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A Qualitative Analysis of Meetings in a New Zealand and an Australian Work Environment Using Dell Hymes’ Ethnography of Speaking Framework

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Abstract: Using Dell Hymes’ ethnography of speaking, this study explored the characteristics of meetings in one New Zealand medical corporate team environment and the characteristics of meetings in an Australian team environment within a not-for-profit sector. Utilizing the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Framework, similarities and differences were articulated through qualitative methods, and the analysis yielded four themes, including (a) degree of formality affecting the length of meetings, (b) adherence to roles and purpose of the meetings, (c) agenda, minutes versus “notes,” and (d) modes of interaction and communication. The study demonstrates the applicability of the Dell Hymes framework in the analysis of more current and industry-specific speech communities. Albeit limited in its scope as only meetings were analyzed, it opens more opportunities for further research, such as investigating other facets of the same speech communities or other areas of the medical and not-for-profit sectors. The study may have implications for using English for specific purposes, business communication, in the understanding of competencies of workers expected to join these types of communities, language learning, and applied linguistics in general.

Keywords: ethnography of communication, Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING MODEL, qualitative research, culture of meetings, characteristics of meetings, speech communities

This paper discusses the concept of ethnography of communication using the paradigm of Dell Hymes, particularly the application of his acronym “S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G” applied in comparative analysis and description of two communication contexts.

It presents two different scenarios: one within a high-level management group of a regional hospital in New Zealand, where I previously worked as an Executive Assistant in the company of senior officials of the hospital; and another, within a not-for-profit organization in Australia, where I currently work as Program Coordinator of its volunteer and advocacy program. This program includes my supervisor or manager and other members of the program who are people with disabilities, older people, and carers of people with disabilities volunteering their time as...
motivational speakers, including students doing an internship or work placement with the program.

Studying these two scenarios is interesting. It presents an opportunity to learn about different speech communities and how people who belong to these speech communities communicate in their working environments. This type of study is also of interest to applied linguistics and communication scholars in general, who may be looking for research topics utilizing non-quantitative approaches and those interested in studying communication and language occurring within specific groups/communities.

The study is both exploratory and qualitative.

In light of the above, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Using Dell Hymes’ S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Model, what are the characteristics of meetings in a New Zealand Hospital’s corporate medical environment?

2. Using Dell Hymes’ S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Model, what are the characteristics of meetings in an Australian volunteer not-for-profit organization’s environment?

Research Framework: Ethnography and Ethnography of Communication

Ethnography of communication relates to a description of cultural behavior among specific members of a society or culture that shapes the way they relate to each other and their ways of interacting (e.g., through language and/or rituals). For Hymes, communication processes are relevant as these serve as tools for understanding people’s way of life.

Ethnography’s roots are in anthropology as a method of social research, where ethnographers spend time observing and “living” in the environments they seek to describe and may use a range of various types of data and data collection techniques to record what is going on in multiple interactions/events they are studying.

Countless literature and studies are available on ethnography, ethnography of communication, and Dell Hymes’ ethnography of speaking. In 1962, a paper was published by Dell Hymes called “The Ethnography of Communication,” in which Hymes proposed combining ethnography, the description, and analysis of culture, with linguistics. This became an approach, a perspective, a method, and a means to discover, understand, and explain the meanings of communication.

It is an appropriate framework for this paper as it gives an overview of the researcher’s daily professional life in these two scenarios. Moreover, this framework allows us to understand features of a speech community’s communication patterns, as it relates to the members’ roles and tools that they also use to achieve the purposes of their communication or existence.

Below is a summary of the critical features of this framework.

Speech Communities, Situation, and Events

A speech community is a group of speakers who share at least one communicative variety, rules, and the norms for its appropriate use. A speech situation is any social situation in which speech is an element. Most human interactions somehow involve speech, so this is a fairly broad category. A speech event takes place within a speech situation. It is composed of one or more situations. They are social events that are carried out through communicative means.

This paper explores the above concepts and describes them with the two identified cross-cultural scenarios.

The Acronym Speaking

The acronym S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G is an excellent first step or framework to use by a researcher who is seeking to understand what is happening in a situation they are not familiar with. Although there may be other nuances that this approach may not fully capture, it paints a fairly good picture of what is happening in that particular context or situation.

The following are what SPEAKING covers:

S – Situation, which includes both the scene and the setting.

P – Participants involved, including people, the roles they play, and the relationships they have with other participants.

E – End or goals of communication (what are expected by each member or the goals of the group)
A – Acts or speech acts, which include form and content, levels of formality as influenced by settings (formal/informal), and the content or messages in the communication situation

K – Key or tone of speech, which can also refer to the manner and spirit in which an act is done

I – Instrumentality, which includes the channel or the modes through which communication flows (e.g., written, spoken, use of media)

N – Norms of communication or the rules guiding talk and its interpretation; this relates to the standard behavior patterns, and each culture has its cultural patterns and behavior

G – Genre or speech genres

A researcher can opt to use all or some of the components when analyzing a community based on the types of questions or inquiries they wish to answer; however, using the entire mnemonic enables us to understand more aspects of the speech community under investigation. I have chosen to provide an overview as describing all the relevant factors is essential to understand how the objectives of a communicative event are achieved.

Review of Related Literature

Hymes’ S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Framework and Ethnography of Communication Further Explored

This section further expounds on the work of Hymes (1967) as articulated by other scholars in the field.

Global opportunities have diversified companies, resulting in local and international employees. This has made individuals cross the boundaries of speech communities, which developed a growing need to understand the phenomenon of people whose meanings have been ingrained in their speech community and go to another one. This has also made them encounter different meanings that may sometimes be opposite from what they have gotten used to. There are cases that these individuals have to spend their lives in a balancing act: encountering a new web of meanings amid visiting their speech community origin and, at the same time, having to maintain good relationships with members of both speech communities. Consequently, it has compelled them to move back and forth between two speech communities. Several questions were raised by Philipsen (1997, p. 47, as cited in Kotani, 2017, p. 1) as regards this phenomenon: “What would happen to their perception of the resources that they use to interpret their own and others’ actions? What would happen to these individuals as ‘culture bearers’? What would happen to their views of the boundaries of speech communities? Is there a way of capturing instances of the boundaries being modified?” Kotani (2017) pointed out that individuals going to another culture have widely been studied in intercultural communication research (e.g., international students are adapting to the new environment and their experiences returning to their original culture, acculturation of international marriage partners, construction of refugee, and immigrant identities). In her study, Kotani utilized two methods: Hymes’ ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972, 1974) and speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1992, 1997; Philipsen et al., 2005).

As Kotani based the definition of culture as a system of symbols and meanings (Geertz, 1973; Hymes, 1974; Philipsen, 1992; Schneider, 1976), she then cited that the ethnography of communication regards “speech community” as a unit of culture: “a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech” (Hymes, 1974, p. 51). In the same light, culture is not defined as a group, a nation, or people, but as a system in which the unit that shares it is a speech community (Hymes, 1974; Milburn, 2004; Philipsen, 2007).

The primary concern then of ethnography of communication is “to discover and explicate the competence that enables members of a community to conduct and interpret speech” (Hymes, 1972, p. 52). This is in the assumption that “there are, in any given place and time, locally distinctive means for, and ways of organizing, communicative conduct, and that these ways implicate a culturally distinctive system, of meanings about communicative conduct itself” (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 355). The said authors also identified that studies seek to describe means and their meanings and explain how communication and culture might be apprehended and formulated in any given case.

It has been described that those studies in the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1972, 1974) have been conducted in various contexts that offer “thick” descriptions (Geertz, 1973, as cited in Kotani, 2017) of communication in given speech communities. Thus, this posits the main concern with descriptive
analyses from various communities. Therefore, an adequate descriptive theory would provide analysis of individual communities through specifying technical concepts required for such analysis and by characterizing the forms that analysis should take. Those should be formal, explicit, general, economical, and congruent with linguistic modes of statement. Aside from having empirical work and experimentation in showing the forms of descriptions are required and are preferred, a descriptive theory must also deal with the speech community, speech situation, speech event, speech act, fluent speaker, components of speech events, functions of speech, and so forth. Researchers who have first studied ethnography of speaking (e.g., Bernstein, 1971; Cook-Gumperz, 1975; Hymes, 1964, 1972, 1974; Malinowski, 1923; Short, 1956) and were formally trained in sociolinguistics have social context as their primary interest.

A researcher can opt to use all or some of the components when analyzing a community based on the types of questions or inquiries they wish to answer; however, using the entire mnemonic enables us to understand more aspects of the speech community under investigation. The author has chosen to provide an overview as describing all the relevant factors is essential to understand how the objectives of a communicative event are achieved.

Consequently, other research methods, such as discourse analysis and conversation analysis, have been amalgamated into the ethnography of communication (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005). The use of language in the conduct of life has been the common thread in the fields mentioned previously. However, according to Philipsen and Coutu (2005), the distinction between ethnography and discourse and conversation analysis is that the former focuses on speaking as a social and cultural system in the specific context of different speech communities. The salient point on the part of the work analyst, according to Cameron (2001), does not stop at the level of description, but they should seek the answer to the question of why particular events occur and why they have the specific characteristics.

Dell Hymes (1972) introduced the mnemonic SPEAKING, which stands for setting and scene (S), participants (P), ends (E), act sequence (A), key (K), instrumentalities (I), norms of interaction and interpretation (N), and genres (G). These components are culturally dependent and could be used to navigate cross-cultural communication and facilitate an individual’s speaking ability to speak up in any social situation (Widiastuti et al., 2020). Zand-Vakili et al. (2012) discussed the SPEAKING framework, not in the order based on the said abbreviation but from the highest to lowest-level unit of analysis. Speech situation is the highest unit of analysis is the social situation where speaking occurs. Hymes (1972, p. 56) pointed out that speech situations refer to “socially contextual situations, such as ceremonies, fights, hunts, meals, lovemaking, and the like.” The next level is called the speech event. Ethnographers of communication (as cited in Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005, p. 342) explained that speech event is the basic unit of everyday communication and not clause nor sentence.

Hymes (year) pointed out that language should be critical to the social practice for it to be called a speech event. For instance, in lectures, thesis or dissertation defense, interview, or phone conversation, speech is crucial such that an event will not take place without a speech. Hymes (1972) stated that “the term speech event will be restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech. An event may consist of a single speech act but will often comprise several” (p. 56). However, if speech has or becomes a minor role in other cases, something subordinates other codes or forms of interaction; this is referred to as a speech situation (p. 201). The lowest-level unit of analysis is the speech act, which is the constituent part of speech events. “Speech acts are the things we perform through speaking—all the things we do when we speak as speech act theory has to do with the functions and uses of language” (Schmidt & Richards, 1980, p. 12). Hymes (1972) highlighted speech events as the most critical levels, though each level is equally important. In 1974, he proposed that speech events should have components to be considered to produce a satisfactory description of any particular speech event.

As the levels were mentioned thus far, Hymes explained that the SPEAKING heuristic also constitutes various factors that he identified as relevant—setting, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities, and genre. Setting and scene refer to the time and place with concrete physical circumstances in which the speech takes place. Participants may be combinations of speaker-
listener, addressor-addressee, or sender-receiver who generally fill specific socially specified roles. *Ends* refer to the conventionally recognized and expected outcomes of exchange and the personal goals that participations seek to accomplish on particular occasions. *Act sequence* is the actual form and content of what is said: precise words used, how they are used, and the relationship between what is said and the actual topic at hand. *Key* is the tone, manner, or spirit in which a particular message is conveyed. It may also be nonverbal by specific behavior, gesture, posture, or even deportment. Listeners tend to pay more attention to the key when there is a lack of fit between what the person is saying and the key that they are using. *Instrumentalities* are the channel’s choice, such as oral, written, or telegraphic, and the actual form of speech done, such as language, dialect, code, or register chosen. Norms of interaction are the specific behaviors and properties attached to speaking and how those may be viewed by someone who does not share them, like loudness, silence, and gaze return. Lastly, *genre* refers to the demarcated types of utterance such as poems, proverbs, riddles, sermons, prayers, lectures, and editorials—these are marked in specific ways different than casual speech.

In summary, the nature of Dell Hymes’ framework is a fitting anchor from which the study of the two selected speech communities will be analyzed. It describes aspects of meetings using the exact parameters suggested in the framework.

### Methods

#### Participants

**The Speech Communities Investigated**

Table 1 presents an overview of the two communities studied. This provides the context for the study and where the analysis of Hymes’ S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Model is anchored on.

**The Speech Community in New Zealand**

The first speech community is composed of the CEO office of a regional hospital in Wellington, New Zealand. The CEO office includes the CEO, the COO, Director of Nursing and Midwifery (DONM), Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Director of Allied Health (DAH), Chief Finance Officer, and Chief Information Officer. I supported the COO, DONM, and CMO, and for a brief time, the DAH. These are top officials of the hospital. The COO oversees the day-to-day business operations of the hospital. Under him are the directors of the directorates (e.g., Medicine and Cancer, Anaesthesia, Women’s and Children’s Emergency, etc.), whereas the CEO’s role is to link the hospital with external stakeholders and represent the hospital in other affairs of the government. The CMO is the “boss” of all the doctors in the hospital, in charge of all the medical decisions and the professional development of the medical staff. The DOMN is the boss of all the hospital nurses and oversees the training and professional development of nurses and midwives.

#### Table 1

*A Summary of the Two Speech Communities Examined*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech Community</td>
<td>Medical professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Situation</td>
<td>Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech event</td>
<td>Interaction between meeting attendees, the conduct of the actual meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Acts</td>
<td>Questions/answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turn-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honorifics during meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of quantitative data (charts, numbers, figures, medical trends, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAH is the boss of all the allied support workers, such as the therapists and others. Only the DOMN, CMO, and DAH have medical qualifications; however, the other roles have extensive experience working in the medical field in corporate functions.

It is essential to describe the organizational chart of the CEO office in the first speech community, as this establishes the extent to which I was a part of this elite group of professionals. As Figure 1 shows, I served as the Executive Assistant of the CMO, COO, DAHTS, and DONM. As I shadowed them in all their meetings, I had a piece of insider information about the significant issues and decisions being made at the CEO’s office. I attended almost all the meetings of these high-level management officials, took notes of those meetings, and circulated them as required. I also prepared a lot of minutes and agenda papers for all their requirements, including OIAs or Official Information Act documents required by media, investigations of deaths, and political data required by the Parliament. On top of supporting these executives, I also managed a team of personal assistants and admin personnel, deploying some team members to be the personal assistants of the directors of my executives.

My life also revolved around assisting the Directors of their human resources functions, such as hiring or firing staff and some personal activities such as booking international travel, accommodation, family holidays, catering, and so forth.

The exposure to the hospital setting was an entirely new experience for me as I worked longer in the education sector. I was expected to catch up quickly on the medical terminology and medical culture and to adjust to a different kind of working relationship with the various personalities of the managers. I also had to learn to deal with the staff working under these managers.

**The Speech Community in Australia**

When I moved to Australia in 2013, I had to adjust to working with a new speech community, a not-for-profit organization. I had to adjust to another culture in general being in a new country.

In Australia, I now work as Program Coordinator of a volunteer and advocacy program supporting people with disabilities, carers of people with disabilities, and older people or seniors who want to share their lived experiences with the community through public speaking, serving as motivational speakers.

Similar to the first speech community, it is essential to understand the organizational structure of the current organization where I work, as this also frames the context of how this speech community is characterized. Figure 2 illustrates this.

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**Figure 1.** Organizational Chart of the CEO Office (New Zealand)
In this role, I manage the day-to-day activities as program coordinator. This is different from my previous role, which is to support people who hold important positions in the hospital. In this role, I am the “glue” that binds the speakers together, and I drive the activities and agenda of the program. I have several hats. Aside from being the volunteer manager, I am also a grants writer, a supervisor for student interns, and a promoter and advocate for the program as well. The speakers follow my lead. The student interns who help out are enrolled in certificate, diploma, or master’s level courses in disability, community services, and social work.

I am now at the center of all the program activities rather than providing support services to executives. This can be considered a shift in focus of my working life. In my role, I report to a manager or supervisor.

The discussion and analysis will now focus on the major differences or similarities of the two speech communities using the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G framework.

**Figure 2.** Organizational Chart – Volunteer and Advocacy Program (AU)

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**Instruments and Data Sets**

**Written Documents.** Agenda pages, minutes, and notes are some of the meeting-related documents that were examined.

**Meeting Protocols, Behaviors, and Routines.** Being part of the meetings, I observed how behavior patterns are actualized or “performed” at the meetings.

**Procedure**

**Qualitative Research Methods and Ethnography of Communication**

A qualitative descriptive method was used for this research. The qualitative method relies more on description than reporting of numbers or statistics.

In the previous section of this paper, it was established that the common thread in terms of the discussion of various literature that used Hymes’ SPEAKING Framework is that these studies applied qualitative research methods in the ethnography of communication. Because this study analyses my cross-cultural communication experiences in two countries, namely New Zealand and Australia, it is fitting to select a qualitative research method. Primarily because qualitative research is defined as an act of inquiry or investigation of real-life events, it is concerned with own experiences of a life event, and the aim is to interpret what has been said to explain why it is said (Litchman, 2013; Silverman, 2021; Suter, 2012; Walliman, 2016).

Because descriptions cannot be quantified, qualitative research develops concepts to understand social phenomena. This research, alongside other related studies, utilized speech in many ways due to various groups of people having their norms of linguistic behavior. Thus, in examining the language of specific groups, reliance on some clearly defined frameworks is necessary for the ethnographical study of speech. Ethnography is subsumed in qualitative research. Carbaugh and Boromisz-Habashi (2015) described ethnography as studying language and social interaction. In collecting the data, on the other hand, Howell (2017) stated that ethnography is part of linguistics anthropology because researchers are endlessly interacting with fieldwork.

Despite undergoing several processes in data collection, qualitative research has its merits. First is...
the naturalistic approach to the subject matter because we understand the phenomena. The second allows us to fully grasp human behavior or personality traits in their natural setting and will not require any manipulation or control. A qualitative research method is one way of understanding and interpreting social interactions, and lastly, it offers multiple forms of acquiring and examining knowledge regarding a particular topic.

In the most practical sense, the qualitative method was deemed suitable for this study due to several reasons:

1. I belonged to both communities studied and have first-hand experience of being “in the midst” of the events as they unfolded periodically on each working day or week.
2. Rather than being a passive observer, I actively participated in the meetings as a staff member of both contexts.
3. I was a part of the two communities for a minimum of five years; I can be considered a very qualified “insider” with extensive, intimate knowledge of both the speech communities studied.

Studying the two speech communities requires much more data collection and observation, especially if we want to fully understand how language and culture play together. For purposes of this paper, only one Type of speech situation is analyzed—in particular, meetings.

Data Analyses

Data that I describe and analyze in the study include meeting protocols or procedures or patterns of behavior during meetings, the paperwork associated with meetings (e.g., documents, agendas, etc.), and verbal interactions based on my recall. Data was not difficult to collect based on the above parameters. Because I was inherently a part of the researched work environment and that meetings are “routine,” observation of the patterns of how these meetings were conducted has become easy to remember and document.

The S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model was the primary tool used to make the descriptions and characterizations of the meetings.

The analysis also includes my reflections on those observations or an act of “making sense” of the phenomenon being studied. There were no recordings collected and analyzed for this study because there was no informed consent; instead, I came up with themes and made conclusions based on those themes.

Results and Discussion

Uncovering the Characteristics of Meetings in New Zealand (CEO Team Context, Medical Sector)

Table 2 summarizes the key features of meetings happening in a top-level team in a medical setting in New Zealand.

Table 2
The S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Model Applied in Meetings in New Zealand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework parameters</th>
<th>Description of CEO Office Team Meetings in a Hospital in New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| S – setting          | • Meetings are always held in the Board room—this is the biggest room that occupies the CEO’s office. It can accommodate up to 20 people.  
                       • There are different types of meetings: monthly, weekly, and daily encounters. The daily sessions are the most casual and shortest (running for around 15–20 minutes), while the monthly meetings are formal, running for about 2–3 hours. The monthly meetings usually include external attendees. The weekly meetings are typically held during the end of the week to plan and prepare for the following week. |
| P - participants     | • All the meetings mentioned above have the same attendees (refer to Figure 1, organizational chart of DONM, CMO, Dir. Allied Health, COO, and the CEO office)  
                       • Weekly meetings occasionally include some of their direct reports. Usually, the directors supervise. The monthly meetings may consist of members of the press/media and any other person expected to provide a statement or update based on the agenda |
Table 2 continue....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework parameters</th>
<th>Description of CEO Office Team Meetings in a Hospital in New Zealand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **E - ends**         | • *Daily meetings*: a quick catch up focusing on daily updates, what are the “top three” issues for each member to prioritize, and other relevant topics to cascade down to teams  
                      • *Weekly meetings*: for short term departmental updates, crisis and risk management meetings, usually to resolve issues in preparation for the following week’s tasks  
                      • *Monthly meetings*: intended for a discussion of whole-organization issues; agenda items include regular updates from the finance/IT/HR departments, reporting to the Ministry of Health and Parliament, and some media/press related health issues |
| **A - act**          | • *Daily Meetings*: casual rotating short verbal updates; “Top Three” round-robin style among attendees; I took notes to be emailed to all attendees; the interaction is more like a Question and Answer format  
                      • *Weekly Meetings*: Because these are longer (around 1 to 1.5 hours), there is an agenda that guides the flow of the discussion; acts include reporting and discussion; collaborative style and some problem solving are involved, action lists are created and monitored for the following week’s meeting  
                      • *Monthly Meetings*: more formal and procedural. These meetings last for about 3 hours, focused more on departmental updates and reporting, and an opportunity for external guests to ask questions. |
| **K - key**          | • *Daily meetings*: casual conversational style, like they are friends and with no reference to positions or roles in the hierarchy  
                      • *Weekly meetings*: borders between casual to business as these meetings occasionally involved their direct reports (Directors of the Units they are in charge of); there is more order followed through the agenda  
                      • *Monthly meetings*: more formal, and many presentations are reliant on data/numbers and statistics reporting, also involve evidence-based discussion, there are more defined rules in speaking as a function of regulating reporting time allocated to different departments  
                      • In all meetings, there is a note-taker or a scribe, but in the more formal meetings, the scribe is also the timekeeper (scribe and timekeeper are my roles in all of the above) |
| **I - instrument**   | • *Daily meeting*: There may be one-page agenda or no agenda at all; the meetings are primarily verbal updates rotating among attendees  
                      • Weekly meetings: There is an agenda plus minutes; each member is expected to report updates or direct reports are invited to present and report  
                      • *Monthly meetings*: There is an agenda, minutes, and voluminous attachments that include reports, data, and other matters based on who wants to table additional things to discuss (e.g., deadlines for submission of reports)  
                      • All meetings have been conducted in person but occasionally may have video conferences, e.g., international meeting attendees or from another town. |
| **N - norms**        | • There are more formal rules around the monthly meetings. These include a deadline for all reports to be submitted to be included as part of the reports tabled at the next meeting; there are also deadlines for when papers need to be circulated to the attendees; a person cannot present if the documents are not attached to the agenda, and only invited people can be present at the meeting  
                      • Daily meetings do not require formal presentation of data as these are only short and done at the beginning of the day.  
                      • The weekly meetings require input from direct reports to share those with the team.  
                      • There is an expectation that unless I was verbally told not to attend any of the daily, weekly, or monthly meetings, I would be present at all those meetings to take notes and circulate the required paperwork. |
Uncovering the Characteristics of Meetings in Australia (Not-for-Profit, Volunteer Organization)

The next set of data presented characterizes the nature of the Australian speech community meetings.

Table 3

The S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G Model Applied in Meetings in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework parameters</th>
<th>Description of Team meetings in a Volunteer and Advocacy Program in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S – setting</td>
<td>There is no board room; small meetings for up to 3 people can happen in the program coordinator’s office or a smaller meeting room; for more extensive meetings, not more than 10 people, the training room is booked (update: due to COVID-19, all meetings are now held online via video conferencing apps such as Zoom), participants are in remote/work from home (WFH) environments; some one-on-one catch-ups can even occur in a café or outside of the office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P – participants</td>
<td>I, as Program Coordinator, and volunteers, speakers, students, or occasionally my supervisor attend the meetings, depending on the type of meeting (e.g., if it is supervision, then the supervisor and I are the only two attendees; if it is a work placement type of supervision meeting, then the students and the program coordinator are in attendance; if it is a volunteer team meeting, then the program coordinator and the volunteers are in attendance and if it is a catch up with any of the speakers, then the program coordinator and the speakers are the ones in attendance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| E – ends             | • Supervision meetings are held to make decisions about the day to day running of the program itself (the program coordinator and her supervisor)  
  • Student supervision meetings are held with the students on a work placement as part of their training and in terms of planning on how to carry out or implement activities/events for the program  
  • Meetings with the speakers always involve preparation for their speaking engagements  
  • Meetings with the volunteers are to check if they are meeting role requirements |
| A – act              | • As the meetings usually revolve around ensuring program goals and targets are met, the meetings are more supervision-focused, more consultative, more planning-focused, and there are a lot of discussion and collaboration; problem-solving activities  
  • Meetings are scheduled as required, and dates/times are more flexible; they can vary or change depending on attendee availability  
  • The only regular meetings held are meetings of the program coordinator and her supervisor, which are fixed in the diaries  
  • Meeting times vary depending on the topic, but on average, a meeting runs for about an hour, regardless of who are the participants |
Table 3 continue....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework parameters</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **K – key**          | • All meetings are done casually; it is not formulaic; students, although working with the program coordinator collaboratively, know their boundaries and still show respect to the coordinator; there is no use of any formal language or honorifics in the meetings  
• There are no formal minutes and agenda prepared for each meeting, but the program coordinator takes notes, and these are emailed to all attendees as a record of what was discussed; these are usually short, bullet-point notes  
• Emails of discussion notes are the main means of circulating what was discussed  
• Program coordinator consolidates those notes, which are prepared as monthly reports to her manager  
• Activities, however, are heavily reliant on documentation (e.g., photo/video, media consent forms, etc.) |
| **I – instrument**   | • Current meetings are now done online, and face-to-face meetings are held very rarely  
• Pre-COVID-19, all meetings are face-to-face meetings  
• Students collect photos/videos of events, speaking engagements; they help prepare reports of activities for our documentation |
| **N – norms**        | • Attendance at meetings, especially for students on placement, are required  
• Meet and greet the speakers  
• During COVID, online meetings are preferred  
• Online training and online events have replaced face-to-face  
• Adherence to policies (informed consent, media policy, code of conduct, etc.) and heavy on documentation such as video/photo documentation  
• Being online, there is an expectation of ensuring video/audio of the attendee works; attendees are connected to the internet  
• Every attendee contributes to the discussion |
| **G – genre**        | These are some of the language genres present in meetings:  
  – Language of “disability”  
  – Newer terminologies (e.g., NDIS, support worker)  
  – Oppression, a duty of care, empowerment, disadvantaged  
  – Inclusion  
  – Diversity  
  – Social justice  
  – Community-based  
  – Social work  
  – Community services  
  – Advocacy  
  – ABI (Acquired Brain Injury)  
  – Vision-impaired preferred over “blind”  
  – Hearing-impaired over “deaf”  
  – A person using a wheelchair rather than “wheelchair-bound.”  
  – Different rather than “abnormal”  
  – Person-centered care  
  – Acknowledgment of country to acknowledge the “traditional” owners of the land or the first peoples of Australia, referring to the aboriginals |
Analysis

Utilizing the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model of Hymes has allowed us to describe the pertinent features of meetings in two different speech communities. Several themes arose from analyzing the two groups.

1. **Degree of Formality of the Meetings**

   Data from the two speech communities reveal a pattern where there seems to be a correlation between the length of the meeting and its corresponding formality. The more formal the meeting is, the longer it runs; and the more formal the meeting gets, the more paperwork it requires. The number of people involved in discussions may also contribute to the length of the meeting. Based on the data, the AU meeting sits in the casual, shorter, and less formal style than the more ritualistic and regimental meeting set up in New Zealand. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

   **2. Adherence to Roles and Purpose of the Meetings**

   Another theme or pattern emerged from that data: more formal meetings follow the hierarchy or recognition of roles and titles. In the New Zealand data, formal meetings acknowledge the people’s positions in attendance. They refer to each other as Dr. X, or Mr. Chief Financial Officer, or Madam CEO, but during the daily round-robin casual meetings, there is no such reference or observance to roles, seemingly interacting as friends, using their first names such as Ken, Shaun, and Geoff.

   The Australian data did not reveal any particular references to roles, titles, or positions. Students on placement, for example, referred to me, who is the program coordinator, by my name rather than putting a title of Mrs. or Ms. before the name. It also seemed that titles or degree of formality depended on the purpose of the meetings. As New Zealand’s monthly meetings focus more on presenting data or reporting as part of the ministerial requirements of running the hospital, it was expected that titles or positions would be acknowledged.

   However, meetings are usually more planning-related, more collaborative, and problem-solving in the Australian data. It did not matter what the roles were, as it was more important that actions become outcomes of the meetings.

   **3. Agendas, Minutes Versus “Notes”**

   The data also seemed to indicate that the more formal a meeting is, the more it is documented with a full agenda, accompanied by minutes of the meeting and all relevant paperwork required during the discussion. Figure 3 also illustrates this. In the Australian data, notes do not come as formal minutes but can be summaries or bulleted points of discussion points and circulated to the attendees via email.

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**Figure 3.** Length of Meeting Vis-à-Vis Degree of Formality
4. **Modes of Interaction and Communication**

The data also revealed that the New Zealand speech community relied heavily on written communication and paperwork to back up discussions and decisions during the different types of meetings. They are data-driven as well (e.g., numbers, figures, statistics, etc.).

The Australian meeting is more focused on verbal communication, which focuses on the expression of ideas, storytelling, learning from lived experiences of the speakers, advocacy, problem-solving, planning, and sharing among meeting attendees. Discussion items noted are the main sources of information rather than formal minutes.

In both Australian and New Zealand contexts, they follow their norms of interaction or “rules” on how meeting attendees are expected to behave and contribute to the discussion.

Because I worked in New Zealand before COVID-19, I experienced that all meetings of the team required a physically contained environment for the interactions to take place. For instance, the board room had to be prepared daily for the different types of meetings and ensured that it was ideal for face-to-face interaction, complete with video conferencing equipment, tea/coffee, and so forth.

Now that I work in a COVID-19 environment, the Australia meetings have become more flexible, not just because these could be held anywhere, and most recent times, they are done online as most people work from home. Interaction is no longer face-to-face but limited to computer-mediated communication. Finally, in both speech communities, sector-specific terminologies are used that only members of that community can understand.

In summary, these patterns or themes imply that the structure of meetings in that New Zealand hospital CEO team was already established and followed by staff for many years; it worked for them, so it was kept that way. In Australia, the composition of teams varies (volunteers and students come and go, and even the speakers come and go), so the same people do not always attend meetings; thus, it is challenging to establish rigid rules for how meetings are to be done. What is currently followed seemed to offer more flexibility to the program coordinator.

Overall, it could be seen that the type of industry I worked in dictated the types of speech events and situations occurring in that particular environment. The health sector/medical field demands a lot of high-level interaction and decision-making than the not-for-profit sector. Although, in both contexts, I am an integral part of the team or the speech community analyzed, I positioned myself in two different angles: first, I was positioned in a support role to the executive level positions during the meetings, I was then a spectator; second, I am now in the center of all the sessions where decisions, discussions, and actions are developed by the teams that help me out. I am now integral to the meetings.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The study demonstrated that the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model has helped characterize how speech communities work and how members of that group function based on several factors identified by the model. It was able to compare and contrast two work environments that I belonged. It would be worthwhile to articulate some possible implications of the study.

**Implications for Workplace Communication**

This study could potentially allow future not-for-profit workers and staff who will work in administration roles within a hospital or health setting to understand the nature of meetings and how specific meetings are conducted in the said speech communities. Meetings are essential interactional opportunities in any business situation or location. This is in keeping with Kotani (2017), who aimed to capture a phenomenon where people, particularly Japanese speakers who have been accustomed to their codes, have encountered both conduct and cultural boundaries in intercultural communication with English speakers in the United States. Although Kotani (2017) utilized in-depth interviews as her primary method and analyzed the participants’ discussion on their past problematic situations, her study made her understand various assumptions about appropriate conduct and possibly changed their perceptions.

**Implications for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Applied Linguistics**

The current study might also offer some implications for language teaching and learning.

English has been overwhelmingly used as a de facto working language that made a strong demand for workplace-specific courses and the development
of a field of applied sociolinguistic research delving into how people use language in their working lives. Essentially, “talk,” whether in written or spoken form, is fundamental in the workplace; Sarangi and Roberts (1999) claimed that “workplaces are held together by communicative practices” (p. 1). Thus, English for specific purposes (ESP) plays a vital role in understanding the role and practice of English in the workplace. It investigates how people communicate effectively in the workplace, which can be done through thorough needs analysis in similar workplace contexts. Some researchers (Bastukrman, 2006; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) claimed that considering ESP as a nexus between academic research and practical applications would result in a growing body of sociolinguistic work that offers source materials. The data, for example, that would have been collected in meetings would provide valuable insights into how language is used in the meeting context.

There were several recommendations concerning honing communication skills in English in the workplace. One of the apparent recommendations based on several studies is the collaboration between educational institutions and companies regarding the students’ expectations when communicating in the workplace. Employers and educators must dialogue by sharing the common objective of defining the skills expected of prospective employees. In turn, course designers, teachers, and students need to agree regarding the relevance of the course objectives and how these are best reached. Al-Musalli (2019) mentioned that in-person and telephone conversations are the most common means of workplace communication, taking 48% and 30% of the responses, respectively. Because postsecondary educational institutions play a significant role in the students’ communication skills, they could offer better and more practical training through continuous cooperation. Thus, employers should not be left with the responsibility of training and handling it independently. Still, students should have been able to work on proper email etiquette and face-to-face communication even before they got employed.

Further, learners, especially in their postsecondary and tertiary education, should be exposed to authentic interaction and are encouraged to notice language use (Marra, 2013) than relying on intuitions and assumptions about communicative behavior, which are unreliable (Angouri, 2010; Kasper, 1997). According to Marra (2013), having the learners develop their analytical skills rather than teaching formulae or strategies addresses some practical concerns such as meeting the learners’ needs from diverse backgrounds and careers and with different workplace goals.

Thus far, we can assume that there is a place for studying workplace communication to enable students to understand the rigor of the language of their future employment and gain an early insight or understanding of what they can expect when they become prospective members of the workforce.

**Implications for Applied Linguistics**

We also must understand the critical role of applied linguistics in communication ethnography. There is a need to explore and understand the use of language constructively, and it is done through applied linguistics. Siddiqui et al. (2019) stated that this field focuses on language-relevant studies used to solve significant language problems in the real world. This is concurred by Grabe (2010), who said that applied linguistics tries to resolve various lingual issues which people usually encounter in real-life situations. The researchers mentioned above identified the importance of this field in some aspects. In the field of research, the teachers act as researchers through which they carry out task-based teaching and action research. Further, learning, teaching, and education reinforce concepts with proper attention, language awareness, and student-teacher interaction.

Aside from this, applied linguistics is significant in critical studies such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical assessment practices, critical pedagogy, and language assessment. Another aspect that highlights the importance of the said field is language use. In some previous studies, participants used language in academic and professional settings. Also, in many other forms, applied language can determine the ways language can work as a mechanism to create problems if one is unaware of using appropriate conversation to regulations and expectations. Lastly, Siddiqui et al. (2019) pointed out the significance of applied linguistics in bilingualism and multilingualism. Bilingualism and multilingualism may be present in the community, school, or professional setting. One notion about multilingualism is that it focuses on problems that bilingual education faces, migrations done to people in the new language setup, fairness, and formation of equity in social services coupled with language policies concerning multiple languages.
Opportunities for Further Research

As regards research, Kotani (2017) suggested that ethnographic investigations into how members maintain a balance between two code systems when they need to be competent members both at work and home could be done. Thus, this potential research can contribute to looking at when some people are accustomed to their codes that do not have semblance with what they will be using, for example, in the workplace. Moreover, in particular, highly niched workplaces like the medical field or the not-for-profit sector, instead of the more commonly accessible areas such as hospitality or general services.

The study opens further opportunities for researchers to analyze other speech communities and focus on what makes their groups unique (e.g., how the members use language and what speech acts and events they are pre-occupied with). For example, studies on other professional groups such as the culture of nurses overseas, disability support workers, people working in the legal sector such as lawyers or barristers; people working in politics, such as parliamentarians, staff members of political personalities, people who are working online as traders, online sellers or business people, and so forth. Studies can also be made by looking into emerging communities online, particularly vloggers, YouTubers, TikTokers, online dating sites, or even specific discourse on online platforms such as Twitter or Reddit. Studies such as the above can leverage theories of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics and can even intersect with gender, inequality, sociocultural affects, and so on. Such studies can continue to enrich the field of applied linguistics and ethnography of communication.

Admittedly and finally, the study has some limitations as well. First, the study cannot generalize the meeting culture, as only one speech group each in New Zealand and Australia were analyzed. These limitations also provide opportunities for further growth. One such area for future work would involve increasing the sample size, meaning that parallel speech communities can be studied to verify whether most hospitals’ meeting cultures are the same within one country or whether different not-for-profit organizations are more casual in their meetings like the one analyzed in the current study. Increasing the sample size will also assist in discovering other aspects of culture that have not surfaced in the present study (i.e., those that may not fall within the Hymes’ parameters). In addition, a much “thicker” ethnographic description may be achieved.

Another angle for future research would be to compare speech communities within cross-cultural contexts, considering a multicultural approach to see parallel results within cultures. Also, it would be of benefit to study the genre of the speech communities, perhaps using a corpus linguistics approach, as this benefits those teaching communication in general.

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Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for this article.

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