the company takes responsibility.

Having a status of independent contractor also means that the trainers can be let go by Eloqi at any time. As far as I learned, this generally happens only when trainers repeatedly fail to follow the company's rules on professional conduct, workload, timeliness, and reliability. For example, trainers have to sign up for and work at least ten 30-minute shifts every month (i.e. 5 hours). These "committed"

phase and proceeded directly to the completion of the online modules and then the mock lesson. My mock lesson was evaluated well enough to begin working as a trainer.

¹³ Although Eloqi's TC is not Mac-compatible, it is possible to run a virtual machine on a Mac, and use the TC inside it, which is what I did.

shifts can be done any day, any time the platform is open for business. While open shifts are signed up for on a first-come, first-served basis, the more a trainer works, and the longer their tenure at the company, the greater priority they are given in signing up for new, open shifts. Once signed up, trainers have to show up for and be on time for the shifts that they have committed to. During the actual lessons, trainers have to closely follow the lesson scripts, using the prompts and sticking to the lesson plan for each interaction, as laid out by the company.¹⁴

Once hired, trainers can begin signing up for shifts immediately. The morning shifts run on Monday-Friday from 8:00 am to 10:30 am EST and Saturday-Sunday from 8:00 am to 10:30 am EST. Evening shifts run Monday-Thursday from 9:30 pm to 10:30 pm EST. There is no limit to the number of open shifts that they can sign up for, but as mentioned above they do need to sign up for a minimum amount (ten 30-minute shifts) each month. Trainers are not paid per shift – they are paid per interaction; if, however, they commit to working a shift but don't receive any calls, they will nevertheless receive a small amount of money for having set aside that time for work. Nevertheless, the more shifts trainers sign up for, especially during busy periods, the greater their chances are of more payment, and there is always an element of uncertainty as to how many calls a trainer will receive on any given shift. Trainers are not paid for other tasks (which I will describe more fully in this chapter) that they might do in service of their jobs with Eloqi, such as periodically completing new training modules, attending weekly trainer conference calls, or posting in the trainer forum.

Over the course of my study, there were approximately 25 active Eloqi trainers at any given time.

¹⁴ Other rules pertaining to the trainers' communicative conduct will be treated systematically in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

THE (VIRTUAL) ELOQI WORKSPACE

In this section I will give a brief overview of the virtual space that Eloqi's trainers work in. The trainers' workspace is virtual in the sense that it is entirely supported by communication technologies like the Internet, VoIP, laptop computers, etc, rather than grounded in a particular geographic space, or an office building (Pang, 2001). While the trainers are physically and geographically remote from the company, its administrators, and the clients, they reported experiencing a sense of place and space in the online workspace that they inhabit while on the clock.

To enter the Eloqi workspace, trainers must be at a computer with Internet access and a web browser. They enter the URL for the Eloqi Trainer Portal login page, which is a plain webpage with the Eloqi logo and fields for a username and password. Once this information is entered, a trainer finds herself on the main page of the Trainer Portal (see Figure 3.1.), from which all other spaces are reached.

Quick Links

- Home
- Schedule
- Payment
- Chatroom
- Forum
- Conferences
- Call History
- Statistics
- Supervisor Schedule
- Our Learners
- Feedback

2011-01 More...

Worked Shifts :	0
Interactions(>=2mins) :	0
M.S. Avg(>=8mins) :	0.0
Call Time Avg(>=8mins) :	0:00
Rev Time Avg(>=8mins) :	0:00
Late :	0
Absence :	0
Late Unsignup :	0

This Week's Schedule

All times in Pacific Time (US & Canada) Green---Shift Available Pink---Shift Full

Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Jan 11	Jan 12	Jan 13	Jan 14	Jan 15	Jan 16	Jan 17
Jan 18	Jan 19	Jan 20	Jan 21	Jan 22	Jan 23	Jan 24
Jan 25	Jan 26	Jan 27	Jan 28	Jan 29	Jan 30	Jan 31

Forum Posts More...

Competition - 5 common questions from trainers

- How can I deal with a learner who has obvious comprehension problems and i...

My answers

- For learners with obvious comprehension problems, be sure to speak slowly ...

Shift release Thursday 13th 8:30-9:30 PM

I have to work my other job.

competition answers

Here are my answers :) 1. How can I deal with a learner who has obvious ...

My answers

Here are my answers to the competition questions: 1. How can I deal with a...

Shift release for Friday

I had to release my Friday morning shifts, I do hope someone can pick them up.

Login to Chatroom FAQ

Tabitha

Notes

Payment

Date	Status	Total

Conferences More...

Recordings	Minutes	Status
WTCC 2011-01-04	download	Read
WTCC 2010-12-21	download	Read

Notice ^{NEW} More...

- New shifts have opened up for the week of January 24th. You have 24 hours to use your commit points to sign-up for the newly released

Figure 3.1. The Trainer Portal

Besides links to other pages, the main page of the Trainer Portal also displays non-static, regularly updated information such as the current week's schedule, teasers (the subject header and the first few lines of text) of the latest posts in the forum, and news updates (labeled "notices" here), and a tabular overview of the statistics of the trainers calls for that month, which is associated with the login ID used¹⁵. Some of the pages that can be reached from the main page of the Trainer Portal are:

- The schedule page, on which trainers can sign up for shifts and manage their working schedule;
- The training page, on which trainers can not only view but also test drive all of the lessons that LQ offers.
- The statistics page, on which trainers can see information, sorted by year and month, on their work at Eloqi, including how many shifts they have worked; the average length of their interactions; the average number of mark spots they have made per interaction; the average length of time it takes them to complete the Review Screen (the page on which they present their written feedback to the learners); and how many shifts they have been late or absent for.
- The call history page, on which trainers can see information about every single interaction they have had, including the unique ID number assigned to that interaction, the name of the student, the duration of the call in minutes and seconds, and the name and topic of the lesson. There is also a link to the audio recording of the interaction, and when this is clicked on trainers can also view the feedback (the note and the mark spots) that they gave that student;
- The Eloqi staff page, on which trainers can see the names, job titles, and photos of chief Eloqi administrators

¹⁵ If I log in with my user ID, I will see my own statistics, and not anyone else's.

- The FAQ page, on which trainers can find the answers to commonly asked teaching and technology questions
- The payment page, on which trainers can see all of their payment records;
- The “our learners” page, on which trainers can read success stories about LQ learners. Each success story includes the learner’s English name and unique Learner ID number, their past IELTS score, target IELTS score, their post-LQ English IELTS score, and a short quotation or narrative about that student’s experience studying with LQ. Some stories include a photo of the learner and/or a brief audio snippet of them speaking during one of their LQ lessons. Additionally, there is a button called “learners I have taught” which allows the trainer to see the success stories associated only with those students she interacted with on at least one occasion.

In addition to the pages listed above, there are four other key places in the Eloqi workscape I will describe in greater detail, since they figure strongly in this CoP’s internal communication, and also inform the trainer-learners interactions. These four places are: the interaction screen, the forum, the Weekly Trainer Conference Call page, and the chat room (also called “the Campfire”). The latter three are accessible via the main page of the Trainer Portal, while the interaction screen, which is what trainers see when they are actually in a lesson with a student, is associated with the TC.

THE TRAINER FORUM

The main Trainer forum page (Figure 3.2) displays a list of general categories for discussion in this community. These general categories of discussion, which were decided by the Eloqi administrators, run from work-related topics like company announcements, trainer certification, lesson content, technology, and shift exchanges, to unofficial ones like recipes, shopping, and movies.












Forum	Thread	Posts
 Soup To Nuts Share some of your favorite recipes here.	46	172
 Official Announcements This Forum is for employees [redacted] to make announcements to our Trainers.	86	249
 Welcome and Introductions A place to introduce yourself to other Trainers and chat.	187	1049
 Certification Process Discussion and Question on the screencasts and training modules.	15	62
 Discussion on Scenarios This is a forum to discuss scenarios. Trainers can talk about their experience during interactions, advice and tips on different scenarios and also any thoughts on how to improve them.	35	175
 Let's talk about Technology A place to enter if you are facing any technology issues and need help from your teammates or if you can give some advice.	66	310
 Let's be creative. If you have any ideas on how to improve let other people know	12	40
 I love Avatars This is place were trainers can talk about how to create an avatars, places to look for avatars as well as comment other trainers avatars	14	136
 Discussion with the Staff This is a forum where trainers and staff can discuss any part of the platform.	51	205
 Shift Exchange (Today: 1) This is a place were you can ask for a shift exchange	743	1051
 Chat (Today: 2) This is a place trainers can comment their experience and share their knowledge	145	1162

Figure 3.2. The Trainer Forum

If you click on any of these categories, a new page opens and a list of subtopics and their concomitant discussion threads is displayed. For example, clicking on the “technology” topic reveals a list of 66 subtopics that fall under the umbrella of technology, like “Mac User Survey,” “hotkeys,” and “wireless headset”. Each of these subtopics, which can be created by anyone, has a discussion thread, and clicking on one will reveal the string of posts that make up the thread. For example, clicking on the “Mac User Survey” shows that there are a total of 12 posts in this discussion. In a long thread there may be a dozen or more posts, while other threads may have only a few, or even just a single post. Each post is stamped with the date and time that it was created, and is accompanied by the poster’s Eloqi moniker¹⁶ and their

¹⁶ My Eloqi moniker was tabithaH, but I noticed that most of the other trainers had monikers composed of the first initial of their first name, and their entire last name. Had mine followed this format, it would have been thart.

Eloqi avatar¹⁷, i.e. a graphical, cartoon-style image representing them. Figure 3.3. illustrates posts that I added to a thread called “Welcome Tabitha¹⁸.”



Figure 3.3. Discussion Forum Thread

Whenever new post is made in the forum, a short teaser instantly appears on the main page of the Trainer Portal, in a special Forum box. The teaser includes the subtopic header of the post, and its first 15-20 words. The teaser is hyperlinked to the post itself, so by clicking on the teaser you will be taken immediately to the relevant post.

Any trainer may post on any of the various topics, respond to others' posts, or create new discussion threads. What's more, Eloqi explicitly encourages trainers to post in the forum; in the Trainer Handbook it states that trainers should “feel free to post as often as you'd like (G-Rated) as this area is entirely for the Trainers to share

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that these avatars, which each person creates for themselves using a website called WeeMe (see <http://www.weeworld.com/>), are the only visual representations of trainers in this community. Unless trainers post photos of themselves in the forum (which is rare), there is no way of knowing what exactly they look like.

¹⁸ All new trainers were welcomed into the community with threads like this, which were initiated by the administrators. These threads were an effective way of prompting a virtual “meet and greet” for incoming members.

their experiences, questions, suggestions and hold public discussions.” (Eloqi Trainer Handbook) Over the course of my study, I frequently visited the trainer forum to read posts and follow discussions, occasionally posting a message. The forum was a rich source of data on the rules, policies and guidelines in this community of practice, and reading the posts there was a good way to follow how they got negotiated and, at times reinstated.

THE WEEKLY TRAINER CONFERENCE CALLS

The weekly trainer conference calls (WTCC) are held most Tuesday evenings just before the evening shift starts, and last 30 minutes or less. The meetings are generally chaired by one of the Beijing administrators, such as the Service Director, but occasionally other people, such as the lead Content Developer or a Trainer Supervisor, will speak. Meeting topics are mostly work-related, and common meeting topics are company news and technical updates, marketing strategies, changes to lesson content and design, new staff and trainer introductions, and student success stories. Other past topics have included life and culture in China (holidays, student life), chat room etiquette, the use of humor in training, and common learner mistakes. While it is not mandatory for trainers to attend the meetings, they do receive bonus points for being there, and this can help them secure work shifts during the sign-up periods.

There are three different ways trainers can join a WTCC: they can have Eloqi’s conference system call them on the phone by submitting their phone number and clicking a button on the conference page; they can place a toll free phone call to the conference system; or they can use Eloqi’s Trainer Client (TC) tool to connect. Whatever method trainers choose, the end result is that they join the call (by phone or via their computer and headset) and can thus hear the talk. The trainers attending the meetings do not speak themselves -- they only listen in on the call -- but they may post typewritten questions or responses in the chat room (aka “Campfire”) during the call. To this end, trainers attending the WTCC must also enter the chat room so that they are visually present. In this way, the WTCC is both

aural (attendees can hear the talk through their phone or headset) and visual (attendees can type in real-time comments and questions in the chat room).

After the WTCC finishes, the audio recording and a set of minutes (created by one of the administrative staff in Beijing) are posted in the trainer portal. Trainers can access these artifacts at any time simply by clicking the “conferences” link on the main Trainer Portal page. The “conferences” page displays links to join the WTCC, as well as links to all of the audio recordings and minutes of past meetings. Trainers are expected to stay up-to-date on this internal communication. Indeed, I found the WTCCs to be an important way to keep track of the latest news and development in the community, and it was also a way to get to know the other members of the trainer team.

THE CHAT ROOM, AKA CAMPFIRE

The chat room, also known as the Campfire, is the primary space for live text-based communication between Eloqi’s trainers and administrators¹⁹. Trainers enter the chat room by clicking a button on the main page of the Trainer Portal. Doing this takes them directly into the chat room, illustrated in Figure 3.4.

¹⁹ Towards the end of my fieldwork, Eloqi developed an additional chat space attached to the student interaction screen. The purpose of this space (called the “Interaction screen supervisor chat”) was to ease troubleshooting communication between trainers and supervisors during actual lessons. Instead of having to go back to the chat room to post a message, a trainer engaged in a lesson with a student can now quickly post into this chat box without having to leave the interaction screen. I do not treat the Interaction screen supervisor chat here because it was launched until the end of my fieldwork phase.

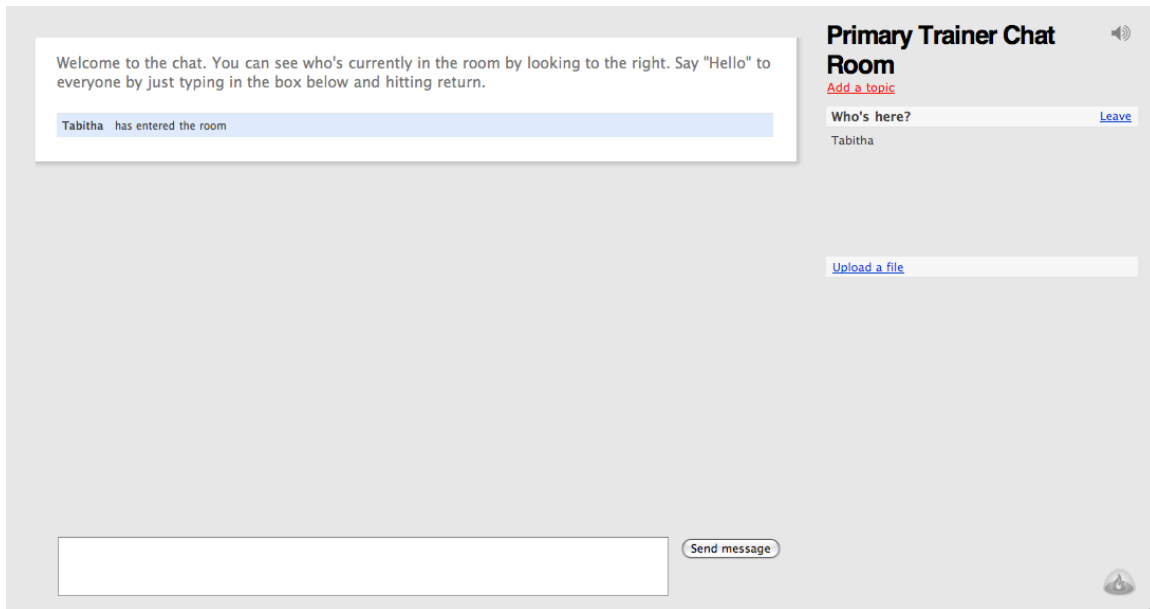


Figure 3.4. Chat Room aka Campfire

Whenever someone enters or exits the chat room, the system posts a message (like the one in the image above): “Tabitha has entered the room” or “Tabitha has left the room.” The messages in the chat field are visible to all those who are currently inside the chat room²⁰. The names of all those present are listed on the far left of the screen, under “Who’s here?”

At the very bottom of the window, inside the plain white box, the user can type in her message, as well as edit and/or delete it, using the customary keys of her keyboard. Once ready, she can press the “send message” button, and the message will appear inside the white and blue chat field at the top of the window.

As previously mentioned, trainers are required to be present in the chat room during any shifts that they are working, as well as during any WTCCs that they attend. Eloqi characterizes the chat room as a “professional work environment”

²⁰ Old messages are not visible to those who have just entered the chat room. That is, when you enter, you do not see those messages that were posted prior to your entrance. Eloqi’s trainers often compensate for this in the chat room by summarizing discussion points for new entrants, much as one would help a new arrival catch up with an ongoing conversation in an offline conversation situation, such as at a party or around the water cooler.

(Eloqi Trainer Handbook) where trainers can pose questions or report problems about the student interactions that they are engaging in. At the same time, the chat room is also a social space in which, as I myself observed, trainers can share stories, shoot the breeze with one another, or engage in animated discussions, as the mood strikes them. Eloqi's administrators are supportive of this more conversational usage of the chat room, provided that trainers follow the company's rules of communicative conduct for this space. The following list of "dos and don'ts" comes directly from the Eloqi Trainer Handbook:

DO

- Chat – Be friendly with other trainers. Be considerate of each other and conduct conversations as you would in an everyday work/office setting.
- Be respectful – We are all from various walks of life, have had different experiences and hold different views on many things.
- Keep comments, links, and photos G-rated.
- Be non-judgmental
- Read your message before posting – be sure your words are clear, concise, and impart the tone that you'd be using if you were speaking.
- Have fun – enjoy chatting!!

DO NOT

- Be offensive – Do not threaten, abuse, deliberately offend or harass other members. The use of discriminatory, racist or prejudicial language in respect of individuals, cultures, religions or groups will not be tolerated.
- Be rude – Use basic social etiquette when conversing. Think dinner-time conversation – if you would not say it over dinner, please refrain from discussing it in the chat[room].
- Post inappropriate comments, links, or photos that do not fall into the G-rated category.

Although in my interviews supervisors and administrators did occasionally allude to these rules of conduct being broken by a trainer, I myself never saw it happen, nor was I aware of it happening during my fieldwork. On the contrary, what I did observe (and sometimes took part in) were many engaging conversations about work in which topics like individual students, the lessons, the feedback given to students, the technologies we were using, and Chinese education and educational culture were discussed. I also observed and took part in many animated conversations that didn't seem to have anything to do with work, such as current events, families, books, movies, food, etc. On the whole, these discussions were a rich source of information for me as I transcribed and analyzed the trainer-learn interactions, looking for the presence of a speech code.

THE TRAINER-LEARNER INTERACTION SCREENS

The interaction screen is what both trainers and learners see and use during the actual lessons they have with one another, although the trainer and learner versions of it are different. The interaction screen is associated with the TC, and can only be activated when the TC is running. It pops up on a trainer's screen only after a trainer has indicated that they can take an incoming call from a student. In this section I will describe, step-by-step, what happens during a trainer-learner interaction, and the various processes that each party goes through in order to complete one.

First, as Kendall observed in her ethnography of an online community, "nobody inhabits only cyberspace." (Kendall, 2002, p. 8) The members of Eloqi's community of practice, while intensely focused on their online work and learning environments, naturally remain physically situated in their offline worlds, a fact that Eloqi took into account while formulating its professional guidelines for trainers and learners. While present on the Eloqi LQ English platform, most trainers are in their home offices, which Eloqi asks be quiet spaces in which nothing – whether background noises, peripheral activities, or other people – will disrupt the trainers' communication with the learners. In this way, the trainers' physical places should

be invisible, or non-apparent, for the duration of their shifts. Similarly, Eloqi also asks its clients, the learners, to ensure that they are physically situated in spaces that allow them to give their full concentration to their lessons. For some of my interviewees, this could be quite challenging. One of the young women I met, for example, was a university student living in a dormitory, and she described how difficult it could be to find a quiet place in which to do her lessons with the Eloqi trainers.

Recall that the LQ English platform is open in the mornings from 8:00-10:30 am EST and in the evenings from 9:30-10:30 pm EST²¹. These shifts correspond to 9:00-11:30 PM and 10:30-11:30 AM in China, which has only one time zone across the entire country. Many of the students I interviewed reported that these hours made it very convenient to them for fitting the Eloqi lessons into their normal work and study routines.

For a trainer to begin her shift, she would first need to settle herself at a computer (complete with all the hardware, software and system requirements described in previous sections) located in a quiet, distraction-free environment. She would start running the TC, which routes students' calls to trainers and also runs the interaction screen during lessons. In Figure 3.5 you can see the Login window for the TC, to the left of which is the TC window itself. Once a trainer has successfully logged in, the Login window will disappear. To receive any calls from a student, and to be officially on the clock the trainer must press a button on the TC window called "Start Working." In the figure below I am already on the clock, so the "Start Working" button is no longer present; instead, there is a "Take a pause" button, which I can press to go off the clock if I need to. Taking a pause will mean

²¹ For trainers on the west coast of the United States, this corresponds with a very early 5:00-7:30 am morning shift, and a 6:30-9:30 evening shift. Since I was living in Seattle while doing this research, I found the morning shift to be too early for my tastes, and so most of the teaching work I did was in the evening, after my duties at the university.

that I will go off the call queue; in other words, no student calls will be directed to me.

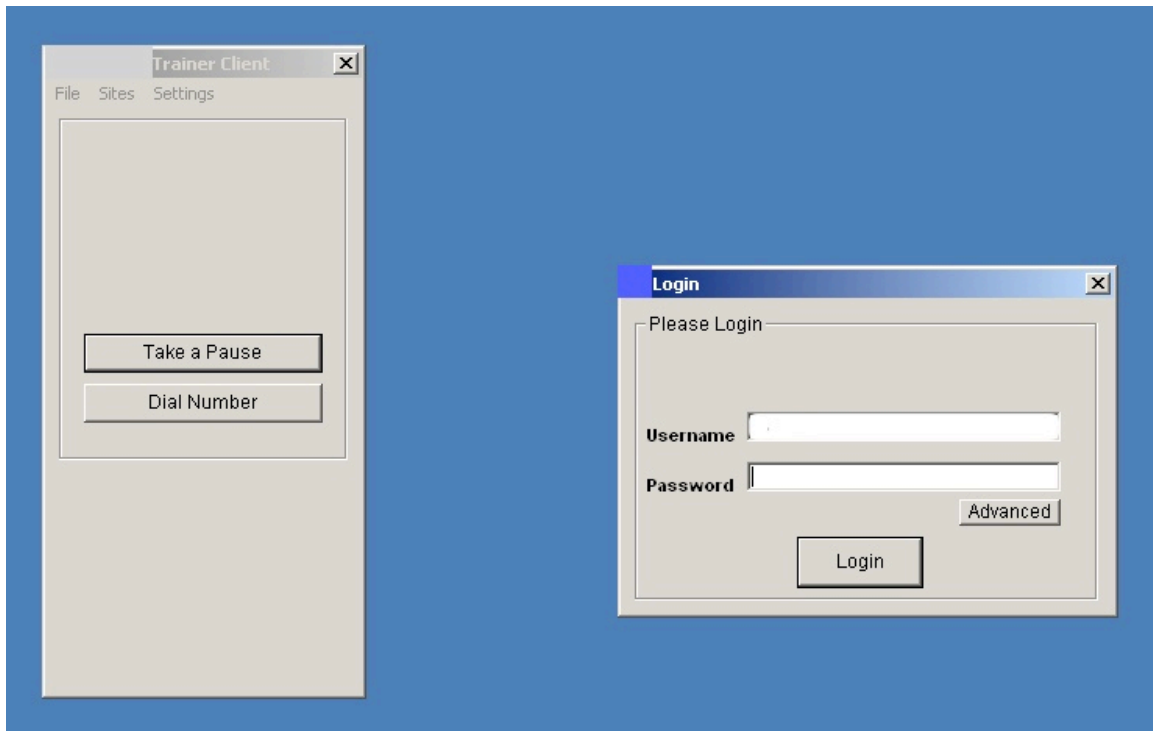


Figure 3.5. TC Login Window

Simultaneous to starting up the TC, the trainer would open up a web browser, navigate to and enter the Trainer Portal, and then enter the chat room (Figure 3.6.). Upon entering the chat room, trainers greet and are greeted by the other trainers present, and can see any new chat messages shared by the trainers. I typically got to this point a few minutes before my shift officially started, so that I would have a short time to socialize before I was on the clock. For any shift worked, other trainers would be entering and, depending on the time and people's schedules, departing, so I would see and engage in a steady stream of hellos (and goodbyes). Once the shift had officially started, it was simply a matter of waiting until a call came in. The supervisors would often announce to the waiting trainers how many students were waiting in the queue, and might even say which trainer was next in line to receive a call. In the meantime, I would keep an eye on the conversation in the chat room or, if it was quiet, jot some handwritten notes in a notebook that I

kept near my laptop. A trainer could conceivably do other things while waiting for a call to come in, like play online games, read, or even paint one's nails (as one trainer told me she sometimes did).

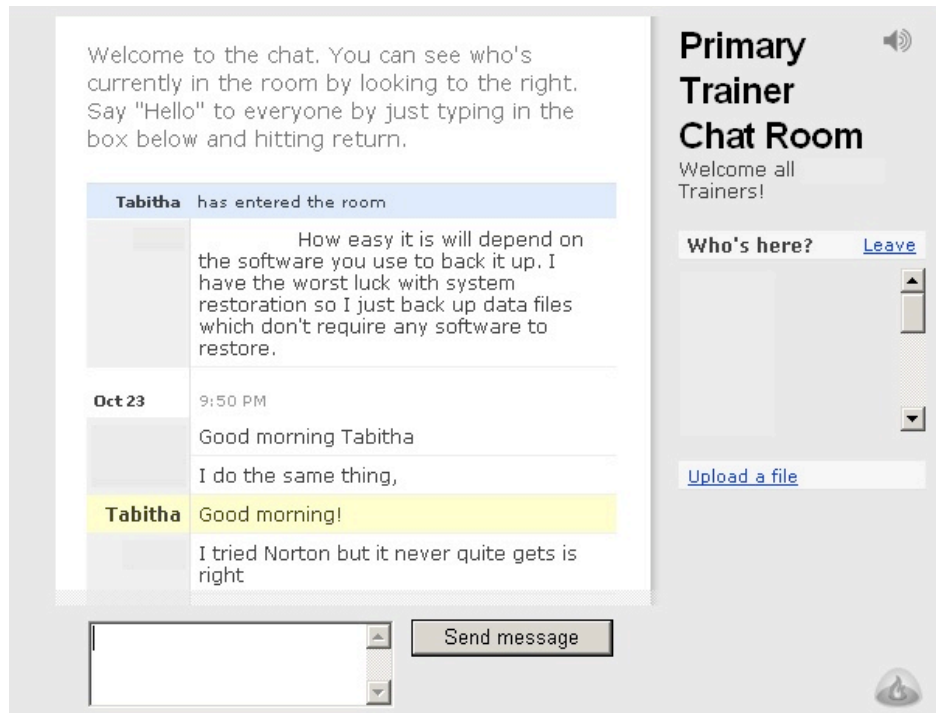


Figure 3.6. Chat Room

Meanwhile, across China Eloqi's learners would be preparing to initiate that morning's (or evening's) LQ English session. Having already registered with Eloqi, paid the necessary fees, and created a user profile, the students would connect to the Internet, open a Web browser like Firefox or Explorer, navigate to the LQ Learner Portal, log on with their username and password, and choose a lesson in accordance with their subscription plan. They would then independently go through the required pre-lesson activities, which are mandatory for the money-back guarantee learners. These pre-lesson activities, which mirror the one-to-one lessons with the trainers, prepare learners for their interactions by pre-teaching the target vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and conversational structures that will be covered in the actual interaction. Once finished with the pre-lesson activity, the student would put in a request for a call with a trainer, and then wait to be

connected²². When the learner's call gets put through to the next available trainer in the queue, the trainer must pick up the line. The interaction then begins.

Generally speaking, the learners whom any trainer teaches are randomly assigned; active trainers simply pick up the next call in line. There are, however, some factors that can influence which trainer gets the next call in the queue. Some of these are whether or not a trainer has committed to that shift, as well as the "time since your last call, trainer attendance, assessment, and performance statistics (call duration average, review time average, mark spots average, etc.)" (Eloqi Trainer Policies Guide) Another factor is the trainer's certification status, i.e. what lessons they have been certified to teach. To clarify, trainers have to be certified by Eloqi to teach the different lessons types; if they aren't certified, then they won't be able to receive calls from students who have chosen to do those lessons. The basic training that new trainers go through enables them to take most calls, but there are specialized lessons, such as student evaluations, that trainers need to complete additional training modules for. Until they do, they won't be assigned these calls while working.

On the trainer end, when a call is routed to them, a message will suddenly pop up on their screen saying that there is an incoming call; this is accompanied by the sound of a telephone ringing²³. On the message screen are two buttons – accept and reject. Trainers must click accept to take the incoming call; once they do, the message box disappears and the ringing sound stops. Instantaneously, a new screen – the interaction screen (Figure 3.7.) – opens on the trainer's computer. Once the interaction screen opens, the trainer and the learner are connected to one another by voice, and can hear and speak with one another. The trainer greets the learner,

²² Ideally, on any given shift there would be enough trainers working, and a manageable number of students, to make these waits minimal. Remember, a trainer wants to get as many calls as possible (so wait times are not desirably) and a learner wants to get connected as quickly as possible, and then get in as many lessons during open hours as they can (so a wait time is undesirable).

²³ This could be rather startling sometimes.

and the lesson begins. The experience is essentially synchronous speech (similar to what one would have on a telephone) coupled with a live, interactive Web page.

The interaction screen, which I will explain below, is an interactive web-based user interface that responds to the users' clicks and keystrokes. It is vital in the sense that it contains all of the information needed by the trainers to conduct the lesson at hand.

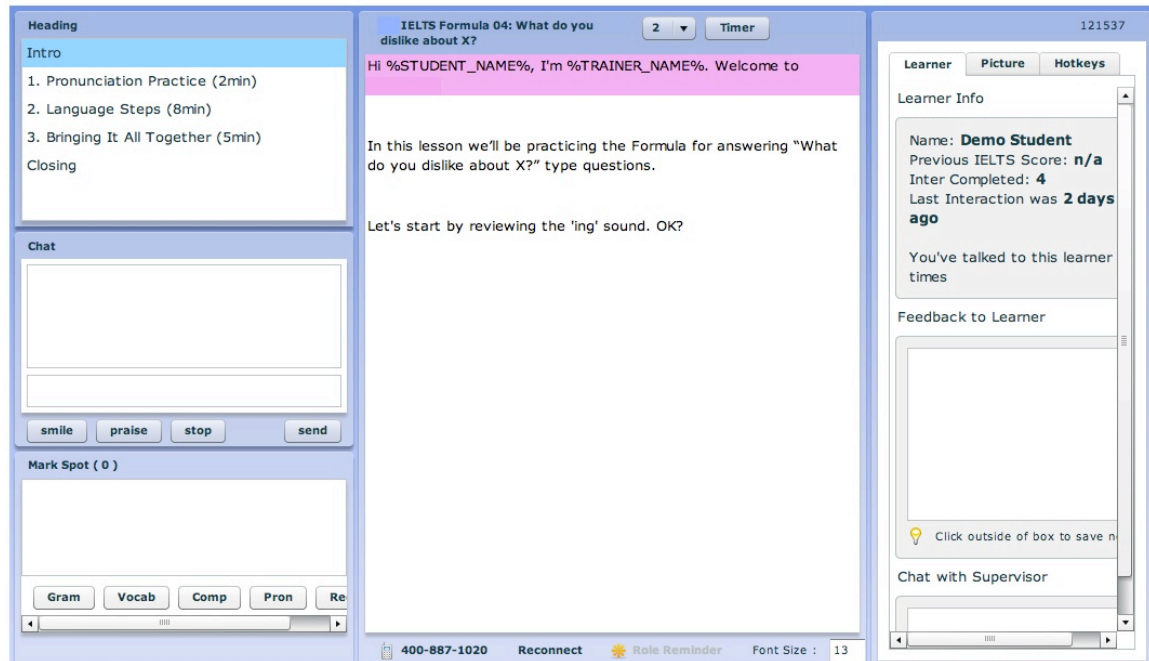


Figure 3.7. Interaction Screen

In the Learner Info box the trainer can see the name of the student she is currently working with, as well as details like the student's previous IELTS score (if any), how many interactions the student has completed, and whether or not the trainer has connected with that particular student before. (If the trainer has connected with them, the number of interactions she has had with them will also be displayed.) The trainer can use this information to tailor her greeting to the student.

At the top of the screen, the name of the lesson that the student has chosen (which the trainer will be teaching for this particular session) appears. In this case, the lesson is LQ IELTS Formula 4: What do you dislike about X? As mentioned

earlier, learners always preselect their lessons based on the package that they have signed up for.

Eloqi's English lessons, particularly those in the Proven Formulas series, are very structured in the sense that they are comprised of a predetermined sequence of speech sections, such as a warm-up, the introduction of key material, practice, and feedback/closing. In the Heading box, the trainer can see a quick overview of the different sections that a lesson contains, as well as the time allotted for each section. For example, in the "Formula 4: What do you dislike about X?" lesson captured in Figure 3.8, we can see that the lesson begins with two minutes of pronunciation practice, followed by an eight-minute section called "Language Steps," then the 5-minute "Bringing it all together" section. The "Closing" section, in which the trainer encourages the student to keep practicing and then bids them goodbye, concludes every lesson.

For every section of the lesson, prompts guide the trainer's speech; because of this, trainers are never expected nor asked to create lesson materials. Some prompts are simply suggested phrases or general directions for trainer communication, like "ensure the learner understands," while others are phrases and sentences that the trainers must read word for word. In either case, moving off the prompts or the lesson topic is strongly discouraged by Eloqi's administrators, who ask that trainers "stick to the prompts as closely as possible, and try not to veer off onto your own words or paraphrases unless this is absolutely necessary." (Eloqi trainer training module)

By clicking on any of the sections in the Heading box, the trainer can call up the prompts, scripts, and any other materials needed for the section in question, which then appear in the large, page-length column in the center of the interaction screen. For example, in Figure 3.8. I have clicked "Bringing it all together" in the Heading box, and now see the material for this section displayed for me in the center of the screen. Here, the Bringing it All Together section begins with the trainer saying, "OK. Let's practice answering the questions like in a real oral exam. Your answers should last for 40 seconds at the most." The trainer is then prompted to ensure that

the student understands. There's no script for this part, so the trainer can say whatever she feels is appropriate, like "Is that clear?" or "Do you understand?" or "Is that OK?" Next, the trainer starts asking the questions listed in the box ("Are there any things about parties that you do not enjoy?" "What do you dislike about your job or university?") When a section has been completed, or when the time for a given section has run out, the trainer can proceed to the next section by clicking on it in the Heading box.

Figure 3.8. Trainer Script & Prompts

While the LQ English lessons emphasize speaking practice, the interaction screen does allow the trainer and learner to text message one another, if necessary. In the Chat Box either party can type in a message and then press "Send" to make it appear in the other person's chat box. Additionally, the trainer has the options of pressing "Smile," "Praise," or "Stop." Each of these activates an icon in the chat box – a smiley face, a hand giving the thumbs-up gesture, and a hand giving the stop gesture, respectively.

Throughout the lesson, the trainers are required to give the learners oral and written feedback. General feedback is provided in a personalized note to the

student, written up in the Feedback to Student box, while feedback focusing on particular errors is typed into the mark spot box, where the trainer can press any of the mark spot buttons (Grammar, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Pronunciation, Recast) as the learner is speaking. Pressing one of these buttons “marks” the audio recording at that particular point. After the lesson, the learner can go back to the recording and quickly identify and listen to the points at which the trainer marked the error. Each marked spot is accompanied by a brief explanation of the mistake, which the trainer types into the empty field above the mark spot buttons. Partially because the mark spots and their accompanying notes are so highly valued by the learners, Eloqi has made it a policy that all trainers must provide a minimum number of mark spots in each lesson. Figure 3.9. illustrates some of the mark spots that I created while teaching a trial lesson.

The screenshot displays the Eloqi software interface during a lesson. At the top left, a green bar indicates the 'Call Time' as 09:17. The main interface is divided into several sections:

- Heading:** A list of lesson segments including 'Introduction [1.5 mins]', 'Part 1 Question (Short Answer) [2.5 Mins]', 'Part 2 Question (Monologue) [5.5 mins]', 'Part 3 Question (Long Answer) [4 mins]', and 'Summary [1.5 mins]'.
- Chat:** A text input area with 'smile', 'praise', 'stop', and 'send' buttons.
- Mark Spot (8):** A scrollable list of marked audio segments with timestamps and categories:
 - 03:43 Grammar someone recommended it to me
 - 04:37 Grammar when I WAS a college student
 - 04:56 Vocabulary once a month
 - 05:17 Grammar I'm interested in PLAYING badminto
- Prompt:** A large text area containing instructions for the student, such as '[Listen for student to:] [talk about the sport and how often they do it]' and '[talk about why they do / not do it]'. It also includes feedback text like 'Okay, that was a good/okay answer however a native speaker would have also mentioned [refer to any of the points not mentioned above]. Remember the English logic for this question is to talk about the sport you do, how often you do the sport, why you do it and why you don't do it more / less.'
- Student:** A panel on the right showing 'Student Info' (Name: New Student) and 'Feedback to Student' (Dear good try on the speaking evaluation! You managed to answer some of the questions correctly. Please be sure to look carefully at all the marked spots that I have given you and listen carefully to the recording so that you can pick out areas where I gave you corrections. In general in order to improve you will need to focus on: Click outside of box to save note).

Figure 3.9. Mark Spots

The last – but equally important – feature of the interaction screen is the timer. The timer starts at 15:00 minutes and counts down in minutes and seconds once the lesson begins. In the image above, you can see that in the top left corner of the screen the Call Time line, which is highlighted in green, indicates that I have 9 minutes and 17 seconds remaining in this lesson. Eloqi places a strong emphasis on timing and time management. Each section of the lesson is carefully designed to

take a certain amount of time and lessons are not supposed to run longer than 15 minutes. At 00:30 (i.e. thirty seconds remaining) the timer turns yellow in warning. Then, at 00:00 the timer flashes red and begins to count up, indicating how many minutes and seconds over time the call is running.


At the conclusion of the lesson, the trainer says goodbye to the student using the closing prompts provided. The trainer then presses the disconnect button to end the call. Immediately the interaction screen disappears and a new window -- the Review Screen (Figure 3.10) -- opens on the trainer's desktop.

Trainers use the Review Screen to clean up and complete their written feedback to the student. In the free form message field trainers compose personalized notes to their students, telling them what they did well on during the lesson, as well as what they need to improve. (If the trainer had already begun to compose the note during the interaction by using the Feedback to Student box, that material would be carried over here.) Trainers may also edit the mark spots that they have created by typing into the Description field. If they need to, they may even add new mark spots by pressing the play button and listening to the recording of the interaction. This is not recommended, however, since the trainers are allotted only two minutes to complete the Review Screen. Once the trainer has completed the Review Screen, she clicks the Save button. The Review Screen disappears, and the trainer's work on this interaction is now complete.

Mark Spots (13) | Note To Student (708 bytes) | Event Logs (2) | Prompt Logs (1) | Feedback To Trainer

IELTS Part 2 Save

Trainer Feedback



It was very nice working with you today, I really enjoyed hearing your monologue about traditional architecture. It was not only interesting and descriptive but you also used a lot of good vocabulary. I encourage you to keep practicing pronunciation and enunciation -- make sure that you speak clearly and make each word understood.

In regards to timing, I agree that it can be tricky to self-monitor to make sure that your monologue fits into the time constraints. The best way to do this is to keep practicing so that you get an accurate feeling for the two minute limit. Keep logging in to

Time	Reason	Description	
02:49	Grammar	I read ABOUT a building	X
03:35	Grammar	These typical houses are commonly made up of... (don't say commonly in regards to one particular building)	X
04:00	Grammar	comes from melted snow	X
04:45	Grammar	hot air can RISE	X
06:12	Pronunciation	roof	X
07:26	Vocabulary	melted snow	X
07:56	Grammar	has snow only one month	X
11:35	Grammar	the city that I live in now	X
11:51	Grammar	Beijing HAS	X
12:23	Grammar	it is REALLY impressive	X
12:42	Grammar	He CAME to China.	X
13:40	Grammar	The traditional building HAS its aesthetic value.	X
14:13	Grammar	Some architects are really passionate about their jobs.	X

Call ID: _____
 Student Name: _____

Figure 3.10. Review Screen

At this point, the trainer will return to the Campfire to wait for her next call, while the student might queue up for another lesson. Sometime soon, if not immediately, the student will log into LQ English's Student Portal to look over the written feedback provided by the trainer on the Review Screen. Additionally, trainers and students may listen to the audio file of their interaction, which Eloqi routinely records and archives. These recordings serve a dual purpose. First, they may be used by trainers and learners as a developmental resource, in the sense that both parties can utilize them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, whether in teaching (in the trainers' case) or in learning and/or English proficiency (in the learners' case). Secondly, Eloqi uses the recordings for research and quality control purposes; specifically "to ensure Instructors are providing the service as outlined in the contract." (Eloqi website, FAQ)

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

With this chapter my intention was to set the scene for my presentation (coming up in the next chapter) of the speech code present in Eloqi's trainer-learner interaction. To this end I provided a description of the Eloqi community of practice, including its background (Eloqi company origins); its members (learners, trainers); the virtual spaces that comprise it (the trainer forum, the Campfire, the interaction screen); as well as some of the regular communication practices that community members engage in (the weekly trainer conference calls). As an ethnographer of communication I hold that this description of the Eloqi CoP and the virtual environment in which its members operate is a prerequisite for an adequate discussion of symbols, meanings, premises and rules shaping members' communicative conduct, to which I now turn.

CHAPTER 4: THE SPEECH CODE OF LOGIC

Recall that my first research question asks what, if any, speech codes are present in the Eloqi community of practice, and how those codes are negotiated, developed, and/or utilized as a resource by the community's students, trainers, and administrators. Specifically, I asked:

Research Question 1: As the members of the Eloqi community (students, trainers, administrators) interact with one another through their technological platform, what speech codes do they negotiate, develop, and/or draw upon?

In this chapter, I will show that members of Eloqi's community of practice do indeed make use of a code of communicative conduct, i.e. a speech code, one that I name the *Code of Logic*. I will provide a detailed description of the Code of Logic, and I will show how it is marked by Eloqi community members as a "native English" code of communication. In explicating the Code of Logic I will illustrate how Eloqi's community members work together not only to maintain it but also to utilize it as a resource for influencing and making sense of one another's communication in their online community.

DISCOVERING A CODE THROUGH ITS SYMBOLS, MEANINGS, PREMISES, AND RULES

In order to discover and describe the speech codes present in my community of study (the Eloqi CoP), I focused my attention on the prominent symbols, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct that were present in the data. I did this because a speech code (which may be part of a larger cultural code) is "a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct." (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126) Recall that a symbol is a means of conveying or expressing a concept or an idea. Two examples of symbols are the Japanese term *amae*²⁴, loosely defined as dependence upon an authority figure's

²⁴ See "The Anatomy of Dependence" (1971) by Takeo Doi, English translation by John Bester (1973).

benevolence, and the German term *Schadenfreude*, which means the joy that one feels at another person's misfortune. Symbols may be unique to particular languages; neither *amae* nor *Schadenfreude*, for example, have matching terms in English. Even when the meaning of particular symbols is not unique to a community, they can still express something crucial about the experience of membership in that community. 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 of communicative conduct, 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 a resource for guiding and interpreting members' communicative behavior, including how to act, how to feel, and how to evaluate and make sense of speech under particular circumstances.

In my data set there were two key symbols, and many premises and rules, often interrelated, which were used in the Eloqi CoP to regulate and make sense of members' communicative behavior, in particular that of Eloqi's trainers and learners. I will describe all of those that I found and formulated in this chapter.

KEY SYMBOLS: “NATIVE ENGLISH” AND “ENGLISH LOGIC”

In my data set, two symbols stood out as meriting special examination: “native English” and “English Logic.”

Native English

As described in Chapter 4, Eloqi's services are geared towards Chinese clients who are preparing to take the IELTS English proficiency exam. Eloqi promises its clients that if they follow the company's instructional guidelines they will be better prepared to attain their desired score on the exam. More to the point, Eloqi

guarantees that its specialized instructional services will help learners to speak English “like a native,” complete with the ability to use what the company terms “English Logic.” In fact, the term “native” appears with high frequency throughout my data set and is used in the Eloqi community of practice by members across the spectrum of roles -- administrative, trainers, and learners alike. Here I will unpack both of these symbolic terms, addressing their meaning and their significance in this community.

Among Eloqi’s administrators, “native” is used to mark three important areas of value. First, “native” marks the value of the company’s trainer team, i.e. they are all “native English speakers.” Recall that contact with native English speakers is considered precious by Eloqi’s clientele. Among my student interviewees, none had any regular opportunity to practice their English with native speakers. Indeed, for many of Eloqi’s customers, connecting with the company’s trainers is the first time in their lives that they have ever directly spoken with a non-Chinese person. Second, Eloqi’s administrators use the term “native” to give weight to the company’s specialized lesson content. Specifically, the lessons are full of “native speaker words” and “native speaker expressions” for the students to learn. Third, “native” marks the outcome that Eloqi’s students will achieve; namely, they will be better able to “speak like a native” at the conclusion of their subscription. The company asks its trainers to keep this goal in mind as they interact with their learners, as illustrated by this reminder, made by an administrator during a weekly trainer conference call: “Suggest alternative vocabulary and phrases to help the student sound more native. Even if you can understand the student’s meaning, there probably is a better way to say it.” (WTCC meeting minutes) On another occasion, the Eloqi’s head content developer asked trainers to “Remind [students] to go back and listen to recordings, tell them to copy how you are saying the sounds. It doesn’t matter if you all have different accents, it’s just important that [students] sound like you.” WTCC fieldnotes).

For Eloqi’s trainer team, there are three important symbolic values in particular attached to the term “native”. First, the trainers accept their status as native English

speakers whose job it is to help the Eloqi students communicate like them. To Eloqi's trainers, a "native speaker" is one who, like them, has learned English as their first, primary, or mother language and has spoken it since childhood. This can include people from other English speaking countries, such as Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, etc. As one trainer noted, across these native English-speaking countries "the accent might be different, so it might sound different, but they're using the same English logic and using the same words, pretty much...." (Trainer interview, Bettina) Second, according to the trainers, speaking like a native involves a range of skills, including the use of a "relaxed and natural tone and inflection;" "proper English pronunciation or cadence;" colloquial and possibly regional expressions; current rather than antiquated language; slang; and appropriate vocabulary for the appropriate situation or context. Furthermore, a native speaker in the Eloqi community is one who is able to use "English logic" in formulating their speech. (More on this later.) During their interactions, the trainers make every effort to help their students acquire these and other skills. Take, for example, the following excerpt from one of my trainer interviews, in which the interviewee describes how she tried to help one of her students sound more native:

I think for the students they don't want to stick out like a sore thumb when they're speaking English, that's their goal.... It's not simply to be able to communicate in English, it's to be accepted as someone who speaks English – maybe not necessarily as well as, but in the same way that someone who is a native speaker [speaks].... A good example I ran across the other day is just choice of vocabulary. A young girl mentioned her handbag, and I said that was a perfectly good word, but often in American English, in today's language, we use purse, and handbag is sort of an old-fashioned term, and that when we think handbag we automatically think old lady. So she wanted to know that because she didn't want to sound like an old lady. There's nothing wrong with using handbag, but it's sort of an antiquated

expression, and it gives a certain impression, a certain visual impression to most listeners. When we hear handbag we think of our grandmother's purse. (Trainer Interview, Iris)

As the trainer describes in her explication of why she taught her student to use the word "purse" instead of "handbag," Eloqi's clients want to speak English "in the same way that someone who is a native speaker [speaks]," i.e. like a native. Vivien and her cohort of fellow trainers are working towards helping students realize this goal.

Finally, the trainers use the term "native" while interacting with students as a resource for emphasizing the authority of the lesson content as well as the validity of their corrections. When introducing content, trainers recite phrases like, "Let's look at some native speaker expressions about (the given topic)," or "Now let's review a few native speaker phrases for talking about...." When initiating a speaking activity, trainers are prompted to say, "I will correct you when you make mistakes or when it's not native." After student turns, when trainers are pointing out errors or awkward constructions in the students' speech, they preface corrections with phrases like, "A more native way to say that would be..." or "A native speaker would/would not say...." In this way, using the term "native" becomes a way of marking the best, correct, or most appropriate kind of speech.

For the students in this community, the opportunity to speak English with the company's team of native-speaking trainers is a powerful draw to Eloqi's instructional services, mostly because they feel that contact (particularly one-to-one contact) with native English instructors is the best way for them to learn how to communicate in native English speech. As one student told me, ratifying Eloqi's value of its services, "What the real valuable thing is that the [Eloqi] teacher tells me how to speak like a native speaker. This is important." (Student interview, Winson) Underlying students' reasoning is the premise that native English speech can only truly be acquired from native speakers, and not from a fellow Chinese or other non-native, however fluent they might be. As one student told me, "'If I want to improve my speaking English I have to communicate with foreigners.'" (Student interview,

Ming) Another said, “If you speak with a native you’ll know what to aim for, but if you learn from Chinese you’ll speak like them.” (Student interview, Cassie) A third student interviewee elaborated on this:

If I want to speak fluently I can speak to a Chinese student, we can talk to each other every day, but how to improve, to use native language, this is [how] LQ should help us. [For example,] if I am speaking to a Chinese student, just using English, he can understand me but he doesn’t know if the language is like native language. But if I speak to a foreign trainer, if he or she feels my expression is not very good, he can suggest me another way, a native way. This is the most important. I can improve from his or her suggestions. This is the difference between a foreign trainer and a Chinese trainer. When we are talking to each other, you can just understand what I’m saying, but I’m not saying like a native speaker. If you are the online trainer and you have enough time, you will give me a lot of suggestions to express better. (Student interview, Winson)

As Winson gets at in the quote above, the great value of Eloqi’s LQ English service is not only the chance to learn English from a native speaker, but the chance to learn how to speak like a native English speaker.

All of the excerpts shared above illustrate three important symbolic values that Eloqi’s students connect with “native” English. First, Eloqi students ratify the idea of native English as an especially valued and even an ideal mode of English communication. They feel that that they are not conversant in native English speech, yet profess a desire to be. Second, the students do not see native English as something that can be acquired anywhere, anyhow. Rather, native English can only be acquired through contact with true native speakers of the language, who are all “foreigners,” and not Chinese. Finally, this acquisition occurs primarily through the students’ oral communication with these native speaking trainers, and is greatly aided by corrections and feedback (both oral and written) that trainers provide. Additionally, the Eloqi students feel that they may enhance their ability to speak

“like a native” through the special online training materials that Eloqi provides as part of its services. In one student feedback report, for example, a client stated, “LQ English gives you the confidence to speak English and at the same time broaden your mind. Most importantly, the content is really so native.” (WTCC meeting minutes)

In this community then, “native” English is both implicitly and explicitly marked by its members -- administrators, trainers, and students alike -- as a good type of English to speak, perhaps even the best type. The company’s strategic use and promotion of its “native” English speaking trainers and “native” content is intended to attract and satisfy customers – who pay a relatively significant amount of money, by their standards – for the services. From another angle, the services are portrayed as valuable because they provide one-to-one training in native speech. The trainers reinforce the “more native,” i.e. optimal, nature of the communication that they are teaching the students through their corrections and feedback. What’s more, all of their instruction is subsumed under the basic understanding that it, as well as their own communication, is native. Students ratify the value both of the native lesson content as well as their developing abilities to speak like a native, accepting what they see as the genuinely “native” nature of what they are learning. In short, in this community there is great value attached to this local understanding of a/the “native” way of communicating in English.

As I will show in subsequent sections of this chapter, there is a speech code shared by the Eloqi community members. In fact, Eloqi’s trainer-learner interactions are geared towards training the students to make use of this speech code, which I call the Code of Logic. At this juncture, I simply wish to emphasize that the Code of Logic, which I will describe shortly, is built on the foundational symbolic value of native English speech that I have outlined above. By their close association, native English speech and English Logic are equated; furthermore, they are foundational components of the Code of Logic utilized by the Eloqi community members.

English Logic

The second symbolic term that I found to be of great importance in this community was “English Logic.” Like the term “native,” “English Logic” appears with great frequency in the Eloqi community of practice, and is used by members across the spectrum of roles, including administrators, trainers, and students. Logic, derived from the Greek *logos* (reason), is the science of reasoning. To be illogical, or without logic, is to be senseless, unreasonable, confused, even irrational. It is worth noting that these standard definitions of logic index the presence of factual, systematic knowledge that operates according to larger rules or laws.

Within the Eloqi CoP, the term “English Logic” is explicitly defined by administrators as “the format that native English speakers use when answering questions and discussing various topics.” (Eloqi Trainer Handbook) As Eloqi laid out in its marketing strategy in 2009, one of the company’s main objectives would be to train students in the use of “English Logic” in order to better equip them to pass the IELTS exam:

In 2009 we will mainly focus on the IELTS exam market because we are very competitive in this sector and we can make a breakthrough. If the students want to get a higher IELTS oral score, they need to speak like a native. To achieve this, they need to learn and use English logic. They can learn English Logic through 1:1 instruction with our LQ trainer by natural questions and speaking. When interacting with trainers they can learn all Core English Logic and therefore be able to answer any questions in a test. Thus, we can help students get a higher score in an IELTS exam. (WTCC meeting minutes)

As illustrated in these excerpts, Eloqi closely associates the use of English Logic with speaking like a “native,” and views it as an indispensable part of successfully passing the oral component of the IELTS English proficiency exam. With its Core English Logic lesson suite and its newer Proven Formulas lesson suite, the company

states that it has built a “scientific, practical and effective course system” (WTCC meeting minutes) the goal of which is to help its learners understand and effectively use this English Logic. This system of English Logic is deployed through the company’s team of native English speakers via the interactive web-based interface designed by the company. I would argue that most, if not all, of the members of Eloqi’s community members are aware of this goal of training students in the use of English Logic, since talk about the use of “English Logic” is prevalent in administration-trainer and trainer-learner interactions. Take, for example, the Core English Logic lessons, in which the script that the trainers have to follow includes a mention of the particular variant of “English Logic” that the lesson will cover, as in the exchange below:

Trainer	Hi Susan, I’m Demi. Welcome to LQ English.
Student	Hi:: Demi. Nice to meet=
Trainer	How-
Student	=you.
Trainer	You too. Well in this lesson we’ll be practicing the English logic of answering what do you like to do type questions. Let’s start by quickly re-reviewing the pronunciation from the lesson, OK↑?
Student	OK↓

The phrase used in the excerpt above – “in this lesson we will be practicing the English logic of answering ~ type questions” – appeared in all of the CEL lessons. When the Proven Formulas lesson suite superseded CEL, a new phrase was inserted into the lesson scripts: “let’s quickly remind ourselves about the native speaker logical order you need to talk about [question type].” Eventually this phrase was replaced by the more neutral statement, “in this lesson we’ll be practicing the Formula for answering ~ type questions.” Nevertheless, trainers continued to use

the term “English logic” in their interactions with the students, usually when framing their corrections and suggestions for better ways of expressing something in English.

When I asked trainers about their definitions of English Logic, many of them referred to the company’s definition in the Trainer Handbook, which I cited above. Their explanations emphasized the natural, almost unquestionable requirement for a larger system of rules or principles (English Logic) according to which native English speakers structure and organize their communication in a comprehensible way:

[English logic] refers to the whole concept of making a sentence sound - literally - logical through the use of appropriate grammar, syntax, etc. by combining English language with...logic. The purpose: by applying principles of logic to the learning of language, a learner will learn to understand the basic rules of the English language, correct pronunciation, correct spelling, common vocabulary, a basic understanding of American speech, and the basic means of having a "standard" American English conversation. (Trainer interview, Reena)

A number of the trainers connected English with a standard sequence of words:

To me, English logic means that you answer questions and speak in the sequence used by native speakers of English. So for example if someone asks "Who taught you to swim?" a non-native just learning English might say "At the beach my mother taught me to swim," but a native speaker would probably answer "My mother taught me to swim at the beach." The non-native speaker is not incorrect but it is more natural for a native speaker to answer the direct question about "who" before going into extra details about "where."" (Trainer interview, Marlene)

Like Marlene, Iris (another trainer) linked English logic with word sequence:

I think the term English logic... can mean something as small as the way you order words in a sentence, and I have a very good example of this. When we use adjectives in English, if we say the noisy little brown dog, we know to put noisy first, we know to put little then, and we know to put brown, but for somebody who is not a native speaker of English, they don't know to put it like that. So they might say the brown, little, noisy dog. And for us to hear that, our ears say hey that's wrong, that doesn't sound right. (Trainer interview, Iris)

Additionally, some trainers described how English Logic also related to the appropriate use of nuance and vocabulary, as described in the excerpt below:

I think "English logic" refers to the logical order or logical choice of words that make the most sense. For example in LQ English there are some activities where different adjectives of appearance are listed and the learner is meant to use them to describe someone, say an old woman. The words might be wise, sexy, athletic, handsome, thin, tall, bookish and stern. Logical words to describe an old woman might be stern and wise. If the learner says the old woman appears sexy and athletic I would have to assume they didn't understand the English logic in this activity. I cannot be certain from the information given that they have completely understood the activity. (Trainer interview, Ellen)

Like logic in general, English Logic is thus governed by systems of rules, and it works to make speech reasonable and sensible. Broadly, English Logic offers this community an identifiable, chartable, holistic, predictable, and sensible approach to engaging in speech. As one trainer told me, "In practice, Eloqi's 'English Logic' refers to a list of guidelines or steps that Eloqi has come up with to answer IELTS questions effectively and efficiently." (Trainer interview, Delia). To speak without logic is not an option here – it wouldn't make sense, because if speech has no logic it is faulty, mistaken, ambiguous, or inappropriate. It would not be logical to say that you and your date were stimulated while at the movies, or that an old woman was

sexy and athletic. To the trainers' ears, such sentences sound inaccurate at best, or like non-sequiturs at worst, i.e. illogical attempts at reasoning.

At the heart of the local code of communicative conduct in this community then, are the symbolic terms of "native English" and "English Logic," as I have described above. To speak English well is to speak like a native, and to speak English like a native in this community is to speak logically. To speak logically is to allow one's speech to be governed by a larger system, commonly shared, of cultural and linguistic understandings. I turn now to a close examination of the larger system at play in the Eloqi community of practice; specifically, its system of meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct, i.e. its speech code. As one trainer told me:

In theory, "English Logic" is an interpretation of how average native English speakers respond to questions and the thought processes or "logic" behind it. Often there is a cultural and historical aspect which influences how the question is answered, which is also something that is taught and/or explained to the students. (Trainer interview, Delia)

It is the "cultural and historical" nature of "English Logic" referred to by the trainer above that I analyze in the following description of the Code of Logic deployed in the Eloqi community of practice.

THE CODE OF LOGIC

In addition to the two key symbols "native English" and "English logic," which I described in the previous section, there were six interrelated rules of communicative conduct at work in the Eloqi community of practice. These rules can be summarized in this way:

1. The learners' speech should be clearly organized.
2. The learners should speak succinctly.

3. The trainers should be open and honest in their feedback to the students. It is an added benefit if the students are open and honest in their communication with the trainers.
4. Learners in the Eloqi CoP should be proactive.
5. Ideal speech is spontaneous rather than “canned”
6. Trainers must be positive and supportive towards the learners. The learners should also frame themselves in a positive light.

Below I will describe each of these principles, showing how, as a whole, they make up a system of meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct, i.e. a speech code, which I name the Code of Logic.

Organized Speech

In the Eloqi community of practice, good speech is modeled as clearly ordered and organized; it is sequential and logical, contained and linear. As mentioned earlier in my discussion of the term “English logic,” all of the CEL and Proven Formulas lessons model a very specific procedure for answering each question type. This procedure involves (1) providing specific content, and (2) ordering that content in a pre-determined way. That is, not only must students include particular information in their answers, but they must also be mindful of the order in which they present it.

Eloqi’s expectation of ordered and organized speech is explicitly expressed in the CEL and Proven Formulas lessons, all of which were designed to teach the students how to answer certain types of questions. Eloqi administrators especially hailed the Proven Formulas lesson suite as taking an approach that “...will help [learners] to arrange their answer in a logical order” (WTCC meeting minutes). Going along with this, each Proven Formulas lesson contains a brief explanation, to be read out loud by the trainers, of the question type being covered in the lesson. This explanation includes the information – in its appropriate order – that students are expected to provide when answering the question. See, for example, the excerpt

below in which a trainer explains to a student what she'll need to do to answer the question type "What do you want / hope to do in the future?"

- Darci Alright now let's quickly remind ourselves of the native speaker logical order you need to use to talk about what you want to do in the future, OK?
- Lucy OK.
- Darci OK, so the first thing to do is to think about your main ambition and choose one that you'd especially like to do. Choose one that you think you can realistically achieve because it's easier to talk about, OK? That's number one.
- Lucy Hmm.
- Darci Number two is the=
- Lucy OK
- Darci =number two is to say why you want to achieve it and number three is to say what you will have to do if you want to achieve it, OK?
- Lucy Um, what- um, OK.

In the final iteration of the Proven Formulas lessons, this information on the content and order of the ideal answer was summarized on the student task card as follows:

Remember to use the following answer order and language steps when you answer the trainer's questions. Say **WHAT** your ambition for the future is. Say **WHY** you want to achieve it. Say **HOW** you hope to achieve it.

A sampling of other question types and information to be included in the students' answers – organized into the expected order – is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Question Types & Suggested Answers

Question type	Expected answer content and order
How often do you do X?	To talk about how often you do something, state how often you do it. Explain why you do it at that particular degree of frequency. Give detailed reasons. Give examples.
What do you usually / normally do?	To speak about what you usually do, state what you do when you get up in the morning. Next, state what you do at different parts of the day. Say how often you do these things (sometimes, never, frequently). Finally, say how you feel about them.
What do you dislike about X?	First you say one or two things that you don't like, say how much or the degree that you don't like it, and say why you don't like it.
How has X changed?	Remember to use the following answer order and language steps when you answer the trainer's questions. Tell the examiner which time is best for X Describe what the conditions at that time are Explain WHY that's the best time

As this material illustrates, ideal communication in this community of practice is governed by a larger system of organization – a system identified by administrators and trainers as a (or *the*) “native speaker logical order.” To be in compliance with this native speaker logical order, the students are instructed to answer each question type in using a particular organizational approach, with deliberately chosen information that is prearranged in the expected way. As the company administrators emphasize to the trainers,

Listen to the context of the student's answer. Ask yourself if the student used English Logic or the complete Formula for answering the question. We want to make sure we're training the students to provide complete answers. (WTCC meeting minutes)

In this CoP then, the acts of answering a question without all of the required information, or providing the required information out of sequence constitutes a failure of logic, specifically a failure of native speaker English logic. As such these mistakes must be avoided, and it is the trainers' duty to ensure that the students are aware of the required organization of speech, and that they execute it correctly.

It is very important to note that in this CoP the communication strategy of producing organized speech is closely associated with "native" and "logical" speech. In the materials cited above we saw how trainers introduced formulas by stating, "let's remind ourselves about the native speaker logical order you need to talk about ~." That is, these prescribed strategies are explained as both "native" and logical, and thus carry extra authority as good or correct ways of speaking. This is further illustrated in this explanation, provided to me by one of the trainers:

One of the questions we ask in the discussion part of the test is talking about the fast pace of growth of the Chinese economy and whether there are benefits or disadvantages to that. So we say, you know, can you tell me about the advantages and disadvantages of the fast economic growth? So a native English speaker would say OK yes, China has experienced this rapid growth, here are the disadvantages, here are the advantages, here is the relative benefit of the two, and here is my conclusion. You know, just smack, 1-2-3. That's the way an English speaker would approach that. And that's one of those things that sometimes our students don't know. Hey, that's the order you answer that question if you're an English speaker. (Trainer Interview, Iris)

In other words, in this community providing a structured, logical explanation is seen as a native English speaker's approach. Through drilling, eliciting, and training Eloqi hopes "to show [students] how these phrases will help to arrange their answer in a logical order." (WTCC meeting minutes) This logical order is marked as native, and thus rooted in the English language and Western culture. As one trainer said, "That's part of the Eloqi platform is to teach people how to think like a Westerner would think, a native English speaker, so that they can order their response to a question the way a native speaker would." (Trainer interview, Iris)

The value of using Eloqi's services to learn how to structure or organize their English communication is generally recognized by the learners. One learner, in what is quite commonplace feedback, reported that "English Logic, [which] is very useful, helped her organize the answer." (WTCC meeting minutes) In my face-to-face interviews in Beijing, students described to me in comparable terms how they had been in need of better organization in their speech, and how their lessons with Eloqi had helped them achieve it:

I heard that the writing and the speaking section are the most weak parts among the Chinese students. They often get the lowest grade on these two parts, maybe because no matter speaking or writing you have to organize your words. So when you organize your words you have to use your logic or reason. So we don't get used to the English logic, so I think it's the one of the reasons why we get such low scores. (Student interview, Terri)

What the real valuable thing is that the teacher tells me how to speak like a native speaker. This is important. And how to make a good beginning and good end – this is important. Good beginning and end – that's especially for the IELTS test, for the topic that you are given. The examiner will tell you to speak for no more than two minutes, so you should make a good start and end so the examiner will understand when you start and stop. This is very important. If you

just speak without managing the time, you won't get a good score.
(Student interview, Winson)

What's more, trainers and students alike view the act of organizing one's talk, of assembling all of the necessary answer components together in their logical order, as difficult.

I tend to notice it more when they do the discussion practice, the free form discussion practice, which is the part three of the IELTS speaking test. [Students] will get to a certain confidence level and then they'll tackle that part three thing, and that's when you can see, OK, they don't have that task card in front of them that says put one, two and three in that order. And that's when it becomes very apparent [that they aren't using the English logic]. They can't order their thoughts the way that English logic would dictate it. (Trainer interview, Iris)

Indeed, these community members rationalize that if it were easy to speak in an organized fashion, students would not need the company's services.

To summarize, a significant element of this community's speech code, the Code of Logic, is to arrange one's talk in a linear way, with evidence to support the points that one makes. Eloqi's students are explicitly trained in this communication strategy through the company's Core English Logic and the Proven Formulas lesson suites. Deliberately utilizing this organizational structure is a skill that is viewed as logical and reasonable. It is also viewed as difficult for Eloqi's learners, perhaps in part because it is a "native" English approach, and thus unfamiliar and/or foreign to them.

Succinct

The second aspect of the Eloqi CoP Code of Logic that came out of the data is that of succinctness. I first learned of this community's emphasis on succinctness during my interviews with Eloqi students in Beijing, when several of my

interviewees told me that through Eloqi they had learned to state their points simply and directly, without (as one student put it) “beating around the bush.” I understood from my student interviewees that the Eloqi trainers had modeled this direct communication approach to her. As one student told me, “The LQ trainers did not use a complicated communication style. Complicated means, for example, if you talk to people a long time you can’t get their key point, you can’t get what are they talking about. That’s complicated.” (Student interview, Cassie) Another student described this in even greater detail:

I think the learner should cultivate the English logic. No matter writing or reading or speaking, I think it’s the most important thing. For example, when I sometimes gave my monologues one teacher stopped me because she didn’t know what I want to say. *((laughs))* You know there are the different logic or different reasons in the Chinese people. I mean [when] the Chinese people would like to think or say something, they would like to begin from saying the background information or something like that. They don’t get used to state their opinions directly. When I tried to say something my trainer found she couldn’t understand what I want to say, and she stopped me and asked if I understand her questions. I said I understand her questions but then I changed my way of expression, because I realized that I must be make a mistake of the English logic. I mean I’m using the Chinese logic to answer the question, so I had said so many blah blah blah, but not touched the key point. I think I have to have more awareness about this.” (Student interview, Terri)

Like the young woman above, another student interviewee told me that he felt there was something different about the way he learned to answer questions through Eloqi’s training, something that he associated with being American (perhaps because all of Eloqi’s trainers are from the United States). In his view, the Eloqi trainers help students to answer a question from a “specific part,” rather than “from a whole.” In his words,

The American style, Chinese style, they are different. They are not just direct or indirect, I think they are just different. The American trainer- I find that they answer a question from the specific, specific part, and most Chinese like to think about a question from a whole...but the trainers just tell me from a specific side to answer the question. (Student interview, Ming)

I took Ming's comments to mean that the focused and succinct manner of answering questions in the Eloqi community of practice (making a concise statement, providing a few specific pieces of evidence to back it up) was a different approach to what he, like Terri, was accustomed to using in his communication.

In crosschecking the data I found that the communication traits of cutting out unnecessary talk, sticking to the point, and stating one's views directly, were also marked as valuable by the administrators and the trainers. As the Service Director wrote in the discussion forum,

If you find the student going on and on and on, it's OK to politely interrupt the student. Sometimes the student doesn't know when to stop and feels that the more they say the better. During the IELTS exam, an examiner could very well interrupt the student to move on to the next question or part. (Discussion forum)

Likewise, in encouraging trainers to assist a particular student who was struggling with the material, one of the primary supervisors wrote,

To start with, please remind Miao to keep his answers concise. This will keep him from rambling and just grasping at words and phrases that just don't work.... (Discussion forum)

What's more, the administrators and trainers linked being succinct with being organized. For them succinctness meant stating one's points in a brief, direct and clear manner, much in the "organized" way that I described in the previous section. As one trainer said,

For an English thinker we have this ordered thought of saying ‘OK, here’s the problem, here are potential solutions, here’s which one I think is the best and here’s the result that I want.’ That’s what English logic is. (Trainer interview, Iris)

To summarize, in this CoP succinctness entails making one’s point, providing some evidence to back it up, and concluding one’s statements. It is preferable to indirectness, beating around the bush, or circling around one’s point without stating it concisely. Furthermore, like being “logical” and “organized,” being succinct is marked as “native” in this community of practice.

Open and Honest

The next element of the Eloqi CoP’s code of communicative conduct that I will describe is that of openness and honesty. All of the Eloqi students and trainers whom I met reported that they valued open and honest communication, but they perceived and experienced this particular communication trait differently.

The Eloqi students who I interviewed in Beijing reported to me that they found their trainers to display a strong vein of openness in their communication, which they characterized as a positive thing. The students associated trainers’ openness with enthusiasm, friendliness, and encouragement, as illustrated in the following interview excerpts:

The teaching style of the LQ is I think very open, very open. And I think the teachers are very enthusiastic. They try to help the students in different ways. I like the teaching style, it’s more easy for people to communicate I think. (Student interview, Gary)

The communication with the foreign trainers was very magical and very funny because they are very nice and frank, and they would like to express their opinions openly and directly. (Student interview, Terri)

I think most of [the trainers] are interesting and open, and they are so kind to encourage me to speak more, and help me to open my horizons. (Student interview, Wing)

As to just what makes the trainers' talk feel open to the students, there was a clue in one interviewee's comment connecting openness with the trainers' corrections and feedback: "Most of the LQ trainers are very open, and provided feedback to me." (Student interview, Pearl) One of the Eloqi customer service representatives explained this to me to me, saying that Eloqi's students typically associate a trainer's readiness to make corrections and give feedback on a student's English communication skills with the quality of being open. She stated:

I believe that student meant that trainers are very honest with her by providing all the feedback to help her to improve. By openness she meant that trainers are very blunt with her about her speaking errors. You know in other situations people may not provide such feedback considering the other side might be embarrassed.

(Administrator interview)

Because most of Eloqi's students have only rare contact with native English speakers in their daily lives, and enjoy few opportunities to practice or get feedback on their spoken English, the direct feedback provided by Eloqi's trainers is seen by them as highly valuable. This perspective was clearly articulated by other students who I met and interviewed in Beijing:

You know, in China, maybe you think that it's convenient to meet some foreigners or [that] you can communicate with (them in) English but they will not, they will not correct your mistakes and you can't find them- you can't talk with them twice or three times a week.

(Student interview, Ming)

I will try my best to ask [the Eloqi trainers] whether my expression is correct or what's the better way that I express my opinion, so I always ask them questions. I really enjoy such relationship because

it correct my every small mistakes. I think I can't make progress unless [trainers] paid more attention to my mistakes and correct them, as much as possible. Because I will like to point out more mistakes, then I just feel secure. (Student interview, Terri)

For the students then, trainers are being open when they helpfully give out direct, honest, and candid feedback on the students' spoken English. This open communication is highly valued by the students, who see it as both as a precious resource and a necessary step towards improving their English fluency.

Eloqi, cognizant of how its students (who are, after all, paying customers) value direct feedback, has taken steps to formalize this element of trainer-student communication. Specifically, the company has implemented the rule that trainers must make corrections – both oral and written – in each interaction they have with the students. For the trainers therefore, being open or frank in their comments (both written and oral) on the students' speech is a prescribed communicative behavior. Eloqi's administrators and students fully expect that the trainers will not hold back from pointing out errors, inaccuracies, and weak points in the students' oral English. In this sense it is a rule for trainers to be open in their communication in this community.

It was notable that the trainers defined open and honest communication differently to the students. First and foremost, the trainers associated openness and honesty with mutual self-disclosure and feelings of closeness. That is, in open conversations with the students, trainers found themselves mutually sharing their true thoughts, opinions, and experiences, which led them to feel a sense of enhanced closeness with their conversation partner. As one trainer told me:

I think there are times depending on the student, depending on the personality that it feels like I am a friend, like you are speaking to someone who is a friend, like you know them. For some reason they're really open, and they share things, and they want to talk

about their day, and um you have to *((laughs))* kind of keep them focused [on the lesson material]. (Trainer interview, Delia)

The excerpt above illustrates how the trainers linked the quality of being “open” with a friendship relationship, as well as the sharing of personal information. This is evident in the following excerpt as well:

[The students who feel like friends] are definitely more relaxed, and more comfortable with the procedure I think, also they’re interested in learning about the cultural differences, and not so much just the language, you know, they ask questions, and want to share their experiences instead of just simply answering the questions and practicing the language. (Trainer interview, Dorie)

What we see here is that the trainers link openness and honesty with the act of mutually revealing personal information (thoughts, opinions, experiences) with the students. Sharing this sort of personal information is a way of sharing part of one’s self, and consequently leads to enhanced feelings of closeness that are more akin to friendship than a service provider-customer relationships or even a teacher-student relationship.

For the trainers, engaging in open communication with students was marked as special and unique, and it set some students apart in meaningful ways. When the trainers felt that they were being open with their students, or when they perceived that students were being open and frank with *them*, the communication felt (atypically) warm and close, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

Not long ago, there was a girl and we started chatting, and almost seemed like we were just, you know friends just having a talk. And I was still sticking by the prompts and everything, but it was one of the more open lessons where we can do more- more open dialogs and I was marking spots, but we were just communicating, and it was really interesting. (Trainer interview, Essie)

As Ellen describes above, engaging in a “more open lesson” that allowed for “open dialogue” helped her to “just communicate” with her student, which gave her the feeling of being “friends just having a talk.” As another trainer reported:

With some students you can really connect with them and (it is) definitely, you know, more comfortable more friendly next time, you know, you talk with them, and as you train them more and more.... I feel that just some students are just maybe more open, and they answer the questions honestly while other students are just maybe giving answers just to practice their English. So the ones that are kind of more open and actually kind of ask me questions about myself or show interest in things that I think or do, I think those are the ones that are easier to connect with.... Some students are just more open and interested in other things other than just the lesson plan.

(Trainer interview, Yasmin)

In Yasmin’s case, open students seem “easier to connect with,” especially since they “answer the questions honestly” and show an interest in their trainers.

As the above excerpts above reveal, trainers feel especially close to those students who engage in open and honest communication. Such students “share their experiences” as well as other personal information; they “show interest” in their trainers; and they ask the trainers questions about themselves. Trainers can “just communicate” with them, like “friends just having a talk.”

The kind of open and honest communication that the trainers valued was held to be in direct contrast to two other types of talk frequently experienced in the trainer-student interactions: the down-to-business type talk that often characterized the lessons; and the rote talk sometimes used by students simply to practice the target language of the lesson. As regards the down-to-business talk, one trainer summarized it very neatly:

There are students who are just there to learn and they want their time, their study time, and they log on and it’s ‘hi, how ya doing, I’m

ready to get started, let's do this,' and they are not very friendly, there's no room for- I guess an opinion. So you can't really share your opinion openly, and it's just work-work-work 'till the end. So you feel more like a teacher in that situation. (Trainer interview, Delia)

In other words, the down-to-business approach is that of being focused solely on the lesson material, a situation in which the trainers remain in their service-provider/teacher role, and students remain as clients. Students taking this approach to an extreme are sometimes critiqued for engaging in the second type of talk – rote talk – that is held in opposition to close talk. When students produce rote talk it means that they are giving unoriginal answers, which are also possibly untrue, simply for the sake of correctly answering the question. There is no rule stating that students cannot do this; in fact, students could say anything at all, true or not, and the trainers would accept it as long as it both followed the prescribed format and was logical. Nevertheless, as illustrated by the excerpts above, trainers displayed a preference for answers that were honest and genuine.

Despite the trainer preference for open and honest communication, four major organizational barriers generally conspire to prevent it from occurring, all of which are related to the company's communication protocols for the trainers. First, it is Eloqi's policy that the trainer-student interactions be dedicated to giving the students the opportunity to practice their spoken English. The lessons are designed to give long speaking turns to the students, while keeping the trainers' talking time at a minimum. As the Service Director told me,

[The lessons are an] opportunity for the students to speak. This is a speaking exercise. So if [trainers] do bring in [their] personal experience it should only be in a reference to allow the student to follow up on that. (Administrator interview)

In keeping with this, the trainers are expected to curb their desire to comment or engage in a two-way discussion on any given topic, a point that they are conscientious about:

Every now and then you'll go into a discussion or you might make a comment here or there about your own family or about your own experience with traveling, or your own experience with being in college, but not a whole lot. I find that I don't talk about myself a whole lot because as soon as you start talking about yourself or what things are like here, then you kind of can take over the session and then that learner doesn't get a chance to work on their English. They need to speak. (Trainer interview, Nelly)

I do not discuss anything about myself personally. That's not- it's not- they're not paying to learn about me. *((laughs))* They're paying to learn English. (Trainer interview, Reena)

In other words, rather than being open by sharing their own comments, experience, or viewpoints on the topic at hand, the trainers concentrate on eliciting commentary from the students. This is seen by all as perfectly reasonable, since the students are paying customers who log in for the sessions specifically in order to get speaking practice and feedback on their oral communication.

The second organizational barrier to open and honest communication is the company's policy of having the trainers and students stay focused on the lesson material and the accompanying service/interaction scripts for each interaction²⁵. Because the trainers are responsible for taking the student through each lesson as completely as possible, the act of engaging in a tangential discussion is seen as superfluous, and even contrary to this goal. As one trainer related to me:

I would like to have more lessons [with free/open talk], of course I am not sure how much it would help them, but I think it would

²⁵ This point will be discussed in greater detail later on in this dissertation.

definitely help them in the long run, I am not sure how it would prepare them for the IELTS, but I think it would be really cool to have them mixed in, because that kind of interaction is- is very useful, because I get to hear what words they know, all their vocabulary, and they're opening up to me, and it's just the coolest thing, so, yeah I like that. (Trainer interview, Ellen)

However pleasant open and honest chats may be, they are not seen as consistent with the service provided by Eloqi – that of preparing the students to successfully pass the IELTS exam. For the trainer to share her experience or opinion could potentially detract from the lesson material, or take up valuable lesson time, and this would be breaking the company's rules.

Third, because Eloqi's lesson time is limited to 15 minutes, and because the trainers are obliged to complete the lesson material in that time, the trainers feel (justifiably so) that there simply isn't enough time for them to share viewpoints with the students:

I try to make it go more for their side, so they're doing more of the talking, (since) like I said it's so short, they have only- you know, a few minutes, so in order to get through everything you kind of have to let them do more of the talking, so you're doing more of the correcting and uh, there's a little bit of time for sharing, but not that much. (Trainer interview, Marlene)

I find that I don't talk about myself a whole lot because as soon as you start talking about yourself or what things are like here, then you kind of can take over the session and then that learner doesn't get a chance to work on their English. They need to speak. (Trainer interview, Nelly)

In fact, the students noted this too, agreeing that the lessons were too short to do more than deal with the required lesson material:

I remember several times I told the teachers about the cultures and the experiences of mine, of here, but it's not possible the teachers to tell me about this, because the teacher have to try their best to teach the content of the lesson. So maybe this is because of the time it's not enough. Just the fifteen minutes online so time is not enough.

(Student interview, Gary)

The main purpose for the lesson [is] the teacher just wants to teach us but there is little chance for us to exchange the idea [sic]. (Student Interview, Winson)

Because of the limited time, the general expectation is that the trainers and students alike will stick to "business talk" (as one student termed it) rather than open and honest communication.

The fourth and final organizational barrier to open and honest communication that appeared in the data related to disagreement. While Eloqi has no explicit rules against disagreeing with students, some trainers reported to me that they felt uncomfortable about openly sharing their own opinions when they went against the position that their students were taking. These trainers explained that they did not want to seem to challenge the students for fear of appearing rude or overbearing. As one trainer told me, "I can't be as frank with [students] because I know they are from a different culture, where if I say the wrong thing it might be interpreted wrongly." (Trainer interview, Delia) Even when disagreement can be approached in a sensitive, tactful way, trainers still feel that it can potentially detract from the ultimate goal of the lesson, which is for the students to improve their spoken English. As one trainer told me:

If we do disagree, we have to be very tactful about it, and be cognizant that the student is allowed to have their own opinion and our job is not to correct their opinion, our job is to correct their grammar. (Trainer interview, Tammy)

For this and the other three reasons outlined above, being perfectly open and honest, i.e. sharing thoughts and feelings sincerely and candidly, is not always seen as a viable communication act for the trainers when they are interacting with the Eloqi students.

As I have shown in this section, there are different kinds of open communication taking place in this community of practice. One type of open communication, that of the trainers giving the students honest feedback on their spoken English, is prescribed. Other types of open communication, such as students showing interest in the trainers, or sharing honest, personal information about themselves, is preferred. All of these types are, however, part of this community's speech code, what I call the Code of Logic. I now turn to the next element of the speech Code of Logic – that of being proactive.

Proactive

The next component of the Code of Logic that I will discuss is the trait of communicating proactively. To be proactive means to be in control, an actor rather than someone who is acted upon. A proactive person looks forward into the future and anticipates how situations will play out; this can help equip a person to act strategically and be in charge once a situation comes to pass. Being proactive is the opposite of reactive, which means to simply respond to a situation after the fact. Early on in the course of my fieldwork, I found that the Eloqi administrators expressed a strong interest in encouraging their learners to be “proactive.” In fact, the administrative team describes the development of a proactive stance in their learners as one of the company's important goals.

Eloqi's stance on the trait of being proactive was first illustrated to me during the online participant observation phase of my research. During this time a very animated discussion thread was initiated on the trainer forum, sparked by one trainer's critique of the lesson, “What do you dislike about ~?” In the discussion thread the trainer in question expressed her own strong dislike of what she saw as the tendency of students to produce rote answers in response to this question. She

also expressed her belief that, rather than making use of the language presented in the lessons to come up with genuine or creative answers, students were failing to share “what they really think.” Finally, she saw this as a failing on the part of administrators and trainers alike, who “should be teaching [students] how to say what they actually think” rather than how to recycle formulaic responses. Here is that trainer’s initial post:

[Students] always say that canned response about, "I don't like going to parties where I don't know anyone. I always have to say who I am and where I am from and what I do for a living." I don't like that. You know they don't really think that because they all say the same thing. We should be teaching them how to say what they actually think, not how to parrot back some canned response. They need to know how to talk about what they really think and experience, not some academic discussion of things you might possibly dislike... I would like to ask them questions that will get a more spontaneous and genuine response and help them to express what they really think
(Discussion forum)

Other trainers responded to this critique with the speculation that the students might not be confident enough to make up their own original statements, perhaps because of a cultural preference for agreeing with the lesson prompts. The administrators disagreed. One administrator responded that there was nothing in the structure of the lesson to prevent the students from disagreeing, i.e. giving their true opinions:

It's meant to be a semi-'natural' conversation. The students can show initiative. They CAN say "actually, there's nothing I don't like about parties at all - I love parties, everything about parties!" Maybe we can ADD some hints and tips to the preparation before connecting to trainer or at another point, to give the student more tips about using their initiative, and reminding them that the question is not forcing

them to list dislikes but prompting them to answer the question in a 'natural' way. (Discussion Forum)

What is interesting about this turn in the discussion is that while the administrator quoted above abnegated any obligation on the students' part – culturally motivated or not – to give canned answers, she did agree that students could be better encouraged and supported in their efforts to “[use] their initiative” in formulating answers to the discussion questions. Reaffirming this stance, the company's primary content developer, who was the last person to post to this discussion thread, wrote:

I think this all touches upon something that needs to be addressed in the courses a little more: The issue of initiative, and encouraging, teaching, the students to think for themselves a little bit more. ... The issue lies in the fact that they still expect to learn a set answer to a question or type of question that, in their minds, will make learning and performing, quicker and easier for them. ...As a next step, the Content Team will be adding an eliciting prompt for this particular lesson to help trainers encourage the student to speak more freely and naturally. This will help trainers to better encourage students to answer these types of questions, which are testing their ability to think more for themselves (Discussion forum)

As illustrated by the comments above, we can see that key Eloqi administrators showed a preference for using the lesson materials and the lessons themselves to foster students' “initiative,” and their ability to “think for themselves.” They and the trainers linked the development of students' initiative with their burgeoning ability to speak English “more freely and naturally,” and to give answers that sounded real and spontaneous, rather than canned. I will address this in more detail later on in this chapter.

Getting students to be proactive was also discussed in relation to two notable communication changes in the Eloqi CoP – the system-wide replacement of the term

“student” with the preferred “learner” and the introduction of a money-back guarantee to clients subscribing to the new Proven Formulas course. First, as regards the vocabulary switch, the use of the new term “learner” was introduced to the entire trainer community in January 2010. During a weekly trainer conference call, Eloqi’s administrators explained the change in terminology as, among other things, a more modern way to refer to independent (i.e. “not related to a school or university”) individuals of any age. Although Eloqi’s administrators did not cite any external sources when they explained this change to the trainers, there is a wealth of discussion on these terms to be found on the Internet. According to this larger discussion, the term student carries the assumption of a more passive, compliant, obedient approach to knowledge acquisition. A student relies heavily on packaged bits of knowledge, which s/he accepts without much further reflection. A student is someone who learns simply to achieve a specific goal or endpoint (such as passing the IELTS exam); once that goal has been reached, the learning stops abruptly. A learner, on the other hand, is someone who is self-determining and self-motivated, a person who wishes to acquire knowledge for the sake of developing new and ongoing skills. A learner takes in information, explores it with curiosity, and applies it in novel and creative ways. The learner sees no particular end in sight to her/his development. As stated in Eloqi’s trainer training materials, “The word ‘learner’ has the connotation of someone who is active and responsible for their studies.”

The re-framing of Eloqi’s students as “learners” was closely coupled with the second change – the deployment of a money-back guarantee to accompany subscriptions to the new Proven Formulas course. With this new guarantee, if learners did not achieve their target IELTS score after studying with Eloqi, they would be refunded the cost of their subscription. To be eligible for this money-back guarantee, the learners would have to agree to follow the company’s prescribed study method, taking a pre-determined number of courses, completing the preparations materials before each interaction, reviewing their feedback from the trainer, and doing any additional activities laid out by the company.

In one weekly trainer conference call, the lesson content developer described how the new “learner” terminology and the Proven Formulas course would work together to encourage the students to be more proactive about their own learning:

Everyone gets the general idea as to why it’s better we call the students learners. We just want to sound a bit more proactive in the new course. [The new course] may seem a little inflexible in terms of the prompts, and we’re quite strict about how you follow the prompts [but] we’re hoping in the future to free things up a little bit, but one of the points of this is to get Chinese learners to become more proactive and take more control of their own learning. [This] means leading the horse to water in a fairly strict path, which the formulas tend to do, compartmentalize the things we want to teach them.... So we have more structured lessons, clearer aims and goals laid out for the learners, so gradually we can start opening that up and getting learners to be more proactive... Again the learner/student thing is to try to push in this direction, to give the learner more of a sense of control of their learning, a sense of personal responsibility, so there’s a lot tied into these formulas. (WTCC meeting minutes)

As the above statement illustrates, the communicative acts of thinking for oneself, “being proactive,” “using one’s initiative,” “tak[ing] more control,” and having “a sense of personal responsibility” for one’s learning and development are highly valued in this CoP. Indeed, in the Eloqi CoP the quality of being proactive in and about one’s communication is being integrated into training that the learners are receiving.

In this CoP, the learners display the quality of being proactive in three key ways. First, learners show that they are proactive by following the company’s study cycle. Where once this was only preferred, it is now prescribed. Specifically, students are now required to take responsibility for preparing for, reviewing, and improving their performance on their lessons. As mentioned earlier, to be eligible for the money-back guarantee, learners must fulfill each of the required learning stages for

every lesson: i.e. complete the preparatory materials before starting the interaction with the trainer; engage in the interaction with the trainer in the required manner; review their work, especially the trainer-generated corrections and feedback, after the interaction is finished; and finally complete any additional exercises to gain further practice with the key language points. Before the implementation of the money-back guarantee, Eloqi only suggested completing these stages of the study cycle. As a result, some students seemed to cut corners by focusing primarily on the one-to-one interactions with their trainers, and leaving out the other steps. This often caused trouble during the interactions, and hindered students' development, as the trainer below described to me:

Today I had a student [who] was so ill prepared that I felt like I was teaching the lesson, everything from pronunciation to grammar. I spent a lot of time just typing and making mark spots for her and explaining, and we didn't really get a chance to do the lesson thoroughly. At the end of the session I felt frustrated, but I felt like you know what, if she goes back and looks at the feedback she will be prepared for the next lesson, [but] she didn't. *((laughs))* She didn't because the next tutor commented about maybe a half hour afterwards saying that this student wasn't prepared and it was very frustrating working with her, it was like a train wreck. So, it was really very sad, but you can't get far with students like that until our High Scoring Team speaks with them. (Trainer interview, Reena)

Now, what with the re-framing of students as learners, and the added obligations that went along with the money-back guarantee, Eloqi's clients (learners) were placed in a position where they had to take greater responsibility for their own learning and development by following the study cycle. The outward signs of being compliant with this would be a demonstration of actively utilizing the trainers' feedback to speak better English. As the trainer above noted, when learners do not make use of the feedback that they receive, trainer report this to the supervisory team, who in turn reports the student's negligence to Eloqi's customer service team

(the High Scoring Team, or HST). By enforcing the four stages of the lesson cycle, the company has thus shifted a large degree of liability and responsibility to the learners, pushing them to take charge and be held accountable for their own performance.

The second way in which learners may display the trait of communicating proactively is to ask their trainers questions, or otherwise seek out additional or supplementary information during their lessons. Because of time constraints, the queries “what questions do you have?” or “do you have any questions?” are not written into the trainer scripts and are almost never used by the trainer team. Furthermore in most lessons, which are strictly controlled in terms of time allotment, there will seldom be an opportunity for students to ask a question. As one trainer told me, “we just don’t have time to address [questions]. We just have time for the actual material, and to get through the lesson because everything is planned and structured so correctly, that you know there’s not a lot of extra time.” (Trainer interview, Essie) Because of this, when a student does ask a trainer a question, it is a notable occasion, and is generally considered by the trainers to be a sign of a highly proactive student. As a trainer told me:

Only within the past six weeks am I really having a lot of learners who will stop me and ask ‘OK, is it OK for me to say this? Would this sound right if I said it this way?’ which is way cool. I think that is just awesome when they do that, because it’s a commitment to step outside the box of the lesson and put their own spin on things.

(Trainer interview, Reena)

In Reena’s own words, for a learner to ask a question and seek additional information is a strong sign of “a commitment to step outside the box of the lesson and put their own spin on things,” i.e. it is a sign of being proactive.

Finally, a learner’s ability to be proactive is highlighted in the final section of the Proven Formulas lessons, called “Bringing it all together.” In this section, the learners have to combine all of the key language points as well as the logical order

presented to them in the lesson, using them to answer discussion questions in a cohesive, more fully developed fashion than in the other sections of the lesson²⁶. This final section is seen by the administrators and trainers as challenging, even difficult, since the learners are not accustomed either to “thinking on their feet” or utilizing “native speaker logic,” and because their previous language training has emphasized “memorization” rather than the creative use of language building blocks. (Eloqi trainer training module, “LQ IELTS Formulas”) As one trainer, speaking about the Proven Formulas lesson suite, told me, “I think the lessons are more free form, there’s actually fewer directions (and) it’s asking the Chinese learners to be much more proactive, and that’s really hard for them.” (Trainer interview, Iris)

As illustrated in this section, communicating in a proactive way is seen as a positive quality in the Eloqi CoP. By the same token, not being proactive, or being reliant on others to develop one’s English speaking proficiency is frowned upon. In this CoP, the administrators and trainers encourage their learners to be proactive about developing their communication skills. Following the company’s study cycle, utilizing the feedback and corrections that one receives, taking responsibility for one’s own learning, asking questions where appropriate, showing that you can “think on your feet” by constructing creative, original answers to discussion questions – all of these things mark an Eloqi learner as “proactive,” and thus help the company fulfill one of its primary communication goals vis-à-vis its customers. This leads us to the next component of the Eloqi CoP’s Code of Logic – that of producing communication that is free and spontaneous rather than “canned”.

Free and Spontaneous (Not Canned)

“Canned” is a term that came up in the Eloqi CoP to describe some students’ speech during their interactions with trainers, or their speech during an IELTS oral

²⁶ As I will show in later sections of this chapter, students are also encouraged to do this in a spontaneous, creative way.

examination. For the Eloqi trainers and administrators, “canned” communication is that which is memorized, written out word-for-word, and/or read aloud rather than produced in the moment of communication. Canned speech sounds rote, pre-prepared and rehearsed rather than free, spontaneous, or extemporaneous. The trainers perceive canned communication as unoriginal on various levels. In some cases, canned speech is unoriginal because it comes from a source other than the person engaging in it, such as the training materials, a friend, or another person. Consider the following excerpt from my fieldnotes, in which a trainer complains of a student producing answers that sound “canned,” possibly because she is having her speech “fed” to her from another source:

When I return to the chat room Iris is mentioning a weird call with a student. Iris says ‘there was always a delay and then she would either give me a mangled answer missing a verb or an answer that sounded canned. Anyone else encounter this? Maybe someone is there with her and feeding her answers. (Fieldnotes)

As the trainer above intimates when she wonders if “someone is there with her and feeding her answers,” canned speech involves little or no independent analysis or context-specific thought on the part of the speaker. In the case of the above excerpt, canned speech is unoriginal. In other cases, canned speech may indeed be drafted by the speaker, but by being pre-prepared the speech is not truly tailored to the real communication situation in which it is utilized, which detracts from its originality.

In the Eloqi community of practice the communication strategy of using “canned” speech is viewed very negatively. Memorizing material and providing canned answers are frowned upon; they are seen as inactive or passive communication strategies – the opposite of what a proactive speaker would do. Put differently, canned speech is a cop-out, since it takes less skill to prepare perfect speech ahead of time than it does to produce it on the spur of the moment. In fact, for the trainers, canned speech is cause for complaint; in fact, if a learner is perceived to be producing canned speech, the trainers are obliged to report this to their supervisors:

The supervisor must be contacted immediately if the following occurs: Learner read answers from a piece of paper or has clearly memorized the answers (Training materials)

When trainers report a student for using canned speech, the company's supervisors will in turn contact the customer service team, who will then contact the learner for consultation aimed at correcting the learner's approach to the lessons. The following excerpt from a discussion thread on the trainer forum is an example of this process. In it an administrator relates a report on one student (Clevin) who had been producing canned monologues:

Clevin [was] repeating [material] verbatim. [He was] cautioned [by two trainers] not to read [answers out]. He admitted [to the customer service team] that normally he prepared the monologue 2 or 3 times before connecting with a trainer, then on the interaction he would recite it. It was not a good way to study English. HST has given him some suggestions: don't write the monologue in advance and then read it on the paper, because it isn't helpful. If you [trainers] connect with Clevin and find him still reading, tell him directly that it won't help with his English improvement. For the monologue, he only needs to prepare the main points ahead of time. He should organize his thoughts on the spot. (Discussion forum)

As we can see, canned speech is rejected as an unhelpful, even detrimental approach to communication in this community, and it is not sanctioned for Eloqi's learners to engage in it. Directives to this end are actively circulated in the Eloqi CoP across the spectrum of roles.

It can be difficult for students in this community to produce spontaneous speech, although the company administrators would argue that that is precisely what the lessons are designed to help them do. Recall that the learners, who must complete the company-provided preparation materials before their lessons, receive sets of phrases, vocabulary words, and explicit "logical orders" in which they must

phrase their answers. Nevertheless, despite being provided with a considerable amount of material that they could simply adopt verbatim, the learners are expected to apply the language material in a natural and original way, and not just “parrot back” words, phrases, ideas, or dialogue. To produce non-canned speech, Eloqi’s learners must therefore hone their abilities to “think on their feet” and “think for themselves.” (Eloqi trainer training module)

Another aspect of producing spontaneous speech involves putting one’s thoughts and experiences into one’s own original words. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from my fieldnotes. This exchange took place during a live discussion in the trainer chat room one evening when I was working:

- Trainer Students often use their own pre-prepared answers.
- Admin Yes, they do. Trainers can guide students, and try to get them to come up with their own answers.
- Trainer I have to remind them even from language step one.

What the trainer and administrator are getting at in the excerpt above is that part of what makes communication sound natural (i.e. not canned) is the degree to which it is made up of words, sentences, and ideas that come from oneself, i.e. it is composed of one’s own words, not another’s. Additionally, the learners must be able to spontaneously produce unique, or personal speech about themselves. As one student interviewee told me:

Eloqi students should not memorize the material because the IELTS trainers and examiners will be able to tell if the answer is a memorized one instead of a “personal” one. The personal element of [your] answer is quite important. (Student interview, Jennifer)

That is, non-canned communication highlights what is unique and individual about the speaker. As Eloqi administrators told trainers to advise their students, “when talking with your examiner, you should say something about yourself, especially interesting things, instead of memorizing answers from others.” (WTCC fieldnotes)

In this way, Eloqi's learners should ideally capture the interest of their listeners; they speak in a non-canned fashion by being appealingly imaginative, inventive, and unique, and they should be able to speak about their own personal interests and experiences.

Free and spontaneous communication is valued all the more in the Eloqi CoP because it is seen as challenging to produce. First, it requires more work on the part of the speaker, who has to expend more effort to produce it than they would need to recite a rote answer. Second, the highly structured nature of the Eloqi lesson material, the trainer-student interactions, and the IELTS exam is thought to lend itself better to copying rather than to the creative production of original speech. As one student reported to me, "The trainers all knew very clearly what [the IELTS exam] was like. They made it clear. But that was also a disadvantage. You and they both knew very well the structure and the expected questions, so you might concentrate on the preparation for it and not be very creative." (Student interview, Cassie)

Because free and spontaneous speech is valued and difficult to produce, the Eloqi learners who do successfully generate it are marked as especially ambitious, passionate and dedicated, especially when their speech is highly unique and/or creative:

As far as I can remember [my students] have given very canned answers [to a particular lesson] as well. It feels like they have the answers written and they're reading them. In fact I think the answers some have given are in their training scenarios and they're just memorizing that. Of course that's not every student. I had a couple of passionate ones who really seem to be trying to elaborate and give colorful responses. I think it's fear. It's easy to repeat what you've heard and it's harder to make your own sentences because there's a bigger chance you'll mess up. (Discussion forum)

Finally, non-canned communication is seen as absolutely essential to getting a good score on the IELTS. One of my student interviewees spoke to me at length on this:

I think I'm the lucky person to find the right way to speak English.... I memorized some answers and sentences for the first time IELTS examination. I thought it's enough to handle the examination, but the speaking score is just 4.5 so- the second time I memorized, I memorized some sentences and some dialogue from the reference books but I just tell them- talk with the interviewer in a different way, the way is taught by the [LQ] trainer. I hear the- I hear the questions and I just think about how to answer this question in my own word. Those questions, those answers I didn't met before, so I have nothing to answer, I just answered the questions from my first reaction, just tell him what I know... Yeah, I used the, uh some words, some strategies from LQ English like uh, the order of your answer, and some connection words, I just answered the question step by step.... I think the way is different from Chinese. I just feel the- I just answer the question. I think the LQ English is- it didn't teach me what to answer, but how to answer the question.... I need to answer the questions in a different way in English, so the LQ English trainer just told me the right way in English to answer the question. (Student interview, Ming)

Ultimately, the Eloqi administrators believe that all of their clients, like Ming above, can and will develop the ability to produce non-canned speech, provided that they follow the Eloqi study procedure and get enough practice in, which leads to the next component of the Code of Logic: positivity.

Positive and Supportive

The final component of the Eloqi CoP's code of communication conduct that I will describe is the quality of being positive and supportive in one's communication. In the context of the Eloqi CoP, I use positive and supportive to mean the qualities of

being constructive and affirmative in one's speech, displaying affirmation, and focusing on what is good and/or beneficial. Being positive and supportive here also includes having a can-do attitude, being encouraging and sympathetic, and giving one's conversation partner help and assistance. In the Eloqi CoP, trainers as well as students are expected to be positive and supportive in their communication in different ways, which I will describe below.

The Eloqi trainers routinely engage in positive communication during their lessons with the students; indeed, this is an expected behavior. Recall that many students are characterized as being very nervous about speaking with the Eloqi trainers, particularly since this may be their first time in their lives that they have any regular one-to-one with a foreigner. Recall too that as per the company's rules, a large portion of any given lesson involves the trainer correcting the student's mistakes and offering constructive feedback to the students so that they can improve their spoken English. While corrections are highly valued by Eloqi's students, administrators and trainers alike express the belief that corrections must be tempered with praise in order to maintain a constructive and affirmative atmosphere. Without praise and positive reaffirmation, administrators and trainers feel that students would become de-motivated in their efforts to learn. This point is illustrated in the excerpts below:

If we overload them with too much criticism and too much to work on, they won't have the opportunity to overcome the major errors and come back to work on the minor ones. They will give up. ENCOURAGE! (Discussion Forum)

Feedback [that focuses on the negative] comes across as harsh and is destructive to Learner morale. It reinforces a "This is too hard"/"I can't do this"/"English is not fun" type of mentality. Obviously learners are going to make mistakes and pointing out errors that they might be corrected is an important part of what we as Trainers do. However, this should be done in as supportive a manner as possible. (Discussion Forum)

It is very easy to find lots of little faults with almost every student, but I believe that confidence covers a multitude of errors. If the student loses confidence and gives up, all the correction in the world is worthless. When a student has a lot of little errors (or even a lot of big ones) I try to pick out the one or two most repeated ones to concentrate on. I choose the ones that consistently make a difference in being able to understand what the student is trying to say. I mention the others lightly or not at all, and always find something to praise the student for sincerely. (Discussion Forum)

Nina is feeling down lately with her speaking. ... Nina needs her spirits boosted also. When I correct her, I try to tell her what she needs improvement on, but I add but "you are doing great with your...." She is taking our corrections as all negative and for some reason is not hearing anything positive.... I think we can really help her if we can balance out positive, as well as things she needs to work on. (Discussion Forum)

Because of this perceived need for positive feedback, there is a rule in the community that trainers must be encouraging and supportive as part of the effort to foster and maintain a positive outlook in the students. This is clearly and explicitly laid out in the company materials, as in the examples below:

Your role as a trainer: it is essential that you are encouraging, professional and friendly from the outset (remember learner may be nervous). (Eloqi trainer training module)

Sound happy, friendly and supportive. We want to give learners the best impression (Eloqi trainer training module)

The feedback should be positive, and negative words should be avoided. Give the students encouragement and admit that they are making progress. (WTCC meeting minutes)

Be encouraging – give praise where praise is due. (WTCC meeting minutes)

The Learning Environment [should be a] comfortable confidence-building learning environment; [students can be] confident in learning from mistakes and getting constructive corrections; [create] a friendly, professional and safe atmosphere; [create] a supportive atmosphere (Eloqi trainer training module)

At the same time, the trainers are expected to be honest in their communication. That is, they should not forsake sincerity for the sake of being supportive. Specifically, the trainers' praise should not be blind, meaning that it should not be indiscriminating, or ladled out just for the sake of making students feel good. Additionally, "over praise" is discouraged. In this community, the trainers' praise must be honest, sincere, and true:

Trainers are doing a great job of creating a comfortable learning environment for the students, but be aware that (most especially for IELTS topics) blind praise should be avoided. Telling a student that they are doing a great job when in fact they are making tons of grammatical and pronunciation errors for example really doesn't help them. Instead, be supportive but also be sure to inform them of where they might need to focus more in their studies. For example, "It's great that you're incorporating metaphor but there's a better way to say that." (Discussion forum)

How can trainer help with converting trial student to sign-up for our service? For trainers it is not always necessary to tell the students "you did a good job". Even to the students whose English is fine, we can tell them that they need more practice and need to improve their fluency. Encourage students to do more practice. (WTCC meeting minutes)

[It is a] weakness [when the] trainer verges into over-praise. (Eloqi trainer training materials)

So, first of all the speaking evaluation, as well as any other lesson we give, should be a positive experience for the student. It should leave the student wanting to come back for another lesson. To achieve this we as Trainers need to be relaxed, friendly and helpful. This doesn't mean to tell the student everything they're doing/saying is correct, but that any explanations, clarifications or corrections should be given freely and patiently. (Discussion forum)

In this way, trainers are expected to be honest and genuine in their praise, which relates back to the “open” component of the speech Code of Logic described earlier.

As the above excerpts illustrate, in this community positivity, supportiveness and praise go along with a can-do attitude. One overriding belief at Eloqi is that students who sign up for the company's services can and will use them to improve their English, and this belief is a strong force in shaping the trainer-student communication. It is the foundation of one of the trainers' primary roles: that of helper or guide, a supportive coach who reassures students of their potential and helps them navigate the complex path towards their goals.

[I try to create] an atmosphere of trust, of positive reinforcement, that they will feel comfortable even if they make a mistake, so they won't feel shy about answering a question, even if they are not quite sure how to answer it, um I would like them to feel that I truly am there to help them, and not to mock them, if you know what I mean. That the service I'm providing is one that is for their betterment, in terms of them learning English. (Trainer interview, Beth)

From our learner success stories we've heard, one of the repeating themes is that after studying with us, learners have confidence. As a trainer you are providing the learner with this special experience and

we need to make sure that we are patient, encouraging, and give constructive feedback to let them know how we can help them reach their target. (WTCC meeting minutes)

We're supposed to be creating a safe environment for them to make mistakes, and to be welcomed, and to feel like they can try things out, and that we won't stomp all over them as they are figuring out how to speak. You're not there to discourage or smash down the ego of your student. You're there to encourage them and to provide a safe and helpful learning environment, and not to crush them, or to make them feel dumb, or make them feel incapable. (Trainer interview, Iris)

I think what I try to do when I'm training is allow a student to feel good about what they are doing. Whether they've made a mistake or not, that I know they are trying. And both in what I say to them in the live 15 minutes and then in my feedback, um you know praising their enthusiasm, and their energy, their wonderful ideas and opinions, and simply saying that the more they interact with native speakers the easier it will become to get all those wonderful ideas and opinions into English. And just trying to um, encourage- you know I have always felt that positive reinforcement is a better way to get any student to learn. (Trainer interview, Beth)

In this community, mistakes are cast as indicators of where students can improve, and the students themselves are seen as individuals moving forward on their own personal trajectories of learning and development. Indeed, ideas of knowledge acquisition and continual improvement go along with the terminology of "learner" since inherent to it is a focus on the act of learning, i.e. gaining knowledge and skills. When students feel discouraged or down on themselves, or doubt their ability to move forward, the trainers show empathy and understanding, and use those moments to build up students' confidence in themselves. In this way, the trainers

use positive reassurance to help refocus the students' attention on their achievements and/or their potential to succeed.

Don't be discouraged because you made mistakes! That is MY JOB – helping you learn and OVERCOME your mistakes. (Discussion forum)

If you feel a student is overwhelmed or stressed and wants to hang up be encouraging. Explain you want to help them and will take things at a slower pace. If you can get them to relax you will get them to move on and make a better attempt at the questions (Discussion forum)

Hi All, the student who goes by the name Lili has sparked lots of commentary in the chat lately.... If you haven't had much interaction with Lili, note that she's taking her language studies EXTREMELY seriously and is studying for hours at a stretch. So if she sounds a bit tense, try to imagine how you would feel if you'd studied the same subject ALL DAY (sometimes at the expense of a day at work) I admire her tenacity.... Anyway, in addition to sharing your thoughts on helping Lili, please remember to be generous with encouragement when giving her feedback. If ever anyone needed a language-learning friend it's our Lili. (Discussion forum)

[Lili] was one of those individuals who I will never forget. To me, it was always nice to try to cheer her up and try to encourage her as much as I can. I felt, at times, like a cheerleader and sometimes more like a pushy teacher, trying to get her to relax and do what I told her to do. I enjoyed talking to her because I knew there was a cheery woman there somewhere who tried very hard. (Discussion forum)

Trainers thus maintain a constructive, affirmative atmosphere in which there is never any doubt that, provided they follow the company's study guide, students can and will develop their English speaking skills. Through this type of positive, supportive, communication, the trainers foster a can-do approach to language

learning. This is an atmosphere in which the community members express strong beliefs about the students' ability to attain their speaking goals, along with the necessary skills to do so.

For their part, students are also encouraged to engage in positive communication. As illustrated in the excerpts above, trainers and administrators appreciate it when students show an enthusiastic can-do attitude, and continually keep trying. Additionally, there is evidence that trainers prefer students to focus on the good things that happen to them, the good qualities that they have, their achievements, and their positive potential. In one forum discussion, for example, which I mentioned in a previous section, trainers discussed and debated how to frame a lesson on expressing dislikes, which a few trainers critiqued because it seemed "very negative." As one trainers commented,

I did the "What don't you like about X?" lesson again yesterday and I felt depressed by the end of it. The student didn't seem happy and she was telling me all these things she doesn't like. It seemed to bring her down, or feed into her unhappiness. (Discussion forum)

Another trainer, who felt that the "What don't you like about X?" lesson was fine as it was, responded,

I never had a problem with these questions [about dislikes]. I saw them as a way to help our students voice their dislikes in an appropriate manner. Sometimes when you try to say something negative in a new language you can sound strange and out of touch...or TOO negative. So these questions allow them to practice taking a contrarian view of some typically "positive" activities. I try to lighten the question at the end, by adding that there are some nice things too...if the student seems overly negative or depressed. (Discussion forum)

What is interesting about this particular exchange is the fact that the trainers on both sides of the debate expressed the opinion that students engaging in negative

(or “too negative”) speech about themselves was not comfortable or fitting in the trainer-learner interactions. I also saw this belief expressed in the chat room. For example, one evening when I was working a shift, a trainer described an interaction that she had with a student who had “dissed” himself and his choice of college majors. In her live report to her training supervisor and the other trainers in the chat room, she described how she had responded to this student’s negative self-portrayal:

I usually take a minute to explore the good things about [the topic of conversation] and help [students] reframe their response more positively. I explain to them that they don’t have to use brutal honesty. It is better to present themselves in a positive light both for the impression they make and how they feel about themselves and their accomplishments. ... I am talking about when the student says [something like] ‘my scores weren’t good enough’ or ‘I wasn’t smart enough.’ One student told me he only chose Journalism [as a major] because he wasn’t smart enough to do anything else. I helped him to see that there are positive things about journalism... He understood the importance of not dissing himself, his major, and perhaps innocent bystanders.... He needed to hear that.... And I really think it is important for them to present themselves positively. It makes a first impression and it sets the tone for the whole interview.

(Fieldnotes)

Even beyond making a good impression, positive talk is seen as a useful tool in getting students to relax and feel comfortable, as this trainer told me in an interview:

I just try to get them talking about things that are positive for themselves, and get them talking about themselves, and even their future goals and dreams and kind of like why are you working so hard, what are you trying to achieve. You know what’s your dream,

so I think that helps them to feel really comfortable. (Trainer Interview, Nelly)

Being positive about students also applies to the trainers, who are asked to maintain a “Learner Supportive Environment.” As part of doing this, trainers can discuss students, but should do so in a positive, forward-thinking way:

While it is encouraged that Trainers share their learner experiences and discuss the needs of learners in the chat, please keep any such discussion positive and constructive to the advancement of the learner's abilities. We are all here to help our learners achieve their goals, not to be disparaging behind the scenes. (Discussion forum)

This positive, supportive atmosphere, filled with encouragement and sincere praise, is certainly noted by Eloqi's students and stands out for them as one of the unique communicative features of the learning community that the company has created. All of the students who I interviewed, as well as many satisfied students who have provided feedback and testimony to the company, have described how their lessons with the Eloqi trainers were remarkably positive and encouraging:

Over the duration of her LQ course, Jennifer met about 5 LQ trainers. She was impressed at how they all encouraged her to speak English; they consistently gave her words of encouragement, which Jennifer feels is very important in her efforts at studying and improving her English. (Student interview notes, Jennifer)

I think the most important things is uh they give me the courage to open my mouth um, and uh give me a chance to say what I want to say. (Student interview, Wing)

I think I can realize my English is very poor but the trainers always encourage me, though I always made some mistakes, but they can tell me to express it in another way, in a better way. (Student interview, Winson)

Thanks to the platform provided by LQ, which gave me a chance to communicate with lots of nice trainers. They had very good pronunciation, and were all patient and responsible. LQ English was very professional, the trainers were extremely enthusiastic, and the whole team was extremely united, and they all gave me a lot of help.” (WTCC meeting minutes)

From our learner success stories we’ve heard, one of the repeating themes is that after studying with us, learners have confidence. As a trainer you are providing the learner with this special experience and we need to make sure that we are patient, encouraging, and give constructive feedback to let them know how we can help them reach their target. (WTCC meeting minutes)

I think LQ trainers don’t give up on any student. (Discussion forum)

In this way, the Eloqi strategy of having trainers create a positive and supportive atmosphere for the students does seem to be both noted and appreciated by its clients, i.e. the learners in this CoP.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This concludes my description of the Code of Logic, the speech code that members of the Eloqi community of practice utilize in their interactions with one another. To summarize, in this chapter I showed that Eloqi’s administrators, trainers, and learners reference, reify, and draw upon a speech code – one which I named the Code of Logic – in their interactions with one another. I described the key components of this speech code. These components include the key symbolic terms “native” and “English logic,” as well as a system of six interrelated rules, premises, and norms, which I articulated as the following: (1) the speech of the Eloqi learners should be clearly organized; (2) the learners should speak succinctly; (3a) the trainers should be open and honest in their feedback to the students; (3b) it is an added benefit if the learners are open and honest in their communication with

the trainers; (4) the learners should be proactive; (5) ideally the speech produced by the learners in this community should be spontaneous rather than “canned”; (6a) the trainers should be positive and supportive towards the learners; and (6b) the learners should frame themselves in a positive light. I now turn to a brief discussion of how the Code of Logic operates as part of a larger cultural system; how these data support propositions 6 and 3 of Speech Codes Theory; and what it means to learn a speech code, in this case the Code of Logic.

The Code of Logic is Part of a Larger Cultural System

The Code of Logic is part of a larger cultural system. That there is a speech code in use in this community implies that there must be a larger culture, i.e. “a socially constructed and historically transmitted pattern of symbols, meanings, premises and rules” (Philipsen, 1992, p. 7) at play in the Eloqi community of practice. This culture, which I have shown to be situated and particular, is both manifested in and expressed through its speech code, the Code of Logic. In keeping with the theoretical assumptions of speech codes theory, I have not heretofore equated Eloqi’s larger cultural structures with a particular nationality, ethnicity, geographic origin, or political bent (Philipsen, 1997), nor do I do so now. It is interesting, however, to note that some elements of the Code of Logic are similar to other codes, mostly U.S. American ones, studied by other researchers, including ethnographers of communication.

Take, for example, the rule that trainers and students should be open and honest in their communication (albeit in different ways). This rule relates strongly to other communication rules described in research conducted by Katriel and Philipsen (1981) and Carbaugh (1988) on U.S. American ways of speaking. Katriel and Philipsen’s article on local North American definitions of “communication” correlates feelings of connection and intimacy with openness. Likewise Carbaugh’s extensive analysis of the “Donahue” talk show reveals the profound ways in which the U.S. American show’s hosts, guests, and audience value the quality of “openness,” characterized by Carbaugh in the following way:

When self is open, its personal qualities become accessible in conversation, its disclosures are unfettered by external constraints. This is speech where one is both aware and expressive about who one is; one is 'open and honest,' direct and truthful. When one is open in communication...one's thoughts, needs, feelings, and problems become potential resources of discursive concern. Communication means...not only being open about one's self, but also open to the self of others. Open communication involves a willingness to listen to other's thoughts, needs, feelings, and problems. Being open to others involves a proper respect for them, for their rights as persons. Openness in speech implies that each participant in communication has equal access to such valued discursive resources. As a result, communication is a cooperative medium for self-presentation, self-validation, and self-respect. ... Closed speech...as invoked through the terms 'normal chit-chat and mere talk,' involves speech in which self or other valued information is not made available. Certain boundaries and barriers are said to operate in such speech which render this information inaccessible. Speech that is closed is speech where important informational needs such as one's and others self go unmet. (pp. 157-158)

The ways in which Katriel, Philipsen, and Carbaugh's informants not only describe but also place high value on the qualities of being open and honest in their communication is consistent with what Eloqi trainers and students reported to me, as illustrated in their quotes and my analysis earlier in this chapter. This also goes in hand with the Eloqi community's value of being positive and supportive in their communication. Specifically, I showed in my analysis how trainers must communicate positivity and support towards their clients (the students), while the students are also encouraged to cultivate a can-do attitude not only towards their own progress as English speakers but also towards their identities as language learners. This runs very consistently with observations made by Ehrenreich (2009)

as well as Katriel and Philipsen's informants on the value of communication (in North American society) as a vehicle for developing a "positive self-image" through "supportive communication." (1981, p. 304) Another parallel between the Code of Logic and other North American codes is the emphasis placed on being proactive. As described earlier in this chapter, Eloqi's administrators and trainers value the students' displays of using their initiative, thinking for themselves, and taking charge of their own learning. What's more, they actively train students to do these things. This seems related to the U.S. American value of individual self-reliance (both emotional and economic) described by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1996) and Varenne (1977) in their studies on U.S. American life. Finally, recall the Eloqi community members' strong preference for spontaneous speech (rather than "canned" speech), which is one-of-a-kind, personal speech that highlights what is uniquely individual about the speaker. This preference seems to be consistent with research done on the Nacirema (i.e. American) value of using speech "to express one's psychological uniqueness" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 6), also elucidated in Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1996), Carbaugh (1988, 2005), and Katriel and Philipsen (1981).

Given its similarities to the North American speech codes mentioned here, it would be plausible to make a connection between the Eloqi Code of Logic and the larger cultural communication norms of Eloqi's U.S. American founders and its U.S. American trainers. In fact, I suspect that the Code of Logic and the regulation that its use accomplishes are even just as strongly connected with Eloqi's unique organizational culture. To reiterate, as researcher employing speech codes theory I have not presumed that because the Eloqi trainers are U.S. Americans and the Eloqi students are Chinese, they must necessarily use different or clashing codes. On the contrary, I have shown that there is one predominant speech code used by Eloqi's community members to regulate their own and one another's communication. The important thing here is that there is a larger cultural system at play, and it shapes the communication being modeled, taught, and preferred in the Eloqi community of practice.

The Code of Logic and Proposition 6 of Speech Codes Theory

The second implication of the analysis presented in this chapter relates directly to speech codes theory. Specifically, I maintain that my analysis provides evidence and support for proposition six. Proposition six states that:

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.

(Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 63)

Phrased differently, proposition six of speech codes theory holds that a speech code can be strategically, deliberately, and/or effectively used by speakers to regulate, influence or control their own or another's communicative behavior. This can happen three main ways, as described in Philipsen et al:

(1) social actors use speech codes to label, interpret, explain, evaluate, justify, and shape their own and others' communicative actions; (2) when social actors use shared speech codes to frame their efforts to shape the conduct of others, such use is effective in shaping the responses of others; and (3) the rhetorical force of speech codes is contingent on the coherence, social legitimacy, and rhetorically artful use of the code so employed." (2005, p. 65)

As I have shown throughout this chapter, Eloqi's administrators and trainers call upon a code of communicative conduct – one that they explicitly label as both "native" and "logical" – when they explain and demonstrate how students in this community ought to talk. Eloqi's administrators and trainers cite elements of the Code of Logic to lend authority to their corrections. The code is also cited as a means of validating particular ways of speaking. In this way, the Code of Logic is used to persuade the students of the best (*most native, most logical*) way of speaking. Eloqi's trainers also use the Code of Logic to predict (sometimes accurately, sometimes not) how students will respond to their questions and elicitation. In my analysis, I also offered evidence of how, after using Eloqi's

services, students can explicitly cite some of elements of the Code of Logic, and name their use (being succinct and not “beating around the bush”; organizing their speech into a clear beginning, middle and end) as a means of hopefully predicting how others (the teachers, the IELTS examiners) will respond to them. Furthermore, the trainers use the code to explain how best to talk, and how native speakers talk. Finally, I provided evidence of how Eloqi’s students also validate this code in their observations and evaluations of the training that they receive as consumers of Eloqi’s services.

This is not to say that citing a code of communicative conduct will necessarily induce the desired communicative conduct in one’s conversation partner. I hope I have conveyed in this chapter how much communication work Eloqi’s members engage in as they continually monitor and maintain the Code of Logic. Furthermore, as I will show in Chapter 7 of this dissertation, there are numerous examples in my data set of interactions that do not proceed smoothly, or go off kilter, or are otherwise beset by procedural problems. Consistent with Philipsen et al (2005) I have shown that while a speech code can be artfully used to exert a kind of persuasive force on a fellow speaker, it does not determine how others will respond. Eloqi’s trainers discuss and challenge elements of the code, just as Eloqi’s students may disagree with the Code of Logic or choose not to make use of it. However, in this tightly regulated organizational atmosphere, the decision to flout a code of communicative conduct can have serious consequences, as I will discuss more fully in Chapters 6 and 7. For now, suffice to say that while codes of communicative conduct in general, and the Code of Logic in particular, do not exert a deterministic force on the people who make use of them, they do have a demonstrable force in the communication of their users. In the present study, I have shown how the Code of Logic is a resource used by the Eloqi administrators, trainers and students to control, predict, and evaluate communication as they navigate their interactions with one another.

The Code of Logic and Proposition 3 of Speech Codes Theory

The third implication of my analysis also relates to speech codes theory, and offers evidence and support for another proposition; namely proposition three. Proposition three of speech codes theory states that "a speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric." (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 61) What this means is that

...the elements of a speech code implicate more than communicative conduct narrowly conceived; they also implicate meanings about human nature (psychology), social relations (sociology), and strategic conduct (rhetoric). Specifically, wherever there is a situated vocabulary in use that pertains to communicative conduct (e.g., terms for talk), or a situated system of premises or rules pertaining to communicative conduct, there can be found in these situated vocabularies and systems of premises and rules, symbols and meanings...aspects of the nature of persons, social relations, and the role of communicative conduct in linking persons in social relations." (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 61. See also Carbaugh, 1995 and Philipsen, 1992.)

In my data, as I have shown throughout this chapter, I found evidence that the Code of Logic implicated community members' psychology, sociology, and rhetoric, as defined by Philipsen et al (2005). When my informants (administrators, trainers, and students alike) described good and effective communication; when they told me about the "ideal trainer" or "ideal learner" in this environment; when I observed how they were expected to orient towards one another, or how they expected others to orient towards them; in all of these cases Eloqi's community members were essentially saying something about personhood, social relations, and strategic communicative conduct.

In terms of psychology (what a person is and what the notion of personhood entails), I have shown that the Code of Logic involves the qualities of being proactive

in one's learning and development; open and honest in one's communication; and creative and spontaneous in one's speech. In terms of sociology (how a person should connect to or relate with others in the group) I illustrated how the Code of Logic promotes relations of positivity and support, in which the administrators and trainers universally frame the learners as having the potential to speak the native speech being taught in the community. Indeed, the learners themselves are expected to frame themselves in a positive light. In this community there are no hopeless cases, no students for whom native speech is an unattainable goal. Finally, in terms of rhetoric (how communication can and should be used strategically to obtain particular outcomes) I have shown that the Code of Logic involves speaking in an organized and succinct fashion. Taken as a whole the entire Code of Logic implicates a high-level communicative strategy for speaking (and even thinking) like a native (defined locally), which should help Eloqi's clients to successfully pass the IELTS exam. In learning the Code of Logic, Eloqi's clients (its students) are not only being trained to communicate in a certain type of way – they are learning to project a certain type of persona. This leads me to the fourth and final implication of this chapter.

To Learn a Speech Code is to Learn a Way of Being in the World

Eloqi's students are learning more than English language proficiency skills or tips and tricks for successfully passing the IELTS exam – they are learning a code of communicative conduct, which involves a way of being and interacting in the world. This is so because

[a speech code] marks off a universe of meaning and supplies a system of interpretive resources with which interlocutors can make sense with each other. And in terms of answering questions of ultimate meaning, in terms of providing individuals and societies with ways to answer questions about why they exist and where they fit in a scheme of sense and meaning, a code of speaking provides the

resources for creating a sense of coherence and form. (Philipsen, 1992, p. 16)

In the case of the Eloqi community of practice, the speech code in question, i.e. the Code of Logic, is being taught through the implicit and explicit instructions that the students are given; the speech modeled for them in their lessons; the directed feedback they receive from trainers and administrators; and the procedural expectations in this environment. This code of communicative conduct, the Code of Logic, is marked as both “native” and “logical” English. It entails producing, using, and responding to speech that is clearly organized, succinct, open and honest, proactive, spontaneous rather than canned, and positive and supportive. It provides Eloqi’s clients with a set of symbolic resources that answer questions about how to be in the world, how to present oneself, how to frame what one knows, how to come across in a certain idealized way, and how to successfully and productively interact with others. It is thus far more than simply language that is being learned in the Eloqi community. Put differently,

People use culture to learn how to be, or become, particular kinds of persons. Such self-forming utilizes symbolic resources provided by the wider culture. Through experience with symbols, people learn desires, moods, habits of thought and feeling that no one person could invent on her own. (Swidler, 2001, p. 72)

As I have demonstrated here, Eloqi’s students are learning about, drawing upon, testing out, and co-creating a cultural resource. I also acknowledge, of course, the important language proficiency work being done in the Eloqi CoP, through which Eloqi’s students do come away with important knowledge and skills that enables them to be successful on the IELTS. The students report that they enjoy tangible outcomes from using Eloqi’s services, such as enhanced knowledge of the English language, including grammar, usage, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.; strategies for passing the IELTS; communication practice; detailed feedback on their speaking; and valuable one-to-one speaking opportunities with native English speakers. I have shown this in Chapter 4 as well as this chapter on the speech code. In closing this

chapter, I note that the Code of Logic, which I have described in the present chapter, may well spring from Eloqi's larger organizational mission of preparing its clients to successfully pass the spoken component of the IELTS exam. Nevertheless, the company is still teaching its students ways of thinking, ways of being, and ways of interacting with others through its language instruction. In this way we can see how very distinctly culturally marked the instruction in the Eloqi community of practice is.

CHAPTER 5: SPEECH CODES, SCRIPTS AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL PLATFORM

In the previous chapter I showed how the Eloqi community of practice is utilizing a speech code, which I named the Code of Logic. The Code of Logic involves a system of two key symbols and six interrelated rules and premises, which I outlined and described. I showed how the Code of Logic is co-constructed by many individuals (trainers, administrators, students) working together to reach particular goals (training students to communicate “like a native,” helping achieve good scores on the IELTS exam, etc.). My analysis demonstrated how the Code of Logic is developed over time through many interactions of different types (trainers to students, administrators to trainers) in various online places that the community members meet in (the student-trainer interaction screens, the weekly trainer conference calls, the forum, the chat room). I now turn to my third research question, which treats the ways in which technology is implicated in these processes. Specifically, I asked:

Research Question 3: How are these speech codes linked to the affordances and constraints of the medium of communication, i.e. the technological platform supporting the interactions? In what ways do the technologies supporting the interactions between Eloqi students and trainers influence the development of the speech code(s) being used in this community?

In this chapter I will answer this research question by showing how scripts, which are encoded into the technological platform in various ways, are vital to the deployment of the Code of Logic. Most importantly, I will demonstrate how the technological platform functions as a cue for communicative conduct in this community.

SCRIPTS

In the previous chapter I showed that the Code of Logic, which is articulated and sustained through all types of interactions in the Eloqi CoP, is most strongly

associated with the trainer-student interactions. That is, the primary interactions during which the Code of Logic gets deployed are those between the trainers and learners, i.e. the spoken one-to-one English conversation lessons that take place on Eloqi's custom-built platform. When I say that the Code of Logic is "deployed" in the trainer-learner interactions I mean that it is implemented and utilized strategically and even systematically. In analyzing my data, I found that scripts play a critical role in the deployment of the Code of Logic. I also found that scripts are programmed into the graphical user interface (GUI) of the technological platform on and through which the trainer-learner interactions occur, and they guide the trainers' communicative behavior throughout the lessons. That is, the members of Eloqi's CoP draw heavily on scripts to regulate their behavior while engaged in the trainer-learner interactions, and these scripts are tightly coupled with the technological platform on and through which this virtual community exists.

I use the term "script" here to mean two things. First, I use it in the theatrical sense, i.e. pre-written words or lines to be read out and performed (cf. Cameron, 2000a, 2000b), just like what an actor in a play or film would make use of. In some customer service scenarios, scripts are provided to workers for them to read out loud word for word. (Cameron, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2008) In other cases, a script might be less of a dictate on what workers have to say, and more of a guideline for what actions must be taken at what time. In this case, the script might be a series of prompts "telling the workers what moves to make in what order... usually reflect[ing] the way the computer software is set up to accept and/or retrieve the information that is the focus of the transaction." (Cameron, 2000a, p. 96)

The second meaning of "script" that I refer to is adapted from Goffman's (1959) seminal work on interaction order. Goffman uses the term "script" to express the idea that in any given setting, on any sort of occasion for speech, people play out situation-specific roles, which are associated with situation-specific settings and interactions. A script in this sense is "a schema held in memory that describes events or behaviors (or sequences of events or behaviors) appropriate for a particular context." (Gioia & Poole, 1984, p. 450) "Scripts represent procedural

knowledge -- the knowledge of how events are supposed to occur" as well as how they are supposed to be done. (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 43) Goffman's concept of script implies that people follow (or flout) generally agreed upon, pre-negotiated terms and guidelines that apply to situations of social interaction, so that "to the extent that these conversations follow a predictable form, they are scripted, even though the particulars of the discussion will change from one customer to the next." (Kivisto & Pittman, 1998, p. 277)

Gioia and Poole observe that "typical examples [of scripts] include going to a restaurant, attending lectures, and visiting doctors." (1984, p. 450) Expanding on this example, I submit that the prototypical restaurant script in the United States involves the roles of diner, host/hostess, and server, and would proceed along these lines: the diner enters the restaurant and waits to be seated by the host/hostess; the diner and the server greet one another, but not by name; the diner orders drinks while deciding on a main course; main courses are eaten before desserts; when asked by the server if everything is alright, the diner assures him/her that it is; the diner pays at the table with cash or a credit card, leaving 15-20% tip; the diner shows himself out once the bill has been paid. (cf. Shoemaker, 1996) This restaurant script, like scripts for other common interaction situations (buying a car, taking a class at a university, attending a dinner party) is a predictable pattern of interaction, oftentimes so deeply learned that it is automatic and thus requires little or no analysis by the people engaging in it. "In a sense, these distinct stages of the transaction look like different scenes in a play; each has its own rules, each follows from the developments of the preceding scenes, and the action... rises to a cathartic agreement and ultimate resolution in the final act." (Kivisto & Pittman, 1998, p. 278)

We are thoroughly socialized into drawing on prototypical scripts (in Goffman's sense) for a wide variety of settings and roles. Because these scripts are so much a part of our interaction order, we might not notice them much until they are violated. Consider how unusual, even startling, it would be if: the server casually asked the diner for a cigarette; the server sat down at the table with the diner while taking the order; the diner walked back to the kitchen to pick up his food; the diner offered to

clean up after himself; the diner tried to bargain with the server over the cost of the food; etc. While a person might not necessarily be able to articulate a restaurant script, they would immediately identify as any of these actions as not right.

In the Eloqi CoP, scripts in both of the two senses described above are utilized in the trainer-learner interactions. First, there are fully pre-written scripts and prompt sheets that guide trainers' speech and actions in their interactions with students. Second, there is a larger interaction order established in the Eloqi CoP as the expected "way of doing" an LQ English lesson, and is thus a script in Goffman's sense. I will give a brief description of these scripts below, providing details on typical lesson scenarios to illustrate my points.

ELOQI'S PRE-WRITTEN SCRIPTS AND PROMPT SHEETS

As described in previous chapters, each lesson in the Proven Formulas suite is specially designed to teach Eloqi's students a key language structure, and within each lesson there are particular language steps that the student is expected to master. From Eloqi's standpoint, the entire Proven Formulas lesson suite has been created to thoroughly prepare its users to achieve target scores on the IELTS oral exam, and the decision to write the Proven Formulas lessons as a series of prompts (i.e. directions for action, suggestions as to what to say and do next) together with chunks of pre-written scripts (i.e. lines for the trainers to read verbatim) was a deliberate one, motivated primarily by the need for quality control. As the Service Director explained:

We want to focus on IELTS, and the way that our lessons are now designed is that we do have a formula, it's very structured, we want the students to make sure that they have mastered these certain language steps, and answer orders to these IELTS questions, so that is the reason why we have changed the format... ...we need to make sure we're using the language and asking the questions in a certain way so that the students have the opportunity to practice the language points that they need. (Administrator interview)

As the Service Director says above, this type of script, which serves to regulate and standardize communication, ensures that the company’s communication product (i.e. its lessons) is delivered correctly and consistently. This line of thinking is echoed in Cameron’s analysis of scripts; she observes that a service script “maximizes efficiency [because] left to themselves, operators might design routines that take more time than necessary, or conversely they might aim for speed and neglect other important considerations (such as checking for accuracy and displaying politeness). These potential problems can be averted by telling operators in detail what to do and say.” (Cameron, 2000a, p. 97) In this case, Eloqi’s administrators want to ensure that trainers cover all the vocabulary, language steps, logical order, etc. for each lesson, and that they do so in the precise language that the company has predetermined to be best. Since every part of the lesson material has been carefully conceived, tested, planned, and designed by the company, it simply remains to the trainers to execute the lessons. To do this easily and effectively in this community’s online teaching environment, Eloqi has chosen the method of providing pre-written scripts and prompts for the trainers to follow. In this way, the knowledge experts (the company administrators) are responsible for the content, and the service providers (the trainers) are responsible for the person-to-person delivery.

To illustrate what the scripts and prompts for a Proven Formulas lesson look like, I offer here some excerpts from a lesson on “customs, parties, festivals, and celebrations.” The lesson opens with a standard introduction (lines 1-3), and a brief greeting which may be varied at the trainer’s discretion (line 4), at the conclusion of which the trainer segues into the first phase of the lesson (lines 5-6), which in this case is a review of key vocabulary and expressions.

Introduction

Hi, STUDENT_NAME. Welcome to LQ English,	1
my name is TRAINER_NAME, and I will be your trainer for this Part	2
3 Formula Practice interaction.	3

How are you today? [vary as appropriate]	4
Let's start with a quick review of some key vocabulary and expressions from the Self-Study.	5 6

As shown in the above excerpt, much of the lesson material is scripted, but there are also prompts that provide the trainers with directions (as opposed to scripted lines) about what to say and do next. In line 3 above, for example, the trainer can either recite "How are you today" or come up with their own greeting along those same lines. Once the trainer clicks the last hyperlinked prompt in this section, the interaction screen bumps her to the next section of the lesson, which, in this case, is Vocabulary and Expressions Review.

In Vocabulary and Expressions Review, the trainer first reads a scripted introductory statement explaining the task (lines 7-8). The trainer is then prompted to select 2-3 words for the students to make sentences with (line 9). As the trainer selects the words, she clicks on them, which causes the vocabulary words to pop up on the student's screen. As the student engages in the task of making sentences with the vocabulary words, the trainer is expected to provide both written and oral feedback and corrections. In providing feedback trainers draws on both the in-company training that they have received as well as their own judgment to decide what errors to address and how.

Vocabulary and Expressions Review (3 minutes)

I am going to give you a word or expression and I'd like you to	7
make a short sentence using it. OK?	8
[Choose 2/3 of the below words in turn.]	9
controversial	10
[CLICK to display word in CHATBOX]	11
appliance	12

[CLICK to display word in CHATBOX]	13
venue	14
[CLICK to display word in CHATBOX]	15
turning point	16
[CLICK to display word in CHATBOX]	17
reunite	18
[CLICK to display word in CHATBOX]	19
Now let's move on to practice some mini discussions, just like	20
those you'll get in Part 3 of your speaking test. OK?	21

At the conclusion of the Vocabulary and Expressions Review section, the trainer reads a line segueing into the next activity (lines 20-21), which, in all of the Part 3 Formula Practice lessons is a discussion. Clicking on this segue causes the screen with the used prompts to close down, and the next screen (with the discussion prompts) to open up.

In the discussion sections, two samples of which I include below, trainers read a line introducing the topic (line 23) and are prompted to ask the discussion questions, being sensitive to the unique “flow of discussion” (lines 24-25) with that particular student. The trainers are expected to read the discussion questions verbatim (lines 26, 28, 30). During the discussion they may ask follow up questions and “challenge [the student's responses] as appropriate” (lines 27, 29).

Discussion 1 (4 minutes)

Let's talk about parties and social gatherings.	23
[Ask the below question then the follow-up questions as	24
appropriate to flow of discussion]	25
Why do some people really enjoy parties?	26

[challenge as appropriate]	27
Why do some people dislike big parties and crowded places?	28
[challenge as appropriate]	29
What special things do people prepare for a party in your country?	30
[Why?]	31

In the next discussion section of this lesson (Discussion 2) the trainers receive fewer scripted lines and more prompts. While the overarching structure of the discussion remains the same (the trainer asks a question, solicits an answer from the student, challenges and follows up as appropriate, offers feedback, corrects errors) the trainer now has a freer rein to shape the discussion.

Discussion 2 (4 minutes)	31
Let's talk about differences and similarities in the way countries celebrate special occasions.	32 33
[Ask the opening question then develop a discussion using the points below it as inspiration to form questions OF YOUR OWN.]	34 35
[similarities and differences between western weddings and Chinese weddings.]	36 37
[challenge and develop as appropriate]	38
[whether it is acceptable and good for countries to celebrate other countries' festivals and celebrations: e.g. Chinese celebrating Christmas.]	39 40 41
[challenge and develop as appropriate]	42
[30 second feedback and summary]	43

Notice, for example, that after a scripted line introducing the topic (lines 32-33) the trainer is prompted to "develop a discussion" of his/her own (lines 34-35) using the

general topics provided (lines 36-37; 39-41). At appropriate moments during or after the student's answer, the trainer is prompted to "challenge and develop" the discussion as appropriate (lines 38, 42). In the Eloqi CoP, this means that the trainer should push the student to support his/her answers with evidence, and back up their viewpoints with additional information. At the conclusion of the section the trainer is prompted to offer feedback and a summary (line 43). Finally, a click closes down these prompts and moves the trainer on to the third discussion section, which is structured in precisely the same way.

At the end of the third discussion section, the trainer closes the lesson by reciting this concluding passage from the script:

Closing

Thank you, this brings us to the end of our interaction. It's been	44
great to teach you today, STUDENT_NAME. Remember to check the	45
study center for the feedback I'll be giving you, and then practice	46
the things that you are the weakest at. Goodbye!	47

As with the introduction, the lesson closes with standard lines. In the sample above the trainer thanks the student (line 44) and instructs him/her to review the feedback received (lines 45-46) and keep practicing (46-47). After the closing, the trainer clicks on another button and is moved to the final feedback screen, where she will write up her qualitative feedback for the student. Once she is done with this final screen, she clicks another button to "send" the information to the Student Portal, and the interaction screen closes down.

I have provided the above excerpts from one of Eloqi's lessons to represent the ways in which the trainer-learner interactions are scripted in the theatrical sense. While each Eloqi lesson addresses a different topic and/or language structure, all of them include scripts like the one I have described here. That is, all of the lessons are comprised of pre-written words and lines for the trainers to read out, as well as prompts instructing the trainers what to say and do. These scripts are intentionally designed, deployed, and utilized to direct trainers' communicative behavior.

Specifically, the scripts tell trainers what to say (“Let’s talk about...”, “I’d like you to make a short sentence...”), what to do (“ask the below question,” “challenge as appropriate,” “click to display word,”) and what topics may be spoken of. Going “off script” in this community is discouraged, even disallowed²⁷. I turn now to the second sense of “scripts” – that of Goffman’s interaction order.

ELOQI’S INTERACTION ORDER SCRIPTS

As I will discuss in this section, there is a larger script, or interaction order, at work in the Eloqi CoP. This script is experienced and promoted as the proper way of doing an LQ English lesson. To reiterate, when I use script in this sense I mean

a knowledge structure that fits predictable, conventional, or frequently encountered situations. In short, scripts are schemas²⁸ for behavior, or for understanding events and behaviors. People in organizations know how to act appropriately because they have a working knowledge of their organizational world.... In this framework, 'knowing the ropes' often is a matter of knowing the right scripts for given situations. (Gioia & Poole, 1984, p. 450)

²⁷ The scripts are not seen in a negative light by the trainers who I interviewed for this project. On the contrary, they viewed the scripts positively for a three main reasons. First, having a script removes the work of preparing lessons from the trainers. They simply have to read the script, and do not need to spend any time writing up or otherwise preparing lessons of their own. Second, a script helps the trainers to manage the time for each interaction, since each section of the lesson has its own suggested time allotment. Third, the trainers see the lessons as purely an opportunity for the clients to learn and develop their fluency, and the expertise in achieving those outcomes is invested in the company administrators. There is thus a sense that the scripts have been designed to do a particular job, and that they do that successfully. There is not, therefore, a need for the trainers to go off script.

²⁸ A schema is an outline or a model for behavior or conduct, “an internal representation of the world; an organization of concepts and actions that can be revised by new information about the world”. wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

In previous chapters I have described various elements of the Eloqi CoP interaction order as it pertains to the trainer-learner interactions. In this section I will briefly review this interaction order, outlining step-by-step what it entails, how it is drawn on as the accepted schema for lesson behavior, and how it is referenced and enacted as the “right way” of engaging in a lesson in this community.

Before the Lesson

Before connecting with the trainers, the LQ students are expected to prepare for their lessons by completing self-directed lesson-specific modules. These modules introduce the students to the key vocabulary, grammar, sentence structures, and discussion topics that they will cover with the trainers. Engaging in this preparation is expected to both ease and focus the trainer-learner interactions, since being familiar with the material is seen as a necessary prequel to practicing and using it.

Eloqi has systematized various strategies for ensuring that the students do in fact complete the preparation materials. First, the trainers play a role in enforcing the learners’ compliance with the preparation and review rules. For example, trainers are expected to report to the supervisors when the learners they connect with do not seem to be prepared, or when learners do not seem to be utilizing the corrections and feedback (written or oral) that they have received. The supervisors then contact the customer service team, who then check up on the students and ask them to be better prepared on their subsequent lessons. Second, with the new money-back guarantee, the company has put monitoring functionalities in place that track how long students spend on the preparatory materials. If students skip them, or go through them too quickly, the company’s customer service team will contact the student and speak to them about the correct and expected way to prepare.

For their part, trainers are asked to be familiar with the lessons in their certified lesson suite. Trainers gain this familiarity by accessing the lessons through the Trainer Portal, where they can review them on their own time.

During the Lesson

During the interactions with the learners, the trainers must follow the written scripts and prompts for each lesson; doing so is not a choice, but an obligation. Each lesson is structured in a consistent and linear fashion. It opens with a brief greeting, then quickly moves on to practicing small components of the language (pronunciation, vocabulary), after which larger components are introduced (sentence components, sentence structures). Finally, the lesson moves into a discussion section, for which the learner must “put it all together” to answer opinion and experience questions at greater length. At the end of the lesson, the trainer closes the conversation and bids the student goodbye, encouraging them to review their feedback and keep on improving.

In these interactions, it is the trainers’ duty to manage the flow of activity. Each section of the lesson has a recommended allotment of time, and the lesson as a whole is limited to 15 minutes, so the trainers must keep an eye on the clock and continue to move the lesson forward in as timely a manner as possible, but without seeming hurried. All the while they are guided by the lesson scripts, which prompt them on what to say when, and in what order. As the trainers use each prompt or line, they must click on it to denote that it has been used²⁹.

Simultaneous to reading the scripts, speaking out their lines, clicking on the prompts, and monitoring the time, the trainers must also pay close attention to the student’s speech and give appropriate oral and written feedback. As noted in Chapter Four, a large portion of the written feedback is tagged to the student’s speech in real time using the company’s mark spot technology³⁰. To use the mark

²⁹ Clicking on prompts leaves a visual marker for subsequent trainers who repeat that particular lesson with that particular student. In this case, the next trainer will see at a glance which discussion questions the student has already had, and will be able to select new ones from the script as appropriate.

³⁰ When a student reviews the written mark spot feedback from any lesson, s/he can also click links to hear each section of the audio recording that the mark spot applies to.

spot tool, trainers must click the appropriate mark spot buttons as the student is speaking. (If the student makes a grammatical error, the trainer selects the “grammar” mark spot button. If the error is one of pronunciation, the trainer selects the “pronunciation” mark spot button, and so on.) In addition to clicking these buttons, the trainers must explain clearly and concisely, in written format, what each mark spot error is, and what the correct form (of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary word, etc.) should be. If the trainer has the time and the inclination, she may also choose to jot down written notes in the free form feedback field, which must be completed before the trainer closes the interaction screen. In this way, the Eloqi trainers’ focus must be on the learner simultaneous to managing other elements of the lesson and the user interface (UI), which is the interaction screen.

For the students’ part, they are expected to follow the trainers’ directives, and go along with the pre-determined, pre-designed flow of activity. While students can (and sometimes do) ask questions, these are usually for clarification purposes only. Furthermore, just as going off script is considered a violation for the trainers, so too is it considered to be wrong or problematic when students do it. That is, if learners attempt to veer off the lesson plan as outlined in the scripts, they must be checked.

In terms of the professional manner associated with their role, trainers are generally expected to be analytical only of the linguistic elements of the students’ speech, and not of the opinions, facts, and/or experiences that students share. As the trainers are told (and as they themselves reported to me) their job entails them focusing on how the learners speak (their grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, etc.) and on getting them to speak more like native speakers (in pronunciation, language usage, grammar, sentence structure, etc.). What the learners say, insofar as their opinions about the world at large, is not something that trainers should challenge. The position of the administrators and the trainers is that the students are entitled to their opinions, thoughts, and attitudes, and that the role of the trainers is not to interfere with these as they relate to anything other than studying English LQ style. As one of the trainers told me when I asked her if she would ever disagree with a student’s viewpoint,

As far as flat out saying, “well you know actually that’s wrong,” no. No, I would never do that. If it’s a total misconception I might have a different attitude, but to date I have never had a situation where I felt compelled to flat-out say, “well that’s just not right.” There’s a question, “Do you believe all Americans are overweight?” That’s one of the questions on one of the lessons, and it’s not asking- the lesson isn’t asking the student’s opinion. The question wants to see that the student knows how to structure the answer correctly, whatever the answer is. The content is completely immaterial, it’s the form, and that’s the point of these lessons. Don’t get bogged down in content, it’s not your job and it’s pointless. You’re concerned with form. Content to the point of pronunciation and grammar, yes, content to the point of their opinion, no, that is not what it’s about, and it wastes time. The student isn’t connecting to hear my opinion, or to hear me- or to engage in a philosophical discussion with me. That’s not what they’re there for. If I want to have a philosophical discussion or argument I’m not going to do it with somebody who’s paying me to teach them something. (Trainer Interview, Reena)

In this sense, the interaction order at LQ English is similar to that in other (customer) service scenarios, where the focus is on the professional transfer of a service or a communication product.

Going in hand with the role of the trainers as providers of a professional service is a ban on topics considered to be too far into the realm of the personal³¹. These topics include sex, religion, politics, Tibet, Taiwan, Tiananmen Square, China’s image abroad, or any negative news stories about China, especially ones that are censored

³¹ These topics are also banned for the purpose of the company maintaining a harmonious relationship with the government of China.

or otherwise suppressed within China³². Also, as professionals representing the company, the trainers must not give out any personal contact information, nor may they ask the learners for theirs.

Like the trainers, the learners must have absolute focus on the lesson: they should not multitask or chat with others while on call with their trainers, they should not be located in a noisy or otherwise distracting environment, and they should not allow anything external to the call disrupt the talk. I will return to this particular point in Chapter 7 in my discussion of procedure and procedural knowledge. For now, suffice to say that anything unrelated to the smooth execution of the task at hand (i.e. the successful completion of the lesson) is considered an intrusion on the most important talk (i.e. the trainer-student talk that takes place during their one-to-one English lessons) in this community.

Again, as with the written script described in the previous section, the cognitive script or interaction order encourages trainers to organize their talk in a particular way, to pursue some lines of talk and ignore others, and to be consistent with the role (trainer or learner) that they play in the interaction. Going off script is discouraged and even disallowed, and can ultimately result in discontinued membership from the community (for the trainers) or revocation of status (if the students lose their money-back guarantee).

As I have shown above, there is a script, or interaction order, associated with the trainer-learner interactions. This script serves as a model for appropriate communicative conduct; it is drawn on, referenced, and utilized to justify the right kind of speech in this setting. This script is evidenced in part by special trainer/learn role obligations that individuals in this community are expected to fulfill. The script is further evidenced by general understandings shared by the Eloqi CoP members about how to do an LQ English lesson correctly and

³² When I was engaged in this study, some sensitive events covered in the news, which the students probably had little or no (or differently framed) information about were the ethnic riots in the Muslim region of China, and Google's decision to pull out of China because of privacy issues.

appropriately. These understandings are at once articulated through the company's own rules, policies and regulations, reinforced by the written scripts and prompts, and monitored through the quality control systems in place here, emphasized through admin-trainer and trainer-trainer discussion, and reinforced through compliance. In this way, the Eloqi CoP's script for LQ English lessons comes from situated experience – situated in particular activities (learning to speak “like a native”), particular spaces (online, via Eloqi's interaction screen, in reference to other online Eloqi spaces like the WTCC and the chat room), in a particular community (the Eloqi CoP). It emerges (and is reinforced) through a shared history of previous activities. Finally, as community members play out the script, they deploy the code of communicative conduct (the Code of Logic), which I described in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter I addressed my research question on the linkages between the speech code (the Code of Logic) deployed in this community of practice and the technological platform on and through which members communicate. I showed how vital scripts are in the trainer-learner interactions, and I discussed how these scripts are encoded into the technological platform in various ways. I now turn to a discussion of how the technological platform functions as a cue for communicative conduct in this community.

There are various ways to understand the linkages between the Eloqi CoP's speech code and scripts, and technological platform. In fact, to fully understand how the technological platform affords and constrains the interaction order and the deployment of speech codes, and how it is implicated in their ongoing development, I propose that a combination of standpoints is necessary. Specifically, technology in this setting can be viewed as (1) a material requirement for membership and participation; (2) a setting for social interaction; (3) a cue for communicative conduct; and (4) a tool for monitoring communicative behavior.

Technology as a Material Requirement for Membership and Participation

First, and perhaps most fundamentally, technology and technological know-how are material requirements for trainer and student membership in the Eloqi community of practice. The function of technology as a material requirement cannot be overemphasized when it comes to making sense of the role that it plays in this particular community of practice, its speech code, and its interaction order. Trainers must obtain and maintain equipment as stipulated by the company, including a PC with a certain amount of memory, a display, a soundcard, a headset, Windows, an Internet browser, pdf viewing software, and high-speed Internet). Students must have a similar set of equipment (a computer; Internet access; a device for listening and speaking through, whether a headset or a phone). Without this assemblage of technological equipment and the knowledge of how to operate it (even at a beginner level), trainers and students would not be eligible to join or participate in the Eloqi CoP.

In many key studies on technology and communication (a great number of which influence my own work), researchers have analyzed technologies that play roles that are central – but not vital – to organizations and their members' social interactions. Barley, (1986) for example, shows how a particular technology (CT scanners) acts as a catalyst for organizational change. Similarly, Bechky (2003) demonstrates that technologies and tools can be used as “boundary objects” through which organizational members with different roles, expertise, and interests can unite. My study is different from these in that without this constellation of tools and technologies (computers, Internet connections, and listening/speaking devices through which the virtual spaces associated with the Eloqi CoP are accessed), membership in this community is precluded. At a broader level, one could even argue that the social interactions that I am studying would not exist, which leads me to my next point.

Technological Spaces as Settings for Social Interaction

In the case of the Eloqi CoP, another useful way to make sense of the technological platform is to see it as a setting or a scene for social activity, one replete with roles, rules, premises, and norms. By setting I refer to Goffman (1959) and Hymes (1962, 1972), who use that term to denote the “place of a speech act and, in general [its] physical circumstances.” (Hymes, 1972, p. 60) In characterizing the technological platform as a setting I follow a line of reasoning that has been developed by a number of Internet researchers. For example, Kendall’s (2002) seminal ethnography of an early online forum touches upon the feeling of place that members experienced in their virtual surroundings:

'synchronous' forums -- those that allow for near-instantaneous response... can provide a particularly vivid sense of "place" and of gathering together with other people. Rather than merely viewing a space through the electronic window of television, many people feel that when they connect to an online forum, they in some sense enter a social, if not a physical, space. Conversation in such chat forums takes place at a pace similar to face-to-face conversation, the room description and most of the objects remain stable from visit to visit, and people's entrances and exits generate text messages that allow them to 'see' each other come and go. (p. 6)

Similarly, Boellstorff’s (2008) recent work is a detailed ethnographic account that explores the aspects of place, space, being and culture which characterize Second Life, a popular virtual world. The theoretical move of characterizing a virtual space as a setting is, however, contrary to some foundational Internet ethnographies exploring the connections between communication, culture and technology. Most notably, it goes against the work of Miller and Slater (2001; see also Postill, 2010), who argue persuasively in their study of Internet use in Trinidad that breaking identity and lived experience apart into separate, unconnected online and offline spheres does not present a realistic picture of the Internet’s function in everyday

lives (cf. Sterne, 1999). Specifically, Miller and Slater reject the idea of cyberspace or the Internet as a place apart from people's other "real" lives. They show that "communicative technology is encountered from, and rooted in, a particular place" and that people's internet use is tied very closely to their "local and embodied social relations" (Miller & Slater, 2001, p. 7). Because people use the Internet and all its resources in the service of such local and embodied social relations, one cannot separate between online and offline, particularly when one is studying identity and/or lived experience. By exploring the Internet as part of the fabric of social actors' quotidian lives, Miller and Slater show the virtual/actual cultural worlds dichotomy to be false.

For my part, I agree with the logic of Miller and Slater's arguments, and have no wish to separate the identities or lived experiences of the Eloqi CoP members into offline/online components. On the contrary, my attempt in this project has been to contextualize the speech of the Eloqi CoP members as much as possible, showing how communication on the Eloqi platform is grounded in different layers of context and in lived, situated experience. At the same time, in coming from an Ethnography of Communication perspective I find value in approaching Eloqi's technological platform as a "setting" because doing so foregrounds the fact that this space has its own particular interaction order, as well as rules, norms and premises pertaining to communicative conduct. To clarify, I draw on Hymes' concept of a setting (also called "scene" or "situation") as a "psychological" space linked with "cultural definition[s] of an occasion." (Hymes, 1972, p. 60) In this sense I take settings to be cognitive as well as spatial (or physical), and so see them as intricately linked with scripts (Goffman) and rules of communicative conduct (Hymes, Philipsen). Put differently, settings are mental constructs, which we associate with guidelines for communicative behavior. Though these guidelines may be largely unwritten, they are widely experienced and generally ratified by us through our day-to-day activities.

Most extant ethnographies of communication focus on non-virtual (i.e. situated in the physical world) settings relevant to the experience of engaging in social

activity. My work on the Eloqi CoP follows in the tradition of these studies, but focuses on a virtual setting rather than a physical one. Just as one does in physical settings, the Eloqi CoP members hold cognitive scripts in their minds, which are associated with their surrounding space and the roles that they take on. These cognitive scripts shape their experience of how to behave correctly in their roles (as trainers or learners) while engaging in one of Eloqi's English lessons. The LQ English lesson script and its concomitant rules, premises, and norms (which I have described at length already) are tied to the virtual, technological spaces of Eloqi's online community of practice.

As a theoretical move to foreground the emergence, development, and maintenance of a speech code pertaining to communicative conduct in a virtual space/place, I therefore find it very useful to see the technological platform as a setting – a virtual communication setting, but a setting nevertheless, one which is experienced by the CoP members very much as a “place” where their work happens, their communication occurs, and the rules for their community's communicative conduct apply. My explication of this CoP's speech code and interaction order is, of course, particularized; it is specific to a unique site – Eloqi's virtual workspace. Although this site is a virtual one, that fact does not diminish in any way the force of the interaction order or the norms, rules, and premises pertaining to communicative conduct there.

The Interface as a Cue for Communicative Conduct

A third way in which Eloqi's technological platform is implicated in the development and deployment of the community's speech code is through its graphic user interface (GUI) and the interactive, hyperlinked scripts/prompts and the functionalities that cue trainers' communicative behavior during their interactions with students. Interfaces are boundaries or meeting points that “enable the formation of networks across or between different beings, objects, or media.” (Gane & Beer, 2008, p. 55) Interfaces are considered to be one of the key concepts or elements of new media “that enable us to study digital technologies as media,

alongside the complex social and cultural transformations they either drive, are tied to or result from, depending on your viewpoint." (Gane & Beer, 2008, p. 2) They are a means not only of presenting information, options, and activities to the user, but also of organizing information, options, and activities. In this way they are implicated in users' interpretational, sense-making, and decision-making processes. (Beer, 2008; Gane & Beer, 2008; Manovich, 2001, 2003)

In Eloqi's case, the GUI and its hyperlinked scripts and prompts lay out a particular procedure – conceived of, designed, and implemented by Eloqi's administrators – for engaging in the LQ English lessons. The GUI is intended to directly guide the trainers and students through the lessons in the manner determined to be correct and legitimate for this setting. In this way, the GUI is used to cue or prompt communicative behavior.

To understand how the GUI, replete with its scripts its functionalities, guides the trainers and students throughout their lessons, we must keep in mind that the trainers' experience while interfacing with and utilizing Eloqi's technological platform via the GUI is very different to the experience of reading a static document as you, reading this manuscript, are now doing. This is because as the trainers (and the students, to a certain extent) interact with the GUI, the GUI responds by providing them with additional instructions, directives and prompts for going through and completing the lesson.

To elaborate, when the Eloqi trainers make use of the GUI and its encoded scripts, they are online and they are on Eloqi's interactive trainer-student platform. Whenever a trainer connects with a student for a lesson, the specialized Interaction Screen, which is a GUI, opens up on their desktops. This GUI connects the trainer and student in real time through two channels: voice (using VoIP) and interactive, hyperlinked text. From the moment that the Interaction Screen is opened, a timer begins to count down, informing the trainer throughout the interaction how much longer they have left for any given section, and for the lesson as a whole. As trainers click on each line of script and/or each prompt (as they are expected to do), the GUI responds. First, it changes the color of the script/prompt to indicate that it has been

used. Second, it pushes the next line of script or prompt to the fore by giving it a brighter, highlighted color than the other text on the screen. At some points during the lessons, it pulls up task cards on the trainers' and students' screens, which provide them with additional information for completing a given task. At the end of a section, when the trainer clicks on the final prompts, the GUI shuts down that section and pushes the trainers on to the next activity or language task. Throughout the interaction the trainer is expected to make use of various fields and buttons at the bottom of the interaction screen for typing in qualitative feedback. At fifteen minutes the timer begins to flash red to show that the time limit has been exceeded. Finally, when the trainer ends the call, the interaction screen shuts down and the GUI pushes the trainer to the final feedback screen. Here the trainer is required to write, edit, and complete her qualitative written feedback to the student. This screen is programmed to remain live until the trainer has entered the minimum amount of feedback. When the trainer has completed the requisite amount of feedback, she may click to close the screen, and the interaction is considered complete.

There is thus a particular communication flow designed into the GUI, which encodes the company's expectation for communicative behavior during the trainer-learner interactions. The GUI does the work of guiding the trainers' communicative behavior by prompting them as to what acts (greeting, asking, telling, saying, giving information, correcting, checking, clarifying, challenging, clicking, directing, saying goodbye, etc.) they need to perform at what time. Simultaneously, the GUI limits the options for speaking, because trainers are expected to follow the pre-determined sequence of communicative events encoded into the GUI. Going by the interaction order programmed into the GUI, there are limited choices as to what a trainer can legitimately do when engaging in an LQ English lesson. Put differently, the possibilities for speaking envisaged by Eloqi and communicated via the GUI are restricted, and departures from this restricted interaction order are not sanctioned in this CoP.

Eloqi's technological platform thus serves as a cue for the trainers' communicative behavior. I deliberately use the term "cue" here to emphasize that the platform guides speaking but does not determine it. The platform provides the trainers with a finite amount of information and functionalities used to shape the sequence of events during trainer-learner interactions. When used as intended, the GUI standardizes the language used by the trainers and students, regulates the length of time that the speaking goes on, and makes the outcome of the speaking events predictable. In this way, the platform exerts a kind of force on the trainers and students using it. This is precisely the intention of Eloqi's administrators, who have created the GUI to organize trainer-learner communication. Insofar as the trainers comply with the interaction order encoded in and articulated by the GUI, the platform succeeds in doing this. When the trainer and student have followed the prompts from the beginning to the end, and have completed the tasks using the language provided in the scripts, in the order specified by the scripts, then they have fulfilled the goals of the interaction, as imagined by the company. In this sense, Eloqi's GUI encodes norms, values, rules, premises and an interaction order that makes sense in this particular community.

As Gane and Beer observe, interfaces "order and facilitate information access, and enable the reproduction and consumption of culture in particular ways." (Gane & Beer, 2008, pp. 67-68) Interfaces are "social" in that they "reshape communication relationships" and "are also culturally defined, which means that generally, the social meaning of an interface is not always developed when the technology is first created but usually comes later, when it is finally embedded in social practices." (de Souza e Silva, 2006, pp. 261-262) This is not to say, however, that the GUI has human-like agency of its own. The inanimate technology behind the GUI has no will of its own; rather, "the relationship governed by the interface is a semantic one, characterized by meaning and expression rather than physical force." (Johnson, 1997, p. 14, cited in Gane & Beer, 2008, p. 54) The technology is encoded with particular social practices (Boczkowski, 1999; Galloway, 2004) and in this way serves to shape not only communication but also the relationships of the people

using the tools (de Souza e Silva, 2006). Eloqi's GUI is specifically designed to keep the trainers speaking in a particular sequence, about particular topics, using particular language, and has these various permissions and constraints encoded into it. Taken as a whole, the GUI and its hyperlinked scripts set forth the expected interaction order for the trainer-learner interactions and have some force, insofar as they cue the trainers to self-regulate their speech in the expected manner for this setting. The trainers, who are agential social actors, comply with the permissions and constraints encoded into the GUI, because their compliance is required for ongoing membership in this community, which leads me to my final point.

Technology as a Tool for Monitoring Communicative Behavior

By entering into employment with Eloqi, the trainers agree to follow the company's code of communicative conduct, just as they agree to follow the cues for communicative conduct encoded into the GUI. This agreement and the communicative actions it requires are conditions of trainers' continued employment by the organization. If trainers should repeatedly fail to follow the communication protocols or the cues encoded into the GUI, then their status as contracted employees (and, by extension, as community members) would be terminated. As a means of regularly assessing the trainers' compliance, Eloqi's administrators make one more important use of the technological platform on which the virtual CoP exists: they use it to record, archive, sample, and play back the trainer-learner interactions. In this way, Eloqi's technological platform can be understood as a tool for monitoring the deployment of the community's code of communicative conduct, and thus for promoting community members' compliance with the expected communicative behavior.

In claiming that Eloqi's technological platform is utilized to monitor and gain compliance with local communication protocols, I do not impute the platform with agency, will, or force of its own. It is not the technology that demands, checks, or evaluates compliance; rather, it is the administrators who designed the technology,

and who make use of it to review the trainer-learner interactions. Cameron describes this process in her treatise on call center talk:

Codification does not in practice eliminate the necessity for talk to be locally managed; what it does do, however, is change what participants have to manage. Workers who are given a script ... may deviate from it, but in that case the institutional definition of what they are doing as deviant and 'accountable' behavior becomes one of the factors they must take into consideration. Where codification is backed up by surveillance, institutional interactions begin to resemble 'mediated' discourse – that is, talk has to be designed not only for its immediate recipient, but also for an eavesdropping third party, namely the manager or supervisor who monitors workers' compliance with the rules. (2000a, p. 58)

One of the key points that Cameron makes here is that the act of monitoring talk (which, in the Eloqi CoP's case is accomplished through the use of the technological platform) leads to social actors' self-regulation, because the talk will be evaluated by a non-present other. This is compounded in my case study, because it is not only the Eloqi administrators who listen to the interactions, but also the students (who listen to the recordings of their sessions as part of the process of improving their English) and the non-present IELTS examiner, for whom all of the talk is ostensibly geared towards.

To reiterate, in designing communication protocols (through scripts, prompts, the GUI, and/or a generally-recognized code of communicative conduct) Eloqi establishes locally ratified ideas about what counts as legitimate communication in this setting. The trainers learn about these local and legitimized ways of communicating as part of the process of becoming members in this community. Knowing that their communication will be recorded, reviewed, and evaluated via the technology used to support the platform, the trainers choose their own communication behavior accordingly. The monitoring capabilities of the technology

are undoubtedly not the only factor playing into the trainers' decisions to comply³³, but they are certainly an important one.

To conclude, in this chapter I have demonstrated how communication in this community of practice, specifically the one-to-one interactions between the Eloqi trainers and students, is shaped by the technological platform on which it rests. I have shown how the virtual space in which trainers and students meet one another has its own associated interaction order, just as offline settings do. I have discussed the ways in which the technological platform is encoded with scripts that cue the trainers and students to local communication protocols. Finally, I have described how the platform is utilized by the company administrators to both oversee the community's communication activity and to promote self-regulation amongst its members. In articulating these arguments I hope that I have clearly conveyed what I saw to be a deep connection between the communication and the technology in this community of practice.

³³ A full analysis of why the trainers comply with the communication protocols is beyond the scope of this study, however, my work thus far suggests these possible reasons: the trainers and students have faith that Eloqi's system, if used correctly, will produce the desired learning outcomes; the company is accorded knowledge authority, and is seen as expert in knowing what the most effective teaching/learning strategies are; the trainers enjoy their membership in this community and want to continue their work with the organization; and the students want to maintain their eligibility for the company's money-back guarantee.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS ON ONLINE INTERCULTURAL SERVICE INTERACTIONS

In the previous findings chapters of this dissertation I described the online environment that the Eloqi community of practice inhabits. I also described the speech code utilized in the Eloqi community of practice, which I named the Code of Logic. After that I discussed the ways in which technology – specifically the technological platform on which the Eloqi CoP rests – is implicated in the speech and the speech code of the community members. Now, in this chapter, I turn to my fourth and final research question, which is:

Research Question 4: What do the data reveal about the nature of online intercultural service interactions in general?

After careful analysis, and based on my findings on the other research questions in this project, I found that the concept of procedural knowledge was key to understanding the service interactions that took place between Eloqi's trainers and learners. In this chapter, I will describe what procedural knowledge is, how it pertains to my data set, how it helps us to understand the service interactions that took place between Eloqi's trainers and learners, and its implications for understanding online intercultural service interactions in general.

WHAT IS PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE?

Procedural knowledge goes along with scripts (Leigh & McGraw, 1989; Shoemaker, 1996) and the two concepts are very closely related. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, Goffman's theatrical metaphor illustrates the connection between scripts and the performance of routine activities. Scripts are also linked with settings (as I have written about), i.e. the places in which we find ourselves interacting, such as online/virtual learning platforms. Recall that a script is a type of schema, or "a knowledge structure that people use to organize and make sense of social and organizational information or situations" which involves details like "expected sequences of behaviors, actions, and events" (Gioia & Manz, 1985, p. 529)

aka procedure. It is this last component of scripts that I want to focus on here – the idea of procedure.

The word “procedure” is defined as a way of doing something, or a series of actions done in a particular order, and procedural knowledge is “the knowledge of how events are supposed to occur” (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 43). In other words, procedure encompasses what steps or actions should happen, how those steps or actions should be carried out, and in what order. We draw on procedural knowledge as we engage in tasks, jobs, and social situations, as well as other types of routine activities. Although we make use of procedural knowledge all the time, it can be difficult to articulate since it is often so deeply ingrained that we don’t bother to think about it. To summarize, we can think of procedural knowledge as a smaller component of a script. Highlighting the concept of procedural knowledge is a way to focus our attention directly on the “what happens now and what happens next” part of an interaction.

MODELS OF “PERFECT” PROCEDURE IN THIS DATA SET

Throughout the previous chapters of this dissertation I have explicated the scripts in use in the Eloqi community of practice, their rootedness in the larger social and organizational contexts of Eloqi, and their interconnection with the technological platform on and through which they are used. In this endeavor, my work has been greatly facilitated by the fact that the company, in its efforts to train its members (both trainers and learners alike) into using particular communication protocols, provides significant directions and explanations about the expected procedures for communication³⁴. Additionally, Eloqi provides its trainers with models of ideal trainer-learner interactions. These models are provided so that the company’s trainers can both see (through a video recording, or screencast, of the lesson from start to finish) and hear (through the associated audio recording of the

³⁴ For example, there are in-house training modules that the trainers must complete, as well as multiple-choice tests, which must be passed at 80% or higher.

trainer-learner interaction) how a good lesson, with a skilled trainer and a willing student, proceeds. I offer one such company-generated model interaction in Appendix B.

In the model interaction, which goes very well by the company's standards, both the trainer and the student follow their respective scripts. In the trainer's case, this means following the written prompts and the scripted dialogue laid out for this particular lesson; using the prescribed amount of time for each part of the lesson; providing oral feedback and corrections; periodically praising and encouraging the learner; and ensuring that the learner is using the target phrases and vocabulary in the required way. In the learner's case, following the script means responding promptly, concisely and clearly to the trainer's questions and requests; formulating answers that get to the point; not asking questions out of turn; not causing the interaction to lag; and producing speech that is spontaneous rather than canned. Taken as a whole, this model interaction – which is part of a larger set of company-generated materials – provides Eloqi's trainers with a clear representation of what a successful, effective, trouble-free interaction should be like.

VIOLATIONS OF PROCEDURE – WHO AND HOW?

Despite Eloqi's extensive modeling of procedure and ideal communication, there were numerous examples in my data set of procedural violations, in which both trainers and learners veered from the expected procedure. After analyzing these violations, I discerned three large categories of procedural violations, and nine subcategories, summarized in the table below.

Table 6.1. Categories of Procedural Violations

Category	Subcategory
Technical	Unfamiliarity with the user interface (UI)
	Bad sound quality
	Task cards not loading properly
Environmental	Student is not seated at computer
	Noisy or otherwise disruptive surroundings
	Inattentiveness
Content-based	Student struggles with sequence or nature of activities and/or tasks
	Engaging in off-task activities
	Introducing forbidden topics

In this chapter I will describe each of these types of violations, showing how they all involve clashes around ideas about and rules regarding standard and/or expected procedure. In so doing I will illustrate how procedural knowledge was critical to these interactions, and demonstrate how lack of procedural knowledge or the deliberate flouting of procedural knowledge caused problems. Finally, I will discuss the implications for these points.

Technical Impediments to Procedure

Unfamiliarity with the user interface (UI)

One of the first – and perhaps most expected – technical issues interfering with the smooth procedure of a lesson is one or both parties simply being unfamiliar with the functionalities of user interface (UI) and the ways in which Eloqi expects the UI to be used. Although it is assumed that trainers are familiar with the procedure of

the lessons once they begin working, since they will have already successfully completed screening and training processes, it does take time for trainers to become skilled in using the Eloqi learning platform and communication protocols. One of the trainers described the learning curve for new lessons and features to me, saying,

Anytime they add a new lesson, there is a certain learning curve. OK yes, it's scripted, but if you are not familiar with how it works or how to time it, there is a learning curve involved in trying to access that new lesson and get it ready to speak with a learner about it. (Trainer Interview, Iris)

As I myself found when I began working as an Eloqi trainer (and as I have been careful to document in the preceding chapters), participating in the company's language lessons, whether as a trainer or a learner, required one to be attentive to numerous details (features, functionalities, timing) on the UI, many of which changed with the task and the time. While on the job I gradually learned, for example, that I needed to be present in the chat room during the WTCC, and that during these meetings my voice could not be heard. These points were not obvious to me at first. My fieldnotes also record the learning that I did while on the job, particularly as regards the interaction screen:

During the second call with Ting, I noticed things that I had overlooked in the first call with Shirley. For example, I was supposed to get the student to practice a monologue. Following the prompts, I explained that the student would need to prepare something on [the topic of] pollution. With the first call (Shirley) I did not notice that I was supposed to pull up a task card so that the student could see the prompt in writing. In fact, Shirley did not get the point about pollution and her answer didn't cover it at all, probably because she didn't see it in writing. In the second call Ting said something like "I can't see the task card," and that's when I realized what I was supposed to do. (Fieldnotes)

I knew I wasn't alone in experiencing a gradual learning curve with the technologies and the interfaces used in the community, because other trainers – from novices to experts – commented on their own learning experiences, especially when new tools and features were introduced to the CoP. Trainers also initiated and contributed to forum threads on topics such as how to make mark spots, how to use hot keys to speed up the process of typing up feedback, and time management, among others.

The learners – particularly the new ones – also require time and practice to become familiar with the UI, its features, and their accompanying procedures. In the following excerpt for example, we see a very new learner struggle to make sense of the trainer's instructions to use the chat window feature.

Tabitha	U:m, do you know the word <u>specific</u> ? I'm going to put it in the chat window. <u>Specific</u> .	11:46
Jacqueline	Spe-ci-city hhh...	11:55
Tabitha	Do- yeah, so, Ja-	11:57
Jacqueline	(sorry)	11:58
Tabitha	Jacqueline, do you see the <u>chat</u> window on the left hand side?	11:59
Jacqueline	Hat window?	12:06
Tabitha	Yeah. Do you see the chat window on the <u>left</u> of your screen?	12:08
Jacqueline	(.) Sorry I hhh...	12:18
Tabitha	That- that's OK, that's OK. On the <u>left</u> side of the screen there is a <u>chat</u> window (.) and I'm ty-	12:21
Jacqueline	Uh, chat window.	12:32

Tabitha Yeah, and I'm typing some words there. 12:33

Jacqueline (.) Oh. 12:39

Tabitha Uh, can you see the words? 12:41

Jacqueline Uh, no. 12:44

Tabitha You can't. Are you sitting by the computer? 12:47

Jacqueline Yeah, I'm sitting in front of computer. 12:52

Tabitha OK. And then do you see the- the screen? 12:57

(..)

Can you see the- the interaction screen?

Jacqueline Inter ° (action scr)° 13:09

(.)

Ah=

Tabitha OK, OK 13:14

Jacqueline = Oh- oh- 13:15

Oh. Sorry hhh...

Tabitha OK. That's OK. Don't worry. Um, so when you use LQ English, ah, we can talk to each other and we can send each other messages. So right now I am sending you a message. I'm typing a message. Can you see the message? 13:18

Jacqueline (.) 13:47

Uh, OK, I-

Oh. I see that.

Tabitha	You <u>see</u> it?	13:54
Jacqueline	Yes.	13:55
Tabitha	OK, good. OK. So sometimes if there is a <u>word</u> that, that, um, I want to teach you, I can put it in this text message.	13:56
Jacqueline	(.) Oh.	14:11
Tabitha	Ah, so I put some vocabulary there for you.	14:12
Jacqueline	(.) Oh yeah.	14:19

In the excerpt above, the trainer's intention is to teach the learner a new vocabulary word ("specific") by typing it into the chat window (11:46) where the learner will be able to see it. The trainer then directs the learner's attention to the chat window five times: directly at 11:59, 12:08, and 12:21; and indirectly at 12:33 and 12:41. The learner's responses ("Hat window?") and silences, combined with the trainer's repeated efforts, indicate that – at the very least to this trainer in this moment – the learner does not seem to understand what the chat window is, or what is happening in it. Then, at 13:08 the trainer explains that they can send one another messages while connected to one another. In the same turn, she rephrases and repeats this information four times ("when you use LQ English, ah, we can talk to each other and we can send each other messages. So right now I am sending you a message. I'm typing a message. Can you see the message?). After this, the learner indicates that she can see the message (13:47 & 13:55). The trainer rephrases and repeats information about this particular feature of the UI (13:56). By this time, over two minutes have passed, and the interaction is nearing the company's time limit of fifteen minutes. The trainer begins to recite the closing statements for a speaking evaluation and shortly thereafter ends the call.

The excerpt above shows how an interaction may stall when the speaking partner is not only unfamiliar with the technical features of the UI, but also the procedures for using them. In effect, the trainer in the example above is teaching the learner about the chat window feature (a space where the trainer and learner can type messages to one another) and the procedure for its use (when dealing with an unfamiliar vocabulary word, type in a message to your speaking partner; read the message from your partner; respond to the messages; keep an eye open for messages during the interaction). Of course, as trainers and learners engage in more and more lessons, they become familiar with and even expert in the UI's features, such that their use no longer causes the interaction to stall. For newer users, however, we see that unfamiliarity with the features and their protocols can slow down the interaction, and even bring it to a stop.

Iris	Ok, so let's look at future ambition phrases, and here is the 3 steps.	07:35
	<i>((Her voice echoes in the background.))</i>	
Lei	Mmhm.	07:42
Iris	Um, I can- uh, right now Lei, I am hearing an echo of my voice. Can you get rid of that echo, please?	07:43
Lei	Uh, s- sorry, could you uh- could you speaking? One time?	07:53
Iris	Lei, I am hearing an echo of my voice and I can't hear you clearly. Are you using um, a headset, and if you are, could you plug it in, please?	07:58
Lei	My phone is not- is unclear?	08:11
Iris	There's an <u>echo</u> =	08:15
Lei	Echo.	08:17

- Iris =I hear my voice, and your voice. 08:18
- Lei O:::h. No, I listen clearly. 08:22
- Iris Ok well that's great, but I am not able to listen clearly. 08:27
- Lei Ok. 08:33
- Iris Are you using your computer or are you using a telephone? 08:34
- Lei No, I don't- I don't use the telephone. 08:38
- Iris Ok, so I need you to plug in your headset, so I don't hear the echo. 08:42
- Lei Oh- OK. 08:51
- Iris Ok. 08:52
- ((voice continues to echo))*
- Ok, I am still hearing that echo. Lei, I am going to ask that you call our high scoring team and have them troubleshoot an echo sound with you. Ok?
- Lei Ok. 09:04
- Iris Call them and tell them 'my trainer said that there is an echo, can you help me?' 09:05
- ((echoing sound seems to recede))*
- Lei Oh, uh ye- (now) I can hear you. I:- I will- mm I can () the () on the (Skype) with the LQ English high (scoring) team. 09:10
- Iris Alright, I- I don't know what you just said but the 09:25

echo has gone away so let's take a look at the future ambition phrases on your screen. If the echo comes back, I am going to hang up the call and you're going to call HST for help, OK?

Lei	Ok.	09:42
Iris	Ok. Can you see the card on your screen?	09:43
Lei	Uh, just a moment. (9 second pause) Yeah, I can see.	09:45
Iris	Ok:: go ahead and begi↑n.	09:57
Lei	Ok. (10 second pause) (I will) call the high (circum) team phone number.	10:01
Iris	(.) Um, if you want to call high scoring team, I am going to have to disconnect our ca↓ll or you can try the card that's in front of you=	10:18
Lei	OK	
Iris	=Did you wanna go ahead and do the exercise?	10:26
Lei	Yeah, I:: I hope- I hope to continue to (stay) uh continue to talking with you.	10:28
Iris	Ok well then go ahead and do the <u>exercise</u> that's on your computer screen.	10:39

Bad sound quality & task cards not loading properly

Other technical difficulties such as bad sound quality (choppy sound, faint sound, echoes, sound cutting out) and the task card not loading tended to lead to procedural problems in the lessons. Any problems related to sound are particularly problematic because the trainer-learner interactions depend almost entirely on the voice-to-voice connection. If the trainers and learners can't hear one another clearly then they cannot go forward with the lesson. Consider the following example, in which trainer and learner both go off script in an attempt to resolve an echoing sound.

In the excerpt above, the technical problem (i.e. the echoing sound) begins approximately halfway through the fifteen-minute interaction, at 07:35. The trainer initially attempts to troubleshoot the problem by asking the learner to ensure that her headset is plugged in. Despite repeated references to the echoing problem (07:43, 07:58, 08:15, 08:18, and 08:27) the learner appears to be confused as to what exactly the problem is, as indicated by her question at 08:11 and her protest at 08:22 that she can indeed hear the trainer clearly. The trainer then states very explicitly the procedure that must be followed (08:52 & 09:05); namely, the learner must disconnect and contact the High Scoring Team (i.e. customer service) so that they can help her fix the problem. Then, at 09:25 the trainer, who finds that the echo has receded, changes the plan. She now offers to continue the lesson with the learner. At the same time, she says that if the echoing sound comes back the learner will have to disconnect and contact the HST. Although the learner assents at 09:42, she seems confused as to what should happen next, as evidenced by the fact that she doesn't go forward with the lesson (09:45 & 10:01) even though the trainer prompts her to do so (09:43 & 09:57). The learner still thinks that she is expected to call the HST (10:01). From 10:18 onwards the trainer and learner reestablish and confirm the plan to carry on with the lesson. In total, more than three minutes elapse as the trainer (who identifies and explains the procedure) and the learner (who is involved in negotiating the procedure) decide what to do. Communicating the procedure, clearing up confusion about it, and dealing with the conversation partner's desire to

do something other than the expected procedure thus takes up a significant portion of the allotted 15-minute lesson. Put differently, it is the procedure that is confusing, and establishing a common understanding of it causes trouble in the interaction.

Environmental Impediments to Procedure

The environmental impediments to procedure that I observed were the student not being seated at the computer, a noisy and/or disruptive environment, and inattention.

Not being seated at a computer

The first of these, i.e. the student not being seated at a computer, is perhaps the most serious environmental impediment to the lessons. In theory, the students may connect with the trainers via cell phones or landlines, but they must still be seated in front of a computer to in order for the interaction to proceed. If they aren't, the trainers are instructed to terminate the lesson immediately, as in the interaction below.

Amy	Hi. Welcome to LQ English. My name is Amy and I will be your trainer for this session. How are you today, Xia?	0:00
	(..)	
	Hello Xia?	
	(.)	
	Can you hear me?	
	(...)	
	Hello Xia?	
Xia	Hello, hello?	0:27

Amy	Hello, can you hear me?	0:29
Xia	Yes I can.	0:32
Amy	OK, great. Well, welcome to LQ English, and my name is Amy. How are you doing today?	0:33
Xia	Ah, it's fine uh=	0:41
Amy	Good.	0:43
Xia	=(right) now.	0:44
Amy	Good. Well, this morning we are going to do a speaking evaluation and to use LQ English you need a computer. So are you in front of a computer?	0:45
Xia	(.) O::h actually not, no ah, I have just closed my computer.	0:56
Amy	OK↓ well, you need the com- ah, you need the computer uh, on to do this evaluation, so maybe please give us a call once again when you are at your computer and have it on and ready to go. So, if you have any questions though, you can, ah, call our High Scoring Team and I hope to speak with you, though, sometime. OK?	1:03
Xia	OK↓	1:26
Amy	Alright, goodbye.	1:27
Xia	Mm goodbye ...hhh	1:28

In the interaction above, the learner (Xia) is not seated in front of her computer, which she says she has “just closed.” Because of this, the lesson must be

immediately discontinued by the trainer, which the trainer (Amy) is compliant with. Simply stated, this lesson cannot be carried out because of a violation in procedure – the student hasn't got her computer switched on with the interaction screen up and running.

Noisy and/or disruptive environment

Eloqi requires that its trainers seat themselves in a noise-free, calm environment in which they can devote all of their attention to the learners. In fact, having such an environment is a precondition for the trainers' employment with the company. Once working, trainers must ensure that their quiet environment can be maintained, and the Eloqi administrators provide periodic reminders of this. In one WTCC, for example, HQ asked trainers to "please keep your surroundings quiet when you are doing interactions with the students, especially trainers with young children. We have received complaints in the past from students about this issue." Similarly, the learners must also ensure that their surroundings are quiet and conducive to their lessons, but this is naturally harder for the company to control. For some of the learners it can be a challenge to find a quiet place in which to connect with the Eloqi trainers. Terri, one of my student interviewees, described to me at length the trouble that she had finding a quiet place with an Internet connection. She was an undergraduate living in the dormitories in one of Beijing's universities, and she lived in a room with several other girls. Each of her roommates had a slightly different schedule, which meant that there were not many opportunities for Terri to be alone in their shared room. What's more, the girls liked to chat in the evenings, which, given the time difference, were primetime for connecting with the trainers in the United States. In the mornings the girls were usually asleep, so although it was a good time to connect with the Eloqi trainers Terri had to speak quietly so as not to disturb her roommates. This sometimes caused problems when she was connecting with the Eloqi trainers:

Terri Some teachers will ask why you are so quiet, there uh if
 there anything unhappy, or something like that. I was just

moved because they were so considerate, but actually I- I can't tell them the real reason, you know, I would like to speak loud and laugh aloud but I- I can't.

Tabitha But you couldn't tell them oh I'm sorry but my roommate's asleep?

Terri Yes, sometimes I told them, but uh maybe in their expressions I'm ashamed and nervous girl *((laughs))* and sometimes I would like to go to the teaching buildings to find a place to take my class.

Tabitha Did you do that? Did you go to a teaching building?

Terri Yes, several times I take my laptop to the main teaching buildings, you know they have a wireless connection. And outside the class and in the corridor I can find a relatively quiet place to take my class.

Terri's scenario is not uncommon, as many of Eloqi's customers are university students living in shared rooms and dormitories.

Disruptions in the trainer-learner environments are not limited to noisy living companions and/or family members, but can occur in other unexpected ways. In the following excerpt, the trainer and the learner are well underway on a discussion about the learner's childhood games when suddenly, at approximately 07:30 minutes, the robot-like voice of an electronic translator program can distinctly be heard reciting vocabulary words (scratch, latch, crush). In the excerpt below, the trainer attempts to identify and resolve this disruption. At the same time, the trainer and learner must cope with additional sound problems that prevent them from hearing one another clearly.

Jennifer Oh::k::ay hhh...

09:12

You read in the lesson that some children get up to-

Jing	Sorry?	09:14
Jennifer	You read in the=	09:16
Jing	() um=	09:17
Jennifer	= lesson-	
Jing	Um, I couldn't hear you clearly now	09:18
Jennifer	Can you hear me no ↑ w?	09:21
Jing	U:m (.) uh could you try again?	09:23
Jennifer	Sure-	09:27
Jing	No- no- I mean uh could you- could you use your microphone or maybe you (.)	09:28
Jennifer	OK, can you hear me <u>now</u> Jing? (.) Jing?	09:35
Jing	Yes, could you just um uh because I couldn't (see) clearly=	09:42
Translator	trademark	09:46
Jing	=I just could see the noisy and I know you are talking when you- when you (speak) something and I- I can't hear clearly what you ask- uh exactly	09:47
Jennifer	OK ...hh are you using uh an inte ↑ rpreter of some sort I'm hearing a different <u>voice</u> or something.	09:57
Jing	(.) U::h sorry-	10:07
Jennifer	It's (a)- It's a-	10:10
Jing	I (can't hear clearly)	10:11

Jennifer	Is that what-	10:13
Jing	Oh maybe that-	10:14
Jennifer	Can you t- (.)	10:14
Jing	Maybe-	10:15
Jennifer	Can you turn that o↑ff?	10:16
Jing	You could um you could uh (.) use- no u:m let me see	10:17
Jennifer	I'm hearing- I'm hearing an electronic voice	10:29
Jing	(move) your microphone- you could maybe move your microphone	10:31
Jennifer	Clo:ser?	10:35
	<i>((volume of Jennifer's voice increases))</i>	
	(.)	
Jing	Hello?	10:39
Jennifer	Yes. I'm hearing an electrical voice, Sa=	10:41
Jing	Hello?	10:43
Jennifer	=meen.	10:44
	<u>Jing.</u>	
	(.)	
Jing	Hello?	10:48
Jennifer	Yes, hold on. Can you- m can you see <u>chat</u> ?	10:49
Jing	U:h I just can't hear clearly- yeah I can see that	10:55

Jennifer types into the chat window:

Can you see this?

Jennifer One moment. 11:04

Jing OK >you- you< 11:05

(.)

OK you ask uh

you ask the question (on) that um on that
(whiteboard)

Jing types in:

Yes I can hear you.

Jennifer types:

There is an electrical voice

I am hearing an interpret

program

Jennifer OK, you read in the lesson hm ((clears throat)) that 11:20
some children get up to some very strange and ()

Jing () Could you speak clearly? 11:28

Jennifer Yes I can hear you. 11:30

(.)

Jing OK you could keep- keep going uh (ask) me: the 11:35
question on the whiteboard and uh I will answer
and just remember to give me the feedbacks on the
uh a:h student portal.

- Jennifer O:kay a:nd when uh 11:49
- Jing i:n= 11:53
- Jennifer Do you have- 11:54
- Jing =terple uh 11:55
- Jennifer Interpret. I'm hearing a voice interpret your words. 11:57
- (.)
- Are you using a program to learn English, to interpret words?
- (...)
- Jennifer types in:*
- Can you turn off the interpret program?*
- Jing, can you hear me?
- Jing 'Lo? 12:19
- (..)
- (oh the) u:m
- Jennifer types in:*
- We need to disconnect*
- Jing oka↓y.
- Jennifer types in:*
- I will give you the feedback in a little while.*
- Jing Oka↓y.

In the excerpt above at 09:14 the learner begins to experience sound problems that prevent her from hearing the trainer clearly. She asks her trainer to fix the

problem, making repeated requests with the phrase “could you” (09:23; 09:28; 09:42; 10:17; 10:31), and asking her trainer to adjust her microphone (09:28 & 10:31). At the same time, the trainer makes numerous efforts to identify what is causing the robot-like voice (09:57; 10:10; 10:29; 10:41; 11:57; and in chat), and asks the learner to switch it off several times (10:14; 10:16, and in chat). Three minutes pass as the two interlocutors struggle to identify and sort out the environmental disruptions, using both oral speech and the platform’s chat functionality. Ultimately, the call is disconnected early. This interaction highlights the messy process of negotiating procedures for unexpected disruptions, especially when multiple disruptions – in this case, the robotic voice of the interpreter combined with sound issues – occur simultaneously.

Inattentiveness

In the section above I described how a noisy and/or disruptive environment potentially prevents interlocutors from engaging in the expected service procedures in Eloqi’s online environment. Another environmental condition that I observed disrupting the standard lesson procedure was inattention. In the Eloqi community of practice, where participants are connected by voice but never physically see one another, it might be possible to mask inattention. In some cases, however, I observed transparent inattention that caused the interaction to stall. In the excerpt below, for example, we see how one person breaking away from the interaction disrupts the flow of speech.

- | | | |
|-------|--|-------|
| Reena | <p>Alright, very good. We’ve got another test card up here, um I want you to- what I want you to do is compare the activities, using the comparative adjective forms. Your- one sentence answer is fine, OK?</p> | 09:22 |
| Nissa | <p>(.)
Yeah. Hhh... Hhh...</p> | 09:37 |

- (.)
- Uh::
- I prefer than- I prefer than walking rather running.
- Hhh... Sorry.
- Reena No you're fine. (You're f-) 09:49
- Nissa (I cannot) 09:51
- Oh, I cannot (under) stand the test card.
- Reena You can't see the task card? 09:56
- Nissa Oh- yes, this time I can uh read the task, task card. 09:58
- Reena OK. OK, good. Ah, you wanna- 10:05
- Nissa Ah, ah, sorry, just a moment. Sorry. 10:06
- ((Speaking Chinese, Nissa calls excitedly to her mother, laughing and telling her that she is speaking English.))* 10:10
- Reena Ok Nissa. 10:19
- Nissa Ah – yes, yes. 10:21
- Reena Um, let's go ahead and do this. I need for you to compare the activity on the left with the activity on the right, using the comparative adjectives at the bottom. 10:23
- Nissa Uh, bottom, yeah, bottom, yeah. 10:36
- (..)
- Walking. Cycling.
- Reena So it would be- what it would be is walking is 10:43

healthier than cycling.

Nissa (.) 10:53

O::h.

In this excerpt, we see the trainer explain the task, which is to build sentences using some given comparative adjectives, at 09:22. The learner, Nissa, makes a false start at 09:37, when she compares two activities (walking and running) but fails to make use of the comparative adjectives on the task card. At 09:37 Nissa is struggling to complete the task, although she begins to self-correct when she reexamines the task card at 09:51 and 09:58. Then, just as the trainer begins to direct her, Nissa breaks away from the conversation to address her mother (10:10), telling her excitedly in Chinese that she is speaking English. The trainer tries to redirect her attention at 10:19 and 10:23, re-explaining what Nissa needs to do to complete the task (10:23). Nissa still doesn't seem to understand what she is supposed to do, as at 10:36 she responds by repeated the vocabulary words (walking, cycling) that are listed on the task card. At 10:43 the trainer supplies a sample answer, which is followed by a pause as Nissa seems to absorb the information (10:53).

I happened to be working the evening that this interaction took place. After it was over the trainer returned to the chat room to report a “frustrating” call with Nissa, who “wanted to chat and giggle with her mother throughout the session ☹.” The supervisor on duty responded by saying that she would inform the HST about it. It is standard practice for trainers to report problems in this way, and for the HST to follow up on them. Presumably, someone from the HST would do with Nissa what had already been done in previous cases; namely, they would contact her to find out what had been going on, and to ask her to pay closer attention during the lessons. The trainer's report, our supervisor's response, and the protocol followed by HST emphasize the expectation among Eloqi's community members that in any trainer-learner interaction both parties must provide one another with their undivided attention. Failing to do so is a violation of the expected procedure.

Content-based Impediments to Procedure

The content-based impediments to procedure that I observed were the student struggling with the sequence or nature of the activities and/or tasks; one party engaging in or attempting to engage in off-task activities; and the introduction of forbidden topics.

Struggles with sequence or nature of activities or tasks

The most common type of disruption to the lesson procedure that I observed was that in which the learners struggled with the expected sequence or nature of the task at hand. As previously discussed, Eloqi has a set lesson that it expects the students to go through, and in all sections of the lesson students must use the target vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures. The intent with this is not to produce speech that reflects their true experience and or emotional states³⁵, but rather to produce speech that incorporates the target language for the lesson in grammatically accurate ways. I saw numerous cases of learners not understanding this underlying procedure of the particular tasks at hand (micro level) and of the lessons as a whole (macro level). In this section, I provide two excerpts that illustrate how this occurred.

In the first excerpt below, the trainer (Iris) leads the learner (Lei) in a lesson on answering “What do you want to do in the future?” type questions. By the time that this portion of the interaction happens, Iris and Lei have already completed two sections of the lesson. The first section was on pronunciation, and required the learner to repeat conditional sentences such as “If I pass my exams I will go abroad to study”. The second section was on expressing hopes and goals, and required the learner to build sentences using the phrases like “I hope to be able to...” and “I would like to....” Now the trainer initiates the third section, in which the learner will practice “future ambition phrases” such as “I would like to.... + I would like to fulfill

³⁵ Although, as I showed in my analysis of the Code of Logic, the trainers do value what they perceive as honest speech when it occurs.

this dream because....” As required, the trainer has clicked a button on her UI to bring up a “task card” with written prompts for the learner to refer to. The task card contains the following information on it, written in English, to help guide the learner through the task:

Now think of 3 great things you’d like to do in the future (they don’t have to be true!) and use the below phrases to make full sentences.

Example: “I’d like to become a famous painter. I would like to achieve this ambition because it would be so rewarding!”

I’d like to / hope to / want to do X...

...achieve this ambition because...

...fulfill this dream because...

...succeed in doing this because...

The trainer’s instructions, indicated on her version of the task card, are to “wait for the student to begin. Ensure the student forms correct sentences that logically make sense.” Here is the excerpt, which begins approximately eleven minutes into the interaction:

- | | | |
|------|--|-------|
| Iris | Ok, well then go ahead and do the exercise that’s on your computer screen. | 10:39 |
| Lei | Ok, I can- yes. (.) °I achieve this ambition because° (.) u::h I: I hope to pass my driving test (..) ah- achieve this ambition because mm:: I can: traveling to work. | 10:45 |
| Iris | OK. Um we need for you to actually <u>use</u> the language | 11:17 |

on the card. So, if you want do that, take a look at your card. Can you see your computer screen?

- Lei Oh I can see↑ the computer su- screen. 11:32
- Iris Good, then follow along with me. The first part of your answer should be I hope to pass my driving test. I would like to achieve this ambition because it would be so rewarding. 11:35
- Lei Ok. I- I- I see what's (your) meanings. I hope to pass (the) my driving test, because it would be so rewarding. I- 11:53
- Iris You left out language step 2. 12:06
- Lei (..) sorry? 12:11
- Iris You did step one, and you did step three, but you forgot step two. 12:13
- Lei O::h yeah a:h- 12:19
- Iris So try again- try again with a new- with the new goal. Tell me about a new 'hope to.' 12:23
- Lei OK. 12:28
- Iris Forget the driving test, try another one. 12:29
- Lei °OK. Mm: ° (..) I hope to- I hope to be able to work in:: in a international hospital. Uh:: I- I fulfill- I fulfill this dream because uh (.) because I- I love- I love this working. It (would) give me a sense of uh, fulfillment. Fulfillment. 12:34
- Iris OK: you forgot a couple of words. Um can you see the 13:09

example on your card where it says I would like to?

- Lei (.) I would >like to< I can see. 13:19
- Iris So: why are you not saying those words? So it should be I would like to fulfill this dream. I would like to achieve this ambition. These are things to do in the future, so we cannot say I achieve this. We must say I-would-like-to achieve this. Do you understand? 13:22
- Lei Ye↓s. 13:48
- Iris Ok, 'cuz we're trying to talk about the future. 13:49
- Lei °OK° ...hhh 13:53
- Iris Ok? 13:54
- (..)
- So try that thing again about the hospital. I would like to or I hope to wo↑rk in...
- Lei I hope to work in an international hospital, u::h 14:07
- Iris Hospital. Hospital. 14:14
- Lei Hospi- hospital. Hos- hospital 14:16
- Iris Mmhm. 14:18
- Lei Uh, to achieve an- to achieve an ambition- 14:21
- Iris No, no, no. No, no, no. I would like to. 14:26
- Lei I would like to achieve am- an ambition, it would give me a sense of fulfillment. 14:30
- Iris I would like to achieve this ambition because it would 14:41

give me a sense of fulfillment.

- Lei I would like to achieve this ambition because it would be so rewarding. 14:50
- Iris There we go. You need to say all of those words. If you leave words out, then your English is going to sound like it's broken, and it's going to be incorrect. Ok? 14:57
- Lei Ok. 15:09
- Iris Ok, so practice- that's why we have the card there is so that you can read off the card and practice saying it like that. OK↑ 15:11
- Lei Ok. 15:20

At 10:39 the trainer prompts the learner to begin the task, telling her “go ahead and do the exercise that’s on your computer screen” in reference to the task card. The learner responds (10:45) by constructing the first sentence correctly, as per the prompt (“I hope to pass my driving test”); however for the second sentence she repeats the fragment provided (“achieve this ambition because”) without modifying it with the necessary “I would like to” that should precede it. The trainer redirects her by telling her to “use the language on the card” (11:17), which could be confusing to the student because she is in fact using language from the card, just not all of it. Nevertheless, the trainer is outlining the procedure for completing this task, which is to use the model language and sentences provided to construct new, slightly varied sentences. She reframes this expected procedure at 11:35, when she provides a model answer (“The first part of your answer should be I hope to pass my driving test. I would like to achieve this ambition because it would be so rewarding.”) The student makes another attempt at 11:53, but this too is incomplete. The trainer follows up by pointing out that all three of the language steps must be used to construct the sentence (12:06; 12:13). At 12:34 the student

tries again, and this time she uses each of the three components required; however, she makes a few grammatical errors and leaves out a few key words. At this point the trainer reemphasizes the importance of using the target language on the task card, and explicitly instructs the student to construct a sentence using those words (13:09; 13:22). The student tries two more times at 14:07-14:21 and 14:30, and in both cases her sentences do not quite match the target language. The trainer corrects her by filling in the missing language (14:26) and modeling a complete answer (14:41). She concludes by explicitly outlining the procedure to the student (14:57; 15:11). Specifically, when answering these questions the students must refer to and “read off” the task card, using all of the target language to provide a complete (i.e. “unbroken”) answer.

In the next excerpt, the trainer (Daisy) and the learner (Grace) are doing a lesson on how to answer “How often do you do X” type questions. They have completed some pronunciation practice and now the trainer begins the next section, which will require the learner to build simple sentences using adverbs of frequency. The trainer brings up a task card for the learner, which lists the target adverbs of frequency for use. Here is the excerpt in which the trainer and the learner engage in the task:

Daisy	OK now let’s practice the language you’ll need to answer the IELTS type questions for this lesson.	4:02
Grace	(.) °OK°	4:08
Daisy	OK first let’s look at the adverb of frequency. I will show you a task card with different activity-activities and adverbs of frequency. Please listen to my questions, and answer the questions with one or two short accurate sentences. OK?	4:09
Grace	OK.	4:26

	<i>((clears throat loudly))</i>	
	<i>(8 seconds pass)</i>	
Daisy	Do you see the task card?	4:35
Grace	(.) Ah yeah. I see.	4:37
	<i>(6 seconds pass)</i>	
Daisy	OK, how often do you go out to sing kar()	4:46
	<i>(7 seconds pass)</i>	
Grace	Ah pardon?	4:54
	<i>(5 seconds pass)</i>	
Daisy	How <u>often</u> do you go out to sing karaoke?	5:01
Grace	Um. Ah. I often, um, go out to sing karaoke, ah, (every weeks).	5:06
Daisy	(..) And how often do you eat Western food?	5:18
Grace	<i>((clears throat loudly))</i> mm uh: usually mm I uh (let me see) uh, once a mo [↑] nth	5:25
	<i>(14 seconds pass)</i>	
Daisy	OK. Can you answer the questions using the information on the task card, please, in a full sentence?	5:49
Grace	Ah yeah, I see.	5:56
	<i>(17 seconds pass)</i>	
Daisy	Gra:ce?	6:14

Grace	Ah yeah.	6:16
Daisy	How <u>often</u> do you <u>eat</u> Western <u>food</u> ?	6:19
Grace	Um:: Ah, to be honest I don't like, ah, eat Western food. Ah, ma:ybe several, ah, several months, ah, I, I, I go out, to, ah, eat Western food.	6:23
Daisy	(..) OK. So can you-	6:47
Grace	(Hello?) Oh. OK.	6:48
Daisy	How would you answer the question- how would you answer the <u>question</u> using the <u>adverbs</u> of frequency and the activities on your task card?	6:52
Grace	Um. () <i>(34 seconds pass)</i>	7:01
Daisy	Gra:ce?	7:36
Grace	Ah, yeah. I'm here. (.) Hello?	7:38
Daisy	Do you- do you <u>see</u> the adverb of frequency?	7:44
Grace	(..) Of frequency.	7:48
Daisy	Are you looking at your task card?	7:52
Grace	Ah, yeah	7:55
Daisy	OK. I need you to answer how often do you eat Western food using the adverbs of frequency and activity on your task card, please.	7:57
Grace	Ah, so- can you- can you- u:m (.) I have- I have <u>answer</u> the question.	8:14

- Daisy That's not correct. I need you to use the information on the task card to properly answer the question. 8:24
- Grace O:h (..) I must use the words, um, left to right. 8:34
(10 seconds pass)
- Daisy OK. I need you to use a full sentence and use the adverb of frequency and the activity on your student ca:rd to answer the question how often do you eat Western food. 8:47
- Grace Um. Hhh... °frequency° I- I eat Western food frequency. 9:04
- Daisy OK Gra:ce, do you see the adverb of frequency list? 9:17
Rarely, occasionally, frequently, everyda:y
- Grace every day 9:28
- Daisy Once in a blue moon, never, almost never. Do you see that list? 9:29
- Grace Ah. Ye:ah. I see. 9:35
- Daisy OK. I need you to use that list to answer the questions that I am asking you. So using a word from that list, tell me how often you eat Western food? 9:37
- Grace (.) U:h frequency. 9:53
(13 seconds pass)
- Daisy OK. Do you eat Western food rarely, occasionally, frequently, every day, once in a blue moon, never, almost never. How often do you eat Western food? 10:08

Grace	Um: I eat Western food, ah, frequen(cy).	10:23
Daisy	Frequently.	10:29
Grace	Frequently.	10:30
Daisy	Frequently.	10:32
Grace	Frequently.	10:36
Daisy	OK. Now how often do you go swimming in the sea?	10:37
Grace	U:h (..) rarely.	10:45
Daisy	OK, and full sentence, please.	10:53
Grace	(.) I beg your pardon?	10:58
Daisy	I need you to answer these questions in a full sentence, please.	11:00
Grace	U:m I, I go swimming in the sea rarely uh because I- I have not enough time to go- uh to the sea.	11:07
Daisy	OK. So, I <u>rarely</u> go swimming in the sea.	11:24
Grace	(uh) <u>rarely</u> go swimming in the sea.	11:29
Daisy	Now how often do you do physical exercise?	11:33
Grace	Mm: ah I do physical exercise every day, ah, when I finish my ah cla- uh class (mostly) I- I always (run) to, mm playground and do some, mm, sports, ah, like jogging, um, mm.	11:39
Daisy	OK. So your answer, Grace, would simply be, I do physical exercise every day after class. OK?	12:06
Grace	OK.	12:16

Daisy	Alright. So how often do you read novels?	12:17
Grace	(.) Uh, to be honest, ah, ah, almost never, um, because I think that, ah, reading is boring.	12:24
Daisy	(.) OK. So I almost-	12:42
Grace	()	
Daisy	I almost never read novels because I think reading is boring.	12:44
Grace	Yeah.	12:49
Daisy	(.) OK. Do you understand what I did with those?	12:53
Grace	Yes. I un ()	12:58
Daisy	OK. Alright. Now I am going to show you another task card and ask you what you usually do at different times of the day. So we can work on the present tense and do a little bit more adverbs of frequency. OK?	13:00

In the excerpt above, the trainer introduces the task at 4:09 and outlines the procedure for completing it. Specifically, she says that the student (Grace) must look at the adverbs of frequency listed on the task card, listen to the questions asked, and use the adverbs to create answers made up of “one or two short accurate sentences.” There are two unexplained pauses before the trainer begins by asking the first question at 4:46, and another short delay while the learner asks for the question to be repeated (4:54), which the trainer does (5:01). Although the learner’s first answer does not actually make use of any of the given adverbs of frequency (5:06), it is a complete sentence and the trainer does not correct her orally. Rather, she proceeds on to the next question, “How often do you eat Western food?” (5:18).

Grace answers the second question with another adverb of frequency (“once a month”) that is not listed on the task card; however this time her answer is not a complete sentence. After a long pause, the trainer reemphasizes the procedure: Grace must answer in full sentences using the words on the task card (5:49). I read the trainer’s response as a prompt for Grace to try again, as evidenced by the next long pause in which the trainer seems to be waiting for Grace to reformulate her answer. In any case, Grace does not try to answer again until the trainer repeats the question at 6:19. When Grace responds (6:23) her answer is grammatically incorrect and does not contain any of the adverbs on her list. The trainer prompts Grace with the question “How would you answer the question using the adverbs of frequency and the activities on your task card,” directing Grace’s attention to the list of target vocabulary and reemphasizing the expected procedure. Grace doesn’t respond, and there is a very long pause.

The trainer tries directing Grace’s attention back to the task card at 7:44 and 7:52, and at 7:57 she repeats the instructions once again (“I need you to answer how often do you eat Western food using the adverbs of frequency and activity on your task card.”) Grace protests that she has already answered the question (8:14), which the trainer contradicts (“That’s not correct”), once again repeating the procedure (“I need you to use the information on the task card to properly answer the question.”) Grace’s response of “oh” seems to indicate realization, which is followed by a statement about the procedure (“I must use the words, um, left to right”), which, however, is not the same procedure that the trainer has been explaining.

There is another long pause and the trainer repeats the instructions yet again at 8:47, saying “I need you to use a full sentence and use the adverb of frequency and the activity on your student ca:rd to answer the question how often do you eat Western food.” Grace provides a full sentence in the right format, but incorrectly uses the word “frequency” as an adverb (9:04) and again the trainer cites the language on the task card (9:17-9:29; 9:37). Again Grace uses “frequency” as an adverb. The trainer corrects her and drills her in the pronunciation of the word

“frequently” (10:29-10:36). The trainer then moves on to the next question, “How often do you go swimming in the sea” (10:37). Grace answers with a word from the task card (“rarely”) without creating a full sentence. The trainer asks Grace twice to make a full sentence (11:00 & 11:24), which Grace does at 11:07, with a small error in word order. The trainer corrects Grace and models the correct answer (11:24) and then moves on to the next question (“How often do you do physical exercise?”) at 11:33. In the remainder of the excerpt, Grace manages to give complete sentences using the target adverbs of frequency, although her answers do not quite fit the model format.

Throughout the interaction the student, Grace, doesn’t quite seem to grasp the expected procedure for completing the task at hand. It takes Grace repeated attempts as well as multiple explanations, models, corrections and clarifications from her trainer, for the two interlocutors to arrive at a shared understanding of how to correctly approach. By the end of this excerpt we still can’t be sure that Grace fully understands how she is expected to proceed.

Engaging in alternative activities

Another procedural issue that arose in my data set, albeit less frequently, was the case of a learner or trainer deliberately engaging in, or attempting to engage in, activities or discussions other than those scripted into the lessons. In my data set there were examples of both trainers and learners initiating such shifts away from the scripts, although it was of course the trainers who ultimately decided whether or not a shift like this would be pursued. On the trainer side, I saw occasional cases of individuals choosing to violate the standard lesson procedure for reasons such as the promotion of a student’s development (i.e. teaching them and drilling them in bonus vocabulary). During one evening shift, for example, a trainer who had gotten three lessons in a row with the same student (Terri) announced in the chat room:

Jill *((addressing Supervisor))*

I went off script a bit with Terri during the discussion, but

it was completely on topic and was a great discussion

Supervisor hmm...ok, please do stay on script as much as possible.

Jill I know, which is why I was telling you about it. Normally I wouldn't have done it.

Supervisor ok Jill...ty³⁶

In the above case, as in most of the trainer-initiated shifts I observed, the shift was explained as something that was intended to accommodate and assist the student in his or her learning and development. In these cases, trainers typically justified the shifts by citing by the particular circumstances of the lesson and the instructional needs of their students. For example, the student may already have covered all the lesson material; the student may have demonstrated fluency in the material and thus needed an additional challenge; the student might have requested extra help; the student might have been struggling with the concepts; etc.

On rare occasions I discovered interactions in which a trainer had gone off script to engage in prolonged free chat with a student, perhaps one who was regarded to be particularly unique, or one whom they felt particularly close to. These cases were the exception, however, and certainly not the rule. From time to time I also observed lessons in which students explicitly asked to do something “off script,” but trainers generally rebuffed these conversational moves. That they did so is unsurprising, given that trainers are explicitly directed to stick with the scripts and never to go into free conversation, as illustrated in this excerpt from the trainer training materials:

[You might have to deal with] a learner who does not want to follow the lesson. Sometimes our learners do the same interaction several times. This means trainers can come across learners who have already done the lesson interaction that they are doing several times

³⁶ Thank you

before. The learner may want to skip sections or request free talk. In this case, a trainer should do try to stick to the prompts as much as possible. Stick to the target language and the main themes of the lesson and develop on them. Focus on the prompts or areas that the learner is clearly weaker at. Don't become too relaxed and lapse into an open free talk. (Eloqi trainer training module, "Dealing with difficult learners")

Indeed, as I have discussed in previous chapters, the trainers' continued employment depends on them complying with the company's protocols, and the systems in place for recording and monitoring calls mean that their compliance can be (and is) frequently checked. What I observed was that trainers typically followed the company's established protocols in handling students who attempted to go off script, either by ending the call or by getting the students back on track with the interaction. In the excerpt below we see just such a situation, in which a trainer handles a student who deliberately attempts to flout the community's expected lesson procedure.

Iris	Thank you for calling LQ English. My name is Iris and I will be your trainer for this session. What's your name?	0:00
Winson	You can- you can call me Winson.	0:09
Iris	OK Winson. How are you doing today?	0:13
Winson	Fine. How are you?	0:16
Iris	I am well. Thank you very much. Um, it looks like we are going to be answering what do you dislike about X type questions today. So let's start by reviewing your pronunciation, alright?	0:18
Winson	OK.	0:32

Iris	OK. You should see a task card on your screen, Winson, and I would like you to read the words on it out loud for me, please.	0:33
Winson	A:h but ah, I could not ah see the content on the co- on the screen.	0:42
Iris	OK=	0:48
Winson	Something-	0:49
Iris	=are you having difficulty with your Internet or what's going on?	0:49
Winson	(.) Ah, I think, ah <i>((clears throat))</i> I think we can just uh talk, ah, without, ah, the computer-	0:55
Iris	No: I- I'm sorry-	1:02
Winson	(with) the computer (with) the network	1:04
Iris	Yeah, no, I'm sorry, at Eloqi we- we have to work with- with the computer, so you'll need to get your Internet working and then you'll have to call us back.	1:05
Winson	A:h please hold on. Let me try.	1:16
Iris	OK.	1:22
Winson	Ah (..) So could you tell me the name of this lesson?	1:23

Iris	Um, actually <u>you're</u> - you've selected a lesson on answering what do you dislike about X type questions. (..) I- I didn't select the lesson - <u>you</u> did. (..) Do you want to get on the Internet and, and go through the lesson first before you talk with us?	1:30
Winson	A:h (..) Let me try again.	1:56
Iris	M'kay. Well, because our interactions are timed, Winson, I'm going to have to let you go until you can get that up and running. So, you do that and then give us a call back. OK?	2:02
Winson	OK uh	2:15
Iris	OK. Thank you.	2:16
Winson	Thanks.	2:19
Iris	Buh-bye.	2:21
Winson	Bye. Bye.	2:22

In the interaction above Winson, who presumably has been instructed by his customer service representative the terms and conditions of Eloqi's services³⁷, does not directly state that he is at the computer. Rather, he says that he can't see the screen (0:42) and then suggests that he and the trainer simply talk without regard to the computer-based lesson materials (0:55). The trainer rejects this suggestion, stating that it is against the company's procedure (1:05). At this point Winson indicates that he would like to pull up the lesson material, asking the trainer to wait while he does this (1:16) to which she assents (1:22). However, Winson doesn't know or remember what lesson they are supposed to be engaged in doing (1:23). The trainer reacts to this with a note of impatience in her voice, saying, "I didn't select the lesson - you did." (1:30) The general idea among the trainers and administrators is that students select their lessons deliberately and strategically from the Eloqi lesson suites, based on what they need to learn and what they want to practice. Additionally, for any given lesson students are expected to do a series of preparatory exercises, in which they learn the key vocabulary and structures that they will be practicing shortly with their trainers. When Winson reveals that he doesn't know what lesson he's supposed to have selected, it indicates that he has not done the preparatory exercises and therefore isn't actually ready to engage in the talk with the trainer. The trainer seems to suspect as much, judging by her question "Do you want to get on the Internet and, and go through the lesson first before you talk with us?" quickly followed by her decision to end the interaction at 2:02. Before saying goodbye she tells Winson that he must have the lesson "up and running" before connecting again.

I was working on the evening that this interaction occurred, and I was in the chat room when Iris reentered and reported Winson to the supervisor on duty. Several of the trainers on duty that night responded with amusement to her report:

³⁷ We know that Winson is not a trial student experimenting with Eloqi's services, because this is not a trial lesson. Rather, it's a lesson from the regular Proven Formulas lesson suite, which clients must pay to access.

Iris	Disco ³⁸ with Winson. Said he wasn't on computer and couldn't I just chat with him. I explained that he needs computer.	01 02
Supervisor	lol ³⁹ ...ok, I informed HST.	03
Daisy	lol @ 'chat with him'	04
Reena	Iris: ROFL ⁴⁰ re: Winson	05
Supervisor	Winson called HST to find out if he could chat with a trainer without going through a lesson!!!	06 07
Daisy	lol	08
Supervisor	they have updated him!!	09
Reena	NUH-UH ROFL	10
Supervisor	lol	11
Daisy	Does Winson need a friend?	12
Supervisor	lol I think that's a first!!	13
Reena	I think he has the wrong 800# lol	14
Daisy	lol	15

As we see above, the supervisor on shift as well as two of the other trainers present in the room found it hilarious that a student would actually request free chat rather than comply with the lesson script. Why? The data indicate that the procedures are so strongly outlined and so widely accepted that community members (at least in

³⁸ Disconnect

³⁹ Laughing out loud

⁴⁰ Rolling on the floor laughing

this case) find the thought of going against them, and certainly the attempt, astonishing. Winson doesn't have the interaction screen up and running; he hasn't chosen a lesson deliberately and strategically; he hasn't prepared for the lesson; he wants to chat instead of doing the lesson; he asks his trainer to wait while he pulls up the necessary material. At the very least, Winson's actions and the trainers' response to them clearly reveal aspects of the standard procedure because they are attended to as violations. Here again, the cause of confusion and conflict is the violation of expected procedure.

Introduction of forbidden topics

As previously mentioned, there are certain topics that the trainers are asked never to raise or pursue with students. These verboten topics include Tiananmen Square, Tibet, China's "Great Firewall", and anything critical of the Chinese government. If a student happens to bring such a topic up, trainers are asked not only to avoid pursuing it but also to change topics altogether, as illustrated in the excerpt from the trainer training materials below:

Learners may sometimes ask very personal questions, bring up uncomfortable topics, or touch on topics that our Eloqi policy requires trainers to avoid discussing. In this event the trainer should move the learner on politely without giving an explanation as to why, saying something like OK, it's not suitable or appropriate to discuss this right now so let's move on to focus on, is a classic move on line, which won't offend anyone if said very politely. (Eloqi trainer training module, "Dealing with difficult learners")

I myself never had the experience of a student introducing a forbidden topic, although in interviews one or two trainers mentioned it happening. For example, in the trainer forum there was discussion of well-known student who liked to talk about Barack Obama with her trainers, especially during his well-publicized state visit to Beijing in 2008.

In my set of transcribed trainer-learner interactions I was able to discover only one case in which a student raised what I interpreted as a sensitive issue. In this case, excerpted below, the trainer and the student were doing a lesson on the topic of health. As prompted, the trainer (Zara) asks the student (Paul) to describe street markets in the place where he lives. In his answer, the student makes comments that could be construed as weakly questioning the Chinese government:

- | | | |
|------|---|------|
| Zara | I see. Well, you know, a street market is an area where a lot of <u>different</u> people can come and sell their (.) things, like their things that they make, or their fruits and vegetables, or, um, interesting items. Are there any street markets like that where people can bring things to sell? | 2:54 |
| Paul | Ah, no. It is, ah, in Shanghai. Um, there, ah, there are ah (no) street- street market. In fact our gov- our government don't encourage (you) to do it. | 3:13 |
| Zara | Really. I see. | 3:33 |
| Paul | Yes- I don't know why. My- many of my customers told me it is quite common in many countries but I don't know why our government <u>doesn't</u> (.) allow us to do it. It's a little strange I... | 3:34 |
| Zara | Mmhm, mmhm. Yeah. Well, you know, in the U.S. ah, there are <u>not</u> many street markets either↓ in fact, there aren't really <u>any</u> street markets↓ there are places that we call fle↑a markets where a whole bunch of people get together like a <u>bazaar</u> , or something like that= | 3:51 |
| Paul | A::h | 4:07 |

- Zara =to sell things but- but as far as setting up on the street just to sell things no, we can't do it either. Yeah. 4:08
- Paul One- 4:13
- Zara Yeah.
- Paul OK. One of my Japanese friends told me ah, there are many mm street markets in parks, and so on so:↑ it's quite common. 4:14
- Zara Mmhm, mmhm. Yeah. I- I wonder, you know for- for a flea market or for a market in a park you probably have to get a permit so the government can keep track of you and know if you earn money. That's probably why they don't let you just set up on the street and start selling things because they want to know
((laughs))
hhh... you know? 4:26
- Paul Yes, maybe. I- I- I'm not sure why. 4:45
((slight breathy laugh))
Hhh...
- Zara Yeah, yeah. O↑K, um, so I saw a program about Beijing and people were buying all kinds of interesting food on the street. Like, um, tofu on a stick, and black tofu, and things like that. Can you tell me about some of the foods like that, that you can 4:48

buy in the hutongs⁴¹ and places like that?

At 3:13 in the excerpt above, Paul states that there are no street markets where he lives in Shanghai; moreover, he says that the [Chinese] government does not encourage them. At 3:34 he extends this response by saying that he understands street markets are common in other countries, a fact that he repeats later on in the conversation at 4:14, in reference to Japan. He states not once but twice that he doesn't understand why street markets are not "allowed" by the Chinese government, and that he finds this "a little strange" (3:34). In the Eloqi community of practice, a teacher would certainly not be permitted to wonder aloud at the Chinese government's actions and to classify them as "a little strange," which, however weak it may be, comes across as critical. Similarly, trainers are not permitted to let the students criticize or question the Chinese government, and so it is not surprising when Zara, following the expected protocols, swiftly and smoothly defuses Paul's comments. She does this by stating emphatically that there aren't any street markets in the United States either (3:51; 4:08). She then suggests that perhaps it is simply an issue of getting the necessary permits so that one's earnings can be tracked (4:26). Shortly thereafter she changes the topic altogether (4:48) by segueing to a question about street food in the traditional *hutong* neighborhoods. In short, Zara skillfully prevents the conversation from veering off script into forbidden topics. At the same time, she herself follows the expected procedures by both keeping the conversation focused on the topic at hand and by ensuring that it remains innocuous.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter I addressed my research question on the nature of online intercultural service interactions. Despite the fact that Eloqi provides its trainer team with a comprehensive set of model trainer-learner interactions to follow, there

⁴¹ Old fashioned, traditional living areas around narrow cobbled alleys.

were (perhaps inevitably) instances in which the scripts and protocols broke down, were not useful or applicable, were resisted, or otherwise failed. In analyzing these cases, I showed that the construct of procedural knowledge was very useful for understanding how and why the service communication between the Eloqi trainers and students broke down or failed. The main types of procedural problems that I identified were technical, environmental, and content-based. To summarize, conflict and confusion – when they occurred – were caused by a gap in, or the deliberate choice to flout, procedural knowledge. Now I turn to a discussion of the larger implications of these findings.

Procedural Knowledge is Learned

First, procedural knowledge, which is a component of scripts⁴², is learned, not innate, knowledge. In my case study, we may ask how a person knows, or comes to know, how to perform any online English conversation lesson, or the ones offered by Eloqi in particular. It is reasonable to assume that no one is born with this type of procedural knowledge or script in mind. Rather, such procedural knowledge and scripts are learned over time, through socialization, experience, and repetition. By the same token, procedural knowledge can vary from context to context, job to job, community to community. All parties come to interactions (service-oriented or otherwise) with scripts in mind (Shoemaker, 1996); simultaneously scripts are co-produced in moment-to-moment interactions. This learning is a work in progress, for which we draw on our extant cognitive resources, including what are called “protoscripts” or “generic script[s] appropriate to a class of situations (e.g. strategy meetings).” (Gioia & Poole, 1984, p. 450) As we experience new situations we recall other scripts that we know, and use them as we negotiate how to interpret and respond to what is happening. (Gioia & Poole, 1984) The key takeaway here is that

⁴² Procedural knowledge is a component of both kinds of scripts treated in this dissertation; i.e. scripts as defined by Erving Goffman, and scripts in the theatrical sense (spoken lines to be learned and produced, word for word). I described both of these kinds of scripts at length in Chapter 5.

we can learn new scripts (Gioia & Manz, 1985) and learn how to apply them in new situations.

This learning process applies to technology mediated communication situations just as it does to face-to-face ones. Moreover, communicating in online environments may pose a special challenge because the modes of interaction and communication there are, in some ways, new and unfamiliar (cf. Boellstorff, 2008; Kendall, 2002; Sternberg, 2009). Indeed, as I learned while doing the research for this dissertation this project, many of Eloqi's trainers and students have no previous experience with online teaching and learning. What's more, many of the students using Eloqi's services have never had one-to-one English conversation instruction before, and have never even spoken with a non-Chinese person. Engaging in these one-to-one online interactions is thus a novel situation on many levels.

As I have shown throughout this dissertation, Eloqi's trainers are provided with written and oral instructions on the procedures involved in teaching the online lessons to the clients, including directives and advice on what to do when things do not go as planned. For the students, however, there is neither a user guide nor any formal orientation to the platform. Instead, students learn what the communication protocols and procedures are simply by engaging them, and, as I have shown throughout this chapter, through trial and error. As one student told me:

I still remember that my first time to connect the online foreign trainer, because I didn't understand very well her instruction, so sometimes uh she have to interrupt me, and I- I felt so confused, and a bit embarrassed, but the second time it became- it felt a bit better.

(Student interview, Terri)

New or novice trainers may innocently veer from the expected protocols because they are still becoming familiar with them. Over time the students, like other types of customers, learn the procedures and scripts expected of them and routinize

(Cameron, 2000b, p. 330) their communication accordingly⁴³. In fact, with time and experience clients may become as proficient in the procedures and scripts as the people serving them, "display[ing] quite detailed knowledge of the prescribed sequence of moves." (Cameron, 2008, p. 152) The practical implication here is that Eloqi, which relies heavily on its community members to closely follow a very particular procedure, would be well served by providing a training orientation to its clients, not only its trainers. The same might apply to other organizations that strongly codify their customer service interactions.

Script Mismatches Lead To Conflict

Second, conflicts occur when there is a clear mismatch in the procedural knowledge and/or scripts that interlocutors choose to apply. As I have shown throughout this chapter, miscommunication and conflict occurred when one or more parties in the interaction did not know enough about the expected procedure to comply with it, or otherwise chose to flout it. By extension, it is also problematic when interlocutors operate from completely different sets of procedural knowledge and/or different scripts (Holdford, 2006; Shoemaker, 1996). For example, service providers and their customers may have mismatches in the style or genre of communication that they select or expect (Bailey, 1997; Hart, 2005; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002). In other cases, the formal scripts that service providers are required to use may not adequately address the actual problems, concerns, or needs of their customers (Cameron, 2000a; Hultgren & Cameron, 2010). This is further complicated by the fact that customers, who do not have to follow codified prompts

⁴³ A glimpse of this is seen in the interaction in which Jing, a student echoing the script used by her instructors, says, "OK you could keep- keep going uh (ask) me: the question on the whiteboard and uh I will answer and just remember to give me the feedbacks on the uh a:h studen:t portal." As this shows, Jing is familiar enough with the lesson to know and anticipate not only what her trainer is supposed to say next, but also what she herself is expected to do next. She has, in this sense, successfully learned and internalized some of the requisite procedural knowledge for carrying out an Eloqi online English lesson successfully.

themselves, (Kivisto & Pittman, 1998) may unknowingly veer into talk that is off script. In fact, a more efficient strategy may be to take the approach of identifying what procedures and scripts interlocutors bring to the interactions, and then use these "as general interactive rules for [the] encounters." (Leigh & McGraw, 1989, p. 29) The key point here is that the service providers should ideally have the flexibility to alter, adjust, and amend their procedures and scripts as needed, rather than being forced to indiscriminately "reproduc[e] specific behaviors across sales contexts." (Leigh & McGraw, 1989, p. 32)

Procedural Knowledge Explains Miscommunication

Third, contrary to the assumptions of many intercultural communication theories, I found that in this study procedural knowledge trumped essentialist notions of culture in its utility for identifying and explaining issues of miscommunication and conflict. Traditionally intercultural communication theorists operate from the assumption that culture (national, regional, local, ethnic, religious, etc.) is the root cause of conflict and misunderstandings. That is, if two or more people of different cultural backgrounds come together, the differences in their cultural frames (including, perhaps, their different ways of speaking, interpreting speech, viewing the world, etc.) will cause trouble in their communication. (Sarangi, 1994) This was not the case in my study. Recall that the EC/SCT view of culture is that it is "a socially constructed and historically transmitted pattern of symbols, meanings, premises and rules." (Philipsen, 1992, p. 7) This system, which influences how people choose, utilize, and interpret communication moves and strategies, cannot be reduced to a nationality, an ethnicity, a religion, a political system, etc. Unlike traditional intercultural communication theorists, I did not start my study by assuming that, because some of my participants were Chinese, and some were American, they would experience conflict in their communication with one another. Nor did I attempt to link the conflict that I did discover with national identities (Chinese, US American). Rather, as a researcher of speech codes and an ethnographer of communication, I utilized an inductive, grounded approach

towards my study of the Eloqi community of practice. I did my analysis by examining my participants' speech within the larger context of the community. In particular I examined participants' rules, premises, norms and symbolic terms pertaining to communicative conduct, and investigated their significance within the community. What I found was that procedural knowledge, rather than culture, was problematic. Had I used the traditional approach of intercultural communication theory, I might not have learned this. In my study, as in others (Poncini, 2002; Sarangi, 1994), moving beyond static typologies of national culture proved to be both useful and fruitful. It also helped me to reveal the important role that procedural knowledge plays in these interactions.

Scripts and Procedural Knowledge Help Us Analyze Service Interactions

Fourth, scripts and procedural knowledge are useful analytical tools for analyzing and diagnosing customer service interactions. The majority of the trainer-learner interactions that I analyzed for this dissertation project were successful and ran smoothly. In those that did not go smoothly, however, procedural knowledge (rather than culture) was at the heart of the conflict and miscommunication. This suggests to me that examining scripts and procedural knowledge, which is an implicit part of ethnographies of communication (see, for example Basso, 1979; Pratt & Wieder, 1993), is a useful approach for looking at service interactions (Shoemaker, 1996), not simply to describe them but also to potentially diagnose miscommunication and conflict, when they occur.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I set out to understand the significance of speech in a particular community of practice, one that was intercultural, service-oriented, and virtual in that it existed primarily in online rather than physical spaces. Following the precepts of my theoretical and methodological frameworks – the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory – I entered into and inhabited the community that I sought to understand. There I made focused observations, participated in daily work routines, asked questions, and got to know people, all in service of my sustained efforts to see and understand the local, situated meanings that members (administrators, trainers, and students) ascribed to speech in their community. In the previous chapters of this dissertation I posed and subsequently answered four interrelated research questions about speech in this community of practice. These questions dealt with the presence of a local speech code, the connections between this speech code and the technological platform on and through which it was deployed, and the nature of the customer service communication that community members engaged in. In this chapter, I will briefly restate and summarize my findings. I will then discuss the broader implications, limitations, and conclusions that I draw from this work.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Research Questions 1 & 2: The Local Speech Code, i.e. The Code of Logic

One of my primary aims in this dissertation was to discover whether or not there was a speech code being deployed in the Eloqi community of practice. I wanted to make this discovery because locating a local speech code and documenting its use and significance is a powerful and effective means of understanding larger-level social relations; local concepts of strategic communication; and (potentially) the underlying reasons for miscommunication, misunderstandings, and/or conflicts experienced in a community. The first research question that I therefore asked was:

Research Question 1: As the members of the Eloqi community (students, trainers, administrators) interact with one another through their technological platform, what speech codes do they negotiate, develop, and/or draw upon?

As a scholar utilizing the theoretical and methodological tools of the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory, I needed to examine the communication of my chosen community in context, taking into account such details as the features of the virtual spaces inhabited by community members, the relationships between participants, the goals of speech events, norms and rules pertaining to speaking, the sequence in which speech events played out, etc. Contextualizing speech is de rigueur in any Ethnography of Communication, but as a means of highlighting my attention to this important aspect of the research I asked my second research question, which was:

Research Question 2: How are the speech codes that are used by the members of the Eloqi community (students, trainers, administrators) connected with contextual factors, such as Eloqi's service protocols, educational goals, etc.?

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation I began my explication of these two research questions by setting the scene of the Eloqi CoP. In that chapter I described in detail the learning and service goals underlying the foundation of this community; the people (trainers, students, administrators) making up the community; the virtual work platform and the different spaces constituting it; and the typical and company-sanctioned procedures for working and learning in this community.

Next, in Chapter 4 I turned to a thorough analysis of community members' situated communication. My analysis revealed the presence of a local speech code, which I named the Code of Logic. I demonstrated that the Code of Logic was comprised of two key symbolic terms and six interrelated rules, premises, and norms. The two symbolic terms were "native" and "English logic." Native speech referred to the type of communication that Eloqi intended its clients (the students)

to learn through the trainers (native speakers) and the company-generated learning materials. Native speech also referred to a type of speaking that Eloqi's students felt they could only learn through contact with a certain type of teacher – a native English speaker (like Eloqi's trainers). In this community, native English speech was characterized in large part by the application of English Logic. Speech produced using English Logic had particular qualities: it was organized; succinct; open and honest; proactive; spontaneous rather than canned; and positive and supportive. These qualities are directly related to the six interrelated rules, premises, and norms, that I identified in the Code of Logic: (1) the speech of the Eloqi learners should be clearly organized; (2) the learners should speak succinctly; (3a) the trainers should be open and honest in their feedback to the students; (3b) it is an added benefit if the learners are open and honest in their communication with the trainers; (4) the learners should be proactive; (5) ideally the speech produced by the learners in this community should be spontaneous rather than "canned"; (6a) the trainers should be positive and supportive towards the learners; and (6b) the learners should frame themselves in a positive light.

Finally, at the end of Chapter 4 I discussed the ways in which my findings offered support for two particular propositions of Speech Codes Theory: Propositions 6 and 3. Proposition 6 states that "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." (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005, p. 63) In other words, interlocutors use speech codes to influence, interpret, or control communicative behavior. This was borne out in my analysis, which illustrated how Eloqi's administrators, trainers and students used the Code of Logic to control, predict, and evaluate communication in their interactions with one another. As regards Proposition 3, which states that "a speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric," (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 61) I showed that in learning the Code of Logic, Eloqi's students were learning how to be like native English speakers by connecting with others in a direct, open, honest, succinct

fashion. This native English persona is positive and forward thinking, spontaneous and creative. In learning the Code of Logic, Eloqi's students are therefore learning much more than language or grammar – they are learning how to be (or at least how to emulate) a particular type of person in the world.

Research Question 3: Encoding Communication Into Technology

Given that the Eloqi community of practice was a virtual one, in that it existed primarily in online spaces, I wanted to explore the role that technology played in shaping, supporting, and/or restricting the communication that took place between its members. To this end, I posed my third research question, which was:

Research Question 3: How are those speech codes used by the members of the Eloqi community (students, trainers, administrators) linked to the affordances and constraints of the medium of communication, i.e. the technological platforms supporting the interactions?

In Chapter 5 I showed that there is a script, or interaction order, associated with the trainer-learner interactions. This script serves as a model for appropriate communicative conduct; it is drawn on, referenced, and utilized to justify the right kind of speech in this setting. As community members play out the script, they deploy the code of communicative conduct, i.e. the Code of Logic. I discussed how these scripts are encoded into Eloqi's technological platform and I illustrated how the technological platform functioned as a cue for communicative conduct in this community. I also drew on the Ethnography of Communication perspective to explain the value in studying a technological platform as a "setting" to foreground the particular interaction orders, rules, norms and premises (pertaining to communicative conduct) associated with such settings. Finally, I reflected on the ways in which the Eloqi platform could be used to monitor and control trainers' and students' communicative conduct. Taken as a whole, this chapter was intended to present a cohesive argument about the complex and dynamic connections between the technological platform and community members' communication.

Research Question 4: Online Intercultural Service Communication

The final research question that I asked dealt with the broad topic of customer service communication. While analyses of customer service grounded in the discipline of communication studies are still few and far between, communication scholars are uniquely positioned to produce insightful research in this area. In hopes of breaking new ground, I therefore posed this question:

Research Question 4: What do the data reveal about the nature of online intercultural service interactions in general?

In Chapter 6 I shared my findings on this question, beginning with a discussion of the concept of procedural knowledge. I argued that procedural knowledge – which refers to our understandings of what should happen in an interaction, and how, and in what order – was key to understanding why some service interactions between Eloqi’s trainers and learners failed. I then outlined and described three large categories of procedural violations that I found in my data set: technical, environmental, and content-based violations. Each of these had three types, or subcategories, of violations represented in my data set.

Finally, I reflected on the implications of this analysis of procedural knowledge. For example, I argued that procedural knowledge, which is a component of scripts, is learned, not innate, knowledge. We are socialized into our local understandings of correct and appropriate procedures. What’s more, when there is a clear mismatch in the procedural knowledge and/or scripts that interlocutors choose to apply this can result in conflict and misunderstanding, as illustrated in my data set. Ultimately, in my case study procedural knowledge trumped essentialist notions of culture in its utility for identifying and explaining issues of miscommunication and conflict.

IMPLICATIONS

The work that I have presented in this dissertation suggests four broader sets of theoretical and methodological implications, which I will outline here.

Contextualizing Studies of Online Communication

The first set of implications pertains to how researchers go about cracking the speech codes that exist in online environments. My dissertation research confirmed that a speech code existed in the virtual Eloqi community, where members worked together over a prolonged period of time to achieve particular organizational, personal, social, and learning goals. This is consistent with what speech codes theory suggests about sustained interaction and the presence of speech codes. Namely, that “in any given time and place where people have interacted enough to have formed systems of symbols, meanings, premises and rules about something, they have also formed symbols, meanings, premises, and rules about communicative conduct.” (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 58) Based on this information, I conjecture that there are many other speech codes in operation in countless virtual communities and other technology-mediated spaces.

As we go forward into this still new and mostly uncharted realm of communicative action, how can we best prepare ourselves (as researchers, as ethnographers, as social scientists) to discover, understand, and explain the codes of conduct that we will inevitably encounter? Learning to look at, listen to, and experience a community from the inside out is vitally important (Philipsen, 2010) and – especially where scripts are concerned, it is essential to examine speech in context. (Cameron, 2000b, 2008) These points are no less important in online environments (Markham, 1998). What’s more, I believe that we must be especially strategic about and diligent in contextualizing our research on online communication.

When I embarked on this dissertation project I knew – as a researcher using the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory – that it was important to contextualize my analysis of speech in this online community. However it was only after I began the data collection that I fully realized how vital this contextualization would be to discovering the local code of communicative conduct in the Eloqi CoP. This realization came after I had begun to collect and transcribe recordings of the

trainer-learner interactions. As I quickly learned, the trainers' communication in most of the lessons was highly scripted, and the exchanges sounded flat and rote. I felt a surge of disappointment as I listened repeatedly to these interactions and pored over my transcripts, because there did not seem to be much to discover in them. Then, soon after this phase, I joined the Eloqi CoP as a trainer, and I began my participant observations. I started my exploration of the different online spaces where the Eloqi administrators, trainers, and students worked together – the discussion forum, the chat room, the weekly conference calls, and the trainer-learner interaction screen. I became part of the behind-the-scenes talk that undergirded the trainer-learner interactions. I got to know and understand Eloqi's customer service communication policies, as well as the rules, premises and norms behind the design of the user interface for the lessons. It was only after gaining this contextualized viewpoint that the deeper meanings of the trainer-learner interactions and the Code of Logic itself snapped into view. In sum, the trainer-learner interactions alone told me something, but they did not tell me enough. To understand the speech code here I had to get to know the community from a local's perspective.

This experience speaks to the importance of contextualizing our studies of online communities. Contextualization can seem challenging in those online environments that are (at first glance at least) only one- or two-dimensional. However, the lines between text and context are blurry, and "...cyberspace is not simply a collection of texts to analyze; rather it is an evolving cultural context of immense magnitude and complex scope." (Markham, 1998, p. 25) In fact, the *Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory* offer us a powerful theoretical and methodological tool for understanding the norms, premises and rules pertaining to online communicative conduct. This utility is heightened when we approach online spaces as Hymes would have us approach physical or offline spaces: places in their own right, with particular interaction orders and rules of etiquette associated with them, just as I detailed in my discussion at the conclusion of Chapter 5.

To summarize, understanding a speech code means understanding talk-in-context, i.e. situated interaction. Speech codes do not exist in isolation from the people and the communication situations that they pertain to. This is true whether we are looking at online or offline settings. In either case, we cannot look at a code of communicative conduct without also examining its larger context. In online settings, learning a speech code must necessarily involve learning what it means to be a local, i.e. what it means to work, socialize, learn, connect, inhabit, etc. that virtual space.

Where Do Speech Codes Come From?

In this dissertation I studied a particular community (the Eloqi CoP) that happened to both very young (less than 5 years old) as well as virtual (members were geographically dispersed and connected with one another via voice and text over a technology-mediated platform). Despite this, I found that the community had a very strong speech code – the Code of Logic – at play in their interactions with one another. This code was used as a resource as community members engaged strategically with one another, interpreted and evaluated one another’s speech, and went about their daily business of teaching communication skills and learning to be better communicators. So where did this speech code come from?

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Speech Codes Theory tells us that “in any given time and place where people have interacted enough to have formed systems of symbols, meanings, premises and rules about something, they have also formed symbols, meanings, premises, and rules about communicative conduct.” (Philipsen, et al., 2005, p. 58). My study, as I have shown, bears this statement out. Furthermore, my dissertation gets at larger-level questions of where and how speech codes arise, how they are developed, how they may shift over time, and their potential for fossilization. For example, my analysis of the Code of Logic takes into account the quotidian organizational talk and practices of community members (administrators, trainers, learners). I showed how the Code of Logic is co-constructed by many individuals (trainers, administrators, students) working

together to reach particular goals (training students to communicate “like a native,” helping achieve good scores on the IELTS exam,). My analysis has demonstrated how the Code of Logic was developed over time through countless interactions of different types (trainers to students, administrators to trainers) in various online places that the community members meet in (the student-trainer interaction screens, the weekly trainer conference calls, the forum, the chat room). In this work I was careful to acknowledge the strong and persistent links between the social interactions that community members engaged in and the overarching norms, premises, and rules that they attached to their speech.

Again, while Speech Codes Theory does speak to the changeable nature of codes, it does not explicitly address how codes arise, develop, and shift over time. I think this might be a useful addition to the framework, particularly in service of those scholars and practitioners interested in studying and even advancing resistance to and change in a community’s codes of communicative conduct.

Critiquing Speech Codes & Scripts

One point that my study supports is that speech codes and scripts (in Goffman’s sense of interaction order, described in Chapter 5) exist wherever there is sustained social interaction. That is, wherever there is speaking, there will be a code of communicative conduct in play which interlocutors draw on to shape, interpret, and evaluate speech. Similarly, wherever there is social interaction, there will be an interaction order at play which social actors draw on to shape, interpret, and evaluate communicative behavior. In this way, speech codes and scripts function as communicative resources. At this level, speech codes and scripts are both natural and neutral features of all people’s socio-cognitive repertoires. Because of this, it is not profitable to argue that speech codes or scripts in general are inherently good or bad. Rather, speech codes and scripts are simply a given feature of social interaction regardless of who is interacting where, when, why or how.

This is not to say that particular speech codes and scripts cannot be critiqued. In fact, communication researchers and practitioners alike may well object to those

situations in which more powerful individuals, groups, and/or organizations enforce the use of certain speech codes or scripts. (Hultgren & Cameron, 2010) This is all the more objectionable when the speech codes or scripts being enforced are ineffectual at achieving the desired outcomes; go against local/native speech codes or scripts; or produce speech and communicative action with an disagreeable or offensive moral bent to it. (Cameron, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Holdford, 2006; Hultgren, 2011; Manning, 2008; Philipsen, 2000)

In the present study there is certainly the potential for extending the analysis by critiquing both the Code of Logic and Eloqi's promotion of it. Although I didn't explicitly collect data on the what Eloqi's students considered their own local/native/Chinese speech code to be, we saw evidence throughout my analysis that it was implicitly marked as not-organized, not-succinct, not-spontaneous, not-proactive, etc. From this we may safely conclude that my research participants would, at the very least, characterize the local/native/Chinese speech code as different from English-speakers' Code of Logic, perhaps radically so. Is it wrong to train a group of people to speak, think, talk, and act in a way very different to their own? Is it wrong to promote, perhaps widely, your own way of speaking, thinking, talking and acting? While I don't address these questions in this dissertation, I acknowledge that they are important ones, and I wish to emphasize that they arose here because I used the Ethnography of Communication and Speech Codes Theory to frame my analysis. This theoretical/methodological framework is amenable to engaging in critical questions about power and its relationship to speech and communicative conduct.

We may likewise critique the lesson script (i.e. interaction order) in use in Eloqi's CoP. As discussed in Chapter 6, I found that this lesson script (i.e. interaction order) caused problems when the people expected to use it (i.e. the trainers and students) departed from it, or flouted it, or did not have the requisite procedural knowledge to carry it through smoothly. While I take no position here on what a good, better, or best interaction order would look like for the Eloqi CoP, I recognize the practical value of testing out interaction orders in before implementing them

organization-wide. (Blomkvist & Holmlid, 2010; Leigh & McGraw, 1989) I also believe that my study bears out the importance of handling scripts as something organic: they develop out of social interactions, and so shift and change over time, just as people's habits, needs, and perspectives shift and change over time. (Holdford, 2006) In this way it would be beneficial for Eloqi (and organizations like it) to continue to observe, critique, and adjust their service scripts, rather than treating them as a final product.

Fitting the Technological Interface with Communication Goals

Numerous studies have used the Ethnography of Communication framework to look at a range of means and technologies used by interlocutors in different communities across the world. (Baxter, 1993; Cohn, 1987; Pratt & Wieder, 1993) These studies show how amenable the EC framework is to an infinite range of language varieties and means/technologies used by informants (or by the researchers themselves). (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) What is new about my dissertation research is the examination of how the deployment of a speech code is effected (i.e. carried out) through the use of technology. A technological interface functions as "the meeting point of a number of important social and cultural dynamics, for it enables and mediates informational power structures, restructures everyday practices in a myriad of ways, and transforms relations between bodies and their environments." (Gane & Beer, 2008, p. 65) In this way a technological interface is implicated in the social and cultural acts of the people communicating in and on it. When a company like Eloqi creates a technological interface to connect its employees and its clients in a communication training venture, every element of the build has significance, because it shapes, constrains and allows for certain communicative practices. Because of this, it is very important that the medium fit with the learning goals, the course materials, the plan for the interactions, etc. (Barbara E. Hanna & De Nooy, 2009).

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

For this research project I studied only one community – the Eloqi community of practice. However, it is commonly understood that ideally “an ethnography should form part of a comparative project” (Miller & Slater, 2001, p. 22). That is, ethnographers learn about many local communities in order to make comparisons across them, formulate and test theories communication, and contribute to our general understandings about human life. (Hymes, 1962, 1977; Miller & Slater, 2001; Philipsen, 2002) This dissertation work is thus, in a sense, incomplete, because I cannot yet generalize my findings to other online communities, or other service scenarios. Because of this, I have been careful to limit my arguments to the local environment that I studied. Going forward, I would like to study other online, service-oriented communities to see what codes of communicative conduct are in play, how the technological platforms are implicated, and how/if procedural knowledge can be used to diagnose miscommunication. In this way the present study can (and hopefully will) be part of a larger and growing body of comparative work.

The present study was also limited in scope and time. As an ethnographer of communication I faced the standard conundrum of studying a community that was in constant flux. At Eloqi the trainers came and went, the platform underwent constant revisions, the training materials were revised and updated, students completed their subscriptions and moved on. In other words, the community was a living organization that was constantly growing, adapting, and responding to changes. My study thus only represents a moment in time, a snapshot of daily work-life at one limited point in the life of the larger organization. My findings cannot be said to have captured a static or unchanging reality. I believe that this limitation can be addressed at least in part by continuing to study the impacts of globalization on “language work” (Cameron, 2000a, p. 114; cf. Hultgren, 2011) and the commodification of communication that goes on in international service organizations like Eloqi.

Finally, while I set out to draw connections between communication, speech codes, culture and technology in this dissertation, it is only through completing this project that I can finally appreciate the great complexity and enormous scope of such a venture. Some culture and technology scholars feel that

[What] is needed for an intercultural global village in which cultural differences are preserved and enhanced while global communications are also sustained is a new kind of cosmopolitan, one who – precisely through the recognition of the complex interactions...between culture, communication, and technology – can engage in both global and local cultures in ways that recognize and respect fundamental cultural values and distinctive communicative preferences.” (Ess & Sudweeks, 2001, p. 5)

I too share in this belief and hope that this project – and my future research – will serve in some small way to foster this type of cultural, technological, and communication cosmopolitanism.

EPILOGUE

In October 2010, just over four years after its creation, Eloqi merged its business with an online language instruction company based in the United States. After three months in this new partnership, Eloqi's co-founder and Chief Technology Officer, who had been my primary contact throughout this project, stepped down. Soon afterwards Eloqi's Service Director, my secondary contact, also decided to leave the company. Eloqi's community of practice continued on for another half year until the autumn of 2011. At that time, just as I was completing my dissertation manuscript, the trainer portal was shut down, and the trainer team was let go. Eloqi and its community of practice were disbanded.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Campfire	A virtual space in the Eloqi community where trainers and administrators meet while on duty; also called the Chat Room.
CEL	Core English Logic; a suite of lessons created by Eloqi, later superseded by their newer “Proven Formulas” lesson suite.
CMC	Computer mediated communication
CoP	Community of practice
ELL	English Language Learner
EC	Ethnography of Communication
GUI/UI	Graphic user interface/user interface
LQ English	The name of the language learning service created by Eloqi
FTF	Face-to-face
HST	High Scoring Team, the name for Eloqi’s customer service team
IELTS	International English Language Testing System; a standardized, internationally recognized English proficiency exam
LOL	Internet slang for “laughing out loud”
Mark spots	A proprietary tool on the Eloqi user interface; used by the trainers to mark points where the learner makes speaking errors
ROFL	Internet slang for “rolling on the floor laughing”
SCT	Speech Codes Theory
Eloqi	The pseudonym applied to the company studied in this dissertation

TC	Trainer Client; a proprietary technology that enables Eloqi's trainers and learners to connect with one another voice-to-voice for their one-to-one English lessons.
VoIP	Voice-over Internet Protocol; a technology that allows people to connect to one another voice-to-voice over the Internet.
WTCC	Weekly Trainer Conference Call; a communication practice in the Eloqi community of practice where trainers and administrators meet online for company- and community-related updates and information.

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APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATIONS

[]	Brackets show overlapping talk
=say	Equal signs show latching (no interval) between utterances
(.)	A period inside parentheses shows a pause. Longer pauses are indicated by adding periods
but-	A dash shows sharp cutoff of speech
<u>better</u>	Underlining indicates emphasis
NEVER	Capital letters show talk that is noticeably louder than the surrounding talk
°what is°	Degree signs indicate talk that is noticeably more quiet than the surrounding talk
>fast< <slow>	“Less than” and “greater than” signs indicate talk that is noticeably faster or slower than the surrounding talk.
ple:ase	A colon indicates an extension of the sound or syllable that it follows. Multiple colons indicate longer extension
↑sometimes happen↓	Arrows pointing upwards and downwards indicated marked rising and falling shifts in intonation in the talk immediately following.
()	Unclear speech or word
((cough))	Double parentheses with italicized content enclose transcriber’s descriptions of sounds or other features of the talk/scene

APPENDIX B: MODEL INTERACTION

- Sylvie Minguo. I'm Sylvie. Welcome to LQ English. In this lesson we will be practicing the formula for answering do you prefer X or Y type questions. OK?
- Minguo OK.
- Sylvie So let's start by quickly reviewing the pronunciation from your preparation. OK?
- Minguo OK.
- Sylvie We're going to practice the 'schwa' sound. Here's a task card. What I'd like you to do is to say the words that you see on your task card. OK?
- Minguo OK. Um. Faster. Quicker. Longer. Smarter. Chipper. Heavier.
- Sylvie OK. Nice job. Let's look at the second to last word. Cheaper. Be careful of the E, that long EE sound. Can you repeat after me? Cheaper.
- Minguo Cheaper.
- Sylvie Much better. OK. Can you read the sentences that you see at the bottom of the task card?
- Minguo Yes. Bikes are mu- bikes are much faster than buses during the rush hour. During rush hour.
- Sylvie OK. Can you say that sentence again please?
- Minguo Yes. Bikes are much faster than buses during rush hour.
- Sylvie OK. Good. The next sentence.
- Minguo It's a lot chipper to commute to work on the bus than the subway.

- Sylvie OK. Let's say that sentence again and be careful of the word cheaper.
- Minguo It's a lot cheaper to commute to work on the bus than the subway.
- Sylvie OK. Good. And the last sentence.
- Minguo He's a lot smarter than her. He decided to rent a house much nearer to his work.
- Sylvie OK. Good. So he decided to rent a house much nearer to his work place. Now let's move on and look at using the word prefer. Here is a task card. OK. What I'm going to do is ask you some questions and I'd like you to follow the structures you see on your task card. OK?
- Minguo OK.
- Sylvie Do you prefer writing letters or emails?
- Minguo I prefer writing emails to letters. To writing letters.
- Sylvie OK. Can you say that again?
- Minguo` Yes. I prefer writing emails to writing letters.
- Sylvie Good. So you used the first structure on your task card. Good. Let's move on to another question. Do you like to watch sports or play sports?
- Minguo I prefer to watch sports than play sports.
- Sylvie OK. So you prefer to watch sports rather than to play sports. OK. Can you say that sentence again using rather than?
- Minguo OK. I prefer to watch sports rather than to play sports.

- Sylvie OK. Good. Ah. Which do you enjoy the most – eating in restaurants or at home?
- Minguo I prefer eating at home rather than eating at restaurant.
- Sylvie OK. Good. And the last question that we will do this time. Do you prefer traveling to cities or the countryside places on holiday?
- Minguo Um. I prefer traveling. I'm sorry- again?
- Sylvie Do you prefer traveling to cities or the countryside on your holiday?
- Minguo Yeah. I- I prefer traveling to the countryside rather than traveling to cities, on hol- on the holidays.
- Sylvie OK. Very good. Let's now move on to comparatives. I'm going to say an adjective, and I want you to say the comparative. So, if I say big, you should say bigger. OK?
- Minguo OK.
- Sylvie OK. The first adjective. Fast.
- Minguo Faster.
- Sylvie Good. Ugly.
- Minguo Uglier.
- Sylvie Good. Convenient.
- Minguo More convenient.
- Sylvie Nice job. Healthy.
- Minguo Healthier.
- Sylvie Cheap.

Minguo Cheaper.

Sylvie Good. Good with that pronunciation.

Minguo Thank you.

Sylvie Fat.

Minguo Fatter.

Sylvie Good. Good.

Minguo Better.

Sylvie Nice. That was a tricky one. Next we have important.

Minguo More important.

Sylvie OK. Bad.

Minguo Worse.

Sylvie Good. And the last one. Friendly.

Minguo More friendly.

Sylvie OK. Good. You can say more friendly as well as friendlier. Both are actually correct. OK. Now let's look at another task card. OK. So what I would like you to do is to make sentences and choose, ah, choose one activity in column one and choose another activity in column two and compare them. OK?

Minguo OK. Um. Yeah. Um. Cycling is, um, cycling is more- cycling is more convenient than working.

Sylvie Cycling is more convenient than what?

Minguo Working

Sylvie OK. Good. Than walking. Be careful with that pronunciation. It sounded like you said working. OK. So can you repeat after me?
Walking.

Minguo Walking.

Sylvie Good. And working.

Minguo Working.

Sylvie Can you hear the difference? The aw sound versus the er sound.

Minguo Yes. I can.

Sylvie OK. So can you say that sentence for me again, please?

Minguo Yes. Cycling is more convenient than walking.

Sylvie Good. OK. The next sentence.

Minguo Ah, ah. Dine- ah, dining out, or deening out?

Sylvie Dining.

Minguo Dining out is more romantic than eating at home.

Sylvie OK. Nice job. Next sentence.

Minguo Ah. Traveling by train is more economical than traveling by plane.

Sylvie OK. So traveling by train is more economical than traveling by plane. OK. And let's do one more sentence.

Minguo OK. Ah. Living in, living in the city is more, if, it's more inspiring than living in the countryside.

Sylvie Um. That's interesting. OK. So you think that living in the city is more inspiring than living in the countryside. OK. Nice job.
((pause)) OK, let's now practice answering the questions as if you were in a real oral exam. OK? So your answers should last for 40 seconds at the most. So here is a task card to help you while you are answering these questions. Do you see the task card on your screen?

Minguo Yes. I see.

Sylvie OK. So. Remember we're answering these questions like you are in a real oral exam. The first question. Do you prefer talking on the telephone or chatting online?

Minguo I prefer chatting online to talking on the phone, on the telephone, um, because compared to talking on the telephone chatting online is cheaper, and it is, ah, more, it is, um, more common way to do it, so for me at night when I have free time I, I will chat with my friends online.

Sylvie OK. OK. Nice job. So, according to you it is more convenient as well as cheaper. Um. You may want to talk a little bit more about why you don't want to use the telephone. OK. Let's now move on to another question. Don't forget that you want to answer it like you are in a real exam. OK?

Minguo OK.

Sylvie Ah. Do you prefer life now, or life when you were a child?

- Minguo Oh. That's a good question. Um. I, I prefer life as a child to life now because I think child, life as a child is, is more enjoyable and very, it's easier. Um. For example if the child, the child doesn't need to worry about, ah, a lot things like job, like money, or like the pressures or something, they can just, the children can just, you know, have a rise and have fine. It's easier, and it's better. Yeah.
- Sylvie OK. OK. So, ah, we could say that life for children is more carefree than life as an adult, and as you mentioned, you don't have pressures that life has, gives to you when you are an adult. Nice job. That was a bit more of a difficult question, but an interesting question, like you said. Let's now move on to another question. Do you like going to the cinema or watching DVDs at home?
- Minguo Oh. I prefer watching a DVD at home to going to the theatre, um, because it is, ah, more economical just watching DVD at home and besides, if, if sometimes, if during the, if you are watching this DVD and you suddenly lost, so you can just, just take it back, just, um, so you can, you can start it over, you can start it again.
- Sylvie Ah. OK. OK. OK. Nice job. So you could say that if you get interrupted while you are watching a DVD at home, you can pause the movie.
- Minguo Ah. Yes.
- Sylvie Or, as you said, instead of back it up, we would say you can rewind.
- Minguo Rewind.
- Sylvie Yeah. Rewind. OK?
- Minguo Thank you.

Sylvie Um. Another thing. With your vocabulary. You said that you prefer watching DVDs at home rather than going to the theatre. OK. Be careful. Ah. Because I said going to the cinema. Cinema implies that you are going to a movie theatre. If you say going to the theatre it may imply that you are going to go see, for example, a play, or to go to see, ah, a musical performance. OK. So if you say theatre, make sure that you say movie theatre. OK?

Minguo OK.

Sylvie OK. OK, Minguo, which do you prefer – winter or spring?

Minguo I prefer spring to winter because, ah, spring is warmer than winter and you can do a lot of, ah, outdoor activities in spring, so I just love it.

Sylvie OK. Ok. A couple of things to take note. Be careful of your pronunciation of spring. Can you repeat after me? Spring.

Minguo Spring.

Sylvie Ah. One more time.

Minguo Spring.

Sylvie OK. And also when we are answering this type of question don't forget that you can also talk about why you don't like winter as well. OK. You said that you like spring because you can do lots of things outside, but you can also talk about why don't you like winter as well.

Minguo Yeah.

Sylvie Do you want to try to answer that question again?

Minguo Yes.

Sylvie So Minguo, which do you prefer – winter or spring?

Minguo I prefer spring to winter, ah, because spring is warmer than winter. In spring I can do a lot of outdoor activities, but in winter, I can ju- I can only stay at home, and just, ah, because home is quite warm.

Sylvie OK. So It sounds like you like to be in warm places.

Minguo Yes.

Sylvie OK. Um. Let's do one more question. Which do you prefer – table tennis or basketball?

Minguo Well. I prefer playing basketball to playing table tennis because, um, um, playing basketball is a more team play game, and when you are playing basketball you need to know how to cooperate with your teammates. So that's the reason.

Sylvie Ok. OK. So it sounds like you like to play team sports rather than individual sports. OK. Nice job, Minguo. Well, Minguo, that brings us to the end of our lesson today. It's been great to teach you. So remember to check the Student Portal for the feedback I'll be giving you, and then be sure to practice the things that you are the weakest at. OK?

Minguo OK. Thank you.

Sylvie I hope that you have a good day, Minguo. Take care.

Minguo Yeah.

Sylvie Bye-bye.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Tabitha Hart

EDUCATION

- Ph.D. 2012 University of Washington, Department of Communication
(Re)negotiating Speech Codes in an Online Language Learning Community
Dr. Gerry Philipsen, chair
Concentrations: Cultural & Organizational Communication, Technology
- M.A. 2005 California State University, Sacramento, Department of Communication Studies
Service with a smile: Starbucks' customer service in Berlin, Germany
Dr. S. David Zuckerman, chair
Concentrations: Intercultural and Organizational Communication
- B.A. 1995 University of California, San Diego, Department of Communication

PUBLICATIONS

- Hart, T. (2011). Speech codes theory as a framework for analyzing communication in online educational settings. In S. Kelsey & K. St. Amant (Eds.), *Computer mediated communication: Issues and approaches in education* Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2007). Semiotic mediation in literacy practices: Private speech in context. In R. Alanen & S. Pöyhönen (Eds.), *Language in Action: Vygotsky and Leontievian Legacy Today*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Mason, R. & Hart, T. (2007). Libraries for a global networked world: Toward new educational and design strategies. Paper translated into Korean and published in *The National Assembly Library Review of The National Assembly Library of the Republic of Korea*, October 2007, Volume 44, Number 341, pp 14-23.

SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

- Hart, T. (2012). *Using the Ethnography of Communication to understand online places/spaces*. Paper presented at Ethnography of Communication: Ways Forward; Omaha NB, June 2012.
- Hart, T. (2012). *Conducting online ethnography: Challenges and future directions*. Paper presented at Public Ethnography: Connecting New Genres, New Media, New Audiences; Victoria BC, June 2012.
- Hart, T. (2012). *The interface is the message: How a technological platform shapes communication in an online Chinese-American community*. Paper presented at the International Communication Association Preconference & the Fifth Global Communication Forum on New Media and Internet Communication and Communities in China, Phoenix, AZ, May 2012.
- Hart, T. (2011). *Cracking the code of an online language learning community*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association, New Orleans, LA, November 2011.
- Hart, T. (2011). *The Pros and Cons of Online Labor: Job Performance On A Language-Learning Platform*. Paper presented at the Association of Internet Researchers Conference, Seattle, WA, October 2011.
- Hart, T. (2011). *Speech codes in dynamic intercultural text/voice online communication*. Paper presented at the International Communication Association, Boston, MA, May 2011.

- Hart, T. (2010). *Codings of "Speech" Implicate Codings of Personhood, Sociality, and Strategic Action: Evidence from German and American Service Interactions*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, November 2010.
- Hart, T. (2010). *Conflicting interests in an online intercultural learning community*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, November 2010.
- Hart, T. & Howard, P. (2009). *A place to reconnect: Urban Indian women's use of social networking platforms*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL, November 2009.
- Hart, T. (2009). *Intercultural conflict in the workplace: Perceptions of Starbucks' customer service in Berlin, Germany*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Summer Conference on Intercultural Dialogue, Istanbul, Turkey, July 2009.
- Hart, T. (2008). *Calling Stereotypes Into Question: Challenging Orientalism in John Jeffcoat's "Outsourced"*. Paper presented at Communicating the Sacred: Religion at the Academic Crossroads Student Symposium, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, April 2008.
- Hart, T. (2008). *Crafting Organizational Intimacy Through Language: The Use of Du and Sie at Starbucks in Berlin, Germany*. Paper presented at the Qualitative Research in Management and Organization Conference, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, March 2008.
- Hart, T. (2008). *Cyber Servants: Orientalism in Indian Call Center Service Discourse*. Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association, Broomfield, CO, February 2008.
- Hart, T. (2007). *(Re)negotiating cultural identities in online VoIP ESL training*. Paper presented at the Association of Internet Researchers Conference, Vancouver, Canada, October 2007.
- Mason, R. & Hart, T. (2007). *Libraries for a Global Networked World: Toward New Educational and Design Strategies*. Paper presented at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions General Conference and Council in Durban, South Africa, August 2007.
- Hart, T. (2007). *India Calling: Orientalism in Contemporary Indian Call Center Discourse*. Paper presented at the MEPHISTOS Graduate Student Conference, University of California, Los Angeles, April 2007.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2007). *The Interrelationship of Private Speech and Learning Contexts*. Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics 2007 Conference in Costa Mesa, California, April 2007.
- Hart, T. (2007). *"You Don't Need A Smile To Buy Cornflakes": The Perception Of Starbucks' Customer Service Communication In Berlin, Germany*. Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association, Seattle, WA, February 2007. Selected as one of the top four papers in Intercultural Communication.
- Hart, T. (2007). *Applying Bloom's Taxonomy to Online Learning Activities*. Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association, Seattle, WA, February 2007.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2006). *Developing identities of competency through literacy instruction in a first grade classroom*. Paper presented at the California Reading Association, Sacramento, California, November 2006.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2006). *Interrelationship of literacy learning practices, agency, and private speech*. Paper presented at the Conference on Language in Action: Vygotsky and Leontievan Legacy Today, Jyvaskyla, Finland, June 2006.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2005). *Constructing literacy knowledge: Private speech in context*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada, April 2005.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2005). *"I can write wheels": The interweaving of identity and competency in literacy activities*. Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, February 2005. Selected as one of the top four papers in Communication and Instruction.

- Hart, T. (2005). *The thing on the blind side of the heart: Jealousy and conflict over a romantic partner's friendship with an ex-significant other*. Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, February 2005.
- Hart, T. (2005). *Discovering organizational culture in an open forum*. Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, February 2005.
- Hart, T. (2005). *Service with a smile: An intercultural communication analysis of Starbucks' customer service in the United States*. Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, February 2005.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2004). *The construction of literacy knowledge and identity*. Paper presented at the Conference on Language, Interaction, and Culture, University of California, Los Angeles, May 2004.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2004). *Issues of identity in literacy learning and teaching*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, April 2004.
- Stone, L. & Hart, T. (2003). *Issues of identity in literacy learning and teaching*. Paper presented at the National Council of Teachers of English Conference, San Francisco, CA, November 2003.

GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2011 | Levy Forgivable Loan (\$1000)
Awarded by the Department of Communication, University of Washington |
| 2010 | Finalist, US Presidential Management Fellowship |
| 2009 | Communication Research Grant (\$400)
Awarded by the Department of Communication, University of Washington |
| 2009 | Ames Diversity Grant (\$400)
Awarded by the Department of Communication, University of Washington |
| 2009 | Chester Fritz Fellowship (1 quarter tuition + \$5,285 stipend)
Awarded by the Graduate School, University of Washington |
| 2008 | Labor Studies Research Grant (\$2,500)
Awarded by the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, University of Washington |
| 2007 | Foreign Language and Areas Studies Fellowship (1 year tuition + \$15,000 stipend)
Awarded for Hindi language study by the University of Washington South Asia Center |
| 2004 | German Studies Research Grant (\$2,000)
Awarded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) |
| 2003 | Suzanne Snively Scholarship (1 year tuition)
Awarded by California State University, Sacramento |