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Introduction to the Special Issue on Method in Communication

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When I sent out the special issue call for articles focusing on “Method in Communication Studies,” I did not fully know what to expect. As the field of communication studies is vast, the variety of methods used in the field is also vast. The Editorial Board and I received numerous articles with methods ranging from semiotics, ethnography, autoethnography, performance, numerous rhetorical approaches, discourse analysis, a variety of critical approaches, and few statistical submissions. In our evaluations of the submissions, we considered many factors: is it conceptually meaningful, methodologically driven, well-written, are the arguments well grounded, and is it interesting. I also looked to a keen statement put forth by Abelson (1995), who asserted that research, “should make an interesting claim; it should tell a story that an informed audience will care about, and it should do so by intelligent interpretation of appropriate evidence” (p. 2).

With these ideas in mind, four articles were chosen. The first piece is “The Fantasy of Separatism: An Examination of the Rhetoric of Sri Lanka’s Tamil Separatist Movement” by Carolyn Prentice and Suranthi Boange. Here the authors use symbolic convergence theory (Bormann, 1982) to analyze the rhetoric of the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka. The authors identified three themes and a dominant rhetorical vision through their analysis. Their work shows the usefulness of symbolic convergence theory outside of the United States.

The second piece is “Pragmatism, Pragma-Dialectics, and Methodology: Toward a more Ethical Notion of Argument Criticism” by Matthew Gerber. In this piece, Gerber asserts the pragma-dialectical approach to analyzing argumentative discourse (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984) is limited and run the risk of amorality. Gerber adds arguments are deemed “good” as long as they meet the needs of the speaker, regardless of the goals or purpose, which he deemed amorality. He outlines corrective measures for standard pragma-dialectical approaches.

The third piece is “Through the Linguistic Looking Glass: An Examination of a Newspaper as Negotiator of Hybrid Cultural and Linguistic Spaces” by Anthony T. Spencer. In this analysis, Spencer English-language media outlets should and could be viewed as minority-language media outlets, particularly when such outlets are in a nation where English is not the first or official language. Spencer conducted three months of ethnographic observations at a newspaper in Costa Rica in which he focused on the hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994) staffers form as they instruct tourists, sojourners, and other transnational migrants in this hybrid space.

The fourth and final piece is “Sculpting the Rhetorician: A Transformation” by Crystal Lane Swift. In this study, Swift entered a culture (a group of artists) to study communicative interactions such as: marking of space, positionality,
speech acts, and the overall formation of community. Through her analysis, Swift asserts she impacted the culture, and the culture impacted her. The piece incorporates rhetorical and performative elements to demonstrate a researcher’s transformation.

These four pieces demonstrate four different methodological approaches to the study of communication, and I applaud each for his/her contribution. I also want to thank Daniel Cronn-Mills for his many years of stewardship of Speaker & Gavel. As I begin my term as editor of Speaker & Gavel, I am pleased to have him not only on the Review Board, but as a colleague and friend I can call for assistance as I begin this endeavor.

References

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