Interpersonal communication in war zones: The U.S. Marines’ use of rhetorical listening as a communication behavior

Angie Mallory  
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Interpersonal communication in war zones:
The U.S. Marines’ use of rhetorical listening as a communication behavior

by

Angie R. Mallory

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSPHY

Major: Rhetoric and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Charles Kostelnick, Major Professor
    Elena Cotos
    David Roberts
    Stacy Tye-Williams
    Gregory Wilson

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2019
DEDICATION

To Faith and Gabriel, whose sacrifice while I was writing this still strikes me with awe. Dear Children, I am incredibly proud of the humans you are becoming. I look forward to walking the rest of this journey of life together—more present now that this particular pen is laid to rest.

And to all of those who are first in their families to reach out for a thing that no one else understands. Becoming an expert craftsman skilled in knowledge-work is honest work, too; it just requires a different sort of blood, sweat, and tears than the hands-in-the-dirt work we have always prided ourselves in.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................................... vi

LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................................................. vii

NOMENCLATURE ............................................................................................................................ viii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................... ix

ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND ............................................................................................................. 1

  Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 1
  The need for this study: Gap in existing literature ................................................................. 2
  Narrative Vignette ...................................................................................................................... 4
  Introduction to the Gap in Research ........................................................................................ 15
  Dissertation Organization ....................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW OF GAP IN TECHNICAL COMM ......................... 20

  The Shifting Role of the Technical Communicator ............................................................ 21
    Role changes require skill changes .................................................................................. 22
  Calls for More Interpersonal Skills ..................................................................................... 24
  Cross-Functional Teams as an Example of Interpersonal Communication Situations .... 26
  Technical Communicators as Part of a Team ..................................................................... 27
  The History of Listening Scholarship ............................................................................... 31

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ....................................................................................................... 36

  Qualitative Methodology ....................................................................................................... 36
  Chapter Overview ................................................................................................................... 37
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Vignette</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Research</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Gathering Methods</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic data collection</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic Methods in Technical Communication</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author Theoretical Situatedness</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classic ethnography features</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poststructural ethnography features</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public ethnography features</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic writing style</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment with other technical communication ethnographers</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Decision Points at Research Site</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining entry</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the participants’ trust and overcoming obstacles in forging rapport</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing the settings and people</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving a brief description of what data was gathered</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length of interviews and topics covered</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings established between researchers and participants</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing epistemological problems</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-uniformity makes categorization difficult</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict between respectful conduct in the workplace and my research design</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of analysis</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three types of codes</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of activity theory</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: RHETORICAL LISTENING AS A COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Listening</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Only Tangentially Addressed in Technical Communication Scholarship</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Communication Scholarship Documents the Need for Listening Skills</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening is Rhetorical/Rhetorical Listening</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Example of the tool MISO Marines use to analyze audiences ........................................ 44
Figure 2 A Coalition Team walks through Mout Town in search of Key Leaders .................. 124
Figure 3 A team of coalition forces approaching the mosque to engage with the Imam ....... 127
Figure 4 The Imam and a Marine pose in the Mosque for a picture ....................................... 134
Figure 5 The Imam and the Mayor listen in to one set of earbuds to approve the message ..... 135
Figure 6 A Coalition team escorts the Catholic Mayor to see the Imam ................................. 136
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Codebook Data .................................................................................................................. 98
Table 2 Data Analysis Methods Used............................................................................................ 101
# NOMENCLATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminology/Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deployment</td>
<td>A period of time where military members leave the U.S. and work in another country. Deployments are usually tied to specific missions in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinetic</td>
<td>A type of action characterized by force, often with potential to be lethal (as a gun or other weapon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messaging</td>
<td>The act of sending out a message over any type of multimedia medium (for example, Christmas lights, water bottles, mass texts messages, TV messages, posters, and leaflets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISO</td>
<td>Military Information Support Operations (also refers to the unit of Marines who do this work, formerly called the PSYOP, or Psychological Operations, Marines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mout Town</td>
<td>The training town built on the Marine Corps base to facilitate Marine Corps training. The town is realistic, with a radio station, an open-air market, a mosque, police station, multi-purpose buildings, and paid actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Listening</td>
<td>An inner stance of listening for the purpose of understanding and relationship-building rather than listening to respond or argue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Listening Behavior</td>
<td>Any outwardly visible act which intends to, or can be recognized as, indicating the inner stance of Rhetorical Listening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest gratitude to my Major Professor, Charlie Kostelnick, who believed in the value of my research from the beginning and who worked with my very asymmetric schedule as I balanced Army technical writing and pursuing a PhD.

Deep appreciation goes out the rest of my committee as well, for putting up with me on this journey! You deserved a much smoother ride than the one I led us on!

I am indebted to Elena Cotos for giving me a space in the Center for Communication Excellence, so I could continue mentoring graduate students and develop my own interpersonal communication skills through writing consultations. I loved that job.

To Stacy Tye-Williams whose narrative theory class blew my mind—and still does! Thank you for introducing me to the concept that I see everywhere now. More specifically, I appreciate your perspective that narrative research is intended to give agency to the storyteller in ways that no other genre can. I attempted to do that in each portion of this project.

My appreciation of Greg Wilson involves his patient mentorship: he taught me ethnographic methods and the scholarly values required to do them well (although I have some growing to do still!). Greg, you took time to listen when I babbled incoherently about half-formed ideas, patiently pulling them from me until they made sense.

To Coach, I owe a good chunk of my acceptance at this esteemed organization. It was he who convinced everyone to take this mere undergraduate into the PhD program and then he who also convinced me that I was ready. Your belief in me fostered increasing belief in myself—especially in all the late writing nights where I wondered if I was cut out for this.

I want to express special gratitude to Doug Downs, who not only modeled for me how higher learning could change a life, but who collaborated with me on the effort—and always takes time to continue that effort, to this day.

To UT and Jules, who long, long ago took me in and showed me what it was to be un-alone, loved, and known, and how to stand on my own. You laugh with me still in those moments when life offers no other remedy and you celebrate with me in ways others cannot—for you intimately know the obstacles which make each success so meaningful. I am grateful beyond words for your presence in my life.

James and Melinda, how do I even begin to thank you for your constant presence in my life? You who willingly agreed to anchor our lives together to help this single mom be a good parent and get a PhD. Your hours, days, and weeks—even years—of being there for me and my children is a love only shown by family, or friends who have become family. We love you!

I am grateful also for Mitch, whose company kept me sane, whose input reminded me why my work is important, and who spent many a lovely hour sipping whiskey or coffee and listening to vinyl “as only true scholars would” (wink wink). Mitch, what would I do without our
campfires? And for Ashley, his Better Half and my favorite Chef, for showing me how amazing food can be. Ashley, you are the sort of friend that every woman needs, and you constantly remind me to have fun.

To Chris Meisner, who helped me link Psychology, Rhetoric, and Terrorism Studies when no one else could—through your friendship and mentoring I learned to be an irrevocably interdisciplinary scholar.

To my cohort: Shannon, Jill, Dale, Angela, Matt, and Raeann, for being an excellent team of encouragers and overcomers. I am so excited watching you all do great things!

For Shannon, who wrote with me across the miles. #TheYearTheMomsGotPhDs and #PreDawnDissertators—yes, we even had hashtags. What are we writing next?

To Dr. Danica, my single mom buddy: Together we laughed and worked through outdoor floods, indoor floods, unspeakable family journeys, roof repair, and cooking. I will always treasure the moment I met you because that was the moment I came to believe that if one single mom could do a PhD and be a good parent, then so could another. You still inspire me.

To Laura, with fond memories of our Coffee House Friday Mornings. I miss them.

As unusual as it may sound, I could not have completed this task without the mountains of Montana, where I went to find clarity when nothing made sense.

To my extended family, who came to appreciate this difficult journey in very kind ways.

To Lorre, battle-buddy in this journey of life. No other words are necessary.

To Max, whose German Shepard loyalty guarded the house was I was too engrossed to notice anything but theory and praxis. I understand why veterans have service dogs now, and you are mine.

For the surgeons and nurses who, in 2014, made me able to get back to PhD’ing after my surgery for a thing I didn’t know existed until it shut down my semester. This has truly been the wildest of rides.

To Kim, who graced a short but important season of my life with the kind of care only a nurse can provide and helped me see myself in new ways.

To my students, whose expectations made me grow; particularly the Veterans Learning Community, who showed me what is possible when we work together for our dreams. Stay alive and prosper.

For the Nine from my Navy squadrons who crossed over. You cannot be forgotten, and I move forward conscious that I now have the Watch.

Finally, my daily thanks go to Grandma Dolly: You mothered like no other, even as my grandma. Your nurturing touch and pride in my accomplishments reached into my future and left the scent of your love for me to encounter when I arrived; despite knowing you’re here, I miss you daily. I’m finally done with school, no more waiting—let’s go fishing!
ABSTRACT

Although much scholarship in the field of Technical Communication assents to the value of listening, little scholarship in the field actually studies it. Similarly, although the field accepts listening as a rhetorical act, no studies address how one might recognize or teach the external indicators of listening.

Krista Ratcliffe posits that rhetorical listening is so powerful that it can create a space for conversations that would not otherwise happen. I further her claim by asserting that the power is not in the listening itself, but in the demonstration of it, in a way recognizable to the interlocutor.

I investigated the use of rhetorical listening in a workplace where communication failure can result in death: The United States Marines. Known for being fast, loud, and lethal, the Marines are the last population to be associated with listening, yet my study indicated that the Marines’ work is more successful when they listen in a way which is consistent with rhetorical listening theory. I observed Marines who work in a Military Information Support Operations (MISO) unit. My study sought to understand what communication theories could account for the work the Marines were doing when they succeeded in creating a meaning-transaction with their interlocutors in this rhetorical space. I used diversified data gathering methods, using questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation to capture words, body language, and physical movement within a space.

My findings indicate that the theory of rhetorical listening partially explains how the Marines communicate, however, alone, it is not a sufficient descriptor of their actions, because it does not address physical indicators. Therefore, I introduce the term “Rhetorical Listening Behaviors” as a concept that sufficiently accounts for the ways the MISO Marines employ
communication theory. My study has implications for professional communicators in any field, because it associates certain theories with indicators that can be learned and practiced, increasing the communicator’s effectiveness in any workplace.
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

Introduction

This chapter will start by giving an overview of my dissertation research and delineating the gap in Technical Communication scholarship that this project seeks to fill. Then I present a narrative vignette that will invite the reader inside the complex workplace of my participants. The vignette is a combination of stories told by my participants, and stories I am aware of due to my work within the military community over the years. I combined the details into one story for several reasons. First and foremost, since some of details in the story come from colleagues in my former occupation who have worked jobs similar to those jobs my participants work and are not part of my study, I needed to protect their identities and not tell a story that they, perhaps, could not tell in public. Second, the stories that arise from my current study of this MISO Marine workplace are complex and detailed and filled with military jargon: to get the full impact of the type of communication space it is, would require 300 pages and a translator just to understand the military hierarchy and jargon. That is well beyond the scope of this project. However, by combining details and shortening the timeline of the story, I compacted the complexity into a size that gives the reader an understanding of the situation, while keeping my writing true to the thick descriptions captured by my data and respecting the readers time. Let the reader be aware that the details of the narrative are not near as troubling as the real-life stories they were compiled from, and hence, are not blown out of proportion or overstated—rather, the opposite is true. I worked hard to change the details of the story and keep the scope and the spirit the same while not immersing the reader in a bloody war without their consent.
I finish this chapter by giving a detailed overview of the rest of the dissertation organization, including what is covered in each successive chapter.

**The need for this study: Gap in existing literature**

Although much scholarship in Technical Communication assents to the value of more fully understanding the concept of listening, and even asserts it as a skill that needs to be taught in technical communication courses, very little scholarship in the field actually studies listening as a vital component of communication. Similarly, although it is accepted that listening is a rhetorical act, very little scholarship in the field addresses the inner stance of rhetorical listening, and no studies within Technical Communication address the way in which one might recognize or teach the markers (indicators) of this stance. While the world in which scholars live is clamoring for everyone to have a voice, very few people are focused on what reciprocal interlocutor action affirms that those who are speaking feel heard. Into this void, Krista Ratcliffe (2008) posits that the inner stance of rhetorical listening can create a space for conversations that would not otherwise happen.

I further Ratcliffe’s claim by asserting that while rhetorical listening can indeed be the impetus that causes an interlocutor to speak things they would not otherwise, this is only the case when the interlocutor experiences being heard. In other words, we can engage in rhetorical listening all we want, but unless it is displayed in a manner recognizable by the interlocutor, it has no power. Such markers of rhetorical listening are sometimes verbal but are not solely verbal—they require the integration of material aspects like speaker position in the room in relation to the interlocutor, as well as body language.

I investigated the use of rhetorical listening in a workplace where communication failure is highly consequential, even deadly: The United States Marines. Known for being fast, loud,
lethal, the Marines are the last population to be associated with listening, and yet they are constantly being placed into positions where they need to quickly build working relationships with strangers in foreign countries who have unfamiliar cultures. Not only are these interlocutors strangers, but they may also have been the Marines’ enemies as recently as a few months ago; consequently, not only do the Marines have to bridge the culture gap, but they have to overcome their own emotions and biases towards the local populations as well. I chose to study this workplace because of the ethos involved in the outcome: if Marines, who are trained killers (not trained communicators), use rhetorical listening, then how much more can we integrate it into the theory and praxis of Technical Communication? And if rhetorical listening proved to be a vital lens through which to explain the kind of dynamic communication that the Marines engaged in, in war zones, under threat of death, and often without sufficient training or technological and cultural resources, then this theoretical concept should be resilient enough to be useful in other technical communication workplaces, as well as the classroom.

In order to capture the context of the material and oral markers of rhetorical listening, I took a multimodal, qualitative approach to my data gathering methods, using questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation to see, hear, and gather data at my research site. Not able to deploy with the Marines, I did the next-best thing: observed them as they conducted a training event where no detail is spared in creating a realistic war zone situation. I observed and participated in their planning and then patrolled the village with them, taking notes on the way in which they engaged with foreign interlocutors and worked to create meaningful working relationships that accomplished something for the community and the Marines.

In this study I observed a specific unit of Marines who work in Military Information Support Operations (MISO). The unit was formerly known as a PSYOP or Psychological...
Operations unit, but since that name had an intimidating ring to it, it was changed to MISO. No matter which label they go by, the MISO Marines are essentially the official rhetoricians of the Marines: their sole job is to conduct audience analysis and communication with local populations in foreign countries. They do this task, achieving varying degrees of success, with very little training in communication. The environment they work in is fascinating because they are essentially doing humanities work in war zones, and their work is misunderstood by the rest of the Marine Corps, whose primary means of reaching a goal is via violent action. Thus, the MISO Marine is immersed in trying to persuade not only the local populations, but also their fellow Marines, of the value of their mission. Due to their lack of appropriate training, each Marine is left to his own devices (there were no women in MISO unit I was with) to translate very rigid audience analysis procedures and themed conversation guidelines into face-to-face conversation. The MISO environment, then, is a space of material rhetorical invention where Marines fall back on their own communication bents and experience to fill the void created by lack of specific training. I sought to understand what communication theories could account for the inventive work the Marines were doing when they succeeded in creating a meaning-transaction with their interlocutors.

**Narrative Vignette**

The following narrative uses findings from my interviews and mixes them with other situations the MISO Marines have faced throughout history in order to give the reader a living narrative of what it is like to be a MISO Marine, particularly one who grew up in the land that many Marines think of as enemy territory.

Young Benjamin (not his real name) ran with his friends around the abandoned schoolyard, rocketing a soccer ball between them. It was the only ball they had, and the school
grounds looked like something from a horror movie, but the boys appeared carefree as they laughed and shouted in the sun and desert wind. Young future warriors caught in yet another of their country’s wars, the boys had no use or time for school; the skills they needed were all survival skills, and chasing this ball with the English words, “U.S. Marine Corps” nearly worn off it was as much training for them as it was fun. This school had stood abandoned for years now, and it provided a perfect haven for boys who wanted to get out of the village and blow off steam.

Until the neighboring village boys appeared on the horizon.

As if on cue, the single ball strayed from the rowdy crowd of boys and rolled over towards the new gang. A bigger boy stopped it abruptly with his foot. A terrified hush fell over the first group: it was the only ball they had, and this afternoon was a rare moment when they could play, but the rival village boys played a different game. Benjamin’s best friend and cousin instinctively ran after the ball before Ben could get the words from his mouth to halt him. “We’ll come back later!” Ben finally hollered with an authority he didn’t feel. At nine he was the oldest of the boys, and his father’s standing in the village meant the others revered him—most of the time. But his cousin wasn’t thinking; he went for the ball and ran right into the fists of the boy who stood with his foot on it. Ben gasped and covered his mouth as hard as he could. Hot tears flooded his eyes, but he held them back, pressing his heels into the sand so as to force himself to stay there and not run to defend his friend. Everything within his soul drove him to protect his friends, but he had seen his big brother try that; he had never returned. Now he watched in invisible anguish as his little friend was beaten to the ground.

Ben might not be able to help, but he would not turn his back. He stood his ground. His gang of comrades rustled to life as if from a trance, and each turned and started running back
towards their village—they all knew better than to fight. Suddenly they realized Ben wasn’t with them and stopped and shouted for him to follow. He wouldn’t move. As he stood and watched helplessly as his cousin’s life was slowly poured out on the desert floor, he determined that he would never again be caught helpless, no matter what the cost. Anger seethed within him, and what had been left of the innocent boy within him grew into a man in that moment, a fierce, angry warrior of a man who was no longer willing to watch and walk away. He ran at the neighboring gang, fists flying.

* * * * *

One hundred clicks away, a mid-level enlisted MISO Marine was heatedly arguing with a commander—a sight not normally seen within the ranks in the US Marines. But in this situation, the MISO Marine was one of two in his unit sent to help the commander to work with the local population in an attempt to get them to refuse the “assistance” of the terrorist group referred to as ISIS. The MISO Sergeant was advocating that they leave immediately to make contact with the locals. “If we don’t, ISIS will get to them first and sell them on all the benefits of being under ISIS protection.”

The commander, taken aback by being addressed in such a way by someone so junior, and having no affinity for the ideas anyway, resisted the MISO Sergeant: “We have orders to take and occupy the territory that the village is in, not run a conversion campaign!” he snapped at the MISO sergeant.

“I understand that, Sir,” Sergeant Abrams, the MISO expert, said, “but you run the risk of a three-way fight once we get there if you do it your way. If you let us go in, our audience
analysis tells us that this village just wants protection, and if we can promise it in exchange for loyalty, we will not only avoid a firefight with them, we will also have allies.”

The commander spat a stream of chewing tobacco on the desert floor, shrugged, and replied, “And? You think the United States Marines should be afraid of a few desert bros with stolen weapons and donkeys? We can take them easily—even in a three-way battle. Besides, the men are itching for some action—it would be a good warm up battle.”

Sgt. Abrams felt the words slice through the darkness and cut into his soul because he had once held the same perspective before he had come to the MISO unit and learned the value of understanding and reasoning with someone that could easily be categorized as an enemy. And these were enemies, for all intents and purposes. This very village had killed a handful of U.S. Marines over a decade ago, and the Commander had been there. Way back then, he had decided what was possible and was not open to options. He growled at Abrams, “You and your love and peace crap—not even real Marine values! You want a crack at them? Go ahead, take a contingent of men in the morning and do your voodoo magic. You have four hours. When you fail, the rest of us will move in with a show of force occupy of this area of responsibility—which, may I remind you, is written in our orders, Sgt.”

Abrams’ hackles rose. Normally a patient arguer, he glared at the Commander, pausing a beat to swallow the words he wished to say. “Sir, I respectfully disagree; tomorrow will be too late. It’s today or it will be a wasted trip. ISIS moves fast.”

The Commander didn’t even pause before responding, “Well good, then we’ll find out their allegiances and take care of all the resistance at once. You know that’s the American way.” Sgt. Abrams looked away. “We’ll go in the morning, then. But I pick my protection team. No
trigger-happy men who were here a decade ago.” As he said it, he realized it wasn’t the best choice of words. The Commander stiffened. “You are dismissed, Sgt. Abrams. And after tomorrow, your team is dismissed as well. I don’t need you in my area of operations any more. Talk is cheap and has no place in my war.”

Benjamin didn’t know what time it was when he moaned and rolled over. It was dark, but he saw through his one eye that wasn’t swollen shut that early morning light was just starting to warm the far eastern horizon. He anticipated the beating he would get from his father, his uncle, and several other male elders in his family, and shuddered more from that thought than from the pain of bruised internal organs. These were men who didn’t communicate with words; they used force. Even in his injured state, Ben would receive the full brunt of that force. And didn’t he deserve it? He had let his friend die. As he rolled over to get up, he found that he couldn’t put weight on his right arm or right leg. As he gasped in pain, wondering how he was going to get the miles back to the village, he heard a sound in the middle distance: men coming. Or animals. He froze, powerless to move. It was men, and they were getting closer, fast. Suddenly he was surrounded by a handful of men in camouflage uniforms, weapons pointed right at him. A bright light shone in his eyes and the men demanded answers of him in hushed tones, using words that he didn’t understand. The light moved from his face and reflected back to theirs and he saw they were mostly pale-faced and blue-eyed, and that the red, white, and blue flag on their shoulders was clearly visible. He shuddered. He had heard of them, and he had seen their movies! They let nothing stand in their way, and for a decade they had been terrorizing the Middle East, convinced that every person was an enemy of the United States. Pictures of the torture they proudly wreaked on their prisoners had been handed around his village with the word “Terrorists” on
them. And what was that movie he has seen once? Rambo or something? These were the worst of the terrorists, living for the blood of their enemies and not stopping to understand them before they fought. The village boys who had killed his cousin were nice compared to these warriors, Ben thought. And now these terrorists had him.

As Ben breathed what he thought would be the last breath of his violent nine years, he caught sight of a straggler coming up behind the group, a small limp form in his arms. His cousin! He had seen videos a local group of heroes had put out: Americans parade their dead enemy’s children in the streets in triumph, and his cousin was about to be their next show, along with himself. But at least he had not abandoned his cousin. As the body-laden Marine came into the group, alarm rustled through the small contingent. It appeared that they were trying to revive the boy but quickly decided against it. As they forgot Ben momentarily, he caught sight of strange words on their uniforms that he faintly recognized, “United States Marines.” Those were the words on the soccer ball! He was confused: the ball had come from a group of ruddy-cheeked boys in similar uniforms years ago. Those had been barely men—boys who had played soccer with them, given them chocolate, and taken pictures with them. He was conflicted: a half-century of lore surrounded the Americans. They came and fought. Sometimes they helped, sometimes they made it worse. But then they left. They were always leaving. Then returning. And causing problems they were not around to solve. And always different ones arrived to take the place of others—some who seemed to hate the locals, some who seemed to want friendship. You never knew with these Americans. And their movies—Ben remembered now—all the bad guys in their movies were men like him and his father. These men who had him now, were these the kind of men-boys who had brought the ball, or the kind who had paraded dead prisoners? Ben didn’t know, but he figured he was about to find out.
Ben played dead. But too late. The Americans pushed forward a translator whose accent he recognized as being from a neighboring village. The translator asked Ben where he was from, if he needed help, and if they could take him home. Ben didn’t answer, but they gave him water, a chocolate bar, and bandaged his wounds. He must have passed out from the pain, because when he awoke, he was being carried like a baby in the arms of a giant red-headed boy-man whose uniform said “Abrams.” He tried to wiggle free, but his arm and leg pain cut down his ability to move, so he lay still, waiting for what would come. They couldn’t be all bad, these Rambo-like men. And perhaps they had another ball. Besides, they carefully carried Ben’s dead cousin, draped in the uniform jacket of one of the men. In the faint, green light coming from the men’s technological equipment he could see his cousin’s blood had partially covered the United States’ flag on the jacket. Ben couldn’t help but warm to them. Perhaps they would help his father and his village to defend themselves from the new group of zealots who had recently come through and raided their food stores.

As the Marines neared Ben’s house with he and his cousin in their arms, Ben saw a stranger in the courtyard. A friend of the red-head Abrams motioned for Ben to be silent as they moved into the shadows and crept slowly into earshot of hushed voices near his home. The man near Ben’s house was Middle Eastern, but Ben didn’t recognize him as part of any local tribe. His demeanor was calm and full of powerful grace. He removed his shoes and went inside, and as the Marines crept up nearer the house, Ben could hear the man inside, partaking of his father’s special stash of tea reserved only for friends and honored guests. The stranger spoke in earnest: “I come in peace. We have received word that the United States Marines will visit you tomorrow. They will say they come in peace and warn you about us. They will say that they are only here to protect you from us, but do not believe them. They are planning to blow up your
village and use it as an encampment because of its tactical vantage point on the river crossing to the east.” Ben heard his father grunt his assent for the stranger to continue, and the stranger resumed speaking, “My brother, I have a proposal for you: Allow me and my men to encamp around about you. We will surround you as the mountains surround the sea and protect you. We have food in abundance and access to weapons for protection.”

“What price does this protection come to us at?” Ben’s father asked in a serious tone that led Ben to believe that he was considering the offer. The stranger cleared his throat, “The Americans will beat your children and take your women for themselves. They say they come to bring aid, but they will occupy your land and take it over as they have the islands that surround their mainland. You know how they are, that great band of GI Joes and Rambo men who know nothing but the glee of violence and war. I urge you consider my offer for the protection of your family.”

Silence filled the night as Ben’s father contemplated the offer. Then, pushing past the boundaries of his normal kindness to strangers, he asked in a gruff tone, “How do I know you didn’t take my son and his cousin this very night?” he asked, “since they are conspicuously missing the same night you come here, and since you steal in here in the night as an enemy would.”

Ben passed out again from the pain. Led by Sgt. Abrams, the Marines moved back into a concealed position, sacrificing hearing the rest of the conversation for some protection because the translator had relayed the words of the stranger and the Marines understood him to be a leader of the terrorist group ISIS. The Commander’s men, protection for the MISO team, went into instant battle mode and pulled out a radio to call in the possible sighting of a “wanted man,” intent on asking permission to engage. Sgt. Abrams’ MISO teammate swatted the radio to the
ground, asserting that this was a MISO mission and the mission was to build rapport and persuade, not to start a firefight. The Commander’s men, on the other hand, said that mission was only approved before they knew that an ISIS leader was colluding with the key influential leader of the village.

Sgt Abrams hesitated. Neither man was wrong. But his gut and the few pieces of conversation that had been translated made him think that they still had a chance. His arms were starting to ache from holding so carefully the passed-out boy. As he adjusted his body to stay in the shadows, dark liquid trickled onto his hands—blood. The boy’s condition was worsening. “This boy needs medical attention, now!” he asserted. The medic shook his head; to effectively assess and help him, they would need to use a light and it would be noisy. They’d blow their cover helping him here—they’d have to fall back and leave the village to render aid. Just as Sgt. Abrams was about to give the order to fall back to render aid to the one living boy, the stranger came out of the house, kissed Ben’s father on both cheeks, and then slipped away into the darkness. The Marines huddled in silence, using night vision goggles to try to identify the stranger before he was gone.

Once the stranger had departed, the commander’s radioman called in the sighting as Sgt. Abrams gave the order to approach the house in peace, intent on carrying out the mission to communicate their friendly, protective intent with the village through its most respected elder. As they stepped up to the door, Abrams ordered the men to lower their weapons, and as soon as the father opened the door, to remove their helmets and boots if they were invited in.

When Ben’s father opened the door, however, everything happened too fast for diplomacy to be an option. When he saw the U. S. flags on the uniforms of the men who held what appeared to be the lifeless bodies of his son and nephew, Ben’s father raged at them, belief
in the stranger’s warning suddenly taking hold in his heart and mind. “How dare you come here under pretense to protect us while you slaughter our women and children. Get out!” Spittle sprayed in their general direction as his angry words were hurled at the Marines. He yelled for his men, who came and snatched the limp bodies of the children. Sergeant Abrams worked hard to keep the commander’s men’s weapons pointed anywhere except at Ben’s father, but it was a losing battle.

Ben’s mother appeared in the doorway, and seeing the limp body of her son, she shrieked and pulled him to her and fell to her knees just inside the house. The translator was calmly stating to Ben’s father that they had found Ben in this condition. As the translator spoke, he held up a medical bag, indicating they wanted to help. Ben’s father looked from his wife, to the bodies, and he saw his son stir. He glared at the Marines and shouted at them to get out and not come back. His men had their weapons drawn now, and aimed at the Marines, but he motioned for them to stop, saying sadly, “It is enough bloodshed for one day.” As Ben’s father closed the door in his face, Abrams saw Ben open his eyes and reach for the Marines and whisper in protest, “Soccer! Good guys…”

After the door closed, Ben’s father left Ben with his wife and went to send a runner to the ISIS leader. “Tell him that we will accept his terms. We will fight the American barbarians together. You were right, they killed my children.”

In the months that followed, the village was the scene of bloody skirmishes. ISIS abused the people, took their food, and used them as human shields against the Americans, who engaged them all as enemies once Ben’s father and the ISIS leader opened fire on them side by side in the market. The village would never be the same, and the world would never hear of just how close the MISO Marines had come to creating a friendship with the locals. Instead, word spread far
and wide that the Americans were as treacherous as ISIS, and that locals were equally at-risk
taking aid and protection from either of them.

The story would eventually come out—years after it occurred—that Ben’s mom had
eventually married a man who took her to the United States. It was unimaginable, in the violent
streets where children’s blood ran with that of adult fighters and where the lone symbol of
friendship—the soccer ball—lay trampled in the mud, but Ben, after a rough and stormy teen
transition in America, would become a United States Marine. A MISO Marine, to be exact.

* * * * *

Sergeant Abrams left the Marines when his tour was over. He carries in his memory the
blood of a child on his hands—a child he thinks he could have saved had he been able to
persuade the commander that getting to the village earlier was paramount. He still doesn’t know
if the child lived or died. Although he works to see only his son, Ben, working on the truck with
him in the garage, a shadow of grief lives just behind the vibrant boy’s smile, just out of Abrams’
reach. Sgt. Abrams will never know that the other Ben became a MISO Marine who travels back
to his home country, knowing perfectly well how to approach local villagers because of his
upbringing.

Ben’s perspective is unique: people are all humans, they all love, they all need, and if we
can just share what matters, we can work together. He carries a weapon, but it is not the gun that
has won over those with whom he has interacted—it is his smile, the way he listens, and the way
he somehow makes the uniform less apparent than his warmth. He doesn’t remember Sgt.
Abrams’ name, but he remembers the night his world was turned upside down by poor timing
and the mere fact that one ISIS communicator got his message through first, framing the actions
of the Marines so that nothing they said would matter. He remembers too the face of a red-
headed Marine who carried him miles to his father’s door and who tried to avert the fighting that
immediately ensued. He teaches his own Marines the lesson from his childhood home:
everything sends a message, and some messages have reached your audience before you get
there; treat everyone like the humans they are, and they will listen. Unconsciously, he touches a
place on the back of his neck where an invisible scar remains: the weight of still trying to save
those his nine-year old self could not save.

Normally, no one would ever know these complexities under which the Marines labor. In
part this is because MISO Marines cannot tell their story—such freedom of speech is a cost that
they pay to defend the rights of others. But it is also because they think that no one cares about
their story anyway. Yet I had the privilege of sitting among these MISO Marines, observing their
practices and interviewing them. I shed tears at their stories and promised that I would convey
their stories to the best of my abilities. This dissertation chronicles the work and humanity of the
MISO Marines and the lessons that professional communicators can draw from the war zone
spaces where mere men attempt to reach out to other humans to achieve a kind of connection that
transcends violence.

**Introduction to the Gap in Research**

As is evident from this vignette, the cost of MISO Marines not knowing how to engage in
interpersonal communication is high in terms of both life and political alliances—so much so
that MISO Marines play a large role in shaping the history of nations. The MISO Marines’
communication, if unsuccessful, stands in the way of possibility in the future, both for the locals
they work with and for the next MISO Marines who pass that way. We often hold up education
as the key to making a better world. This is no less true in the field of Technical
Communication, which straddles the boundaries of what industry needs their communicators to be capable of and their sacred duty as scholars to not have their subjects of research dictated to them. While I stand among those who believe higher education can be life-changing, and I find passion in discovering what industries’ needs truly are, my study indicates that Technical Communication isn’t currently equipped to give the professional communicators in the MISO Marine unit what they need to succeed. My study’s findings indicate that in order to succeed and even in order to stay alive, these Marines must be able to listen in whole-body ways, observing details about their interlocutor that they have no way of knowing before the encounter. They have to take that knowledge they just observed and translate it into performable indicators that reflect back the body language and communication culture of their interlocutors. This is key, because only in succeeding in this endeavor will the MISO Marines demonstrate to their interlocutors that they are truly heard. The successful conveyance of “feeling heard” is not just in being able to listen, but to use cues the Other recognizes to demonstrate this listening. And the MISO Marines have to do all this while in drastic living conditions, under threat to their life, and with the weight of international consequences hanging on their every move. At present, we in Technical Communication could teach them the inner stance of rhetorical listening, and we could teach them rhetorical and textual analysis. However, if they went out into the field with only the knowledge of how to have an inner stance, not how to indicate it appropriately, and if they focused on texts rather than on speech and body language as well, they would not succeed. The MISO Marines, then, make visible this gap we also have in Technical Communication scholarship: Although we have much scholarship documenting the need for more interpersonal communication and listening scholarship, there is very little research that actually does that work, or that shows how to do such work, as I will show in the next chapter.
My study attempts to begin to fill this gap in Technical Communication scholarship by identifying two interdisciplinary concepts that account for the Marines’ successful interpersonal communication under pressure: rhetorical listening and the Communication Studies concept of “behaviors.” I combine these into rhetorical listening behaviors and identify several characteristics of these behaviors (which include a mindset or stance). These rhetorical listening behaviors can be taught in technical communication courses, applied to situations like the MISO Marines’ workplace, and researched further to establish best practices for implementation in the classroom and workplace.

The value of my research goes beyond the field of Technical Communication and the MISO Marines, however, for theirs is not the only workplace where unsuccessful interpersonal communication can have dire consequences and where there is currently not sufficient training or scholarship to facilitate their success. All organizations with military-type leadership hierarchies (paramilitary organizations) deal with similar issues: fire, police, ambulance, the Department of Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department, and even Congress. While in Technical Communication we haven’t seen the military or paramilitary organizations as users of our courses and consumers of our scholarship, my research shows that they both need and want such scholarship. As of right now, however, Technical Communication cannot fill this need, as I will show in the next chapter.

**Dissertation Organization**

This dissertation breaks down my research into six chapters. This current chapter gives an inside view of the life and work of the MISO Marines. The vignette introduced the gap in research that my study seeks to fill, and my analysis of that gap follows. Chapter Two is a literature review of what has been done in Technical Communication research that pertains to the
study of rhetorical listening. Due to the sizable gap in scholarship on that topic, I widen the net and examine Technical Communication scholarship on listening (more generally). Because this is also an area of sizable gap (listening was relegated to speech when speech and writing were separated several decades ago), I broaden yet again to include scholarship from Communication Studies, particularly from the *Journal of Listening*. Chapter Two comes to a close noting the ways in which Technical Communication continues to assent to the need for scholarship on listening but has not produced it.

Chapter Three is my methods chapter; it is organized after a typical ethnographic methods section in which I review ethnographic theory and praxis norms and state where I stand in relation to them as an ethnographic researcher. In Chapter Four, I define and describe *rhetorical listening* and the concept of communication “behaviors” and how they encompass understanding, speaking, and acting. I go on to show how those two concepts can be intertwined to create a new conceptual framework: rhetorical listening behavior. Such a framework captures not only the audible and textual communication work of the MISO Marines, but also how they use silence, body language (reading and “speaking” it), as well as physical location, to effectively create meaning during their interactions. I conclude with three characteristics of rhetorical listening behavior that I believe we can teach professional and technical communicators to identify and to use.

Chapter Five is broken into two case studies: I go over the details of the first MISO Marine in my case study, and the story of how he used (unconsciously, I would argue) rhetorical listening behaviors to move his relationship with his interlocutor forward. My second case study gives the instances in which the other MISO Marine in my study did not use rhetorical listening behaviors. By comparing the two cases, it becomes clear what the use of rhetorical listening
behaviors looks like, which is key to it being recognized in the field and taught in classrooms. I then tie in aspects of my conceptual construct of rhetorical listening behaviors from Chapter Four, using examples from my data collection. Both of the case studies intend to be examples of the concepts of rhetorical listening behaviors, so they focus more on showing the ways in which the Marines enacted (or didn’t) the concepts. In Chapter Six I address implications to the field, discuss the limitations of my study, and call for future research. I conclude by summarizing the dissertation.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW OF GAP IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

In this chapter I support my claim that Technical Communication has contributed little scholarship to the conversation on rhetorical listening, listening, or interpersonal/face-to-face communication, despite scholarship that focuses on other topics but gives a nod to the need for more these three. I group these three together: rhetorical listening, listening, and interpersonal or face-to-face communication. I did this because there was such a lack of scholarship in all three areas that I widened from my initial focus on finding Technical Communication scholarship on rhetorical listening, to include what the field has said on listening in general. When listening was addressed, it seemed to be addressed tangentially and grouped with “interpersonal communication,” “people skills,” and “face-to-face” communication. Existing scholarship in Technical Communication follows a trajectory of being increasingly aware of these three areas, while not yet addressing them directly. This awareness is due to the shifting role of the technical communicator from one who merely works with texts to one who works on teams; from a recorder of knowledge to one who collaborates to produce that knowledge. Therefore, my tracing of the gap follows this same arc.

I map the gap in research by first reviewing scholarship that documents the shifting role of the technical communicator. I follow that by reviewing pertinent scholarship on how this change in roles necessitates a shift in the skills and training needed to be an expert in those shifted roles. I then delve into the scholarship that calls for more focus on interpersonal skills (though I found precious few who addressed that as their sole topic and more who came to it as a small part of their research findings, a sort of addendum to their focus).
Next, I review scholarship that uses Cross-Functional Teams as a tangible example to show how technical communicator’s roles are shifting from knowledge-collector to knowledge-creator, and more specifically, how that shift requires more interpersonal communication skills. I review recent scholarship on the role and experience of technical communicators as parts of larger teams within organizations, and the challenges they face in that transition.

Finally, I turn to Communication Studies scholarship on listening, contrasting the gap in our own field’s scholarship on listening with the abundance of scholarship available there and making an argument for how this existing work needs to be brought into our field to help equip technical communicators for their shifting roles. I finish the chapter by addressing how my present study brings together this scholarship from both fields and combines it into a tangible concept that can be further studied: rhetorical listening behaviors.

The Shifting Role of the Technical Communicator

The role of technical communicators shifts with the development of technology and with the changes in organizational structures and the culture of society. Chief among those changes for technical communicators is a shift in what skillsets are a valuable currency. Currently, that currency is shifting away from a technical communicator’s value lying in how he collects and transmits knowledge and moving towards facilitating the managing of knowledge, and more importantly, to having a role in creating that knowledge by being part of a team. In 2006, Bekins and Williams defined the current environment for Technical communicators as a “‘creative economy’ in which workers use their knowledge of a product as well as their ability produce clear, concise, and persuasive information about that product to innovate a new product, technology, or business process” (287, emphasis original). We see, then, the technical communicator being involved in the sequence of capturing and producing knowledge. As true as
this was in 2006, it is even more true today. The difference today, driven forward by advances in technology, is an increase in the skills that technical communicators need to have, the knowledge they need to possess, in order to be competitive for hiring and long-term career success.

**Role changes require skill changes**

In 2017, Batova and Andersen did an exhaustive literature review on the changes in roles/skills needed in component content management environments, as well as implications for education. An integral part of a technical communicator’s job in many workplaces is component content management (CCM). The idea is that technical products are often made of reusable pieces (boilerplate), and, in many cases, technical communicators work more at managing that content and moving around its pieces to create new products than they do at inventive “writing.” That is changing, though, with more and more technical communicators being on teams and working to create the knowledge that will eventually become the boilerplate. This shift has had a tremendous influence on the skillset that technical communicators need when entering the workplace. Specifically, this shift has caused the environment that technical communicators work in to be much more dynamic than it once was.

“In CCM environments, technical communicators work with information products that are not static but rather adaptable, portable, and reusable. Designing these products requires strategic business analysis, extensive user research, and the expertise of various stakeholders within organizations; as a result, technical communicators collaborate across organizational departments with knowledge workers who range from subject-matter experts to marketing specialists” (173).

All these skillsets depart from the traditional Technical Communication focus of teaching the genres within business and technical communication and instead require technical
communication experts to learn the organizational roles of those around them, collaborate with stakeholders across the organization and outside of it, and even have knowledge of business and marketing analysis. More so than ever before, rather than the technical communicator merely producing a product, their extensive knowledge is the product or commodity that makes them valuable in the “opportunity marketplace.” This extensive knowledge of organizational process and content makes the technical communicator a manager as much as a writer. “We are moving from an economy and society built on the logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the Information Age to an economy and society built on the inventive, empathetic, big picture capabilities of what’s rising in its place, the Conceptual Age” (Pink 1). Therefore, the technical communicator needs to be able to see the big picture through a lens of collaboration rather than just see through a genre-based lens that focuses on what products need to be made.

Batova and Andersen’s review of scholarly and trade publications points to how career technical communicators need to gain extra skillsets, re-brand themselves, and be willing to take on new roles in order to stay relevant and move up for an entire career. Among their recommendations for changes are: gain leadership skills and be willing to step into managerial roles, learn content management and merge that skillset into their professional identity, and be user-experience experts. Each of these areas, while definitely requiring good written and presentation communication skills, require a high level of what industry calls “people skills” to succeed. The final skill in that list, developing user experience skills, is where I want to pause. Numerous scholars claim that industry is pushing for technical communicators who can not only create handbooks, instruction manuals, and similar written communication, but who can also go out and meet the end user, getting a feeling for how the end user works and thinks in order to design a better document for them (Batova and Andersen; Waner; Lanier). This focus on context
is encouraging for the rhetorically-focused Technical Communication scholar, who has understood for a long time that all writing is contextual (Barton; Fish; Kostelnick).

**Calls for More Interpersonal Skills**

Industry and Technical Communication’s call for more “people skills” makes sense in light of the shifting role of technical communicators, but is this an isolated case or a wider call for more focus on interpersonal communication? Technical Communication scholarship over the past two decades shows a continual interest in the subject, but it comes out as a result of investigation of industry’ and other departments’ needs more than from a singular focus of scholars, as if industry keeps asking for an increased focus on interpersonal communication but the scholarship is not yet there to support their need.

For example, Wardrope (2002) reports that department chairs across six business disciplines rated 34 communication skills. After the top four writing skills, the other top skills, listed from most important to least, were cultural literacy, technology-mediated communication, interpersonal communication, listening skills and collaboration skills. Although these interpersonal communication skills are still rated below writing skills, they come through as skills vital to a successful technical communicator.

Moving forward eleven years, the calls for more focus on interpersonal communication that was limited to business department chairs is now visible in the press as well. Narrowing from the many existing communication behaviors, Keyton et. al. (2013) examined 300 communication behaviors gleaned from organizational communication textbooks. Once they had refined those behaviors down to 16, they surveyed 126 employees to determine if they had witnessed these behaviors in the workplace. “The top 10 behaviors included listening, asking questions, discussing, sharing information, agreeing, suggesting, getting feedback, seeking
feedback, answering questions, and explaining” (119). Keyton went further and divided 43 of the most common communication behaviors into four categories: “Information sharing, relational maintenance, expressing negative emotion, and organizing” (119). It becomes evident, then, that not only were department chairs and industry experts calling for more interpersonal skills, but technical communicators in the workplace were witnessing the use of interpersonal behaviors as well. Clearly this was an era ripe for new scholarship, and a sizable research gap existed, even in 2013. The gap remains to this day, however, and other scholars help to flesh out its length and breadth. Perhaps a partial reason for the longevity of the gap is the warring concepts within the field of Technical Communication.

An ongoing argument against filling gaps which are defined only by industry is that an academic discipline cannot be driven solely by industry needs. This logic could explain why the gap in interpersonal behaviors defined so long ago stands unfilled. But additional research shows that faculty and employers don’t differ much in what they want their students/technical communicators to know. Conrad and Newberry (2011) compared the perceived importance of various communication skills from the perspective of faculty and employers. They ended up with seven interpersonal skills gleaned from 217 publications. These interpersonal skills were overwhelmingly cited by the authors of the 217 publications as being important for the success of technical communicators. These seven skills included listening actively, building trust, exhibiting emotional self-control, building rapport, showing respect, and relating to those with different backgrounds. “Notably, no statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of the faculty and employers with one exception: Employers perceived showing respect as significantly more important than faculty members did” (Coffelt et al.). As we can see
from these passages, current scholarship is pointing to a need for the cultivation of interpersonal skills on various levels, and it reflects the desires of both academics and industry.

The scholarship reviewed in the previous section demonstrates how organizational culture is shifting how technical communicators do their work. It also demonstrates how each scholar calls for changes in Technical Communication’s approach to pedagogy and scholarship in their own ways. However, the shifts reported by these scholars all have one thing in common: the technical communicator has a definite role that includes personal and face-to-face interaction. Despite documentation of this shift in roles, and the widespread agreement that addressing it within Technical Communication scholarship is vital, little attention has been paid to conducting research on the important role of face-to-face communication/interpersonal behaviors. That these shifts in technical communication tasks and roles requires a change of focus in scholarship makes good sense: skills needed to successfully engage with end users are often markedly different than those skills needed to sit in a cubicle and design effective documents and write effective software installation guides. Often, personalities who excel at such cubicle work balk at interaction with strangers, especially outside the workplace. While we can chalk that up to temperament, the scholarly response would be to investigate further this industry- and faculty-stated need for more interpersonal communication skills and define what aspects of it are needed in various workplaces, and then determine best practices for teaching these skills.

Cross-Functional Teams as an Example of Interpersonal Communication Situations

Cross-functional teams (CFTs) are becoming more common in the technical world, and technical communicators are becoming a fixture within them. Examining how these cross-functional teams function is a good way to understand the complexities of the shifting roles that technical communicators are playing within organizations, and how that shift requires face-to-
face, interpersonal communication. Cross-functional teams are made up of experts from various disciplines and fields who focus around a project. The arrangement and goals of CFTs are as varied as the organizations that use them; however, most literature on them agrees that what makes them truly unique is their social-interactional approach to the creation of knowledge (Denison et al.; Batova and Clark; Lovelace et al.; Arnand et al.; Guinan et al.).

Another benefit of CFTs lies in how they level hierarchies: “One person becomes subordinate to another for a particular task, and roles reverse for the next” (Quinn 124). CFTs also have value for innovation as they break away from organizational structures and constraints, allowing the free movement of individuals. “Interacting in a way that maximizes contacts among individuals and with knowledgeable individuals outside of the core also maximizes learning, potential knowledge gains, and progress” (Quinn 123). Thus, we see the trend of industry increasingly using CFTs, and it serves as yet another indicator that technical communicators are moving from functioning as capturers of knowledge to creators of knowledge, serving on teams where face-to-face communication is an essential component of their jobs.

**Technical Communicators as Part of a Team**

This movement of technical communicators moving into the role of knowledge-creators is not new. In fact, in 2005, the issue was so poignant that *Technical Communication* published a special issue on the future of the profession, and many of the articles are relevant to this conversation. With regards to cross-functional teams, Albers (2005) asserts that it’s not only important that technical communicators be skilled in face-to-face communication, but is essential and necessary. “Without the ability to coherently participate in the conversation occurring around the cross-functional and interdisciplinary team table, technical communicators risk either being left off the team because they [are] not assets or being relegated to the clerical
position of taking notes and cleaning up the team’s reports” (269). Moore and Kreth (2005) assert that the primary task of technical communicators increasingly lies in interpersonal communication such as information gathering forums, stakeholder consultation processes, and requirements definition processes. They go on to do what other scholarship up to this point has done: point out that technical communicators are being asked to engage in interpersonal communication. However, they stop short of addressing the deeper challenges of this shift and how the field should address it.

“Today, technical communicators who add value to their organizations do not merely write and edit documents. We must manage situations, events, and interactions and experiences of individuals, groups, and cultures. We must manage complex strategies involving people, projects, goals, priorities, institutional rules, and politics, nation and international standards, cultural conventions, relationship between diverse technological platforms, and a variety of constraints” (303).

Rainey, Turner, and Dayton (2005) continue in this vein and assert that collaboration and interpersonal communication should be core competencies as much as text-based communication abilities, “In overall ranking, the two most important competencies for technical communicators emerging from this survey are both collaborative skills” (327). Predating this special edition, in 2001, Breuch asserts that technical communication students would benefit from learning interviewing and listening skills (208). Turning to the technical task of website design—which one would think might be an exception to the rule of technical communicator’s needing interpersonal communication skills—Turns, Wagner, and Shuyler (2005) assert that, rather than studying the content or architecture of web design, technical communicators should focus on how social communities impact knowledge creation and sharing (25).
So, we see this shift in focus from technical communicators as solitary text-creators to vital, face-to-face participants in workplace structure and organization. Inherent in that shift is the semi-invisible idea that technical communicators’ roles are shifting towards being vital to creation of knowledge, rather than just the transfer of it, and that these roles are defined by interpersonal communication. Hovde's research at a software development firms finds that technical communicators use five different tactics for the creation of knowledge, one of which is “Talking to others within the organization” (76). Salvo suggests that the way technical communicators conduct audience analysis is shifting as well: where in the past it was accomplished through observation, now it is accomplished through interaction and collaboration. Salvo writes, “Collaborative design methods challenge technical communicators to invent and define new roles for themselves in new and collaborative design processes” (274). Despite all of this research on the value of technical communicators within teams and the more formal CFT, however, Conklin claims that “there is no structure, thorough research that attempts to identify and describe the experience of technical communicators on CFTs” (212). In other words, the field’s research has said that the roles of technical communicators are shifting in ways that require them to hone new skills, and yet no one has spoken to the actual technical communicators about it.

Conklin set out to fill this gap in understanding technical communicators’ experience of serving on teams and contributing to knowledge creation. He surveyed and interviewed 12 technical communicators who served on CFTs at a medical technology company. His findings returned seven themes that accounted for how the technical communicators understood their roles within the CFTs. Interestingly, “all respondents stated that they believed that other members of the CFTs saw them as ‘a necessary member of the team’” (216). One of Conklin’s
major findings was that the technical communicators on the CFT teams were experiencing a shift in their work away from documentation and texts and towards communication with people in person (223). They expressed the uncertainty of this shift, and some sense of wistfulness towards a simpler life in the past where the solitary task of interacting with texts had left them feeling as if their roles had been more defined. The other themes that emerged from the technical communicators serving on CFTs were: wondering how to fit in (218), the experience that their workplace is a challenging and dynamic environment (219), that the past was both a burden and a security (220), and finding the patience to allow the new technical communication role to emerge (222). Thus, Conklin documented the experience of technical communicators on CFTs, gathering insider perspective on what it’s like to be a technical communicator in transition between text-focused and team-focused roles. Although most of these themes fall outside of the scope of my research, one experience stands out: that of handling challenges.

One of Conklin’s major contributions to scholarship was to chronicle the challenges that technical communicators face as they adapt to this shift from knowledge-documentation to knowledge-creator. A major theme he found among the challenges he documented was “Finding the courage and wisdom to act.” Within this theme, Conklin quotes the employees as speaking about how to be a vital part of the team. “As one participant said, ‘We cannot wait for invitations; we have to push ourselves on them. We have to make sure we are invited. They won’t just do it; we have to ask for things…we have to be active…we have to be proactive’” (216). The leaders who were not on the CFT seemed to echo this sentiment, many of them wishing that the technical communicators “could be more aggressive in promoting their value. One said that technical communicators ‘could add value by being more proactive or visible’” (226). But how could these technical communicators know how to assert their value and be more
vocal when the field has been collectively pointing to the importance of interpersonal communication but not researching or teaching it? The time has come to equip technical communicators with the abilities that will help them succeed as outspoken members of a team.

The History of Listening Scholarship

Scholarship in Rhetoric and Technical Communication that is dedicated to listening (rather than just mentioning it as an outcome of another study) examines it mostly in terms of silences and of individuals having no voice (Chambers; Ballif; Beard; Britt; Thill; Aiken; Lunsford and Rosenblatt). The other major focus has to do with physically listening in connection with English as a Second Language studies (Ahern; LaVecchia; Anderson). However, to stay current with the challenges of industry technical communicators, we need to address the issue of interpersonal/face-to-face communication and the role that rhetorical listening behaviors plays in these situations increasingly facing technical and professional communicators.

The study of listening and its associated behaviors as vital components of communication is not new; it is just neglected within Technical Communication. Part of the reason for the lack of scholarship on rhetorical listening, listening, and interpersonal communication behaviors in Technical Communication is the division that occurred between speech and writing within universities in the 1950’s. While Rhetoric, Writing Studies, and Technical Communication claimed texts and writing as their area of research, oral communication—which included body language and listening—were relegated to Communication Studies and Speech (Bizzell and Herzberg).

However, our divided areas of communication study are not the only fields that engage in listening scholarship. In the current lay of the academic landscape, many disciplines point to
active listening as not only a vital piece of communication, but particularly useful during initial interactions. These fields include researchers and practitioners from public administration (Stein), social work (Rogers and Welch), education (McNaughton et al.), leadership (Hoppe), sales (Boe), physician-patient communication (Fassaert et al.), and crisis negotiation (Royce). In fact, there is an International Listening Association (ILA) which supports the interdisciplinary study of listening in multiple ways, but in particular, by publishing the peer-reviewed *Journal of Listening*. The ILA defines active listening as the most effective kind of listening, and this definition, though less complex, is similar enough to our field’s conception of rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe) to be obviously related. The ILA definition of listening is “The process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages” (Weger Jr et al.).

Despite the ILA’s impressive focus on listening, however, Charles Veenstra, the president of the ILA, recently published an article stating that even scholars in Communication Studies don’t pay as much attention to listening as ILA believes they should (Veenstra 2018). Veenstra elaborates on why listening is so difficult, and why, perhaps, it gets so easily ignored by scholars.

We often get the sense from people that it does not take much effort to listen. “Anyone can listen,” they seem to say. All one has to do is be quiet while the other talks. I have even heard professors say, “I will talk and they will listen. That is all there is to it.” Clearly implied by such a statement is that listening training is not needed […] How can it be that many Communication scholars give insufficient attention to listening? I suggest that one of the reasons it is hard for many of us to listen is our own training in Communication. Many of us came into this field through debate. Debate is a wonderful
activity that forces us to dig deep into the issues so that we can win over the other side. Of course, we had to listen to the position of the other side but as we did so, we focused on our response. We learned to very quickly just pull out the right note card and hammer the opponent with it in the next speech (2).

If even the very field who lays claim to the study of listening is guilty of neglecting it, then how difficult must this study be? Part of the complexity is due to its multiplicity of indicators: speech or text, absence of speech or text, and body language—all of which require various methods of data collection working together to gain a wholistic understanding. I will address that complexity more in my methods chapter.

Despite the relative neglect of the topic by communication studies, however, scholars in this field have conducted much more research on active listening than has Technical Communication. From their scholarship, later in this document, I will draw upon well-accepted aspects of active listening so that they can be incorporated into Technical Communication’s understanding of rhetorical listening (see Chapter Five). For the moment, however, I want to return to our own field, and pose the obvious question: If Communication Studies owns the expertise in studying listening, then why should we bring it into Technical Communication? The answer is simple: if Technical Communication is charged with training the technical communicators of the future and researching concepts of communicating technical information; and if, as we have seen in this chapter, the role of technical communicators has changed; then it is our responsibility to understand the components of the new roles technical communicators find themselves in. Chief among those new roles is that of knowledge creator working on a team, often in person. In order to succeed in the future, technical communicators must be equipped to listen differently and better than ever before, and to teach them that, we must research to
understand the power of listening and how to teach in a way applicable to today’s technical communicators.

In conclusion, this review of the gap in Technical Communication scholarship on the nested layers of rhetorical listening, listening, and interpersonal communication, showed how the role of technical communicators is shifting from being knowledge compilers and projectors to participating in the creation of knowledge. This shift necessitates a different skillset than technical communicators in the past have needed. Technical communicator’s participation in cross-functional teams gave an example of how interpersonal communication skills are needed and provided an inside look at how technical communicators are experiencing this shift in their roles.

I showed the arc of focus as industry called for more technical communicators to receive training in interpersonal communication skills, then business department chairs and textbooks requesting such training as well. I addressed the argument that academic foci can’t be completely dictated by industry and how it doesn’t stand up as reason not to research interpersonal communication, because further research indicated that faculty, staff, and industry leaders have the same perspective on the need for technical communicators to be more versed in “people skills.” Throughout this roadmap of the gap, I showed that very little scholarship exists within Technical Communication on rhetorical listening, and as I widened my search of literature to include listening, the scholarship available in the field is still very thin: for the most part, articles don’t directly address this need for listening, but mention it as a result from a study that focused on identifying topics relevant to Technical Communication. Scholarship also usually collocated any reference to listening with the terms “interpersonal communication,” “people skills,” and “face-to-face interaction”, calling on the need for more focus on these areas as technical
communicators are forced out of cubicles and documenting and into teams and knowledge creation.

Despite the preponderance of scholarship stating the need for technical communicators to learn more interpersonal skills as they are increasingly thrust into roles which require them to engage in teams and lean forward to show their value, there is a conspicuous gap in scholarship that begins to address this need. What theories pertain to this gap? How can the theories be taught in order to fill this gap in technical communication learning? What research needs to be done in order to be able to teach related skills? My research indicates that a combination of rhetorical listening theory and the concept of “behaviors,” which I combined into “Rhetorical Listening Behaviors,” can account for the successful meaning-making interactions of the Marines, providing Technical Communication with both a theory and behaviors which can be taught. I will elaborate on these concepts in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

“Researchers turn to field methods because they seek contextualized data. The conventional notion of context is that of the circumstances that surround a given person: the person’s cultural-historical surroundings and the goals that the person has chosen to pursue. These circumstances contextualize the data, the observed behavior of a person or thing.”

--Clay Spinuzzi, Toward Integrating Our Research Scope: A Sociocultural Field Methodology

Qualitative Methodology

Because my research site hasn’t been studied by Technical Communication, especially at the level of access I was granted, I chose qualitative methods that would allow me to broadly characterize the research site and create space for future research. Often researchers apply qualitative methods to open rarefied spaces in this manner (Bleeden et al.; Pezzullo; Rai; Wilson and Herndl; Cintron), especially in rhetorical studies. Conversely, to conduct a robust quantitative study, I would have needed to know more about the site and participants prior to designing my study. The severe gap in research that my study seeks to fill was evidence enough for the need for a qualitative study that would first of all explore the site, documenting the articulating pieces of it (Stormer) and how they meaningfully interact as one moving body. Since quantitative methods intend to capture the norms and qualitative methods explore outliers, and my entire population is made up of outliers, qualitative methods provided the appropriate foci to gather data.

I state that my participants are outliers because of their unusual tasking: they are essentially doing humanities work: they focus on communication and persuasion, building rapport and showing care to the local populations. Yet, the experts who are doing this humane work are Marines, who are trained to kill, and who must put behind them much of what “makes them good Marines” in order to do the humanities work well. In addition to this complexity,
these Marines are often doing this humane work within warzones, where to be effective they must display a level of connection with the local population that could be misunderstood by the rest of the Marines as being a “friendship with the enemy.” Thus, the entire population of my study are unique outliers, even within the various discourse communities to which they belong. Additionally, thick descriptions borrowed from the field of Sociology would be necessary to document and convey the complexities of this site and its participants, and ethnographic data gathering would provide the rich data to convey their workplace experience. Due to all of these complex factors, I was certain that qualitative methodology was the best fit for my research site and population.

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter describes my methods and the decision-making points behind some of the complex moments I faced at my research site. I start with a Narrative Vignette that describes the situation in which I researched. Since my research started before I had access to the site, with textual analysis of the documents that govern the actions of the experts at my research site, I include that in the Preliminary Research section. Once the reader has that context of my research site, I widen from that specificity to address why I chose qualitative methods. I follow by describing my data gathering design which uses the multimodal qualitative methods of questionnaires, interviews, and observations, which meshes well with Spinuzzi’s tri-focused coding schema that I used for data analysis (more on that in a moment).

Next, I do an overview on why I chose to use ethnographic methods and move into situating myself within the host of ethnographers and workplace scholars who have come before me in Technical Communication. I then go in-depth into the three different types of ethnographies (classic, poststructural, and public) and show how I draw some piece of my
theoretical stance from all of them—and why they are important to me as a researcher. Next, I move into the features of ethnographic writing and how I align my writing choices with scholarship by those Technical Communication ethnographers who have come before me.

This chapter doesn’t follow the traditional methods chapter organization which tends to uphold the values of quantitative data collection and analysis. Instead, my methods chapter follows standard Anthropological organization which is the best choice for bringing the thick descriptions of my ethnographic scholarship to light. Following in this ethnographic norm, then, my next section chronicles the major decision points in my methods design. More specifically, I speak of the challenges of gaining entry and building rapport. I elaborate on the place and the participants and give a brief description of what data was gathered. Continuing in the ethnographic vein, I divulge the feelings established between researcher and participants, the length of the interviews, and how I addressed epistemological problems.

After situating the reader in my research site and data collection, I turn to my method of data analysis: Clay Spinuzzi’s Activity Theory. To overview: I decided to use Activity Theory because it traces processes and actors within those processes. This focus enabled me to analyze my data not as the Marines might, according to the actions of enemy and friendly forces, but according to the activities of all parties, including their objectives and the disruptions to their process which forced other actors to change their process. This gave me a built-in safeguard against personal bias in that I am a former member of the Navy who worked with Marines and can sympathize with their causes more than I can sympathize with those actors they would label as terrorists. Yet, in the simulation where I gathered data, Marines, terrorists, and local populations were all actors seeking the objective of recovery from a storm; categorizing them all as actors enabled me to see differently than I would have otherwise been able to.
Specifically, I used Spinuzzi’s coding schema which includes Starter, Open, and Axial codes. I give examples of my data analysis—enough to give the reader an understanding of my application of Activity Theory but without dragging them through the months of data analysis I conducted to get my findings. I used Spinuzzi’s coding framework to think about each individual type of data I gathered (questionnaires, interviews, and observations), and noted the same codes emerging from the data. Viewing these sets of codes holistically, it became clear to me that each type of data fits together to form a narrative accounted for by rhetorical listening behaviors. I close by introducing my findings as a transition into the following chapter where I address my findings in-depth, through the lens of my concept of rhetorical listening behaviors.

**Narrative Vignette**

My methods were designed to operate within the bounds of a Marine Corps training event that occurred over a three-week period. The training event was a simulation that incorporated real, modern problems that the Marines will encounter when they deploy. As a simulation, the training event utilized a fake town complete with real buildings made to look like the country the training simulates, real aircraft in which the trainees fly (V-22 Osprey), and real pamphlets that get dropped from aircraft to the remote locations where the local population cannot be reached by any other method of messaging. The simulation also included troops from five countries other than the United States, in their full gear and weapons, along with about 20 paid actors of the same nationality as the host-nation where the Marines simulated their deployment. The Marines worked for two weeks at a camp high up within the Marine Corps base, in Quonset huts, researching the people they would go out and visit, creating themes for the messaging they would do in the country, and at last developing the messages themselves, as well as the medium they would use to spread the message.
During the third week, Marines headed out to the constructed town (called “Mout Town”) and, in their groups, took turns landing in the Osprey, going into the town they had never seen before to accomplish a specific and different mission for each visit. For example, on the first visit, they had find out who the Key Leaders in the town were, find out if the town had a radio station, and find the radio operator, all while building rapport with the townspeople so that they could work together. On their second visit to the town, they had new information and a new mission: get the two leaders of the town to talk to each other. Finally, just prior to the third mission, they were told that a disturbing video had been distributed among the people and was stirring up division and doing damage to the cooperation the Marines had facilitated between the leaders the day before. Also, there had been an assault on a young local woman and the local population are blaming the Marines for it, though there is no clear evidence as to who committed the atrocity. During the third mission, the Marines navigated these individual situations, using only the themes they were allowed to speak about when they spoke to the locals. They also accomplished certain larger missions—all of which required getting the townspeople to act in a certain way.

Of course, all of the detail I’ve been describing happens in the context of the simulation’s backstory: A typhoon is bearing down on the southern Philippines, and, in desperation, they send a request for humanitarian aid to the United States, Australia, the Netherlands, and Canada. These countries send a small contingent each toward the Philippines, with food, water, medical supplies, and security forces to keep the peace. While help is on the way, however, members of the terrorist group ISIS (who have a presence in the region) set up to vandalize the community, and as soon as the humanitarian aid workers began distributing food, they steal the food and block the supply lines. They also begin messaging that the United States is only there to take
over the island (as is the United States’ habit, they say) and they offer as proof the prediction that
the U. S. Marines will soon ask the Pilipino people to gather in camps, where, as ISIS claims,
y they will be held and tortured.

Meanwhile, in response to ISIS stealing food and assaulting civilian aid workers in the
region, and due to the infrastructure being destroyed by the storm over a wide region, the U. S.
Marines did ask that the locals come to one central area where they can get food and supplies, as
well as protection if they need it. Hence, what was a simple humanitarian aid mission quickly
became a battle for the trust of the local population in a fight to help them. ISIS acted first, as
they often do, necessitating that the United States change their ways of helping the locals. ISIS
also messaged simultaneous to their actions, as they often do, framing the United States’ actions
in a way that helped ISIS’ ultimate cause: to discredit the local government and take over the
country.

While the bulk of the U. S. Marines are busy rendering aid and protection, a small
contingent of Marines called the Military Information Support Operations Marines (MISO)
engaged in Psychological Operations (PSYOP) work in the Quonset huts nearby, trying to
understand the culturally complex situation enough to create a persuasive message that would
garner the trust of the locals and get them to come to the central locations where there is food
and shelter. The MISO Marines wrote out objectives which they hoped their messages would
influence the population to act upon (such as moving to the central location, so they could be fed
and protected). Then the Marines agreed on the themes they could safely use in the location and
got them approved by their approval authority back on the mainland of the United States. Once
all this was complete, the MISO Marines could start creating written and radio/television
messages that they would later use in support of their objectives. Finally, these MISO Marines
would go out among the people and interact in support of the messages they send over whatever media would still be working in the country (sometimes printing messages on water bottles, even, because all electrical means of communication were down). Sometimes the Marines’ face-to-face interaction was in the form of asking the locals to fill out a survey, so they could determine if the aid was getting where it needed to go and if it was enough aid. Asking the locals to fill out the survey in person gave the MISO Marines a chance to be on the ground to visit with the locals, and in this step, the way the MISO Marines carried themselves and interacted was key to the campaign’s success. In the simulation I observed, the MISO Marines were prepared to administer surveys, so that they got the experience of creating them, but their time in the village was not to administer surveys, but to carry out the missions I outlined above (find the key leaders, get them to talk to each other, etc.).

To conclude my description of the simulation, I want to point out a key component in this simulation that reflects real life for the MISO Marines once they deploy: It is a common occurrence for aggressors (like ISIS) to take advantage of a situation of unrest (like a storm, famine, or civil unrest) and to begin messaging the locals in order to frame the situation in a way that is beneficial for the objectives of the aggressor. Then the aggressor will carry out actions in addition to their messaging—actions that make it look like they predicted what would happen, and that frame all friendly actions to prove their point. The U. S. Marines, on the other hand, are often constrained to a timetable that requires them to message in response rather than message first. And the U.S. Marines often cannot act in the location when action is necessary, they must get approval first. This delay caused by procedure gives aggressors like ISIS all the time they need to get in the first messages and the first actions, taking control of the narrative and framing it to their benefit, even if they cannot completely control the situation.
The training simulation, then, mirrored this quintessential situation, where a mission that could be carried out by physical action (bringing food and aid) was changed into a MISO (persuasive communication) campaign by the insertion of ISIS followers who made it impossible for the Marines to help unless they could first gain the local population’s trust.

It was into this situation of turmoil and unrest that I embedded with the MISO Marines, seeking to understand how they go about their communication practices and eventually being invited to join two teams that went into the village to build rapport with the locals. In the process, I met an Imam (Muslim leader), analyzed an ISIS beheading video sent to terrorize the country, ate rice cooked in the village, and visited with the locals, while secretly asking the paid Filipino actors how they were instructed to respond to the MISO Marines’ efforts. I was also asked if I could deploy with the MISO team as an advisor, and asked by a high-ranking Marine officer to brief him on my findings when my study was complete. Additionally, I was asked to return next year to participate in the training simulation again. (These are noteworthy accomplishments because they speak to the success of my attempts to gain the trust of the community in which I conducted my ethnographic study—a community that is not usually open to outsiders.)

**Preliminary Research**

Prior to designing my methods, I conducted a preliminary review of a MISO instruction manual. My findings indicated a lack of consciousness of the messiness of human interaction on the part of the anonymous authors. All instruction materials were given in linear form: an intersection of categories where MISO experts find information from a distance on their “target audience” (their term for the audience they wish to influence) and then fill in the boxes. Literal boxes. In Figure 1, below, across the Y axis is the acronym ASCOPE, and then across the X axis is the acronym PMESII. ASCOPE stands for, Area, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations,
People, and Events. PMESII stands for Political, Military, Economic, Social, Informational, and Infrastructure (See Figure 1). This planning and assessment matrix is a key tool for the MISO Marines in interacting with the target audience, but there’s nothing in the manual to explain how to move from the information collected for the matrix to rhetorical action on the ground among the audience.

**Figure 1 Example of the tool MISO Marines use to analyze audiences**

I searched in vain for the course that would take such linear processes out of their respective neat boxes and teach the Marines how to do face-to-face communication based on the information they had placed in the boxes. Even the contact person I tracked down who teaches the MISO communication course said there was little instruction on either narrative (which
would help Marines translate from proscribed text to conversational interactions) or face-to-face communication. Although originally my research was only going to analyze the MISO instruction manual, after this preliminary research, I wondered what sort of training and experience was actually going on in the Marine Corps MISO units. Often organizational culture and processes are different in their execution than their upstream documents which dictate how they must enact those processes, and I wanted to observe the MISO Marines in action to see what that difference might be. I was curious what kind of communication principles the MISO Marines were using, and if they were conscious that they were using them—because I saw no evidence of Marines being taught such principles in their handbook.

**Data Gathering Methods**

It was with this preliminary research in mind that I designed my research methods: I used multimodal qualitative research methods in order to see my research site and participants from various angles (Creswell and Creswell). Since I needed to participate in the activities taking place at my work site, and since my history of military service (which gave me entry and rapport) could prevent me from seeing the data with new eyes, this multimodal approach would assist in revealing dimensions of meaning I might otherwise pass by. The multimodal approach would also fit well when I analyzed my data using Spinuzzi’s coding scheme for Activity Theory. Since Spinuzzi’s coding schema looks at data in three layers, my three-pronged approach to data gathering would mesh well. With Spinuzzi’s Macro level of activity, which focuses on cultural and historical norms for the organization, I would use my questionnaires to ask about Marine Corps communication culture; the Meso activity level, which examines actions and goals would mesh well with my interview, since I could find out how much of the Marine corps communication norms the MISO Marines were consciously enacting; and the Micro level,
which addresses habits and reactions that the participants are not always aware of, would be observed as I took my ethnographic field notes. In this way, when it came to communication theories and communication instruction in the Marine corps, I would find out what the organizational norms are (what is taught or practiced); what the Marines can recall of that and what they think they do, and whether or not it conforms to Marine Corps norms; and what I observed them doing in the enacted situation.

Desiring to understand all I could about my research and to avoid educated assumptions based on my own experience, I broadened the purpose of each of my data collection methods from the precise foci that Spinuzzi outlines. In particular, I used questionnaires to attempt to understand how much general and intercultural communication experience the Marines had received and how much of that was a result of Marine Corps training, Marines Corps experience, or family and personal experience. I also interviewed the MISO Marines, based on their questionnaire answers, to find out more about what they consciously knew about communication. Lastly, I used ethnographic methods to observe the MISO Marines in the field, taking notes on their interactions as they went through a training simulation where their situation mirrored being deployed to a country that needed their assistance.

In this particular simulation, the MISO Marines had to successfully interact with a foreign culture in order to succeed in their mission, which was to feed and protect that local population after a devastating storm and during terrorist take-over attempts. Since the organization of the simulation was small groups working in teams, it would have been awkward and impacted the cohesive quality of the team if I merely observed, so I chose participant observation as my method of data collection (Spradley). Another dynamic that influenced this choice was the fact that I was gathering data at a training event where the Marines were observed
and rated on their performance. Many people, some high-ranking, came and went, spending time standing by and silently observing. In my previous work experience, I had seen the presence of these observers negatively change the quality of the Marines’ interactions, partly because they distracted the Marines and partly because they intimidated them. Those negative impacts seemed to always be when the Marines didn’t know the person observing and didn’t know what they were there to evaluate. Knowing this, I made sure that, each time I arrived, I was introduced by the Marines running the event so that the rest of the Marines always knew who I was and why I was there. The leadership knew of my concerns not to be a hindrance to the simulation (Marines’ lives depend on training!) and in response, assured the Marines that my presence and data collection was approved. The leadership also asked the Marines to get me whatever I needed while I was there.

**Ethnographic data collection**

This research project utilized ethnographic methods, for multiple reasons. First, since there is no existing research published on this workplace, it was important to map the culture and communication norms utilized by the experts within the workplace while they happened, in their context. I knew from my time in the military that military communication manuals capture the rigid standards of military communication but give little insight into the embodied oral communication that takes place between Military members while they are working. These interactions needed to be observed as they unfolded. Second, as a former military member, I also was at risk for seeing the MISO workplace through a preformed perspective: even the interview questions I thought to ask would be constrained by my own experiential perspective. Adopting an ethnographic methodology allowed me a frame to understand my dual insider/outsider perspective (with the associated potential for bias) and to be reflexive about my positionality in
my writing (Geertz; Weiss). By inserting myself into the community via participant/observation methods, I would come to understand the MISO community at MCIOC experientially, allowing me to later utilize semi-structured interviews to gain the MISO Marine’s perspective on their work. According to Winchatz (2017), “Ethnography of communication is dedicated to understanding the localized means and meanings of cultural communicative practices from the participants’ viewpoint while simultaneously providing insight into general principles of communication across cultural contexts.” Ethnographic methods, then, fit my purpose perfectly.

As I designed my methods, I assessed the many unknowns I would be going into and acknowledged that I needed to understand the situation through the participants’ perspectives, not just through my own. If I accomplished that “seeing through another’s eyes,” then I would know how to gain insight into principles of rhetorical silence and communication behaviors as used in the MISO workplace. Next, my experience with the MISO Marines prior to this research project had led me see how their use of communication was so much more than documents, so that any methods I utilized that required me to analyze only texts (be they text produced by the workplace experts or transcripts of interviews with the experts) would mean effectively missing the lived and enacted aspects of their communication activities. Lastly, I know from experience that the Military, especially the MISO community, is an exceedingly private community, so they probably would not give me their honest, actual perspectives on their workplace use of persuasion in communication unless we had created some bond of trust. Seeing through the participants’ eyes and gaining their trust so that they would allow me that view of their workplace was key.

Experts on trust-building in small military teams claim that one common type of trust that develops is “Person-based trust [which] develops over time, and is based on direct experience
with another person” (Adams and Webb). Shared missions are a key way to facilitate person-based trust, because the shared tasks and risks force people to work together in ways that they must come to know the strengths and weaknesses of the other. The ethnographic method of participant/observation gave me the only means available to engage the MISO Marines in their mission and build the necessary aspects of trust that would later facilitate easier sharing of genuine perspectives in the interviews.

**Ethnographic Methods in Technical Communication**

Technical Communication scholars have long used ethnographic methods to conduct research in the settings where communication activities take place and they have oft-explored the complexities of situated communication acts (Doheny-Farina; Hess; Winsor). Because of this, workplace scholarship is now a thriving area of research where rhetoric and Technical Communication routinely intersect. Within Technical Communication, much valuable research has been done under the broad umbrella of a range of larger themes in the field. For example, Dorothy Winsor investigated how engineers write in their workplaces (1990); Jack Selzer looked at Engineers’ composing process (1983); Zsuzsanna Bacs Palmer (2013) studied the impact of globalization on intercultural connections within Technical Communication; Meg Morgan et. al. examined collaborative writing in the workplace (1987); Teresa M. Harrison researched organizations as rhetorical constructs (1987); Shaun Slattery explored undistributing work through writing, and more specifically, he examined how technical writers manage texts in complex information environments (2007); Brockman (2002) investigated exploding steamboats, senate debates, and their common tie: technical reports; Faber (2002) looked into community action and organizational change; in 2010 Elizabeth Tebeaux analyzed safety warnings in historical tractor operation manuals and wrote extensively about how manuals and warnings
don't always work; and in 2007, Simmons and Grabill explored participation and power in civic discourse in environmental policy decisions. My research follows in the footsteps of these scholars in its utilization of ethnographic methods to investigate a workplace where complex technical communication and human meaning-making happens in ways that are, as yet, unexplored.

One may wonder how the MISO Marines are technical communicators, since I have focused almost solely on their interactions with others for the purpose of persuasion; however, I assert that MISO Marines are very much technical communicators. Most of the technical aspects of the MISO Marines’ communication does not pertain to this very focused study on rhetorical listening, however, I witnessed the MISO Marines engaging in highly technical communication activities during my time with them. In one segment of the simulation, the MISO Marines had brought loud speakers that could be mounted on vehicles or buildings, and had gifted the equipment to the locals. The MISO Marines had to show the locals (who spoke not one, but two different languages) how to use the equipment. Since the locals (who happened to be police officers) couldn’t read English and the equipment’s handbooks had long ago vanished anyway, it was on the MISO Marines to demonstrate the use and maintenance of the radio equipment, as well as to test the equipment’s compatibility with the police officer’s equipment. So even though the MISO Marines were not writing technical manuals, they were, in essence, acting out the manuals, or serving as living manuals—being the only form of instruction that came with the equipment. These were the sorts of activities I witnessed as I engaged in my ethnographic data collection, and they evidenced the technical nature of MISO Marine’s workplace communication.
Author Theoretical Situatedness

I situate myself within Technical Communication, indicating in the structure of my methods section how I am building upon those who have used ethnographic methods in the past to do the work of the field. More specifically, I draw on Adler and Adler’s analysis of the writing of ethnographic research as a framework for constructing the structure of my methods section in particular, deliberately conveying the following information: 1) telling the stories of gaining entry 2) developing the participants’ trust, 3) reporting on how I overcame obstacles in forging rapport, 4) describing the settings and people, 5) giving a brief description of what data was gathered, 6) giving average length of interviews, topics covered, and feelings established between researchers and participants, and finally, 7) addressing any epistemological problems that arose so readers know how I handled them. I used each of these categories to frame how I made decisions regarding methods at my research site. Although a couple of these categories are merged into one, each is a subheading later in this chapter.

Classic ethnography features

As an ethnographic researcher, I draw from classical, post-structural, and public ethnographic norms. Classical ethnographies affirm the need for subjectivity, rather than shunning it, acknowledging it as necessary to develop rapport with participants (Adler and Adler). For example, Yount (1991), whose ethnographic study examined female coal miners in Colorado, stated that her family’s affiliations with mining assisted her in establishing a sense of shared experience and thus gaining the trust of the workers. In the same way, my own Navy background gave me common ground with the MISO Marines and not only shortened the time that it took for them to accept me as part of their team, but also reduced the impact my presence there had on their actions. Additionally, my military background and my visit to this research site at a previous training event gave me the understanding to know the background of what was
happening in front of me and so bring an expert analysis to it. While a person with fewer connection points with the Marines would have had to ask about the meaning of every acronym and organizational structure, I knew the background; what I didn’t know was the personal understandings of these Marines regarding good communication practices, nor what their courses in military education had taught them. These familiarities between researcher and researched, according to Adler and Adler (1987) and Douglas (1976) produce a depth of insight that is valued in ethnography just as much as objectivity, distance, and detachment are within other methods (Adler and Adler).

For the classic ethnography, subjective disclosures are used by readers to assess the validity of the data (Adler and Adler). For example, in Dilorio and Nusbaumer’s 1993 research of abortion escorts, they wrote of how they were members of the community they researched. As member-researchers, then, they shared the vision, perspectives, and experiences of those they studied. This shared experience enabled the researchers to more deeply understand those whose lives they studied. According to Atkinson (1990), when ethnographic scholars rhetorically use the participants’ colloquialisms, writing up their experiences as “here and now action,” authors both establish their own ethos with the readers as well as “bring readers into the midst of the action” (Adler and Adler, p. 7). While I went into my research site carefully acknowledging my own biases based on shared cultural experience with my participants, I soon found that the experience of being immersed in the challenges they faced changed my mind in many ways, and melded a desire in me to convey the power of that experience in my final text, as a way of ethically preserving the data I collected as living, human experience. Thus, my writing throughout these pages includes elements of narrative unusual to a traditional dissertation, but common to a genuine classic ethnography.
**Poststructural ethnography features**

I borrow also from poststructural ethnography, as Adler and Adler describe it, building “on the impressionist tradition, emphasizing language above all to capture the fluidity of meanings, unstable identities, rapid transitions in society, liminality, and changes in our work” (2). This quintessential description of rhetorical focus on language is especially poignant in my research because the MISO Marines, as expert communicators, have to follow a carefully proscribed way of communicating themes. Thus, the Marines’ power to make meaning is in the seemingly small ways each one personalizes amidst the proscription. In addition to my focus on language, I challenge and stretch ethnography farther into the poststructural era, borrowing Material Rhetorics’ foci on the physical aspects of a situation and their influence on words (Latour 1999; Stormer 2004; Gries 2015; McNely et al., 2015; Huysmans 2011). Similar to the Material Rhetorics scholars, I use theories from other fields to shed light on material aspects of rhetorical communication the field has not yet explored. Also, it is worth noting that, although a growing body of literature in the field of Rhetoric lays out the concept of embodied communication, that terminology gets at something different than what I wished to focus on in this project.

**Public ethnography features**

Researchers who engage in public ethnography believe strongly in the power of contextual language, and in particular, that "The meanings of a culture are embodied, in part, in its language, which cannot be grasped by an outsider without attention to the choice and order of the words and sentences" (Duneier, 1999, p. 339). Following this line of thinking myself, I drew from Duneier’s methods, using voice recorders beyond the scope of the interview as he did (21). Following my initial meeting of my participants, the explaining of my research, and their signing of consent forms, I let them know that I would often be recording their training sessions, and that
was to ensure that I never took their words out of context. As in Duneier’s case, some of my participants were uncomfortable with the idea, and joked that I was collecting evidence to show where they messed up. I handled this resistance by explaining a little of how academic research works, including my perspective, drawn from narrative theory, that my research intends to give those who might not otherwise have a voice in research, a voice (Tye-Williams and Krone, 2015). I explained further that I would clarify their words with them when I didn’t understand them, and that if they wanted to know what I was writing, I would send them the draft of my work, so they could explain anything that may have been lost in translation between their context and mine. This rapport-building went a long way to assure the Marines that I valued the work they were doing—so much so that one Marine in particular brought up this idea several more times throughout my visit, saying things to the effect of, “You don’t just have the power of words, you have the ability put yourself in our shoes, in our experience, and that is power. Go tell our story in ways we never can. Please, tell our story.”

**Ethnographic writing style**

Public Ethnographies embrace a clear, storied writing style, as do Classic Ethnographies. I model my own writing after this scholarly tone and structure. Adler and Adler explain that, “One of the hallmarks of classical ethnographic writing is the simple, direct style of presentation that is personal, storied, and close to ordinary speech. Data sections use this narrative form, a literary genre, to rhetorically enhance the reality effect. Although they are not overly laden with references to the researchers' presence, they convey a vivid, rich, thick (Geertz 1988) description that captures the sights, smells, and sounds of the settings and activities as members experience them. Quotations from subjects are introduced in a personal and descriptive way” (Adler and Adler 9).
Situating myself within the same academic camp, I find that my own data becomes less valuable when it is forced into the neat boxes of a writing style developed for quantitative, scientific work intended to remove the researcher from the results. Further, I push back against the very term “results” because the term implies that I did my work in a lab and came up with something that did not exist before. While my research contributes previously unknown knowledge to the field, it does so while acknowledging the content was previously unknown because no researcher had yet stopped to observe and participate in the lives and stories of those workers whose activities I find worth reporting on. Therefore, in place of “results” I use “discussion.” However, I don’t have an official “discussion” section in my dissertation; rather, I have the Case Studies chapter (Five) where I walk through my findings as enacted by the two Marines I did the case studied on. I also consider Chapter Four to be part of my “Discussion” section since it develops the idea of “rhetorical listening behaviors,” which are my contribution to the field, based upon my research. In all my chapters I attempt to preserve the clear and concise writing style of Technical Communication, but where the choice must be made to be concise or to attempt to tell my participants’ stories in ways that draws readers in and allows the stories to be truly heard, I chose the latter.

For example, my reviews of literature interspersed with my data do not just present the plain facts of relevant literature in the field, but my co-constructed story of that literature. I draw heavily from authors’ reviews of their own work in *Central Works in Technical Communication* because not only do they fit with ethnographic methods in telling the story of their own role in their research, but each author reflects on what would have made the piece better. Each author who has influenced me mourned the fact that they lost some of the power and “so-what” of their work by trying to take ethnographic data and fit it into more rigid writing structures than what it
was intended, as I will elaborate on below. Each author returns to claim the propriety of the researcher’s transformative journey as being a legitimate part of their final document. Walking in the footsteps of these greats, I attempt, like Dohini-Farina, to let my journey as a researcher show through; like Dorothy Winsor (2004), to value the human experiences of the group; and like James Paradis, to trace the interaction between document and human action. After all, what can be more ethnographic than a researcher reflecting on their work and giving their readers the story behind what worked and didn’t work for them in it—even all these years later?

Alignment with other technical communication ethnographers

As I write the story of my own ethnographic research, I situate myself within a rich legacy of ethnographic scholars in Technical Communication. For example, Doheny-Farina (1986) examined a technology start-up company; his research not only examined workplace writing utilizing an ethnographic lens, but as he states years later, was “a somewhat extreme embodiment of the emerging understanding of workplace writing-as-socially-embedded discourse” (Johnson-Eilola and Selber 225). Doheny-Farina’s research was unique at the time because, even though he gathered a year’s worth of ethnographic data, he ended up tracing the origins of a single sentence in some cases, exploring its embeddedness in rich social contexts. His article added depth to the growing field of Technical Communication, asserting that studying texts was not only valuable for the results of the analysis of those texts alone, but to better understand the origin of those texts and how they impacted the emergence of the organization itself (Johnson-Eilola and Selber 325). Twenty years later, Doheny-Farina looked back on the value of the article and laments that

“What disappoints me today about the article is its form, a narrative constricted by all that analytic compartmentalization. What I am seeking and not finding in the article is the
impact of the drama: a story of highly flawed efforts to create new products that might revolutionize the way the business worked, of office intrigues, dubious accounting practices, visionary software geeks hopped up on caffeine, cabals within cabals, and secret meetings at undisclosed locations” (Johnson-Eilola and Selber 325).

He states further that none of that story survived the writing process, and instead, he fit the story into a scientific-type form that left out the impact of the very ethnographic methods he used. I situate myself with his perspective offered in the following reflection, working to include the messy complexity of ethnographic work via vignettes and stories that reflect the humanity and power of the workplace I examine. As Doheny-Farina states so pointedly, “If I were writing this today, I would still want that analytic significance to come through […] but I would want to subordinate it all to the narrative: A tale that would not only explain the crucial nature of workplace writing […] but would also pull back the frame to reveal me as a character generating the story” (Johnson-Eilola and Selber 326). Along this same line of thinking, I strive to preserve both the analytic and the storied nature of what transpired in my interactions among the community of MISO Marines.

As an ethnographic researcher, I situate myself also in the vein of Dorothy Winsor’s stance; her “Engineering Writing/Writing Engineering,” is an insistent scholarly presence for me, guiding what I find valuable for study. Her article’s contribution to the field was partially based on the fact that there were very few such on-site workplace ethnographies at the time. Her contribution was also due to the fact that Winsor used even her language to challenge the accepted theories of the field, exemplified by phrases such as “While our theory says […] studies have not shown…” (342). Like Winsor, I find myself in a workplace where no other researcher has embedded, and where “the strange has become familiar and the familiar strange” (343),
forcing me to hold in one hand what I thought I understood about my own field’s theory and right next to it, what I see happening in the workplace. Reflecting on her article many years later, Winsor criticizes her lack of data and lack of description of methods. At the same time, she holds firmly to her citation of multiple sources from outside of the field, asserting that “it can be seen as a sign of our field’s commitment to interdisciplinary work, a commitment that is necessary because of the way that writing crosses the boundaries of the knowledge fiefdoms we so arbitrarily construct” (Winsor 341). Like Winsor, I find myself reaching out to other fields for knowledge that can be pulled into my own field to help illuminate a workplace whose levels of complexity are easily masked by outsider assumptions of employee’s motivations. I find similarities in Winsor’s results, as much as in her reflections on her early work, as she compares engineer’s perception that writing is part of their job but not as a part of engineering itself (342).

In Winsor’s framing of engineers as being wholly caught up with action as being separate from writing, I see threads of the shifting perspectives Marines go through when they move from the traditional force to the MISO force, where writing/communicating often is the action. Winsor builds on Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar’s Laboratory Life, where they claim that most scientific writing in the lab is inscribing actions until they become documents of some form. Each document, then, builds on the legitimized knowledge of the last one until the document as the container of knowledge is well removed from the action it once came from. “Knowledge,” she says, “is thus constructed through texts, not discovered as the original work” (343). In a partial reverse of that process, the MISO Marines seem to be creating texts from texts, and then deriving an action plan from those texts. This Marine process is part of the rhetorical process of invention, except that it does not occur in a context where we would expect. Instead, Marines are methodically creating texts, then freelancing their actions and interactions
with the local population, enacting the message they were given a mission to spread. The Marines’ enacted personal communications with the local population mirrors Winsor’s account of “textual construction of knowledge as being social in nature because each document must convince other people of its validity in order to be accepted as knowledge” (343). However, my research site differs from Winsor’s description because at my site, it is not texts convincing people, but the Marines themselves: their lives as they walk among the people influencing the perceived validity of any textual messages they send.

Paradis and Miller (1986) explored the complexity and pervasiveness of utilizing texts to translate knowledge expertise into action, and how when the operator manual, in his case, comes up short of giving full details translatable by Operator X, the operator must construct the missing pieces for them. This area of human translation of meaning based on cultural and experiential norms is seen in the MISO Marine’s actions taken at their worksite: They are given every instruction in detail, and they are procedurally heavy-laden, yet when it comes to how they embody the message while walking and talking amongst the locals, they seem to fall back on their own communication style. The communication styles they fall back on are sometimes not even based on the models of good communication they have been trained on and can converse about, but instead, are a mix of their everyday banter and their proscribed manner of speaking to certain ranks. Part of this disconnect for the Marines in my study is that Marine corps procedure is incredibly rigid and compartmentalized, not allowing for the variances of human emotion and complexity in their analysis of audience. In this way, the Marines are left to “make up” how to enact the message, a message that was approved in bullet-points and phrase-length themes, but not translated to human conversation. This is a weakness for the Marines, whose conversation skills are formed by the way they speak to each other, by their military banter, their home
culture, or their detailed, proscribed instruction for speaking with a superior (Mallory and Downs).

**Researcher’s Decision Points at Research Site**

The following section headings are drawn from Adler and Adler’s categories of data which I listed earlier in this chapter. I go in-depth into my decision points within each category, providing the reader with an understanding of the decisions I made which relate to my methods and my logic behind them.

**Gaining entry**

Much of the reason for the lack of field research at military workplaces is due to its limited access. For this research project, there were two levels of gaining entry: one with the leadership who invited me to conduct research in their unit and another with the Marines once I got on the ground amongst them. I gained access to the leadership due to my position of being a civilian technical writer for the Army and being known as a skilled peer by those who work with what we call “human aspects of military operations” (or persuasion, relationships, meaning-making through words, images, and deeds).

A year prior to conducting my research, I was asked to accompany a Soldier who was tasked with evaluating a training simulation that a Marine Corps MISO unit was conducting. The Soldier was high-ranking, and well-respected and well-received by the leaders of the MISO unit. He introduced me to everyone he met—some new colleagues of his and some old. We were at the simulation for several days, and during that time, once we had been briefed by the leadership and given permission to mingle and ask questions wherever we wished, we separated, observed different evolutions, and reconnoitred to compare notes later. During the hours of just being in the spaces, I struck up many conversations with the leaders, describing myself as doing
“the civilian equivalent of MISO work—studying persuasion and its uses.” I was well-received and at the end they asked me to return during next year’s simulation. I asked what capacity they would like me to attend in, and they offered that I could observe and do analysis and feedback or participate—whichver I wanted. When they found out I was a PhD student looking for field work, they said that they would have to get permission, but once that was secure, they would be happy to allow me to conduct my study during their simulation the next year. Due to the hierarchical structure of the Marine Corps organization, gaining entry to the leadership granted me entry to the Marines on the ground, because the leadership has the power to require the Marines to participate. This posed an ethical issue of coercion in participation in my study, which I address in the next section.

Developing the participants’ trust and overcoming obstacles in forging rapport

Due to the way the MISO unit’s leadership introduced me to the Marines who would be my participants if they so chose, I had the Marines’ cooperation—they would do whatever I asked because their leaders had told them to. As a former military member myself, however, I knew the world of difference between cooperation and actual trust, so I worked via the mandated cooperation to gain trust. I started that process when I was first introduced to the Marines to explain to my study. I called out to Andy, the one unit leader who remained in the room, “earmuffs!” (which, in military speak means “this is not for your ears!”) while I went on to tell his Marines that they absolutely did not have to participate. I strategically used this language for two reasons: it was a term that showed I spoke their military language, and it showed that I was willing to go up against their leader in order to support their choice. That stance of an outsider going up against an insider’s established authority is unusual in the military in anything other than joking terms, and my mixture of humor and the fact that I did it gave me some initial respect
from the potential participants. It seemed that they understood that I wasn’t just there to feel important and lord it over them, but I was truly interested in their perspective—even if it wasn’t popular to their leadership. It also intended to signal to them that anything negative that they expressed to me about the organization would not get back to him, even though I was interacting with them during a training simulation in which they were evaluated. I then proceeded to tell the Marines that the only way they could truly help me is if they wanted to, so despite what their leader said, I needed them to only participate if they felt comfortable, and I explained how we would handle them declining to participate without outing themselves to their leader or the group.

Since the leader was still in the room and could actually still hear me, I addressed him next: “Andy, with all appreciation of you putting your marines at my disposal and with all due respect to your position, in order for these men to help me as you instructed, I need them each to know they have the power not to participate, and will suffer no negative consequences.” I felt Andy’s appreciation of me rise (I went up against him, in a sense, and this showed courage he understood), as well as his confusion in what manner of work I was involved in. He smiled, nodded, shrugged, and said he was going to help his buddy prep for the morning exercise. He was in and out of the room while we talked, but I noted with some interest that the men no longer looked at him wherever he went, but their eyes were on me. I suspect that was due to the fact that he told them he was turning them over to me, and due the negotiations of power and leadership that I did in that initial meeting. Although I did this delicate dance of alleviating the Marines of feeling obligated to participate, I was also conscious not to take on a similar role of authority over them; my observation of them based on their responses was that their unit cohesion and sense of ownership of their mission and its exclusion of outsiders dampened any chance that they
would look to me as one who was forcing them into a role, but rather they would continue to see me as something of an insider/outside, accepted but not exactly one of them.

I had many opportunities to gain the trust of the Marines, each and every day I was at the site, because the situation changed often in ways I could not control. The first change was that the initial 12 US Marines who signed my consent form and filled out my questionnaire were divided up into two groups, called “DETs” (short for “Detachments”). Since this simulation is international, with MISO Marines from five other European countries, and part of the goal is to get the US Marines working with those allied partners with whom they will actually work in a real war zone event, the DETs are made up of members of each nation’s Marines. Hence, even though I made the first step to gaining the US Marines’ trust that first day, once they were separated and others added to their group, it felt somewhat like starting over. The first day I joined DET Alpha (not its real name), the initial Marine leader who had introduced me to the initial 12, Andy, introduced me to the DET, told them what I was doing, and essentially handed me over to the leader of the DET, telling him to get me whatever I needed. It was uncomfortable for someone as myself who still feels like a military member, even though without a uniform, to have the Marines put directly in my service. From my perspective, I wanted to leave the smallest footprint I could so as not to disturb their mission or change the way they did things. As the gracious hosts they were, the men often asked me if I needed anything.

During my first few minutes in the Quonset hut with DET Alpha, I spoke briefly to the group about my work, about my interest in their work, and about my process. I let them know that I had brought a recorder and would let it run during discussions and that I would be taking notes. One remarked in a joking way that I was capturing “evidence” that would get them in trouble. This is a common concern in the military, as the evolution of smartphones and social
media has progressed, Marines have discovered that if they capture and post their meaningful moments, the moments are then outside of the context in which they were harmless (or not). Being subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice before the US Justice system and having far fewer rights than any other US citizen, military members can pay with their career for what was a harmless prank or meaningful moment that outsiders would translate as offensive. This culture of secrecy is elevated even more within the MISO community, whose intent is often misunderstood by friendlies and enemies people alike. MISO Marines also engage in operations that cannot be made public knowledge, so to a more severe degree than other Marines, they are isolated from public interaction relating to their work. Being aware of this culture from my background and my technical writer position, I was quick to address this worry. I raised my hands to hush the nervous laughter at my bringing a recorder and told them about my military service and how I understood the importance of perception and representation, and that my goal here was not to expose what they do wrong or show anything bad, but to truly understand what they do. They seemed to wonder at that and to stand in genuine awe what they do is complex enough to be studied.

I took this opportunity to explain to them how my field studies how people make meaning and how people accomplish tasks using language, but we are never in the kinds of situations they are in, so we as researchers are curious what kinds of ways they use words and what we can learn about our theories of communication by watching them enacted in their environments. Some were intrigued, some shrugged, and overall, they nodded. I asserted that where I wasn’t sure what something meant, I would ask them, and that my draft was supposed to be reviewed by someone in their command to be sure I wasn’t releasing any information that would be problematic for the organization. I also reminded them that I would be using
pseudonyms in the place of their names and would not identify them by exact rank, so they could feel free to speak their minds without fear of retribution, even by the reviewing officer. They seemed satisfied by the amount of detail I had described, and believed my appreciation of the difficulty they lived in. They returned to their joking to each other while working.

After being with DET Alpha for a couple days, I decided I needed to meet DET Bravo and observe them while they were doing the same part of the simulation that DET Alpha was engaged in. The leader who had first introduced me to the 12 Marines and DET Alpha was busy that morning and trusted me to embed wherever I needed to, so I stepped into the next Quonset hut. Finding the DET busily engaged, I sat down outside their work area and began taking notes. I was counting on the US Marines in this DET from the first day to recognize me and, when there was a break, say hello and possibly introduce me to the rest of the DET members, but none did. My presence felt intrusive—not because I was observing—others were as well—but because observers were usually reporting to leaders how the Marines were doing, and the first time I had visited, I had seen the presence of the observers negatively shape the Marines ability to act with the agency they needed to succeed in their current mission. So, when there was a break in the conversation, I introduced myself—again to the US MISO Marines, and anew to the rest of the DET. The U.S. MISO Marines in this group were not very talkative or demonstrative, and we had not connected as well as some of the others on that first day. Between that dynamic, and the fact that the leader was not there to vouch for me, I felt like an outsider all of that day.

Frustrated and trying to understand the dynamic and if I could shift it, on a lunch break I went back to visit DET Alpha, and was met with applause, high fives, secret handshakes I was no good at, and general enthusiasm. My perception that I was an insider with them was confirmed, especially in contrast with the other DET. Andy, the Marine leader from the first day,
stopped by to visit the DET and asked me how I was doing. I recorded my interaction with him directly after it occurred, because it represented a major decision point in my data collection methods: I had been determined to observe only, taking notes and recording conversations of interest. But the problem was that the DETs were large, and the recorder didn’t pick up the one conversation on the far side of the room that was of interest to me over the rest of the din in the room. Plus, those in the conversation got interrupted by taskings, and as an observer-only I was not able to approach the Marines and inquire farther into the meaning of their conversation. From my notes on “Series Production”:

Ben is talking to an Australian about how when MISO gets their own school it’s going to be really different from how “they” (points north…Ft Bragg) do things.

Andy (Lead Marine assigned to coordinate my work; not his real name) asks how I’m doing, and I say not well because it’s so hard to follow one conversation, but I don’t want to get closer because I will impact the conversation. He says to insert…hesitates, then says to assert myself and ask questions. I say I’m supposed to be observing only and I don’t want to be in the way of their training. He animates in a humorous face like he does with the Marines, but I have observed he also has a serious message when he does this, and not unkindly says “Ask questions.” Then he walks busily away.

So that is it. I’m making a decision: I can’t get anything of value without being closer and asking questions.

My motivation for observing and not participating had not been only based on my data gathering design, but also on the feedback I’d heard from my last visit with the soldier: that
strangers visiting and poking their heads into the process (telling Marines what to do when they were only there to observe) had negatively impacted the process. Hence it had never occurred to me to ask to participate while gathering data. With Andy’s urging, however, and after having tried it the other way, I changed my methods to include participation. This would give me more to record, for I would also need to keep track of what I inserted into the conversation as well as what was returned to me.

The next day when I returned, I found Andy and asked him if he would walk with me to DET Bravo and show his support for my data gathering as he had with DET Alpha. He inquired if they were not being helpful, as if he would get them in trouble. I asserted that they were doing their jobs, which was their current mission, but that I felt they were hesitant because not all of them had been told by someone in charge that I could be there. Andy did walk with me and introduce me, but it didn’t yield much interaction. I had also gone out and bought two bags of candy, and once Andy had left Bravo’s Quonset hut, I tossed it on the table and announced, “For your trouble of putting up with me!” It was a freezing cold, overcast, miserable day, and there was no heat in the hut. A steady rain fell outside, and it had fouled up the portable electric connections (extension cords strung across streets) that powered the internet, computers, and coffee pots, making everything more difficult. A number of the DET members pounced on the candy with gleeful faces, high-fiving me and suddenly finding my presence a benefit. One offered me coffee right away. Just then a trusted member of DET Alpha walked over to see if he could borrow an item. He saw the candy, pounced on it, and was promptly swatted off by several members of DET Bravo who proudly announced as they pointed to me, “She brought it for us. Only us.” The Marine from DET Alpha looked at me as if I was a traitor, in a way that I couldn’t tell if it was playful or not, then he walked away shaking his head.
The whole incident worked in my favor, though, because it served to pit one unit against another (in playful fun), and now in a turn of events, Bravo was with me, while Alpha were outsiders. It reminded me of the first moment with the 12 Marines where I showed them I was on their side, even going against Andy’s orders. Bravo showed an openness to me after that, and even playfully pouted over who would get interviewed—all of them wanting a shot at being interviewed, even though I had only intended to interview a couple of them due to time constraints related to their mission. They were tiring of this preparation portion of their mission, tiring of being cold and still, and my presence seemed a welcome distraction. They didn’t, however, finish all the candy, so I took what was left of it to Alpha after lunch. They turned a mock cold shoulder to me, asking why they’d want Bravo’s leftovers when I didn’t think they rated candy of their own. So, responding in turn as only a military jokester would, I grabbed up the bags and walked away. They relented and came after me, returning to Bravo later to tell them that they now had Bravo’s candy. I had no more difficulty with gaining Alpha or Bravo’s trust, even though the temperament of Alpha DET was made up of more men who would engage in more vulnerable ways than Bravo DET’s member would.

It is striking, given my research focus on communication behaviors that I gained the trust of the initial 12 Marines and then both DETs, not by words, but by actions: moving myself into a position of leadership over Andy (even as I stayed within the space he gave me and kept my rapport with him), and then in engaging in the type of banter and one-upmanship that is the language of camaraderie in the military. Although these moves were facilitated by language, what effectively moved me from the status of outsider to insider was the way in which I enacted the language: the content and its delivery showing my membership in the Discourse community to which they belonged (Gee), and my rhetorical actions providing what they needed and with
that, bringing a sense of being understood. As charming as candy can be, it is not the power of
candy to buy trust, but its symbolism that on a dreary day where food was hard to come by, they
felt touched that I not only came to take but to give.

**Describing the settings and people**

The research site was located deep in the hills of a Marine Corps base. This was the site
they used to simulate war zone deployments because its remoteness and lack of creature
comforts make it realistic. The site is so far away from main roads and so remote as to not have a
name or address to input into a GPS—I had to be shown how to get there, and then get lost trying
to get there alone the next day. Cell reception is spotty at best, and even though the Marine’s
processes rely on access to the internet and they had brought hotspots, the internet wasn’t of
sufficient bandwidth to handle all of the visual-rich data they needed to send. Consequently, it
mimicked network difficulties in warzones.

The men live together in a village made of Quonset huts: 60 bunk beds in an open bay,
with shared bathrooms in another Quonset hut a hike away. (There were only a handful of
women and they were not among my participants.) During the day the men pushed the bunks
towards the back of the hut and made the front into a workspace: crude plastic tables pushed
together, papers scattered everywhere, and cold folding chairs unfolded. By the third day of
mission preparation, the teams finally had white boards and large paper on which to plan. And
when the network was down, they used runners to take messages to and from the “headquarters
building” which was just another Quonset hut set up with tables in a “U” shape, the fourth end
occupied by a giant smartboard through which to communicate with the home unit. The Marines
dined at yet another chow hall Quonset hut at mealtime, but for those who were busy at that time
(operations ran 24/7 without full breaks for everyone) and missed chow, they had to go to a little store at the back of the area that was only open for a few hours at a time.

Fresh water sat around in green, five-gallon jugs which, I discovered, were extremely difficult to pour into regular coffee pots without spilling—and the water couldn’t be wasted, even though it tasted like the nasty plastic jugs. Each DET, though consisting of 10 or more folks, only had one coffee pot, and on the cold days it took everyone working at it constantly to keep the coffee pot full. The space was not heated, and the guys wore gloves as they typed and wrote, often having to stop work and warm up their hands to be able to go on. I experienced the same difficulty with my note-taking. The international Marines bunked and ate with the US Marines, so despite there being certain borders on the starting and ending of one training evolution, the entire three-week event was training, with the men learning how to live with each other in less-than-easy circumstances and without the distractions of much technology to ease tensions. In general, I recognized their deportment as normal for military personnel on a mission: ridiculing the stupidity of the things that didn’t work, some becoming the comic relief that they all needed, offering to help each other, and pretty much goofing off and insulting each other through laughter the entire time.

During this on-the-ground time of data collection I came to understand in terms I could finally articulate what I had innately known as a service member all along: Military members are doers; therefore, ethical data collection methodology must also do/participate, not simply observe. To be present, observing, without doing alongside them is to risk being seen as an outsider (grading observer, leader who won’t get their hands dirty, or reporter-to-the-public), and to trip the "civilian filter switch" many military members flip when they leave work. To observe without participating is to risk breaking the bonds of rapport, because to stand by and observe is
a kind of disrespect, a statement that stands in direct opposition to the expressed goal of "understanding their work."

Other research paradigms require objective distance to maintain ethics, but to research inside the military workplace, ethical methods require getting your hands dirty and feeling the weight of responsibility shouldered by the those who are trained to be violent killers but who instead, are engaging in rhetorical communication acts to build relationships with local populations who, a few months prior, were enemies. To leave without feeling some sense of that complex burden is to fail to ethically capture the complexity of the workplace and those who spend their lives in it.

**Giving a brief description of what data was gathered**

Tony Whitehead, an Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at University of Maryland advocates for the use of 15 observational categories, which help the ethnographer to organize their powers of observation and their field notes. I utilized these 15 items to guide my observations:

1) Space: The nature of the space utilized in the social setting.
2) Objects: The material culture found in the social setting, and how this material culture is organized.
3) The Individual Actors within that setting, and their specific characteristics
4) The Social Systemic Context of the Actors in the Setting (i.e. Actor Groups).
5) The Behaviors that are being carried out in a socio-cultural setting (acts, activities, and events).
6) The Language used by the actors in the space.
7) Other Forms of Expressive Culture found in the social setting beyond general language (e.g., music, song, dance, art, architecture, etc.).

8) Patterns of Interaction carried out by the actors within the social setting.

9) Discourse Content of the Setting as reflected in the language, expressive culture, and social interactions the actors in the social setting.

10) Emotional Level of the Discourse.

11) Ideational Elements (Beliefs, Attitudes, Values, significant symbolisms) that appear to be present in a Social Setting.

12) Broader Social Systems that might influence the actor, behaviors, and ideations found in any specific social system.

13) Physical Environmental Elements present within or surrounding a specific social setting.

14) The Goals, Motivations, or Agendas of the various individual and groups of the actors within the social setting.

15) Human Need fulfillment that is attempted or met within the social setting or interaction (Whitehead 10).

I used this list to help me chunk out my observation notes before I coded them. Since I gathered so much data of various types, I needed a way to begin breaking it down into categories before I applied Spinuzzi’s coding schema to it. This process was also valuable to see which of Spinuzzi’s codes were to be found in each of Whitehead’s categories. For example, as I observed the Marines’ planning, I might have taken notes on across several of Whitehead’s categories, such as “Patterns of Interaction carried out by the actors within the social setting” (number eight), or “Discourse Content of the Setting as reflected in the language, expressive culture, and
social interactions the actors in the social setting,” (number nine), or the “Emotional Level of the Discourse” (number ten). However, I am a narrative and chronological note-taker, so I wrote down how one group of Marines were interacting differently in one area of the training from the other Marines in another area (number eight), and why I thought that was occurring. I also documented while onsite how the US Marines focused on process while the Australian Marines focused on theory (Number nine), and how the Marines got in a heated discussion (number ten). However, I didn’t think of those as being categories of activity until I went back and looked at my notes. This process helped me digest and understand my data in new ways (other than one long, cold, interesting experience), and it added a layer of richness to the data. Although I didn’t used these categories to analyze the data and report it, the perspective helped me see what I had experienced as a different sort of narrative—a categorized narrative—than the overwhelmingly complex narrative it was without this lens.

A final quote from Whitehead sums up my experience gathering my data extremely well. He says that while ethnographers should use such items to organize their observations, each one of their observations are answers and the thing the ethnographer has to really search to find is the relevant question.

The term observation is usually associated with the sense of sight. But In the purest form of observations without participation, ethnographers raise all of their senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and feel, to levels higher than normal, and take in stimuli from all sources of the cultural environment in which they are studying and living. In other words, the ethnographer’s whole body becomes a highly charged data-collecting instrument to take in and process stimuli that might have meaning for the members of the community, or that provide insight regarding their lifeways. Some ethnographers often view this
process as one in which they are responding to inquiries about the study community from themselves, although sometimes they might not consciously be aware of any questions that they are pursuing responses to. As Spradley comments, everything that the ethnographer observes are actually answers, and the process of observation is actually finding questions to those answers (11).

Although I went into my research curious about how the Marines might be using theories of communication without being conscious of them (or with consciousness of them), it was my initial interactions of the first days with the Marines that made me realize that much of the meaning-making communication within their interactions in some way included actions, not just words. I did note that the Marines who had the most meaning-rich interactions used listening in ways I hadn’t expected to see in young Marines, thus rhetorical listening became the theory I homed in on, tuning my observations to note whatever might have even tangential import to listening and its physical expression by the Marines.

By the time the simulation had moved from its two weeks of analysis and creation of communication content and into the actual role-playing with paid actors as local villagers, I was creating categories of speaking/action and labeling them in the margins as I collected more notes. Whitehead notes that this iterative process is normal for ethnography, where the researcher must choose which data to collect, since by sheer size, all the data cannot be collected. In his words, “Usually, discussions of ethnographic observations, interviewing, and data interpretation are presented in separate sections of a document, separate chapters in books, or as separate books. However, ethnography is a cyclic iterative process, wherein the ethnographer, moves back and forth between observations, interviewing, and interpretation” (11).
Average length of interviews and topics covered

The interviews I conducted ranged anywhere from 15 minutes to over two hours. I began with semi-structured interview questions from my list of IRB-approved questions (See the Appendix). Most of the questions were to follow up or clarify something the Marine had written about in the questionnaire. For instance, one Marine, Ben, had marked that he has no intercultural background, yet he had grown up in the East and moved to the West. I wanted to understand the disconnect (which I explain more in Case Study I). For another Marine, he had run out of paper marking the communication courses he had taken, and the sheer number of words he used made me recognize a propensity for communication, yet I wondered if he was conscious of the reflexive need to see himself through his audience’s eyes as he sought to connect with him—and my questionnaire hadn’t gotten into that.

Yet another Marine gave me yes/no answers to questions I thought it was impossible to respond like that to. Sensing that they were the closed type and more comfortable with procedure, I asked them about organizational structures and practices, such as when the Marines actually got into the communication schools required for working as a MISO expert (it varies), and if some Marines deployed without any formal training (according to him they do, coming directly from the regular Marines where they live, sleep, and breathe to kill). Some of the Marines were curious about what I was studying in my PhD program, how in the world it connected to their work, and what I saw that they could do better.

Some of the Marines opened up and shared much more about their lives and experiences than I would have ever asked, or even thought to ask. For these Marines I just let the recorder go, continued to take notes, and got swept up in wonder at these humans who engaged at what I recognized as an undergrad (or above) above academic level, and who engaged with a level of comfortability with emotion and vulnerability that I would never have expected Marines to share
with a researcher. With one Marine in particular, I wasn’t prepared to interview him yet—we were just moving to a quiet area to talk about some of the communication principles I use and how he might be able to use them in the upcoming village interactions. But he was so curious and the interaction so rich that I conducted the interview right there, even though I did not have my recorder on me. I felt that to go get it or put off the conversation to another day would be to never hear what he had to say, so, not even having my notepad with me, I absorbed everything he said and when the interview was over, removed myself to a private location to take notes from memory. It was an interesting meta moment for me as a researcher because in the moment where my only available task was listening to absorb, my interlocutor’s words impacted me and changed my mind in ways that proved incredibly difficult to put into notes later. I encountered these moments of then-invisible appearances of rhetorical listening in multiple instances, recognizing them only later once my data analysis was complete.

**Feelings established between researchers and participants**

It is difficult to describe the type of meaning making that occurred between some of the Marines and myself. I went into the researching thinking I knew Marines, and thinking that engaging them as a stranger and in a work environment would bring out all the very impersonal and unfeeling aspects of Marine corps life. I also entered the observation portion of my data collection insistent on being an observer only, not fully aware of the power of ethnographic interaction to pull people together and create shared understanding. In one particularly powerful day I went from studying a workplace to studying people, and then from studying people to us—participants and researcher—creating knowledge together. Where I had anticipated interviewing them and receiving short answers and not questions in return, they not only asked, but rephrased
and paraphrased my answers, adding their understanding and shifting mine in ways that I utterly
had not anticipated.

It was during this day that I recognized that my participants were going to synthesize and
that they wanted me to participate in order to learn from me, and that due to the dynamic nature
of the existing training operation, that was how it was going to have to be. I think the opening to
the possibility of shared work between us—military and civilian—happened for some of them,
too, because they started including me in more operations. Not only that, but when I moved
towards interviews and spoke with Ben and then later with Gregory, they opened up about their
personal lives in ways that startled me. I no longer felt like a researcher, but a trusted confidant.

Due to the sensitive nature of the life details they shared, and the deep emotion displayed
by sharing it, I no longer wanted to do research where I had to report on what they said. The term
“data” suddenly became a cold word, almost betrayal of trust—and yet both men knew that I was
going to be writing about what they told me. And I, feeling deeply the ethics of vulnerability,
shared in return, after they had, about my own struggles with moving from one culture to
another. What shocked me was that, with two Marines in particular, when I asked them about
communication experience, they got into their very real lives—one more than the other. No other
Marines did—for the most part they gave me procedural or short answers. The two helped me to
understand who they were and the origins of their consciousness of communication strategies.

It was at this point, then, that I down-selected and made a shift in my methods. I decided
that, rather than trying to follow and take notes on multiple Marines as they went out to do their
field work, I would focus more closely on the two Marines who had opened up to me about their
personal meaning and motivations in communication. When I designed my methods, I was
unable to foresee that any Marine would display the kind of vulnerable reflections that Ben and
Gregory both did, so doing a case study had never crossed my mind. I also could not have foreseen the intensely dynamic nature of the research site where everything shifted so quickly that my methods were difficult to follow. Additionally, through the openness of Ben and Gregory, I found I had underestimated just how personal each Marine’s reason for their communication norms were: how could I actually understand any Marine’s field work if I didn’t know something of who they were as people? In order to understand their actions out in the field, I would need to know something about their values, and temperaments, and why they do what they do. Since they were the only participants who volunteered this type of insight, they were also the only participants who could verify whether what I observed them doing was conscious or unconscious utilization of communication principles. These two, Ben and Gregory, had let me in and allowed me to see their motivations in astonishing ways, motivating me to focus my observations around them, more than others I had interviewed.

At the end of my time of observing them, Ben asked if I was deploying with them, to advise them, and when I said no, he asserted that he wished I could, because he would trust me in that situation, and there were Many Marines he could not say that of. And then we sat around in a Humvee listening to soccer on the radio. I had hung out around the outside of the vehicle, not wanting to intrude on their team, but they nearly forced me into the driver’s seat and then took pictures with me. We took several pictures together, some of them goofy, and we sat there chilling in a combat vehicle—a female Rhetoric PhD student, a U.S. Marine born in a third world country, two Canadian Marines, and an Australian Marine with a degree in Sociology and Anthropology—laughing like the team waiting for action that we were.

To this day, Ben’s words from earlier in the training echo in my head: “You’re not the person who just takes off your shoes and gets in someone else’s, because that is just about
feelings—that would be feeling how they feel. But you get in their head…you put aside all of your experience and your way of thinking and can think how they think and that is amazing.”

 Addressing epistemological problems

I have written in detail about the various choices I made as I collected data: from moving from multiple interviews to proceeding as a case study, and from starting as an observer and moving into participant-observation, among others. The other difficulty I confronted for the first week of data collection was that I knew the MISO process so well that I couldn’t see the value to research in what I was observing. I took notes on everything, knowing that once I had some notes, I would be able to tell what had to do with each Marine’s understanding of communication theories or not, but until then, I had no real focus for what information was valuable at my site. It wasn’t until I thought of rhetorical listening as a theoretical framework that I began to truly be able to step back from my own knowledge enough to see data rather than military people carrying out military procedures.

Just as Krista Ratcliffe proposed that to truly understand we must stand under other’s discourses, seeking to experience them first of all, rather than respond to them immediately, so I deliberately put away what I knew about Marines and their process in order to attempt to see what they were doing through new eyes. I believe that this stance of being there and demonstrating a kind of listening that is unusual from one Marine to another, is, in part, what created the space for my two case study Marines to speak words they may not have otherwise (and didn’t, in any other circumstance). It was a meta-experience: listening via words and deeds before I even understood how the principle functioned.

IRB

In this section I will talk about my IRB proposal: the basics of what was approved, how the complex situation I encountered at the research site differed from my expectations, and thus
what I did to maintain the spirit and protections of the IRB while adjusting to account for the situation in the field, which was beyond my control. In the following pages I insert an indented paragraph from my IRB proposal, and then follow it with a paragraph that covers how the situation in the field differed from my expectations in ways that forced me to adjust the order of how I collected my data, being careful to stay true to the commission of the IRB: to protect the rights of the participants. In this way the reader can see the complexity of the research site, even to one who had visited it before. The fact that this discrepancy exists adds value to my research because it shows the severely uncharted nature of my research site; even with the oversight of a competent dissertation committee and IRB committee, we could not foresee the complexities that would confront me at the site. Rather than being a failure of effort or foresight, this is the very definition of a research gap: entering a place where no one in our field has gone before.

IRB Text and Contextualization

My research design takes advantage of an already-occurring, 3-week long military training event later this fall (2017) where members of the U.S. military come together to practice better cultural communication. I am proposing that I give some of the training event participants my communication guide, and ask them to use it as they make their communication plan during the event, in addition to the documents they already use to guide their plan (the documents they are using already are public-access documents and I will examine them as part of my research). Specifically, my research will be carried out as follows:

1) I will work with the training event leaders (whom I already have a relationship with) to identify 12 participants: 4 who have a significant amount of training and experience with the type of cultural communication being done in the event, 4 who have some experience
in it, and 4 who have very little or no experience. For each group of 4, I will give 2 participants my communication guide and not the other two, but I will observe all 4 of them as they move through one certain section of the event that involves planning how to speak to local populations. The reason for to categorize participants into different experience levels is that I want to see how experience and training impact the participants' intercultural communication and their use of my communication guide. I will use my Survey (attached) to help me decide how to group the soldiers based on their number of communication trainings, years of experience performing intercultural communication, etc. (9).

This plan differed from its outworking in a couple ways. First, it differed in the uniformity of the Marines’ cultural experience in ways I didn’t expect: when I arrived at the research site, the leadership had changed around some plans in order to make their training event work. They assigned a group of 12 Marines to me, and though this group represented a vast difference in the length of time each had been part of the MISO Marine unit, it proved very difficult to decide which participants qualified as having a significant, some, or little experience and/or training in cultural communication. For example, while one participant was brand new and had taken almost no Marine Corps courses required for his position (it takes time to get them into the courses, so this is not unusual), he had experienced radical cultural adjustments in his upbringing and his family and circle of friends represented an extremely wide variety of cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, another Marine had been there so long he was about to transfer out after his requisite three-year tour of duty, but on the questionnaire (called a “survey” in the IRB document) he marked that he had very little intercultural experience or training. The other 10 Marines ranged between these two extremes, forcing me to admit that my three categories for
experience and training were not able to be engaged as strict categories, but rather, like most human experience, were on a continuum. For the purposes of my research, then, I chose to interview and observe only those Marines whose experience seemed to most accurately represent these three categories of experience. That left me with two Marines who were most clearly in each category—six in all.

Non-uniformity makes categorization difficult

I was surprised that for a military branch that stresses uniformity over anything else, their men were so varied in qualifications. My knowledge of the Marine Corps’ value of uniformity and my own experience in naval aviation where you must take a course before you do a job had led me to write my IRB proposal as I did. I would learn as I interviewed my participants that for MISO Marines, because they are such an outlier with regards to Marine Corps norms, they often arrive in their unit and go directly on a deployment to a warzone—with no courses. In fact, a MISO Marine might not be able to get into his required course until he is almost ready to rotate out of the MISO unit. This Marine, then, might have a significant amount of work experience in cultural communication, but might not even mark this on my questionnaire, because his work didn’t go by that label. Even though it caused complexity in deciding who had the most/least cultural experience, I’m glad that I fashioned the questionnaire to ask about courses, deployments, and personal experience/family life. As I intended, these questions on the questionnaire allowed me to select Marines who would prove to have incredible intercultural acumen that was not reflected by their courses taken or work experience, but came from home life.
Conflict between respectful conduct in the workplace and my research design

My IRB Proposal stated above that, “For each group of 4, I will give 2 participants my communication guide and not the other two, but I will observe all 4 of them as they move through one certain section of the event that involves planning how to speak to local populations.” It became clear to me the first time I tried to give a Marine the communication guide, that these Marines had so many roles and tasks within the training event, and so great was their pressure to perform well, that either my communication guide would get lost in the mission focus or cause the Marines to miss something else they needed to be focusing on during the event. The Marines liked the information on the communication guide, but they tucked it away with the other stacks and stacks of paper they were working through during their analysis, and it was clear to me that I could not insist on them using it and remind them to use it in the field and at the same time honor the commitment I had made to the leadership who invited me: to not get in the way of the training event.

Therefore, not having much time to change course, I adhered to the IRB ethics of protecting the participants by not pressuring them to do something that might earn them a negative by their supervisor. Still wanting to follow through and find out if my communication guide principles could help the Marines provide evidence of their willingness to engage with other cultures without judgement, I chose the Marine with the least amount of training and deployment experience (Ben) and had an in-depth conversation with him about the principles. This choice impacted the rest of my data collection: no longer could I view my process through the lens of quantitative values where I had a “control group” who didn’t use my communication guide. I came to understand, quickly and with finality, that each person in this MISO unit was so different that even if I had been able to adhere strictly to my plan, I wouldn’t have been able to
come away with conclusive evidence about whether or not the communication guide improved the Marine’s intercultural communication, or if it was temperament showing through. It was at this time that I realized that my research site truly was ripe for ethnographic observation: this was no longer a mission to see if my communication guide could make their work more successful, it was a mission to understand how the participants did their job, and why they made the choices they did. I had thought I understood the nature of their workplace when I submitted the IRB proposal because I had spent over a year studying the upstream documents that they base all of their processes on. However, their actions within the simulated battlefield were nothing like those documents, so in order to uphold the ethics of the IRB permissions and still gather data, I had to shift my actions to some degree. We return now to my IRB text, to address two of the few aspects of the workplace that were as I expected when I wrote the IRB.

2) During week 1 of the training event, I will meet with the group of soldiers who has come to this certain location for the training event. My personal contact who facilitates the event will introduce me and leave the room. I will introduce my study using the language on the informed consent form, and verbally go over the content in the consent form. Then I will give the soldiers the attached consent forms. I will instruct them that if they do not want to participate in the study, to go ahead and pass the forms back to me in the end so they don't feel singled out if they don't want to participate. I will instruct all of them that if they choose to participate in the study, they should read, sign and date the consent forms and pass them back to me. I will also inform them that I will be asking half of them to use a communication guide. This will help to assure those who are not participating that they won't be singled out by their peers, because when it comes to me
interacting with participants later during the training event, it won't be obvious who is not participating vs. who I did not give the guide to.

3) After the participants have signed the consent forms (or elected not to), I will hand out my survey (attached). The intent of the survey is to find out how much training and experience they have in communication, especially in intercultural communication. I will instruct the soldiers in the room that those who did not fill out the consent form don't need to fill out the survey: they can either feel free to go, or if they want to stay, they can read over the survey and hand it back to me with those who are participating, so that they are not singled out (9).

When I arrived at my research site, although some things had changed from my expectations as I stated under number 1, I carried out number two and three as proposed. Number four of my IRB proposal research description needs more explanation of the complexity and I get at that, below.

4) During Week 2 of the exercise, I will visit the field location where the training event is being held. I will pull aside one person at a time to give them my communication guide. I will verbally go over Communication Guide, Part 1 (attached), and also give them time to read it. Then I will give them Communication Guide Part 2 (attached), and instruct them that this is an abbreviated form of Part 1 and they should keep it with them and refer to it as they go about the communication tasks that occur in the training event. I will repeat this with 2 participants on the first day of week 2, with 2 more participants on day 2, and with the last 2 on day 3. I will observe and take notes each day, both of the 2 participants who are using my communication that day, and those 2 who are not. Because the training event already breaks down the participants into various teams, I will not have all 12 of the participants in the same place at the same time, however, with 6 in each group, the
group is large enough that I can stay outside of their process and take notes. There is
enough space and enough activities going on that randomly require soldiers to leave the
group to do a task that it will not be obvious who I am working with.

A) My focus on the participants who do not have my communication guide
will focus on if they show evidence of knowledge of the communications
practices represented by the document, and if that evidence increases as the
participants’ experience-level increases. I will also be taking notes on anything
else that seems interesting and pertinent (9).

The result of my recognizing the complexity of the research site and the humans
negotiating it was that I also recognized that to do quality data collection that accounted for that
complexity, I would need more quality time with fewer participants than the initial 12 I had
asked for. The 12 Marines got very busy, too, so some of those who agreed to participate were
never free for an interview. I ended up interviewing six of my participants; out of those, two
opened up to me about their motivations for doing what they do and we built the kind of rapport
that would ensure I could be involved in their field work and observe close enough to understand
the complexity without causing them uneasiness that could get them a bad performance review in
the exercise. Those two ended up representing opposite ends of the extreme too: one had much
experience, both deployment and courses, while the other one was brand new but had a great
degree of cultural variety in his background and home life. The remaining four participants who I
interviewed gave me good background on their organization and its complexities while not
giving me any insight into their internal process or thinking about how they conducted
intercultural communications. I ended up sharing my communication guide with three of the
participants I observed, but only two of those ended up in the field (the two I chose for my case
stated that he thought there was value in the ideas I was bringing, but since I didn’t get to see him at work in the field, I used his input to help clarify my understanding of the MISO unit’s organizational stance towards theories of communication, education practices, and organizational challenges.

B) My focus on those participants who are using my communication guide will examine if there is a difference in how the experienced ones use it vs. how the inexperienced ones use it. I will note anything interesting and pertinent about how each one uses my communication guide and the results, noting other possible reasons for the results. I will also note anything else that seems interesting and pertinent (9).

As I stated under Number One of the IRB proposal, there wasn’t a hard line of demarcation between experienced and non-experienced, and the Marines were too inundated with tasks to keep the communication guide in their mind during the field work portion. I also recognized that while the Marines were concerned with what kind of information they were getting from people in the field, they were less conscious about how they were perceived by those others. Since my communication guide was based on showing a certain inner stance to those others, and since this was a foreign idea to the MISO Marines, I recognized that my participants would have needed a several week course on my content in order to be able to act on it. My focus, then, turned from seeing if my translation of accepted communication theories helped the Marines do their mission better, to presenting the theories in applied language to the Marines and seeing what their understanding of it was. I was able to stay within the limited of the IRB approvals and make this switch by using follow up questions to the questionnaire, and discussion about the communication guide. (Note that my planned interview questions were not helpful anymore,
since they had been designed to capture the participant’s conscious use of the communication guide.)

C) I will be utilizing ethnographic methods to take notes on the communication that my participants do during the exercise (9).

This may have been the only truly wise sentences in my IRB proposal, and accounted for most of my data collection activities on site.

5) After the participants use my checklist, I will interview them: 2 on the evening of the first day of week 2, 2 the second evening, and the final 2 the third evening. The interview will be conducted as follows: A staff member who is part of the training event but not one of my participants will ask a participant to come outside the group one at a time. This is not unusual and is normal in the event setting, even if I were not there. The staff member will direct the participant to the on-site office building where it is quiet and private. In the interview I will ask participants about the helpfulness of the communication guide, how it worked for them, any changes they recommend, etc. (interview questions attached). I will be using an audio recording device to record the interviews, and the participants will have been informed of this prior to their signing the Informed Consent Form (9, 10).

Yet another major unforeseen shift that happened at my research site was that I realized early on that I would not have a chance to interview the participants after their field work because that is when high-ranking Marines and various other important visitors were on site to observe. In addition to carrying out their own tasks, the participants were engaged in After Action Reports (AARs), and ensuring the visiting dignitaries were taken care of. Thus, I made a
decision to take advantage of the down time prior to the field work to interview my participants and get their perspectives on the communication guide and its principles. This proved to be a wise choice because at the very end of the field exercise, the leadership threw in surprise night time operations which further taxed the Marines and left everyone with very little time for sleeping or eating, much less interviews. It was a realistic choice on the part of the training event leadership because it mirrored deployment life, but they had never added this complexity in the past, so none of us was prepared for it.

Regarding the way in which I conducted the interviews, I did not have a staff member accompanying me as I had been told would happen. This was a good thing, because it indicated a level of trust and rapport had been built beyond what I anticipated. However, it necessitated a deviation from my IRB details, while I maintained the spirit of protecting the participants: going to find a staff member to have them call a participant I was sitting right next to away for an interview (they were all very busy and far away from the location of my participants) would have negatively impacted the training event. It would also have been awkwardly formal, clashing with and affronting the rapport that I had built with the participants. Instead, when there was a break in activity, I approached one participant or another and asked if I could ask them some questions about the exercise separately, so as not to interrupt the team’s work. I then asked them where they would be comfortable going. Some chose to move back in the building we were already in, where there was more privacy. Others chose to go outside and sit in the cold wind on the steps of a vacant building. No matter their choice, I upheld the IRB approvals by making it clear that I would accommodate whatever level of privacy each desired. I left it up to them in part, based on my knowledge of how military males tend to tease each other about being alone with a female, especially one who is mostly unknown to the group. I had to balance my desire to give them
privacy with a silent acknowledgement of what such privacy could earn them in terms of jeers if I chose a place that was truly isolated from the rest of the male participants. In this way I accomplished my goal of conducting interviews, but also made allowances for the participants’ privacy in ways I hadn’t anticipated were necessary until I arrived at the site.

**Data Analysis**

All of the data I collected was used to some degree to arrive at the conclusions stated in this work. Of course, various frameworks lend themselves to different uses of data, and my focus on physical indications of rhetorical listening meant following the research question through each type of data I analyzed. Most of my data was analyzed in layers, with the conclusions from each layer informing my analysis in the next layer. For example, I analyzed the open-ended responses that my participants entered on my questionnaire to decide which participants represented lesser, average, and greater levels of experience in intercultural communication. The conclusions I came to in that analysis (mentioned in the last section) led me to switch my plan from observing multiple participants closely to observing only two: one who claimed very little experience and one who claimed much experience with intercultural communication. The reason for that decision was in part that there was no clear line of demarcation between levels of experience if I included both courses, home life, and workplace experience. It seemed the most ethical decision, then, to pick the only two participants who were clearly on opposite ends of the spectrum.

Once I had decided upon the two main participants for my case study, I used thematic analysis of my interviews with each of them to attempt to understand what they themselves understood about intercultural communication; what topics did they bring up? What theories did they cite? What examples did they use to help me understand their perspectives? Then, I did a second analysis of the interviews with each of the case study participants where I used
Spinuzzi’s interpretation of fourth generation Activity theory. I had, as I describe below, the starter codes that I had gathered from my reading of my participants’ upstream documents. Each of those starter codes represented a closed and aloof nature. However, when I did the 4GAT analysis of the case study interviews, I found nothing but incredible warmth and openness, which accounts for my “open” codes (See table 1). As I describe in further detail below, the articulation code, which accounts for the difference between the starter and open codes, was the difference between how the MISO Marines’ activity is explained in their upstream documents versus how it actually happens on the ground. That difference is in the lived nature of the activity, where humans enacting connections with other humans can demonstrate rhetorical listening in their behavior. Conversely, the documents that outline the procedure for this interaction do not reflect any humanity at all—or any consciousness of human messiness and needs. Because I studied the documents, my expectation of what I would find as a norm for intercultural communication was different than I found it when I experienced it in person.

I note in an earlier section that I interviewed more participants than just the two I chose for my case study. Since those participants didn’t give me any insight into their own logic or passion for their job, but gave me many details about their organization, I used the details in those interviews to do a 4GAT analysis of the training activity they participated in, from which I constructed a visual map. This analysis of the data was useful because it allowed me to take the storyline the participants and I were all participating in (we were “good guys” fighting “bad guys” and there are also locals who got drawn into the conflict), and make each group actors in a joint activity (each actor was working to recover from the storm that devastated the area—the storm was the simulated instability for the training event I participated in). In my 4GAT analysis, I mapped out the activities of each of the groups of actors (ISIS, local population, Marines, and
my participants, the MISO Marines. I didn’t end up including most of this analysis because it only informed my understanding of the situation my participants were entering and allowed me to write the context and narrative pieces. After all, I didn’t have IRB approval to investigate any other players in the event (ISIS, or the local population); the only actors in that activity that I was authorized to collect data on were the MISO Marines. So, while analyzing the activity was useful for my being able to describe the situation, the true insight into how the MISO Marines interacted with the local population was the actual subject of my research. In this way, I used all of my data, but in a wholistic and layered fashion, where each layer of analysis helped me understand the next.

My final analysis was that of my observation notes from the field exercises that my two case studies participated in. I laid those out and followed Spinuzzi’s methods of analysis (as detailed in its own section, below). In these notes, as well as in the interviews, I found similar patterns, with the exception that these codes were divided: when I analyzed Gregory, the codes represented a pattern from starter codes of closed and aloof, to open code of interrogation. When I did the same analysis of my observations of Ben, the pattern went from starter codes of closed and aloof to open codes of warmth and invitation. Finding the articulation code which would explain the difference between the codes, I had to go back over my observations of each of the two participants, as well as their answers to my questionnaire and our interviews to try and figure out what each did differently to render such opposite results in the open code section of analysis. This piece was the most difficult to analyze because any number of reasons could have accounted for the difference between participants, including temperaments. To sort out the difference, I went back to activity theory and analyzed the activities (not just the words) of each participant in the case studies. It was then that I discovered that Ben engaged in actions that
showed an openness and respect for the culture of the local, while Gregory did not (I go into these in the case study chapter). Once I identified those actions, I went through and analyzed what language accompanied each significant action. It was in doing this last step that I recognized visual indicators of rhetorical listening and began to put the pieces together.

**Methods of analysis**

Since my knowledge of MISO communication practices was rooted solely in their rigid training manuals, and since my initial research question of “What communication principles are the MISO Marines using?” was also based on that upstream-document way of knowing, I needed a method of data analysis that allowed me to shift from what I expected to find to what I actually did find. Clay Spinuzzi’s Activity Theory gave me that rigor.

According to David Russel, “An activity system is any ongoing, object-directed, historically-conditioned, dialectically-structured, tool-mediated human interaction: a family, a religious organization, an advocacy group, a political movement, a course of study, a school, a discipline, a research laboratory, a profession, and so on” (Russell). Or, said another way, AT traces systems of human meaning-making in action. Activity Theory has gone through multiple generations as various scholars have applied it to differing problem sets. Rather than focusing on that history as others have, I jumped right into fourth generation activity theory (4GAT) and its value to shedding light on my dataset.

Fourth Generation AT is a useful lens for my data because my research focuses on the interaction and collaboration between multiple complex activity systems. While third generation activity theory (3GAT) would have me focus on mapping the activity systems themselves, I only mapped the systems to show their interactions, and more importantly, their contradictions or disruptions. Spinuzzi defines these contradictions as “systemic disruptions that form within
activities, sometimes within parts of the activity, sometimes across activities in the network. For instance, different actors working on the same construction project might seek contradictory outcomes: the investor wants to finish the building as soon as quickly as possible whereas the foreman wants to build it to the best of his or her ability. This perspective was useful for me as I coded my data because it allowed me to categorize all the groups of actors within the training simulation (ISIS, local population, Marines) as actors upon the same objective. This deliberate choice was an ethical consideration for me, bringing the group I would have seen as “bad” (terrorists) onto a level playing field with those I would have easily seen as “good” (the locals and the Marines). This bias would have hidden elements of the actors that interacted to create the dynamic situation I researched within, skewing my perspective in ways that this action prevented.

In the same way, as I coded my data, I set the ISIS actors, MISO Marines, Philippine government, and other Security Forces as actors in the same activity of recovery from the storm—however, their individual desires differed: ISIS wanted to undermine the local government, while the United States wanted to support it; the local population needed food, safety, and shelter, while ISIS took these items, causing disruptions in order to be in control. ISIS’ activities in the region forced the security forces to go from merely providing a physical service of protection and rendering aid, to having to run a campaign that garnered the local population’s trust. This is where the MISO Marines conducted all of their activities: messaging in direct contradiction to the acts and messaging of ISIS, who, as usual, was on-scene and sending messages prior to the US Marines arriving in-country.

outlines a schema for coding that is useful for analyzing complicated ethnographic data due, in part, to its ability to lay out codes based on expectations, shift them with findings, and the finally bridge the two. My expectations of what I would find at the research site were based on textual analysis of the documents that are produced by the MISO Marines and of the handbooks that dictate what methods they use in the field, yet I know from experience that military publications are very clean and neat while the outworking of them in the field is messy. Because of this discrepancy, I needed the freedom to use my limited exposure to my participants’ workplace (via the documents) to create my research questions and the codes that I thought would apply, and also build in a framework that is flexible enough to contain the dynamic shifts in perception that I as an ethnographic researcher experienced as I conducted my data collection and analysis. Spinuzzi’s data analysis method gave me that ability.

Three types of codes

Spinuzzi lays out three levels of codes that encompass the shifting learning of the researcher that accompanies ethnographic research: starter codes, open codes, and axial codes. According to Spinuzzi, “Starter codes are descriptors representing the thing you expect to find—things that you expect to look for when you designed the study” (138). Open Codes are the codes that Spinuzzi says the researcher will utilize the most and they consist of things you start to see in the data as you do data analysis (140). Finally, after starter and open codes have been utilized and laid side-by-side for comparison, Axial codes are born. “Axial coding is a way to indicate relationships that you see emerging across codes—connections that start to jump out at you because the codes appear together so frequently. Axial codes describe persistent connections between some of the existing codes” (Spinuzzi, 141).
**Levels of activity theory**

Spinuzzi’s coding schema is based in Activity Theory, and as such, addresses three levels of activity: The Macro, the Meso, and the Micro. Macro pertains to the organizational level and looks at concepts such as culture, objectives, history, and outcomes. Spinuzzi characterizes the Macro level as an activity level that is usually unconscious to the person enacting it. Next comes the Meso level, which is the human level; it pertains to goals and actions. This level is carried out consciously, according to Spinuzzi’s schema. The final level, the Micro, has to do with habits and reactions and is usually unconscious.

The three levels in Spinuzzi’s coding model will help me map the various levels of activity that I will examine at my research site. For example, when I administered my questionnaire asking the Marines what they know about cultural communication, I was asking them something about which they are conscious, so those codes will go in the Meso (human, conscious) level. But when I observed how the Marines enact their intercultural communication, I was examining their unconscious habits as well, so that data will be slotted into the Micro (habits and reactions) level. Finally, observing conversation among high-level leadership and hearing comments the MISO Marines make about organizational issues gave me a framework for what the experts at this worksite know about their organization and its culture and complexities. Reading their founding documents and observing organizational structures at work gave me data that goes into the Macro level.

For example, the MISO Marine organization struggles because Marines cannot choose to be a MISO Marine for life, they can only be there for three years—which means that the command spends half of that time training them and then has only a year and a half to use them fully trained. They may get new Marines who should get mentored by those experienced Marines
before they rotate back out into trigger-pulling positions, but that may not always be the case—due to organizational structure.

These challenges mentioned above are not something the MISO Marines can control or influence, but they do have a tremendous impact on the Marines’ ability to do their jobs effectively, because they are always receiving untrained people. In addition, many Marines come to the MISO command because they are told to, or because they think it will get them back out on the front lines—having no idea what the MISO culture is about. It takes time and training to even show these Marines the value of non-kinetic work to a Marine, and then that Marine may never “convert” to the value of warring with words for a living. The organizational structure creates the “weak link” then, impacting the other Marines who will end up being sent out in teams of two or four, and one of them will not be a believer in the mission.

All of these organizational structures can impact the workplace at an unconscious level for the marines, but yet are forces to be reckoned with and must be recorded in my research. See Table 1, below, for an example of my codes with their levels.
### Table 1 Codebook Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>CODE TYPES Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macro: Organizational level—Culture and history, objectives and outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Controlled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Welcoming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rejected/underdog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Warm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axial</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rhetorical Listening Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meso: Human Level—Actions and goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Persuasion in support of mission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Persuasion documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication postures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Much smaller steps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not conscious of big-picture mission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships with locals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axial</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rhetorical Listening Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Micro: Habit level—Habits and Reactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Procedure-following</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication postures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rhetorical Listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Procedure-following</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axial</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rhetorical Listening Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part of utilizing the Macro, Meso, and Micro models is developing definitions for each code. For example, one of my Macro-level Open codes is *controlled*. In my codebook, I developed a definition for this code as follows: *Rigidly following communication procedures to*
an almost robotic degree; communication driven by military rules more than by listening to the interlocutor. I utilized this code because I spent hours studying the field manuals that instruct Marines on how to analyze their audience during their field campaigns, and the instructions are incredibly rigid, with no evidence of room for human-to-human communication that builds rapport or understanding of any kind. The field manual also failed to account for analyzing how the audience would perceive the Marine communicator and how that perception would impact the audience receptivity to the message and medium. One of my Open codes at the Macro level is open, which seems to clash with my Starter code of controlled. This open code is based on my experience of data gathering, watching some of the Marines enact a type of open and easy communication that I never could have imagined them modeling based on my reading of their communication instruction field manual.

These examples demonstrate the appropriateness of Spinuzzi’s coding schema to my research project and how it assists me in framing the levels of data I gathered, as well as tracing the shifts in my understanding of the workplace and its activities. Even at this preliminary research stage, the models showcase the value of doing ethnographic research on site versus merely examining the field manual that guides the experts: the field manuals led me to create a code that framed the Marines as robotic communicators where the immersive data collection showed a completely opposite communication style. Further data analysis teased out the spectrum between the open and robotic communication styles and the complexities behind the discrepancy in expectation versus experience and revealed that some Marines were unconsciously using principles of rhetorical listening.

As I analyzed my codes, looking for the axial code—that connection point between what I had expected to find and what I was finding as I coded my data—I discovered that the Marines
did indeed have a gap in training in how to move from tightly proscribed analysis of their audience and tightly controlled themes they were allowed to talk about, and their hours of face to face interaction with the local population. And yet they were conducting the face to face communication—some of them successfully—so what were they falling back on? Each was inventing his own way of filling his lack of knowledge, and in the instances where his choices brought about meaningful communication rather than angry conflict, the MISO Marine showed evidence of using what Ratcliffe has termed “rhetorical listening,” but in a way that included physical actions. (I will go into great detail about Ratcliffe in the next chapter.) Since my research investigated what communication theories the Marines might be using (consciously or unconsciously), I went through my data again and looked for instances of words and actions (from my notes and knowledge of procedure) that indicated use or lack of use of rhetorical listening. (See Table 2 for the precise data analysis methods I used, my reason for choosing them, and the outcome of their use within my study.)

Once I identified those instances above, I understood that rhetorical listening theory alone was not enough to account for the way in which the Marines interacted, so I drew from the concept of behavior as part of communication. I also pulled Narrative theory from Communication studies, in that it helps to explain the rhetorical moves the Marines made in that they showed evidence of understanding how their interlocutor’s saw themselves fitting into the world and were able to interact in a way that showed the interlocutor that they were very much in the same story (another way of making the interlocutor feel heard). Together, I called these collaboration of theories Rhetorical Listening Behavior. In the following chapter I delve into these theories; then in the case studies that follow, I give examples of the theories in action, and give some preliminary way by which we might identify this new theory in action.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing of Data Analysis</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Logic</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary research</td>
<td>Textual analysis of MISO procedures</td>
<td>To understand what governed and informed the MISO Marines’ in-person communication practices</td>
<td>Starter codes that indicated MISO Marines would be aloof, closed off, and cold, due to rigid nature of procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At research site</td>
<td>Textual Analysis of questionnaires</td>
<td>To determine what level of intercultural communication experience each participant had. This information would inform my observations of them in the field</td>
<td>The levels varied from Marine to Marine, and varied on the source of the experience: workplace or personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After data gathering complete</td>
<td>Spinuzzi’s 4GAT analysis of the workplace activity</td>
<td>To understand what each group was doing in relation to the other within the simulation</td>
<td>Used this mapping to create the vignettes and to better understand how a mission to do a physical act (render aid) became a campaign to build trust via communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After data gathering complete</td>
<td>Spinuzzi’s Coding schema: Starter, Open, Articulation</td>
<td>Repeatedly reviewed all of the data: questionnaires, interviews, and observations notes, to let themes emerge</td>
<td>Found the “Articulation” code—the concept that explained why my Starter Codes contradicted my Open codes. Articulation code concept: Upstream documents tell how something should be done, but not how it is done. Thus, study of the actual process in motion is important, rather than just studying the documents that inform it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After all other analyses were complete</td>
<td>Whitehead’s 15 categories of Ethnographic data</td>
<td>To flesh out my descriptions of the data in my methods section. In other words, did I describe the space and how it played into my perception of the interaction? Behaviors? Cultural aspects of the setting? Language? Etc.</td>
<td>This last analysis helped my writing to stay true to Ethnographic thick description and address the multidimensionality of the research site in a categoric manner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: RHETORICAL LISTENING AS A COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR

“Every rhetorical act must be expressed through a given medium: spoken, written, digital, electronic, visual, and so forth. Whatever form it takes, there will be an extraverbal dimension to that act—pitch, gestures, fonts, papers, sets and backdrops, lighting, costume, visual accompaniments, and so forth—and in some cases, the rhetorical act may be entirely extraverbal.”


Introduction

In order to understand my findings and the work that the MISO Marines are performing, it is essential to understand the rhetorical principle they are demonstrating in their successful meaning-transactions, namely, rhetorical listening. But as rhetorical listening is theorized in the fields of Technical Communication and Rhetoric, it is not sufficient to describe what is happening in the MISO Marines’ workplace. Specifically, when Marines interactions are successful, they are utilizing what Ramage calls “extraverbal” means (84). Rhetoric and Technical Communication have yet to theorize these extraverbal means of communication, so I posit that we use the term Rhetorical Listening Behaviors to explain the stance, acts, and words synthesized through the way that the MISO Marines interact with the local populations. This term does not currently exist in literature, but I propose that we use it to draw together the concepts of two fields because it is sufficient to carry the complexity of interaction taking place in the Marines’ workplace. Through the lenses of knowledge in Rhetoric and Technical Communication, behaviors may sound objectional, denoting only acts separated from
understanding and intent. However, as I will explain, in the field of Communication Studies, a behavior is something that is engaged in that encompasses understanding, intent, textual/spoken communication, as well as actions. Thus, behavior is an appropriate term for this combination of theories to counteract our field’s lack of attention to acts in conjunction with silence or Text (spoken or written).

In this chapter then, I introduce the concept of rhetorical listening and elaborate on its complex modus operandi. In the West we often assert a difference between personal and professional or workplace communication, with the understanding that the professional communication is somehow unfeeling or does not contain any personal connection. However, I assert that, as defined by Communication Studies, “Interpersonal” is indeed an appropriate term for what is otherwise considered professional, workplace communication, and the reasons for this will become clear in subsequent sections. This appropriateness of using “interpersonal” to describe workplace communication is especially appropriate in the context of my research site and to describe the interactions the MISO Marines engage in, which are often and mostly with cultural populations whose cultural norms include the conception that when they sit down to have a conversation about business, they first engage in conversation about family and matters that we in the West might not count as professional. Indeed, these populations’ communication behaviors involve acts like kissing on both cheeks, grasping each other’s hands while talking, and physically being far closer to their interlocutor than an average workplace in the US would consider “professional.” Thus, due to the culture of the Marine’s interlocutors, in order to understand the communication situation from multiple perspectives, we have to adopt a theory of communication that addresses more intimate communications than those we might normally conceptualize as workplace communication.
Next, I define, describe, and give examples of how communication involves Behavior. This concept of behavior which focuses on the observable communicator-interlocutor negotiation of meaning, then, is intended to capture the non-linguistic acts that transpire within the communication instance. These acts which enhance the visibility of listening (as perceived by the interlocutor) are an essential component of enacting rhetorical listening performed by a communicator. Rhetorical listening, as currently theorized, has insufficient markers by which to recognize its enactment in the field. Invoking communication behaviors integrates some ways of acting and behaving that provide observable markers of listening—which will then be explained as both rhetorical and as essential components of listening rhetorically. Finally, I define, describe, and give examples of my extrapolated theory: rhetorical listening behaviors. In chapters five and six, I then describe my findings in terms of two case studies, showing the outworking of rhetorical listening Behaviors at my research site, as well as what the absence of it looks like.

**Rhetorical Listening**

Rhetorical listening is not a new idea; it has been theorized over time, beginning with Aristotle who asserted in *Rhetoric* that his students, in studying rhetorical theory, will not only learn how to produce effective communication, but also to analyze it. In an era where most communication was oral, this implies listening. “But Aristotle’s theory never delves into how to listen” (Ratcliffe 20, emphasis original). This neglect of the how to listen continues to this day, which is curious, since, for two thousand years, the four cornerstones of Western rhetorical Studies were reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Murphy, “Rhetorical History” 5, 11, Cited in Ratcliffe, 18). Even after the relegation of speaking and listening to Communication Studies and of reading and writing to English studies (early twentieth century), and after their partial reuniting with the rise of Rhetoric and Composition in English (mid-twentieth century), still,
“reading and writing reign as dominant tropes for interpretive invention; speaking places a respectable third; but listening runes a poor, poor fourth” (Ratcliffe 18). Some of this disciplinary bias against listening can be explained by the work of Rhetoric and Composition Studies: adopting principles of Western rhetoric to teach and theorize writing (Ratcliffe). Because we don’t focus much on oral discourse, and listening is imagined to be paired with speaking rather than with writing, “we have been slow to imagine how listening might inform our discipline” (Ratcliffe 19).

Despite this resistance to listening, however, some scholarship exists on rhetorical listening. Ede and Lundsford explore written texts utilizing listening for voices which may be speaking or not speaking within the text. For Phelan (1990), listening is “Some conceptual model for defining and investigating voice in written discourse” (132), while Lundsford (1990) imagines listening as a way to reclaim “the voices of women in the history of rhetoric” (6). In their individual scholarship, Ballif (1997) and Vitanza (1997), on the other hand, don’t focus on listening as a focus on voice. Instead they utilize listening to render language play visible in texts, with Vitanza advocating listening as a way to question logos within language (165-169).

Traditional rhetorical theories, Ballif argues, subdue listening, making it merely a way to know the desires of audience members (51-58). Ironically, despite this scholarly work on listening in Rhetoric and Composition, they have relegated listening in the same way they assert that academia has done to writing: listening, like writing, is a natural process that everyone does, thus it need not be taught or theorized (Downs and Wardle, 2012).

**Listening Only Tangentially Addressed in Technical Communication Scholarship**

Technical Communication scholarship has touched on the concept of listening over the years, but tangentially. In Mcdowell et al.’s profile of Technical Communication students in
1981, they sought to understand the characteristics of Technical Communication students, administering a survey to 205 students from universities across the U.S. The survey asked nine questions, including asking students to “rank the importance of technical communication course, and to assess their skill in the forms of communication” (11). The results of the study showed that a majority of students thought they had good listening skills, and “students ranked listening, professional writing, and scientific and technical writing as the most important technical communication courses” (17). Ruppel et al. (2013) mention the importance of active listening in their article that focuses on using communication choices as a boundary-management strategy. Barker and Gower, in their 2010 article “Strategic Application of Storytelling in Organizations: Toward Effective Communication in a Diverse World,” give a nod to the importance of listening, but it doesn’t play a prominent role in their treatment of effective communication among diverse audiences. Hackos and Redish, in their 1998 book User and Task Analysis for Interface Design, include a chapter on conducting a site visit in which they posit that listening is the most important part of the interviewing process and that the technical communicator should repeat back what they hear so as to get it accurate. They also touch on how listening is not enough, and observations of what is being done at the site must go hand-in-hand with it. While these are important components of listening, particularly for the technical communicator, compared to the 477 pages in the book, the less than one page they dedicate to listening falls short of qualifying as addressing the topic so many Technical Communication scholars have nodded to as important.

**Technical Communication Scholarship Documents the Need for Listening Skills**

Despite this deficit of Technical Communication scholarship on listening, scholars note in surveys of the skillsets employers want in the field, the importance of listening. Waner, in her 1995 article in *Business Communication Quarterly* asserts that “When the competencies were
ranked by means, listening effectively, maintaining eye contact, and using voice effectively became part of the top five” (53). Wardrop, in surveying department chairs’ perceptions of which business communication skills are most important, claims that department chairs across six business disciplines ranked listening as an important communication skill. Keyton et al. (2013) defined a list of 163 verbal communication behaviors from organizational communication textbooks, then surveyed 65 employees to see if they had witnessed any of the behaviors the day before at work. Listening was as one of the top ten behaviors that the employees witnessed. Gray’s study (2010), which administered a questionnaire on 27 oral communication skills to accountants, asking which behaviors were the most important, found that participants ranked listening attentiveness and listening responsiveness in the top five important oral communication skills. Conrad and Newberry (2011) reviewed 217 publications and compared perceptions of the importance of communication skills between business faculty and employers. Their findings indicate that active listening was one of the top seven interpersonal skills the authors addressed. Most recently, Coffelt et al. (2016) addressed what employers mean when they say “communication skills” (300). Employers ranked oral communication as the most-used mode of communication in their workplaces and included listening as one of those necessary oral communication skills.

The scholarship reviewed thus far shows again the needs of listening skills in technical communication scholarship and pedagogy, yet of the relegation of listening to the area of oral communication, and thus separate from both Rhetoric and Technical Communication. Not surprisingly, the bulk of oral communication scholarship easily applicable to Rhetoric and Technical Communication resides in the field of Communication Studies, which often teaches oral communication within universities. In fact, listening is so central to Communication Studies
as a field that they teach courses on it and have a journal dedicated to it, namely, the *Journal of Listening*. Next, however, I review scholarship on the rhetorical nature of listening (and relatedly, hearing and silence), paying particular attention to the foremost author in the field on the subject, Krista Ratcliff.

**Listening is Rhetorical/Rhetorical Listening**

**Definition**

Listening is a rhetorical act (Hundleby 2007). I assert, then, that even when scholars are referencing listening and do not label it as especially rhetorical, this listening is still a rhetorical act. Rhetorical listening, as a theory and construct, however, is much more purposeful and deliberately enacted than the unconscious sort of listening that is often referred to when someone refers to “listening” as a needed communication skill. I will show the need for rhetorical understanding in order to perform rhetorical listening in an effective manner so as to produce a space for meaning-transactions that might not otherwise occur.

Rhetorical listening consists of, first and foremost, *rhetoric*. Because scholars differ in their definitions and use of rhetoric, setting the boundaries for use in this study is important. In his *Rhetoric: User’s Guide* (2006) Ramage says that “Rhetoric can only hold sway in an imperfect world where words can have more than one meaning, where truth is not universally acknowledged…” (4). Ramage goes on to assert that “The way of rhetoric can be understood as an organized attempt to discover ambiguity and to use those discoveries to leverage new possibilities for meaning” (20). This definition is helpful for understanding silence due to it being situated in Ramage’s work as rhetoric as a conversation in which people voluntarily engage and attempt to negotiate meaning. Thus it is easy to imagine the conversations we have all engaged in where we listened intently, seeking to understand our interlocutor, and those
conversation where our hackles instantly raised in opposition to an interlocutor but where we deliberately laid aside our reaction and attempted to hear more than we expected to hear, withholding assessment and response until a later part of the conversation. This is how Ratcliffe theorizes rhetorical listening.

Similar to rhetoric, rhetorical listening is easier to compare than to define in a few words. In her pursuit to draw attention to rhetorical listening in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, however, Ratcliffe offers rhetorical listening “as a trope for interpretive invention” (26). She goes on to assert that “As the performance of a person’s conscious choice to assume an open stance in relation to any person, text, or culture, rhetorical listening […] constructs a space wherein listeners may employ their agency […] to conscious identifications that may, in turn, facilitate communication” (26). Furthering Ratcliff’s claims towards application at my site of research, I assert that, under her definition, rhetorical listening performed by a person may actually change what the interlocutor perceives is possible and fruitful to say, thus facilitating communication in deep—and nearly invisible—ways.

The invisible piece is key, because if listening is imagined to be a non-act, and that listening makes the interlocutor able to say something different than they would have otherwise, we are in the dark if we try to study this phenomenon as text. Thus, it is necessary to understand listening—specifically rhetorical listening, as an act with associated markers that can be physically seen and identified. In order to come to understand how rhetorical listening functions and understand how to enact it in different situations, we need to understand the power of rhetorical listening: It can make space for conversations that would otherwise be impossible. My research is the first to document this as a field observation, but my work only scratches the
surface of why rhetorical listening has this power and how we can use it. Much more research needs to be conducted that investigates this phenomenon.

**Description**

Ratcliffe views rhetorical listening through the lens of identification, gender, and whiteness, and while none of those topics exactly fits my research, her theorizations assist in understanding how rhetorical listening works, and thus how to view the value of my research findings. Ratcliffe conceptualizes listening as a stance that she applies in an almost-metaphorical way, positioning herself to understand intersections of identity, gender, and whiteness by “listening” to autoethnographies, academic research, and the stories of others. While I share Ratcliffe’s assertion of rhetorical listening as a stance, I build beyond her work by asserting that this stance, in order to be useful in the workplace, must have markers by which it can be identified and associated behaviors that can be taught. I hasten to say that the behaviors cannot be separated from the internal stance that Ratcliffe advocates, but that will be covered in the section on communication behaviors, where Communication Studies understand a behavior differently than we do: it encompasses a certain understanding, motivation, and mindset. An important aspect of rhetorical listening that Ratcliffe neglects to address is that rhetorical listening, while valuable as a stance for openness, may still be invisible to those who do not identify the same markers of openness, or for whom openness is not an available option (See chapter 6, Case Study 2). It becomes necessary then, as we utilize rhetorical listening, to ask ourselves what rhetorical acts, be they physical or verbal, indicate *in the eyes of the interlocutor* that we are listening in the way that we believe we are? A true stance of rhetorical listening will go beyond ensuring we take the stance and also reflect back on how that stance may look to others. It is a circular dynamic, because as we perform this reflective task, we must set aside our
assumptions of how the interlocutor sees (especially how they see us), and with great openness, attempt to understand the interlocutor.

Ratcliffe addresses this understanding of self and reflexivity on self as viewed by others as being tied to “troubled identifications” and sets forth rhetorical listening as a possibility for negotiating them. By focusing thus, she seeks to push away from rhetoric as persuasion. “In this way, rhetorical listening does not simply assume that identifications will precede persuasion; rather, it offers one tactic for attempting to negotiate troubled identifications that haunt many rhetorical exchanges” (27). Part of negotiating these troubled identifications, Ratcliffe asserts, is developing understanding, which she defines within rhetorical listening as “standing under” other’s discourses, for the purpose of letting them wash over us and inform our decisions and actions. It is in this absence of motives other than understanding, she claims, that we can truly understand people and their discourses. Ratcliffe admits that this all sounds idealistic, but claims that it is a “tactical idealism,” looking for similarities and differences between and among people, not just merely one or the other (28).

Ratcliffe claims that rhetorical listening comprises four moves that may not be linear but can “foster in listeners the critical thinking skills that may lay the grounds for more productive communication” (26). The first one “Promoting an understanding of self and other (26), is helpful to understand my research findings.

**Understanding self and other**
Ratcliffe asserts that understanding is the goal of rhetorical listening. Her words are precise and exacting in explaining what she means by that.

As employed by this study, understanding means more than simply listening for a speaker/writer’s intent. It also means more than simply listening for our own self-
interested readerly intent, which may range from appropriation (employing a text for one’s own ends), to Burkean identification (smoothing over differences to achieve common ground), to agreement (affirming only one’s view of reality). Instead, *understanding* means listening to discourses not *for* intent but *with* intent—with the intent to understand not just claims but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well. To clarify this process of understanding, rhetorical listeners might best invert the term *understanding* and defining it as *standing under*, that is, consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others while consciously acknowledging all our particular—and very fluid—standpoints. Standing under discourses means letting discourses wash over, through, and around us, and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics (28 emphasis original).

Ratcliffe is asking for a departure from traditional lenses of rhetoric and focusing on *intent* rather than seeing rhetoric (and rhetorical listening) as a tool to accomplish a specific end. The power of such focus on intent, she claims, is neither the idealism of pretending sameness for the sake of agreement or hostility—neither an insider nor outsider view of others—but a way to be realistic about our differences and at the same time find connecting points and *being willing to be informed by those differences*. Thus, rhetorical listening becomes not a passive act (invisible intent) but a dynamic act that positions us in a certain way in relation to the rest of the world. This positioning, she claims changes the nature of what kind of communication is possible. The emphasis, however, is on the intent.

Ratcliffe asserts that we need to not only stand under others’ discourses, but our own as well. Standing under our own discourses has to do with listening for multiple discourses within and then imagining how they might affect ourselves and others. The question then becomes, how
do we hear something that is so common to us that we can no longer see it? In essence, how is reflexivity possible? Drawing repeatedly on Rayner, Ratcliffe asserts that listening is the key. As Hans-George Godamer asserted, “the primacy of hearing is the basis of the hermeneutical phenomenon” (420).

In other words, we speak because someone is listening. This applies both to the understanding of self and the understanding of others. Rayner points to Virginia Woolf, eagerly desiring to hear the echo of her own words. “The need for a return (echo) of speech and gesture, a return that occurs in openness, not in a static image or closed meaning. The echo is life-giving because while it is rooted in the past, it is not fixed by the past. It returns the voice to the speaker, the same but different” (21). Said another way, those who often shed the most light on our viewpoints and propel us forward in understanding are those who repeat back our own thoughts, differently, changed, but yet still echoes of our words. Rayner suggests that listening should be done with consciousness of the communicator’s desire to be heard, with the focus being on the intent to listen. Within this desire, Ratcliffe says, is the power to change differences of opinion from disagreements to limitations of understanding, and limits can be “moved and re-moved” (30). The agency for such movement, says Rayner, is in capacity and willingness (7). Everyone has the capacity, but we must supply the willingness. “This focus on willingness, on conscious action, does not deny the socializing power of discourse on our unconscious. Rather, this focus simply articulates the space within which we may interject our own agencies, albeit partial and complicated, into our socializing identifications” (Ratcliffe 30). The result, says Ratcliffe, is a different and more encompassing cultural literacy which “affords us opportunities for negotiating our daily attitudes and actions, our politics and ethics” (30). Confrontation, however, is inevitable in real life, so this literacy provides a more productive way of navigating it. And, as
Ratcliffe asserts, “Given this potential, acquiring such literacy becomes both an ethical and a political issue for people with power and for people without it” (30).

**Examples of rhetorical listening**

Ratcliffe applies the theory of rhetorical listening, in part, in what she terms, “Listening pedagogically: a tactic for listening to classroom resistance” (133). She posits that while this type of listening may well have application beyond the classroom, her intent is that teachers and students might grow to be more open to listening to each other’s metaphors and, possibly, to “celebrate the words of the stories that we all acquire during a lifetime” (134). Continuing her theme of race, Ratcliffe points to the way in which people have been taught that to be blind to race as if that is inclusive. Instead, she asserts, pedagogical listening would have us listen for and see those differences, and then lay them side by side. But laying them there to admire them and observe conflicts and resistances isn’t enough. In the words of Danny Weil, author of *Towards a Critical Multicultural Literacy,*

> One rarely gains a knowledge of others through exposure alone. It requires an examination of the logic of the points of view advanced—both cognitive and affective exploration into self and others. […] Lacking significant opportunities to reason from other cultural points of view, both students and teachers lose any chance to redefine their own individuality through a critical dismantling of the myths that define them. (245)

Ratcliffe gives several moves for a teacher to make situate themselves so as to utilize listening pedagogically. For instance, move one is “Reflect on the term pedagogy and its power dynamics” (141). Move two is to “articulate one’s own pedagogical assumptions” (142). Move three is to “identify teacher goals and student learning outcomes” (142). (Aside from the reflexive function of move two, such moves are common in the MISO Marine’s planning process
as well.) While Ratcliffe goes on to discuss the ways in which she discusses identification, gender, and whiteness in the classroom, her offerings are too specific to her foci to be helpful in describing my study’s results. What is clear, however, is that her focus on listening is focused on the mental posture people must take to engage in rhetorical listening and is almost metaphorical. Her focus on the inner stance and the concept lays a solid foundation for my focus, which addresses the physical, enacted piece of listening and how listening rhetorically must include nonverbal rhetorical acts as well as verbal. To fill this gap and account for the physical acts that displayed listening in my study, I will turn now to the concept of *Communication Behavior*, a concept researched and taught in the field of Communication Studies and most often associated with the Social Sciences rather than with Rhetoric or Technical Communication.

**Communication Behaviors**

My research differs from much scholarship on technical communication which is researched at the worksite because my focus was less on how the Marines interact with each other and more on how they approach the unique situation where they meet strangers and must build a relationship with them in a short period of time—a relationship upon which negotiation of war often hangs. Although many workplaces find experts interacting with strangers, this research site is different in many aspects, but in particular the ones that make communication behaviors the most important modality of communication: The need for translation and the often poor translation, leaving the interlocutors to rely on body language more than usual; the fact that both parties are away how high the stakes are and that if they are not at war already, they soon might be; and the fact that these are quite literally inter-national negotiations. Thus, the need for communication signals to be clear, accurate, and culturally appropriate is exceedingly high.
Rhetorical Listening Behavior

My contribution to the field, the result of my research, the term and definition of “Rhetorical Listening Behaviors,” is a way to further the theory of rhetorical listening. Rhetorical listening behaviors encompass the stance of rhetorical listening, but carries it out into a behaved conveyance of an inner stance. It posits that the internal stance of listening for intent and standing under discourses is vital to make space for communication that may not otherwise be possible. It acknowledges the assertion that we speak because someone is listening, yet acknowledge that the fact that listening is happening isn’t enough to make it evident to the potential speaker that listening is actually occurring. Instead, it draws on principles of rhetoric to ask the rhetorical listener to observe what kind of evidences of listening the speaker may need to proceed, and to display those in oral, textual, and extraverbal fashion. As is the case with other communication concepts, behavior encompasses the internal stance of listening as well as the external actions to evidence that internal state. In addition, it asserts the need to see the communication situation rhetorically, acknowledging ambiguities in search of multiple means to get to meaning (Ramage). Rhetorical listening behaviors acknowledge that while some people have a knack for rhetorical listening and its associated behaviors, or come to it through their cultural diversity and temperament, its principles can and should be taught and learned. (In Chapter 7 I will address a call for future research which works to identify more markers of rhetorical listening behaviors, as well as ways to teach it in the technical communication classroom. In analyzing my data, I identified several behaviors (which include an internal stance) which I identified as rhetorical listening behaviors. The internal stance--external indicators I observed were as follows: 1) Investing time and how that investment is indicated, 2) using repetition and paraphrasing, 3) using narrative (both your own contribution and creating a narrative that includes your understanding of the speaker’s words and how they fit into the
current situation. This helps situate you both within the same “story” and build rapport as well as clarifies shared understanding), and 4) Reading facial cues and body language and making visible your response to them. For example, Ben, when he was getting nowhere responding to the Imam’s words, noted from his body language and facial expressions that he was upset, and then said to the Imam (diverging from their current topic of conversation) “You seem upset. What is wrong?” These items are best theorized in the context of my case study, so I go into them in detail at the end of Chapter 6.
CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDIES

The Presence and Absence of Rhetorical Listening Behaviors

Ratcliffe’s concept of rhetorical listening as an inner stance where communicators lay aside their intentions and ideals to truly understand (stand under the Discourse of) others significantly advances the focus on listening as a valuable component of communication within Technical Communication. I build upon her foundation by documenting instances of rhetorical listening and assigning and labeling behaviors that demonstrate the stance in action. These behaviors are important to the advancement of the theory of rhetorical listening because, unlike an inner stance, behaviors can be identified, observed, studied, taught, and learned.

In this chapter, then, I place the reader at my research site, observing both of the Marines I chose to focus my case studies on, then moving on to address the behaviors they model and why those behaviors are indicators of rhetorical listening—or not. Ben and Gregory (not their real names) both demonstrated impressive communication ability when I interviewed them, and they were the only Marines who opened up beyond my professional communication questions and voluntarily shared how it felt to be who they were in their lives and workplaces. Due to the depth of their sharing (and complications beyond my control at the research site which I will address in detail later in this chapter), I focused my data analysis around them, as demonstrators of what can happen out in the field when rhetorical listening behaviors are present and absent. I include absence, because even though both Marines showed communication acumen in their interviews, they differed greatly in their execution of their skills in the field: Ben enacted rhetorical listening behaviors and Gregory fell back on a Marine Corps-enculturated style of communication that was as directive as it was confrontational (which is the opposite of rhetorical listening).
Ben, Multicultural MISO Marine

Meet Ben, the mid-twenties Marine who was the focus of my first case study. My first contact with him was when I was introduced to all of the participants, as I explained my research, consent forms, and questionnaires. Although he presented at first as nearly illiterate, having difficulty even reading and responding to my 6\textsuperscript{th} grade reading-level questionnaire (which asked what experience participants had with cultural and intercultural communication, either in personal or professional ways), something about him made me note that I wanted to interview him later.

There seemed to be a particular rivalry between Ben and another marine or two, and he seemed to be the butt of their jokes. It started when he raised his hand to ask what I meant by one of the earlier questions in the questionnaire. It continued as he raised his hand time and again—not seeming to mind what the others said of him, but wanting to get the task right. Eventually I asked if he wanted me to stay near him to explain each question, because it brought less attention to him than me walking back over to him each time. When he got to the question that asked if he had any experience with intercultural communication, he marked no, then asked me what “intercultural communication” meant. I was about to answer him when he mentioned that he had been born in a third world country and then moved to the United States when he was in elementary school. I said that yes, for the purposes of my study, that definitely qualified as intercultural communication experience. I noted that his knowledge might be unconscious, and that anything I wanted him to read would not get us very far—I would need to orally explain it, but he definitely had multicultural communication experience and I wanted to know more.

It was several days later when I encountered Ben in the hooch (as they called the Quonset hut) where they spent two weeks doing audience analysis on the population of the simulated local village and creating communication “products” to use in the field portion of the exercise. I
observed the group for a while and referred to my notes and their questionnaires, trying to put
faces with names in the new environment, which was much more fluid than the classroom we
had started in. Based on Ben’s extensive experience with intercultural communication, I decided
I wanted to interview him and observe him during the field portion of the training event.

When there was a lull in the activity, I asked Ben if I could talk to him. We went back
amongst the bunks in the hut. This being a simulated deployment environment, they worked in
the front half of the hut and lived in the back. He put his back against a wall, sat on a footlocker,
and pulled another one out for me. He asked me to tell him about my study, and then he sat so
still, so obviously listening, that I was taken aback. I told him a little bit about how I study
communication principles like rhetorical listening, identification, and narrative, and that I was
interested in seeing if the Marines used those (and other) communication principles.

In short order it was no longer an interview, for when I asked Ben to tell me about his
intercultural experience, he started telling a story that was so riveting I found it impossible to
interrupt, and he swept me up into his history as if I were there. Snippets of the story, like
borrowed memories burned into my soul, stand out still. (I paraphrase his story from my notes;
since this wasn’t the planned interview, I hadn’t taken the voice recorder with me. That is an
oversight I will make only once.)

**Ben’s story**

_We were children. We loved to play soccer. There was an abandoned school area
halfway between our village and another, and we went there often to play. One day the children
from the other village were there to play, and they challenged us, saying that it was their spot.
Instead of one of us going away to play later as I would now, we fought violently for the use of
that area, until we had literally driven the other children back out of our territory. We were eight_
or nine, probably, and there was unspeakable violence. And I don’t know who taught us that this is how you win disagreements, but we just knew. If this is what the unspoken rules were for children, then what must they have been for adults? And did we ever talk about these things to adults? No! Because not only did you get your ass beat on the “playground” but then your father or uncle or any male relative would also beat you. We didn’t communicate with words, our communication was all kinetic: Violent action.

In contrast to that world, when I came to the United States, I didn’t understand these people who communicated with words alone, not with deeds, or non-kinetically. On the playground in elementary school I finally made a friend, and one day the friend got into an argument with another kid on the playground. I knew without a doubt that one of them would not be back at school the next day, because that’s how it would have been in my country—one would have died. I just didn’t know which one would be missing. I was puzzled when the next day they both came back. In my country I had never been able to be there for my friends. I could tell them where to get food and what areas to avoid, but I had to tell them not to call me if they got in trouble because that would have been the end of me. But I had always wanted to help them. Now in the United States, I saw that I could maybe help my friend. So, the next day I brought in a steak knife in my jacket and I secretly showed my friend on the schoolyard, telling him that I had his back if anything went down again. The friend was justifiably appalled and turned me into the principle, who suspended me. When I got home, my American father grounded me. I didn’t know what these words meant, so I used the time off school to go out. When I got home, I got in trouble and my father said that I was not able to go out. I defiantly told him that yes, yes, I was, and I walked out again. I didn’t understand that it was words that forbade me and words that stopped me, because in my country, words didn’t do that—deeds did. But I would slowly catch on.
after catching on, I would slowly gain respect for this way of life—because I didn’t respect it at all at first. Words seemed a weak way to communicate. Now here I am, a Marine with all the kinetic force I could ever want available to me, and yet I chose to engage the fight with words.

As he spoke—including additional details about his family and life that I found too personal to include, though he divulged them to me—tears filled his eyes. The emotion was contagious, and this dynamic happened about ten times during an hour interview. The emotion for him seemed to be about how his hands had been tied so that he could not help his friends and how he valued his current work and his new country because he now had power to do exactly that. And his words were so full of feeling, so full of living, so emotional, that I chided myself for my own American view of what it means to be a US Marine. And in spite of my conceptions of what it meant to be a US researcher (detached, objective), tears filled my eyes. In those moments I saw him as no longer a Marine, a participant, or a foreigner—though none of his demographics had changed. In that moment he became a person to me, a person with abilities to communicate that he had no label for—and may not even be aware of—but abilities that had changed my mind within the space of an hour. He had brought me into the world he inhabited, showed me how this world looked through eyes that had lived through another world. Whatever principles of communication these proved to be, they were highly effective.

It was clear to me that, at least one on one, Ben was using rhetorical communication strategies—strategies I would have to get some distance from and analyze methodically to label. But would he use them out in the village with locals? Before I could wonder any more, however, Ben did something astonishing: he took the sheet of paper, where I had written some communication behaviors that, modeled out in the village, might engender the trust of the locals. We talked for a considerable length of time about these behaviors until he felt he understood my
take on what constituted excellent communication. He asked me if it was okay if he asked the other groups working out front what they thought about these words. I was stunned. And embarrassed, thinking, though not saying to him, *you are going to ask Marines what they think about feeling words?* But I didn’t know what would transpire in the next two weeks and what opportunities I would have, so I said as long as he didn’t give away that the idea came from me, and thus change their responses to me later, he was welcome to.

The next 30 minutes was the most remarkable thing I have ever witnessed: Ten Marines from six allied nations analyzing the following words, words that I, given my military background, would have thought they would have scoffed at: Genuine, Responsive, Open, Transparent. Although this exchange between the Marines of allied nations cannot be included in my document because it includes statements by international persons not covered in my IRB, I note the exchange because it was a powerful example of how Ben could build rapport with multicultural interlocutors, on a subject I thought would have been taboo due to the Marine Corps culture they all shared. I was certain as I watched that I could not have pulled off the kind of discussion facilitation that Ben did in that environment. The Marines responded to him in ways that they would not have responded to me: I was watching rhetorical invention in action. It looked different in the field than it had in the classroom I learned the concept in, though: Up until this moment I had thought of rhetorical invention as a construct only applicable to writing, yet here it was happening between actors conducting an activity. Between them, they constructed meaning and knowledge that had not existed between them a moment before; surely this was rhetorical invention in a form unconscious to the Marines. Although I had not come to study rhetorical invention, recognizing it there in action confirmed to me that other rhetorical constructs would become evident through my data analysis as well.
I sat there taking notes, gathering evidence of Ben’s powerful ability to bring anyone into a conversation that mattered to him—it wasn’t just me who was subject to his abilities because my profession had taught me to attempt to see the world through other’s eyes. He really did have the ability to help others see from new perspectives, in ways that seemed to me more academic than military. I looked forward to seeing him out in the field, interacting with the local population in the simulation.

**Ben engages the Imam**

Case study one opens in Mout Town (pictured below), where in order to save their village from the attacks of ISIS and the ravishes of a major typhoon, a Catholic female mayor and a Muslim town elder (called an Imam) must come together. The mission of Team One (not their real team nomenclature, which has been changed to protect the anonymity of participants) was to get the Imam and the Mayor talking. The situation was complicated due to the fact that in the

![Figure 2 A Coalition Team walks through Mout Town in search of Key Leaders](image)
past 48 hours, ISIS had circulated a video claiming that one of the coalition forces had already joined them in trying to overthrow the Philippine government.

Unknown to the Marines participating in the simulation, ISIS intended to cast doubt in the minds of the locals about the motives of the US forces who had arrived to deliver food and aid to the local population. Violence had been enacted against the local population, and a rumor started that it was the local Muslims who worshiped at the local Mosque who were causing the destruction. Meanwhile, the Muslims were not safe enough to perform their prayers in a timely fashion, and since cell phone service was destroyed, they were cut off from the rest of the community. The first thing the Muslim and Catholic community heard and saw once cell phone service was restored was the ISIS video that further introduced unrest and called each party’s allegiance into question, as well as that of those who had come to help them.

It was into this roiling unrest that a small contingent of five or six Marines (including a translator) were airlifted into the town, jumped from the back of a still-roaring V-22 Osprey, and spread out to find the Mosque. Multiple complex encounters happened between the Osprey and the Mosque, which do not pertain to the case study, but which explain how Team One came to find the Mosque. The basic procedure in this part of the training event was that the team walked through the town, speaking with the locals until they ascertained who the key leaders are, then they attempted to engage those key leaders in discussion. Because this operation of finding the person or persons of influence in the town takes time, it can be assumed that the Imam knew the Marines were coming, although he would have varying assumptions as to the intent of their visit.

Team One approached the Mosque with less apprehension than I suspected they would, based on their tactical disadvantage of entering through the single gate: there was no way to see what awaited them inside the blind gate, and then again inside the single door that lay just
beyond the gate. Once we committed, we were committed. Team One spoke for a minute about who would do the negotiating, who would play the role of scribe, and made a quick game plan.

Ben walked through the other members of Team One and entered the gate, then removed his helmet in respect as he walked through the door. Although removing one’s hat when entering a home or place of worship is customary in many cultures, Ben’s action bears noting here, because it is not customary for Marines to remove any of their protective gear without a very good reason. The Imam, being accustomed to the presence of U.S. Marines in his country, would understand the significant show of respect that Ben was engaging in because Ben was breaking his own protocols and taking a personal risk to show his respect for the Imam, the Imam’s way of life, and the Imam’s place of worship. Although no words were spoken to accompany this act, I noted it as a behavior that fit with the spirit of rhetorical listening, which calls for one to stand under another in order to truly understand that other. Ben’s act, though seemingly insignificant, was his opening salvo in a battle for a relationship that would be won by laying aside differences and defenses.

Ben seemed to make the very first act of openness, however, much earlier than removing his helmet: When we arrived outside of the Mosque, rather than just banging on the gate or barging in, the group had halted while one spokesperson asked a gate guard if the Imam would visit with us. Then we waited quietly outside for his reply. The Imam could have said no, but instead he invited us in, taking his own first risk in the rapport-building. If the Imam’s act of invitation was viewed through the usual Marine Corps perception that analyzes the other without too much thought for how the other perceives the Marines, this invitation would just be a check in the box on the way to mission success. “Gaining entry” is always a big step in military tactics. But rather than let that perception rule, Ben responded in kind, removing his helmet in a gesture
that not only showed respect for the Imam and his place of worship, but that acknowledged the
risk the Imam took in inviting an entire group of armed men into his small space which was
nearly devoid of his own guards. Ben’s helmet removal, then was a responding act of
vulnerability and openness, indicating that the Imam’s efforts were not only seen but responded
to in kind. It is these types of small-seeming actions that indicate the inner stance of rhetorical
listening.

Ben’s third act of rhetorical listening within a few moments was the smile lighting his
face as he entered the Mosque and thrust his hand out to greet the Imam with warmness that I
didn’t know existed in locations that also require body armor and machine guns be worn as a
daily uniform. The ruddy-faced Marine who, on the march through town had been serious-faced,
ever-alert, and directive to the rest of the team, transformed before my eyes, and had I not known
any better, I would have assumed that these two men knew each other and were friends from the
past—although I confirmed later that this was a first meeting for these two. Observing Ben move
from serious, on-alert Marine to a much more friendly and open stance, made me realize how even just the smile stood in such stark contrast to the seriousness of the uniform with its lethal components and acknowledgment of ever-present danger. The smile too was an indicator of rhetorical listening, a conscious act by Ben to lay aside his work demeanor and to invite, via his facial features, a conversation normally shared by friends—and not normally shared by those separated by body armor, guards, and weapons.

The Imam was “acting like an alpha male once we got inside” Ben described it later, but Ben didn’t posture to meet the Imam’s huffy response to their entrance as I expected a Marine would. (It is not only the temperament of the “type A” personalities often found in successful roles in the Marines that made me expect Ben to rise to meet the Imam’s resistance, but also Marine Corps protocol, which is much like law enforcement’s in that demonstrating an escalating “show of force” is routine. This simply means that if the interlocutor shows aggression, the Marines elevate their own aggression just a little higher, showing that they mean business and won’t be pushed around. That would have been the automatic trained response for a Marine, but Ben chose otherwise.)

Instead of escalating force, Ben asked the Imam how he was doing and if his people were able to worship and hold prayer at the appointed times. This question actually shocked me as I observed, because it was so not part of any conversation cues I observed up until that point. Not being Muslim myself and having only heard Group One talk about the goals of this mission, not much on how to achieve them other than who would talk, who would write, and who would stand guard, I wondered at first why Ben had interjected that into the conversation. It took me a minute to understand that Ben knew something about the religion and culture of the local Muslim population, and he knew that the most important thing to them was to be able to
maintain their prayer times. Rather than begin with the Marine Corps’ mission that day, or with a question that pertained to the conversation Ben wished to have, he showed that he knew the Imam’s needs without having to ask, and that he put those needs before his own agenda.

Although we might know this move as a normal empathetic part of caring conversation, again, it stands out in stark contrast to every other aspect of the situation—all of which point to war and opposition.

The Imam didn’t give Ben a direct answer to his question about time to pray but mumbled and wouldn’t meet Ben’s eyes in a way that worried me as I observed (because I had seen suicide bombers behave in such ways immediately before a detonation and we had been briefed that ISIS was active on the ground). Ben, however, was unfazed. He addressed the Imam not as a threat or a stranger to overpower, but as a person with human needs equal in importance to anyone else’s—a rare consideration in a situation where, again, body armor and loaded weapons are the norm.

Ben stepped nearer the Imam, touched his shoulder and, looking concerned, as if for an old friend he spoke to every day and whose facial features he knew, asked “Imam, what’s wrong? You seem upset.” Then Ben stepped back a little to give the Imam space, continuing to gaze in intent concern at him. This move in the conversation away from whatever mission Ben might be there to enact and towards concern for a stranger demonstrated that Ben was listening to the Imam with more than just his ears and that he showed a kind of identification: despite wildly different cultures, generations, and garb, Ben was showing the Imam that he could identify with the look on his face and its indication of a troubled soul, and that Ben wanted to alleviate the suffering. This act of rhetorical observation, or listening with more than his ears (Ratcliffe), was Ben demonstrating a rhetorical listening behavior: reading body language and
demonstrating that he noticed and cared about what he read there enough to set aside his agenda and respond.

The Imam, visibly shaken by this unexpected, personal approach, took a few seconds to decide on his answer and then directly voiced his sense of betrayal that the wider community (the village) was accusing his own Muslims of causing the violence against the Catholics who trustingly shared the same village. Next, Ben spoke directly with the Imam in a way that, at first glance, might seem like normal Marine Corps interrogation-type questioning, but I later identified it as engendering trust because through it Ben would convey that he took the Imam’s answer at face value and believed him. Ben asks if the Imam knows if any of his Muslims are stealing or causing violence. I held my breath, expecting the Imam to send us away for such a blunt question and thinking that Ben has blown the rapport he had just started to establish. But the Imam doesn’t get defensive, he simply asserts that, no, the Muslims are not engaging in such destructive behaviors. Ben moves directly on as if the answer is fact, steering well away from the Marine Corps’ style of communication that can easily come across as interrogation. “Well then it’s a rumor, not the truth.”

If we go with Ratcliff’s definition of rhetorical listening as a kind of understanding turned on its end, “standing under” discourse rather than trying to alter or influence discourse, then taking the Imam at his word communicates that Ben was there to hear the Imam. Rather than try and assure the Imam that everything is okay, Ben jumps right into the conversation, indicating that he accepts the Imam’s assessment of the situation and works from that. This is a manifestation of rhetorical listening that I didn’t expect at all, and for a time I thought that Ben could have done better; however, his next steps revealed an aspect of rhetorical listening behaviors to me: joining the narrative.
Ben had been standing a small distance from the Imam, but now, he stepped closer, facing him directly. He quickly goes on to ask if the rumor only started since the storm or if it’s an older conflict in the community. The Imam asserts that the rumor started about the same time the food started getting stolen. Ben takes in this information, then casually, as if he’s asking something inconsequential, asks if the Imam has a good reputation in the community. The Imam, as taken back as I am, affirms that yes, he has a very good reputation in the community. Ben goes on to ask, again, very casually, somehow not coming across as if challenging, if the Imam has always had this good reputation. The Imam affirms that he has. Ben nods his understanding, and in a gesture that seems to me to indicate that the issue is settled, he pulls a small pad and pencil from his pocket, swings his weapon farther behind him, and steps across an invisible divide to stand near the Imam, facing the same direction yet still angled towards each other.

Ben’s intended meaning in this physical gesture is clear to me even though I never expected to see it: The Imam and Ben are now on the same team, on the same side, and more importantly for the purposes of this study, seeing themselves as operating within the same narrative. Or, said another way, Ben has indicated that he sees their situation similarly to how the Imam sees it, and hence, the two, who were strangers minutes ago, are now acting within the same story, the same narrative. In this exchange Ben has now also tactfully established both what the Imam believes is true and the sort of influence the Imam believes he has.

This aspect of narrative is a key part of rhetorical listening: an oft-overlooked way of understanding narrative is that each person sees themselves as being within a story. Their story includes and excludes certain individuals who all have roles in the narrative. Those others also have their own narrative picture of their place in the world, and their role within it very well may differ from the roles assigned to them by the first person. As long as each individual’s narrative
about the story they are living and their role in it are different, it will be difficult for them to work together. However, if they can understand the narrative that the other lives in, in a way that resolves the differences, they can bring their understanding of their own experience into the same narrative: now they are in the same narrative, in agreement on their individual and collaborative roles.

Seeing the world through such a shared narrative is powerful, enabling those who share this meaning to advance their lived story in ways they never could if they didn’t see themselves in the same narrative. Through this lens, then, Ben established the Imam’s narrative: where he stood in relation to his community and where the community stood in relation to him. Ben accepted this—or indicated that he did in words, and then in deed, physically stepping over to stand beside the Imam. This powerful process of consciously sharing the same narrative made Ben’s next act possible in ways that the posturing and arguing of the other team never could achieve as they stood outside the Imam’s narrative attempting to influence him. A key aspect to rhetorical listening, then is it enables a communicator to enter the narrative of his interlocutor, in a way that both are aware of.

Standing near the Imam, now, and with his small pad and pencil out, Ben asks if the Imam is willing to send a message to the Muslims and the larger community, a message asserting that the Muslims are not stealing, and that in fact, they desire to work with the Catholic and Christian members of the community to recover from the storm. The Imam seems swept up away from his tendency towards argumentation (which I didn’t notice about the Imam until the next team spoke with him) and into the momentum of Ben’s easygoing mannerisms. The Imam merely nods his assent. Ben asks the Imam what he would like to tell the community and that Ben and his Marines can send a message out to the community if the Imam wants to send one.
Ben also asserts that his team is going to speak to the mayor and police chief and that they will send a similar message.

After a moment, the Imam says something incoherent (from where I’m standing), but it appeared that he asked Ben what to say to the people. Rather than act the part of the wise advisor as Marines’ official roles usually engender, Ben looks taken aback and then asserts, “You know the people better than I do, so if you have the reputation you say you do, then I think it will work.” Here it would have been normal, even expected, for Ben to advise the Imam on the message. This act would have been consistent with the reputation Americans have in many parts of the world where U.S. occupation is a reoccurring thing: They come, they think they know it all, they tell us what to do, they leave. Ben takes a different route, here, though, deferring back to the Imam in a way that shows the genuine nature of his interactions so far, using the opportunity to recap the ground they have covered already. The Imam indicates he will send a message and some incoherent chatter ensues, related to how they will capture and distribute the message.

Ben pokes his head out of the cluster in a few minutes and looks at the rest of the Team One, and says, “what we are doing here is trying to get the spirit of the message.” The Imam works with the interpreter who then repeats to Ben what the Imam wants to say. Ben repeats it back more clearly and asks the Imam if that’s what he wants to send to the village. Once the message is written down between the Imam and interpreter, Ben asks the Imam to please review the message and make sure he agrees with it. Then he coaches him on the sound, saying he doesn’t want it to sound robotic but wants it to be smooth, because he doesn’t want the population to think that the US is forcing the Imam to say it. At this point I thought the interaction was done, but Ben threw out another request before the process of goodbye greetings could start.
“Imam, when we’re done with this, we have some products that we’re creating and we’d like your input to see if you think they’ll work.” Ben was referring to the MISO Marine productions that would soon be circulated among the local population in an attempt to stir support of the US mission. When the Imam finished with recording the message, he looked over the products that another member of Team One held out to him. He asked in a direct fashion that differed from how he approached the other team later in the day, “What is your intent with these products?” I could tell Ben wasn’t prepared for this question, but he handled it with the honest answer driving their mission. “We are here to help.”

“Then,” the Imam said, “You should make something to message the children too.” Sensing an opportunity, Ben ventures to ask the Imam if he would mind giving recording a message about the role of coalition forces here too. Ben asserts that it’s important for the cohesion of the village that they know that the Marines are here to help.
Once this message too is captured (with some minor technical difficulties), Ben reached out and gripped the Imam’s hand as in the beginning, smiling warmly and speaking, “I just want to thank you so much for your time!” Then Ben voices what is more an assertion than a question—though it comes across as if Ben almost forgot to say it, “And you’ll be willing to talk to the police chief and mayor yourself.” The Imam says yes, and Ben responds with a happy, “Okay! We’ll get a message from the mayor and police chief too. And then if we can bring *you* along to talk to the police chief and mayor themselves, that would be the most effective message.” The Imam agrees heartily. The original mission accomplished—at the last minute—and only after Ben had facilitated fixing the problem that had the Imam concerned: the reputation of his Muslims.

I discovered later, while speaking to the instructors who designed the training, that the Imam was not supposed to agree to the future meeting with the police chief and the mayor, even though that was Team One’s mission. The Imam was one of 30 paid Filipino actors hired to
make the training realistic, and therefore his paid job was to not ever agree to meet with the Mayor; however, Ben’s rhetorical listening behaviors persuaded him beyond even where he intended to go. When I asked Ben later how he thought the interaction with the Imam went, he told me that one of the main things he would have changed is having all of Team One remove their shoes when they entered the Mosque, out of respect. He asserted that he showed as much cultural respect as he could in the situation, but in reality, they should have gone farther.

Gregory: MISO Marine

Gregory showed significant interest in communication principles on his questionnaire responses and approached with me after filling out the questionnaires to request that he be included in the interview process because he was curious about what I was doing and wanted to be part of it. Our interview, conducted even farther back in the hooch than Ben’s (due to noise
happening in the front), started awkward and gradually became easier until we ended up with three hours of conversation recorded on the topic of being a MISO Marine and various aspects of communication.

I found myself impressed with Gregory’s level of understanding of various communication principles and the way he was able to describe them to me. He had taken communication classes in college and showed his understanding of audience perception of himself by explaining how he had worked with underprivileged adults where he said he had to represent himself differently in order to gain their trust. He also seemed to have a sense of propriety, possibly ensuing from an introverted personality, that made his knowledge of communication principles invisible to me for the first part of the conversation. The contrast was especially stark in comparison with my interview with Ben: while Ben carried the conversation, I had to work to get Gregory to talk to me, asking many follow-up questions.

It was an interesting comparison between the two, with each of their communication ability profiles switching almost 180 from the questionnaire to the interview: Had I disregarded my gut, I would have counted Ben as illiterate and Gregory as an expert, but in personal interaction Ben proved readily able to sweep me up into his world, where I had to pull, prompt, and tug to get a glimpse into Gregory’s world. This can be due to culture or temperament, and probably a mix of both, but it matters as a point to note because when it comes to MISO Marines’ interpersonal communication in the field, the ability to connect with a stranger on the street matters tremendously—no matter what aspects of personality and training enable it.

**Gregory interacts with the Imam**

Gregory went through the same exact rotation to the Mosque as Ben, where his goal was to get the Imam and the Mayor to meet and speak to each other, however, due to nearby noise
and my position outside the Mosque door, I was not able to get a good recording with quotes from that training event, so I work from my observation notes. I did observe Gregory with keen interest, however, wanting to see his rich knowledge of communication principles in action. I was surprised to observe that he was methodical, almost robotic in his interactions with the Imam. He introduced himself, then went immediately to asking questions of the Imam, barely waiting for the Imam’s answer before asking another one. His mannerism reminded me so much of interrogation methods of communication that I wondered if the training instructors had given him a mission other than building rapport between the Imam and the Mayor, or if the Imam was supposed to be considered a hostile entity now, for the purposes of the training event. But checking with the instructor later proved that nothing about the situation or mission had changed: Gregory’s goal was still, like Ben’s, to get the two leaders to speak to each other.

Gregory did not end up succeeding in getting the Mayor and the Imam to talk that day. The next day, after the instructors had introduced the ISIS video to the Marines (before they only heard about it from the local population), Gregory had a chance to go back and speak with the Imam again. This time he and his team’s mission was to understand the Muslim population’s response to the video and if the Muslims disapproved of the video, and to get a message from the Imam saying that he disapproved of the message. Having seen other teams’ second meetings going more smoothly due to the previous rapport they had built, and due to having built my own rapport with Gregory, I asked for specific permission to be inside where I could hear better. However, this meeting didn’t go any different than the first one—except it ended up deteriorating into nonsensical, irritated, near-shouting on the part of the Imam.

Gregory introduced himself and his team as before, and then mentioned the video. Next, he asked if the Imam knew or recognized the man who was featured in the ISIS video. This is not
an unusual question since Marines are always supposed to be gathering information as they go about their mission. In this situation, information would have been particularly helpful in executing the rest of the larger mission. But key to that mission was gaining the trust of the Imam, and nothing else would work if that didn’t happen. By asking if the Imam knew the ISIS fighter in the video, Gregory could be easily read as insinuating that either the Imam condoned the violent appeal, or that since he was a Muslim then he must, of course, recognize and know the other Muslim. And it was an accusatory question: if the Imam knew the Muslim, he could next be questioned about his dealings with the fighter, leading the Marines to believe that he was untrustworthy and even part of the ISIS insurrection.

To further magnify the issue, Gregory was the most senior person in the team, and what he reported to the Marine commander about their interaction—no matter what lens it got translated through and no matter how he inadvertently provoked the Imam—would be taken as the truth in that situation. Had it been more than an exercise, had it been a real mission, the commander might have decided that it was too risky to work with the Imam, and if no other leader was available to build rapport with, relationship attempts would be abandoned, and the Marines would move into kinetic actions in the locale.

Kinetic options are never beneficial for the Marines or the local population. Unlike other technical communication workplaces where the pros and cons can be evaluated and a new plan of action created, wartime pushes decisions into a breakneck speed where options are limited. MISO Marines are the non-kinetic option ahead of the lethal force, and their ability to bring others into seeing from their perspective, or at least seeing the benefit to the community in their perspective, is essential for their success. It would not be an overstatement to say that lives depend upon this ability.
There were physically-evident results of the mindset Gregory and his team entered the mosque with, as well. They took a less relaxed posture (physically) than Ben and his team had: they stood rigidly in obvious military stances, hands clasped in front of them over their weapons, or hands resting but at a higher location so there was a shorter distance for them to move if anyone assaulted them. Helmets were not removed in respect of the sacredness of the place, either. It was clear to me from both their body language, Gregory’s initial accusatory question, and his rapid-fire questions after the initial one, that this was a team demonstrating that they felt like they were in the presence of hostility. And yet, unbeknownst to them, they had brought the hostility with them.

One can argue at this point, that the difference between Ben and Gregory’s handling of these situations was driven by their cultural and religious preferences: perhaps since Ben was Muslim he did not possess the anti-Muslim sentiment that has become prevalent in the United States since the September eleventh attacks. It could also be argued that Ben’s culture of origin was more open to expressing emotion and so he was more prone to acting with a warmness rather than on the cold calculation that the Marine corps and Western culture is steeped in. While both points are valid, they are beyond the scope of this research project. However, even if both of the points were the reason behind Ben and Gregory’s communication difference and their varying success, this is all the more reason to pursue the principles of communication that were working in the situation and understand which ones were not and why. Technical communicators both inside academia and in the field will ever face communication situations where they must build rapport with someone from a culture that expresses emotion and relies on logic differently than they do. In these situations, sacredness is defined differently by all parties but must be negotiated anyway. So, no matter the reason for Ben and Gregory’s varying levels of success, it
is important that Technical Communication be able to teach technical communicators to negotiate different cultures with their variety of indicators of rhetorical listening.

The Marines do cultural training before entering a location: The Marines get (if they have time) a brief on some major do’s and don’ts in the culture. However, my research looks for ways that technical communicators like MISO Marines can learn to be sensitive to the indicators of cultural values, and instinctively turn to a kind of listening that will give them a deeper understanding of the communication situation they are in, even if they haven’t been briefed on the details of the culture. This is, in part, an acknowledgement of the many microcultures that exist in the areas the Marines deploy to: in the West we often understand the Middle East to be a land of multiple countries, each of which has a culture, or at most, multiple cultures. But the mindset in much of the region is more tribal than that, with deep respect going to village elders while “country” is something with less impact on identity. Thus, culture and values can vary widely between two villages which are only a short walk from each other. As Ben said, “Mothers in this village can walk around outside and go shopping, while mothers in the village a couple hours’ walk away are confined to never being seen.” Thus, while the MISO Marines receiving briefings on major culture values is helpful, the briefings could do more harm than good, if the Marines believe that they have been told all they need to know. A more valuable piece of training, for the Marines, and, I argue, for all technical communicators, is training on the communication stances that enable a communicator to observe more than those details he expects to see, and a stance that teaches him how to make his interlocutors feel heard.

All communicators, like MISO Marines, will be in a situation where there is some sense of perceived hostility; regardless of the reason behind this perception, knowing what communication behaviors to use in order to move the situation forward amicably is what is
important. Bearing this in mind, I examine the difference between Ben and Gregory’s communication behaviors in the light of rhetorical listening principles.

**Rhetorical Listening Behaviors**

If we go back to Radcliffe’s definition of rhetorical listening as a setting aside of one’s perspective in order to stand under another’s discourse for a time, then we know that this act, though happening as an internal, purposeful stance and way of thinking, is not a visible act. Of course, internal stances usually show on human faces or in body language unless someone is trained in repressing them, but the differentiation I wish to bring to light here is that an internal stance requires certain external acts in order to make that stance visible. Or, said another way, if you wish your interlocutor to feel heard, then you must display evidence of listening that he or she recognizes.

Furthermore (and this was a point that none of the Marine participants were aware of until I explained it), you must display actions that indicate *to the interlocutor* that you are listening. Many factors influence what evidence of listening a person must observe in order to feel heard. These actions are called “communication behaviors” in the Communication Studies field, and the term is useful to differentiate between rhetorical listening (so far defined in scholarship as a stance) and displaying an action that evidences the listening *in the eyes of the interlocutor*. These were covered in Chapter Four. However, let us observe, at the current research site, what interpersonal behaviors were present in Ben’s interaction with the Imam, and not present in Gregory’s.

**Time**

One communication behavior that becomes apparent in this workplace study is the importance of time as a rhetorical listening behavior. Due to the nature of Marine corps work,
time is of the essence: from boot camp, Marines are taught to move swiftly and with purpose. In fact, when non-military people point out telltale signs that give away if a person in civilian attire is active duty military or a veteran versus not having served, often they comment on how the military or veteran moves with a sense of purpose, even if they are just doing ordinary things. In a military environment this manner of swiftness creates an ethos that indicates to other Marines that the swift-mover is on top of his game. Besides that sense of ethos, swiftness often ensures Marines live through an operation that would otherwise not be survivable.

However, in the MISO Marines’ situations, they must deliberately slow down the pace when they want to convey the message that they are indeed listening, not just searching for information. Why? Physically, it takes time to listen: you can’t perform accurate message-reception while talking. But beyond the physical challenge of multitasking is the issue of perception: slowing the cadence of interaction indicates time to care. Ben greeted the Imam and let him speak, and when he didn’t convey an intelligible message, or his message was hostile, Ben moved to “reading” facial feature and body language, and indicated he noticed the Imam was upset, questioning what was wrong. This exchange took many important moments in the exchange and took even more time due to having to use a translator both to speak and to hear the Imam’s response. Moving back to Gregory’s interaction with the Imam, his pattern of speaking (with the mayor as well as with the Imam) was compressed in time, leaving no pause between the Imam’s answers and his next question. The very lack of deliberately placing space between answers and new questions sent the message to the Imam that Gregory valued his questions more than the answers. This stands in stark contrast to Ben’s handling of time in his meeting with the Imam, using all of his time to attend to the Imam’s concerns and then inserting his mission requirement at the very end.
Repetition and paraphrasing

Gregory didn’t repeat back the Imam’s answers in his own words, which again, sent the message that Gregory didn’t value getting the information right as much as he was dedicated to his own questions and quickly moving on to the next one. Thus, we can assert from its absence in Gregory’s and its presence in Ben’s (and the outcome of both), that repetition and paraphrasing can indicate rhetorical listening is occurring. Research into paraphrasing as a listening strategy claims that empathetic listening sends a message of unconditional acceptance, demonstrated via paraphrasing (Rogers and Welch). Indeed, Weger et. al. in their article, “The Relative Effectiveness of Active Listening” list paraphrasing as one of three components of active listening (2014). Paraphrasing is also tied to sending a signal of acceptance because it deliberately indicates the withholding of judgment and instead affirms only that the message was heard (Garland). Van Hassalt et. al. report that the more experienced members of the Federal Bureau of Investigations’ hostage team use paraphrasing in simulated trainings more than junior members of the team do, with better results (355).

Narrative

The Imam spoke in terms of narrative (stories), where the Marines tend to deal in questions, procedures, and facts. Part of this is due to the Marines’ culture of not disclosing information for safety’s sake, but part of it is that they simply receive no training on the concept or enactment of narrative. Ben’s interaction with the Imam ended up co-creating the narrative of what was happening in the village: the Imam stating why he was upset, Ben clarifying the details and asserting that the accusations upsetting the Imam weren’t true and they should act to show that to the community, the Imam expressing his concerns with doing that and Ben coming up with a plan. And then as they executed the plan, Ben constantly deferred back to the Imam, asking him what he wanted to say to the village, stating that the Imam knew what would be
effective far more than he, and then repeating back what the Imam said he wanted to say, with a slightly different wording that captured more of the essence that Ben and his crew had set out to get.

In this way Ben moved from listening to the Imam’s narrative, to showing the Imam that he was truly listening, and then co-creating a narrative through plans of action: they were working together in a situation they both saw similarly. This co-created narrative action also solidified Ben’s move from being an outsider to being a partner with the Imam; working together on a task, which the military knows, can bring people together. In contrast, Gregory asked rapid-fire questions and never inserted himself into the Imam’s narrative, never got to the point of solving a problem together. Gregory was missing the rhetorical listening piece.

Marsen notes that using a narrative framework is beneficial for both “organizational learning and investigation” (302). Miller et.al. point out that in crisis communication, a narrative framework “allows for persons who are engaged in crisis planning and response to sense the narrative thematic continuity that is expected of the organization and to imagine the narrative events (such as terrorism) that could occur—because they are a possible or probable narrative” (186). Still other scholars assert that a significant value of narrative frameworks in research is the opportunity to see the role the narrator casts themselves in, and to respond in kind, focusing perspective on certain aspects of the story (Boje and Rosile). Narrative scholars assert that we make sense of life by putting it into narrative form (Riessman). Fisher describes narrative as a way to integrate our actions and our reasons for acting. Yet, narratives are complex in that we don’t construct them alone (MacIntyre). The Imam offered his portion of the narrative as he told what was happening that upset him, and in doing this he offered Ben the opportunity to step in and contribute to the narrative, which Ben did. For Gregory, his insistence on rapid-fire
questions never gave the Imam the chance to engage in narrative communication, thus also
preventing Gregory from being able to co-create the narrative with him. Instead, The Imam and
Gregory stood in the same room and in their opposition to each other, each used the other’s
words to continue constructing a narrative about the other that amplified their differences,
making it more and more difficult to work collaboratively.

The importance of understanding narrative’s ability to showcase perspective is so
important that Roe advocates that all policymakers should be trained in it. Although Marines
don’t receive any narrative training, Ben’s upbringing was in a storied culture, and perhaps this
was why he knew to communicate in this way. Whatever motivated his actions, my findings and
relevant literature indicate that instruction on narrative would be beneficial to technical
communicators who work in environments where the risks of miscommunication are costly (and
where are they not costly?).

**Reading facial cues and body language**

Within the time that Ben took to listen was embedded the engaging of a different type of
communication: body language and facial feature reading. For many in the West, this is viewed
as a behavior reserved for intimate friends and family, because we tend to believe it takes
knowledge of the person to understand what their facial expressions and behaviors mean.
However, this assertion can be a barrier to effectively displaying rhetorical listening behaviors.
Some facial features are nearly universal (think of smiles) and in this research situation it didn’t
take any special training to see that the Imam was upset. What it did take was time to notice,
time to comment on it, and a deliberate slowing of words in order that the question didn’t sound
like an interrogation. I noted later that Ben spoke considerably faster to his peers and to me than
to the Imam. Part of that was due to being accustomed to using a translator so he automatically
slow to allow for translation, but some of it was rhetorical listening behaviors in action, making space for the Imam to speak something that he may not speak otherwise.

In addition to the physical aspects of slowing down conversation, however, were Ben’s attentiveness to nonverbal cues displayed by the Imam, and the concern he chose to display in return, demonstrating his own concern that the Imam was upset. Scholars of listening indicate that this nonverbal interaction (sometimes referred to as “backchanneling”) is a vital part of demonstrating listening. Wager et. al. assert that part of active listening (which corresponds to rhetorical listening) is “maintaining a moderate to high nonverbal conversational involvement” (14). The International Listening Association, when they define listening, include perception of and response to non-verbal cues (n.p.). In fact, drawing on an extensive review of literature, Wagner et. al. defines active listening as necessarily including the following three elements: 1) demonstrates moderate to high nonverbal involvement, 2) reflects the speaker’s message using verbal paraphrasing, and 3) may include asking questions that encourage speakers to elaborate on his or her experiences” (15). Thus, we see through scholarship and the interactions of the MISO Marines, Ben and Gregory, how vital knowing how to indicate listening via nonverbal communication is.

**Internal Stances Indicated by External Behaviors**

When I interviewed both Gregory and Ben, I eventually spoke about four ways of being that need to be perceived by the interlocutor for communication to be effective in these high-stakes, fast-paced, intense communication situations. The four items were my deduction, drawn from rhetorical listening theory, the cultural courses Marines had access to, and pedagogical experience utilizing the various pedagogical principles. My four ways of being were: Genuine, Open, Responsive, Transparent. Note that these ways of being were understandings I arrived at
my research site with, and ways I thought I could advise the Marines to utilize if they weren’t already. I knew that it would be unhelpful to tell the Marines to “utilize rhetorical listening” because even our field had not yet worked out how enacting that listening would work; what would its physical indicators be? During the end of my conversation with Gregory, his eyes brightened, and he said, “Oh yeah! We have an acronym that is similar to these four things: LEAP. Listen, Empathize, Agree, and Partner.” The problem that this acronym introduces, however, is the same problem that all of their documentation reflects: not accounting for how such actions look to others.

For example, evidence of listening in the military very often is standing still and erect, eyes straight forward. Agreement might be evidenced by hearty “Yessir!” and Partnership might be evidenced very much by the innuendo- and insult-ridden banter military members engage in to show each other that they care. Empathize, I cannot even find a military example for. Case in point: What looks like listening, empathy, agreement, and partnership varies widely simply between the military and academia, and between the military and civilian worlds. Add all the intensity of a wartime situation where the two sides may have been enemies a few months ago, and it becomes incredibly difficult to enact any of the LEAP acronym effectively.

While the Marine Corps advocates actions, they were missing the piece where they teach the Marines both the importance that their interlocutor sees those actions as they are intended, and how to convey them in the intended way. I labeled the difference between LEAP and rhetorical listening behaviors as follows: with LEAP the Marines were being asked to take action. With my initial conceptualization of rhetorical listening in terms of the four words Genuine, Open, Responsive, and Transparent, I was giving them words that represented a mindset, a stance, that would help them shape the action to the perception of the interlocutor.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Implications, limitations, call for future research

In this chapter I talk about the limitations of my study, which mostly relate to my research site being a military training event where I ended up with even less control over enacting my data collection methods than I planned for. Then I call for further research, suggesting some of the opportunities I see to build upon the work I do in this study. From there I move on to an aspect of my findings that bears discussing, even though focus on it did not really fit in any other area of my document: the need for communication training to be “sanctioned/approved” by the organization calling for it. I address this because there was a significant discrepancy in how one of my participants, Gregory, interacted with me versus how he interacted out in the field. My analysis of his actions indicated that when in the field he felt the need to communicate in a way that projected his organization’s culture. Since his organization was the Marine Corps and their communication training is about being fast, direct, and authoritative, that was the tone he set in his village interactions, even though he demonstrated rhetorical listening behaviors when I interviewed him. I think it is important, as we move forward with research on rhetorical listening behaviors, to acknowledge the influence of organizational culture on communication styles and to teach technical communicators when and how to set that organizational tone aside in order to achieve a larger mission or objective. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an overview of the dissertation focus and findings.

Study Limitations

My study was primarily limited by lack of control by the researcher. Because it was a large military event already, and I was a guest, I had little control over making my data gathering happen in the way I had planned—even though the planners and I had agreed upon my methods
prior to my arriving. For example, I wanted to wait to interview the participants after they did their face to face interactions with the village, but it became clear after my third day there, that any interviewing I wanted to do needed to be done prior to the village interaction because after it, the Marines would be non-stop busy with nighttime operations (a surprise element that the planners added after we collaborated on my data gathering model). Being a guest and wanting to preserve the relationship and respect the Marine’s workplace, I had to change my plans mid-stride and interview my participants prior to their village engagement.

Luckily, at the same time, I decided to go with a case study model and participate with only two teams in their village interactions—the two teams which included the two Marines who opened up to me the most in the interviews. Due to this limitation-driven choice, I was able to speak to my participants a little bit after their village interaction and listen in on their debrief to find out how they thought it went. I was interested to find out that the cultural instructor who debriefed both teams criticized Ben pretty sharply for engaging with the Imam about religion, since it was always a risky move, and a theme that is not allowed to be engaged in. When Ben said it was his one and only major connection point with the Imam, he took it. The instructor relented, reflective aloud for a moment that never before had they had a Muslim Marine in the unit who could make that connection on religious points without fouling it up due to assumptions.

**Call for Future Research**

My data analysis indicates that by utilizing an inner stance of rhetorical listening, a communicator can observe what indicators or markers of listening an interlocutor needs to see in order to participate as if he or she feels heard. It follows, then, that in teaching, modeling, and practicing this principle, we can become better at doing the kind of listening that engenders
interactions rich in meaning-transaction. However, I didn’t answer a glaring question: since Ben, who modeled rhetorical listening behaviors, wasn’t aware that he was using this principle, why was he successful in doing the kind of listening that created meaning-transactions? We can guess that it was because of a shared cultural background with the Imam, or due to his multicultural background that makes him more sensitive to other ways of communicating. We could also wonder if it is his bent towards (oral) communication.

These questions are beyond the scope of my research, for I wanted to know what communications could account for the ways in which the Marines communicated, given their unique situatedness in the world. But to pursue the questions for a moment anyway: Say Ben was successful due to his culturally diverse background. Does that give Technical Communication something that can be taught? The entire university system is becoming structured around the idea that diversity is good, and healthy for learning, and yet one has only to look around or watch the news to see the kind of listening that allows the un-heard to speak is not prominently displayed. As much as we push for diversity of cultural experience (and we should), we will not experience the drastic, life-altering cultural movement that Ben experienced—nor should we ever hope to, for it was violent and difficult. Perhaps the increase of cultural focus without a correspondingly visible payoff in terms of standing under and hearing our interlocutors is due to how often our efforts to provide culturally immersive experiences are less genuine than we hope they will be—not in terms of intent but in terms of experience. Just as classrooms are places of artificial writing exigence (it must be written because the teacher says so, graduation requires it, and parents require decent grades—yet we ask for audience analysis) so our attempts at cultural immersion can be artificial. They are also expensive, require people to think outside the box, and don’t always come with an acceptable amount of risk for administrators.
However, we can, with relative ease, take the principle that explains what is working for the Marines and begin to teach it in our technical communication classrooms. If we teach aspects of interpersonal communication, we answer the call by industry and Technical Communication to provide future technical communicators with more face-to-face communication ability. If we teach the inner stance of rhetorical listening, then we give students the ability to see the invisible aspects of their world—inside and outside of the classroom—increasing their ability to think critically and interact as citizens of a multiculturally inclusive society. Since rhetorical listening behaviors mixes these two positives together—theory and praxis, if you will—I propose that more research be done on this subject, allowing the field to understand more fully what rhetorical listening looks like when it is in action. It is only then that we will be able to teach it. My next course of action will be to design a course that incorporates teaching rhetorical listening behaviors and gathers data on the benefits and challenges of using it in the classroom.

In my research, I assert that, under Ratcliffe’s definition, rhetorical listening performed by a person may actually change what the interlocutor perceives is possible and fruitful to say, thus facilitating communication in deep—and nearly invisible—ways. The invisible piece is key, because if listening is imagined to be a non-act, and that listening makes the interlocutor able to say something different than they would have otherwise, we are in the dark if we try to study this phenomenon as text. Thus, it is necessary to understand listening—specifically rhetorical listening, as an act with associated markers that can be physically seen and identified. In order to come to understand how rhetorical listening functions and understand how to enact it in different situations, we need to understand the power of rhetorical listening: It can make space for conversations that would otherwise be impossible. My research is the first to document this as a field observation, but my work only scratches the surface of why rhetorical listening has this
power and how we can use it. Much more research needs to be conducted that investigates this phenomenon. Such research needs to be interdisciplinary, as well, investigating what markers of true listening and genuinely feeling heard does in the brain and the psyche and in culture to make rare conversations happen. To be sure, there are textual and oral markers of listening, but they do not stand alone, and as scholars of rhetoric as a foundation of Technical Communication, we must not neglect the context of this language, even researching it requires borrowing methodology from other disciplines.

**The Need for Rhetorical Listening Behavior to be “Sanctioned” by an Organization**

I said that even though Gregory was conscious of enough communication concepts that he could have interacted with the Imam in similar ways that Ben did, he did not. Due to military constraints and limitations, I didn’t get a chance to ask him why he used those rhetorical listening behaviors with me as I interviewed him but then set them aside when he interacted with the local population in the simulated field work. However, I postulate, based on what I saw in the rest of my time at my research site, that culturally (both in his upbringing and in Marine Corps culture), he is more comfortable conversing in a way that seems “personal” with a woman than with a man. This was evidenced for me at the end of our interview when I asked if I could email with follow-up questions and he heartily agreed but then asked if I wanted personal or work email and clarified that he is married—a statement that confused me for months. Ben, on the other hand, was from a culture of close touching—both in violence and in greeting, such as the town elders grasping each other’s hands while they talk and kissing each other on both cheeks as a greeting. To Ben, I imagine, there was less divide between work conversation and personal conversation, and less divide between appropriateness of nearness in relation to males and females. Although this could be a fascinating gender study, that aspect lies outside of the bounds
of my study. However, what does pertain to my study is the focus on what type of interpersonal communication is acceptable in various workplace environments and what that means for future attempts to teach rhetorical listening behaviors.

**Conclusion**

My research demonstrated a need for MISO Marines to be better trained in interpersonal communication. In the face of their lack of training, the spaces where they must conduct communication in personal contact with another human in the field ends up as a space for rhetorical invention, with each Marine falling back on their own communication habits and bents to fill the void. I observed two MISO Marines in particular as they conducted training, communicating with paid actors hired to act a certain way to infuse the training situation with as much realism as possible. Ben demonstrated use of rhetorical listening, but in physically-active ways. Greg demonstrated conscious knowledge of these communication principles in his interview with me and demonstrated use of them with me. However, when he was out in the field, he didn’t use any of them, and instead switched into a mechanical, Marine-Corps style of communication that appeared similar to interrogation and shut down the actors he was speaking with. Why did he suspend his own go-to knowledge in the field? Although he was never asked directly about his reasons, it can be theorized that although he knew the type of communication required for successful interface with the local population, due to his lack of explicit instruction from the Marines on how to do that, he didn’t see it as part of his official capacity. Military communication is unbelievably proscribed, even to the point of dictating that junior military members only greet their Commanding Officer but not start a conversation with him unless he initiates it (Mallory and Downs, 2012). Indeed, it appeared from watching Gregory that he moved from comfortable personal interaction with me who was accepted as almost an insider, to
“putting on” a way of communicating that fit the persona of a warfighter and the militaristic, proscribed, curt way in which he was trained to communicate.

The gap in the MISO Marines’ training—that of focus on rhetorical listening and face-to-face communication—is demonstrative of a similar gap in Technical Communication. Although multiple articles across decades assent to the value of listening and assert that Technical Communication should study it in-depth, these calls come as a surprising side-note to research articles on another topic. Focus on rhetorical listening in Rhetoric and Composition Studies has focused more on the aspect of silence and on the mistreatment of minorities than on workplaces and the accomplishment of tasks. Broadening the search for scholarship on rhetorical listening, to merely listening, the same result is found. Communication Studies has an entire journal devoted to listening, so I drew much research from that source, using it to describe the value of my observations on the need for further research on rhetorical listening in Technical Communication.

It is vital for Technical Communication to engage in research on rhetorical listening and face-to-face communication because technical communicators are experiencing a shift in roles where they are moving from being knowledge-documenters to knowledge-creators, and vital members of organizational teams. Scholarship in the past has equipped them to be knowledge-documenters, but not to fill the dynamic and shifting interpersonal roles they fill now.

Communications Studies uses the concept of behaviors as the indication of inner stances, and this is particularly useful in my study because, starting on the foundation Ratcliffe laid, of rhetorical listening being an inner stance, we had no observable indicators of that stance. I observed the MISO Marines carrying out behaviors that I assessed to be in keeping with the concept of rhetorical listening and coined the term “Rhetorical Listening Behaviors.” This list
included: Time, Narrative, and Reading Facial Cues and Body Language. My study indicated that if a MISO Marine took time to slow his pace of operations and even his speech, it indicated to his interlocutor that he was truly listening. My study also indicated that the interlocutor at my research site (the Imam) spoke using a narrative framework. One Marine (Ben) met him in that framework and co-created a narrative with him that indicated to the Imam that he indeed saw the story the Imam painted and believed him and saw himself within the same narrative. This co-creating of narrative indicated not only that Ben had heard the Imam, but that he was willing to collaborate with him—and ultimate evidence of hearing.

Finally, Ben engaged in both reading and displaying facial features and body language that indicated careful listening and responding with concern. Although in Western cultures we often reserve reading and commenting on facial cues to those we know well enough to be confident in our ability to “read” them, for other cultures, it would be rude not to observe and react to facial features. Operating within a general framework of “you seem upset” can suffice where unfamiliarity with an interlocutor is an issue. Scholarship on listening affirms that much of listening is indicated through non-verbal communication often referred to as backchanneling.

In conclusion, it is vital that Technical Communication as a field engage in research that investigates the power and process of rhetorical listening as indicated in observable behaviors, and the role of those behaviors. Although Communication Studies has invested much time in scholarship on listening, they don’t incorporate the rhetoric piece as we need to, and they don’t apply their research to the communication of technical information. In a world where technical communicators are increasingly being asked to function on teams as a vital part of the organization’s knowledge-creators, it is vital that we be able to equip them for this task.


Aiken, Suzan E. *Silence as a Rhetor’s Tool: Rhetorical Choices for and Uses of Silence*. December, 2011.


Downs, Doug, and Elizabeth Wardle. *Re-Imagining the Nature of FYC: Trends in Writing-about-Writing Pedagogies The Subject and Ethos of Composition Studies*.


To: Angie Maitory
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CC: Dr. Charles Kostelnick
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From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Rhetoric Goes to War: The Challenge of Warriors Who are Required to Become Intercultural Communicators

IRB ID: 17-526

Approval Date: 2/7/2018
Date for Continuing Review: 2/6/2020

Submission Type: New
Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 50), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.

- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.

- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

- Stop all research activity if IRB approval is rescinded, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as the date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingard, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.