Book Review of Geisler, C., & Swarts, J. (2019). *Coding Streams of Language: Techniques for the Systematic Coding of Text, Talk, and Other Verbal Data*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado.

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In *Coding Streams of Language: Techniques for the Systematic Coding of Text, Talk, and Other Verbal Data*, authors Cheryl Geisler and Jason Swarts (2019) detail the processes needed to collect and understand different types of qualitative data. Readers learn about *hand coding*, or "the use of human coders to interpret and categorize streams of language," in each chapter, alongside detailed instructions and additional screencasts that detail how to perform each step of the coding process (xv). The authors' "commitment to being procedural" opens up analytical skills for readers to "see, use, question, and refine" (p. 10). The text functions concurrently as a complete guide to conceptualizing, carrying out, and writing about coding research and also as a handbook for scholars looking for guidance for coding projects *in situ*. Geisler and Swarts acknowledge these concurrent uses throughout Chapter 1. They promise a distinctive workflow, which encompasses project design, choice of reliable coding scheme, uncovering patterns, and the evaluation and communication of results (p. 13). Included within this workflow are accessible tools and procedures for coding data using Microsoft Excel, MAXQDA, AntConc, and Microsoft Word. A nod to researchers looking for guidance regarding coding projects *in situ* occurs at the closing of Chapter 1, when the authors locate answers to technical questions, including decisions about what to code, interrater reliability, and how to make different tables,

graphs, and charts (pp. 20-21). The book is worthy of its authors' aspiration: to articulate a method for verbal data analysis, from development to analysis to publication. Along the way, the "disciplined, systematic, and reliable" approach advocated by Geisler and Swarts contributes to writing analytics by furthering a rhetorical approach to coding research (p. 22). This rhetorical approach takes into account the "complexity of language use" (p. 11). Understanding this complexity is useful for investigating communication processes in digital environments, a key emphasis for readers of *The Journal of Writing Analytics*.

1.0 Situating the Book

Building on Cheryl Geisler's 2004 book *Analyzing Streams of Language: Twelve Steps to the Systematic Coding of Text, Talk, and Other Verbal Data*, authors Geisler and Swarts (2019) focus on memoing as a means of reflection and documentation, a process necessary for defending the methodological choices the reader chooses to employ (p. 21). The book also makes transparent the changes between the 2004 and 2019 volumes, including updated procedures, screencasts, the inclusion of AntConc, and discussions of major coding issues per chapter. Moving beyond these updates, however, Geisler and Swarts also make clear that they "do not assume that you have knowledge of coding and analysis or that you are beginning from anywhere other than square one" (p. 22). Square one, then, begins on the next page, where the audience begins to design a research project. Geisler and Swarts explain that verbal data studies constitute a mixed-methods approach to research and that coding "allows us to ask more precise questions and make judicious selections of data that are sensible within that analytic frame" (pp. 28-29). The chapter aims at researchers ensconced with two different parts of the research process. First, for researchers who have already gathered data and now need a strategy for analysis. Second, for researchers who require a strategy for data collection. From there, the authors illustrate multiple ways to narrow research focus, construct a descriptive framework, employ contrasts for comparison, acquire samples of data, and set up the data for analysis.

A recommendation here for readers: Pause after reading this chapter (Chapter 2). If readers have already gathered data, they may wish to pull up the dataset before moving on to the chapters on segmentation, coding, reliability, patterns of distribution, and significance. While Geisler and Swarts provide examples of datasets and coding choices throughout the paragraphs, and extraordinarily helpful references with parenthetical notes at the closing of some chapters, readers might find it useful to have their dataset open on one screen while the procedure is open in another. Having an available dataset helps ground the instructions and situate the methodological choices that Geisler and Swarts explicate for the audience.

2.0 Establishing Background

Geisler and Swarts note that the audience for *Coding Streams of Language* consists of scholars who wish to incorporate a rhetorical approach to coding. Identifying as rhetorical scholars themselves, the authors write that "we believe that language does work as well as conveys

meaning" (p. 69). This belief informs the methodological choices that readers make when coding research. Interestingly, though, the authors also write that "We come to the coding of verbal data from the allied fields of writing studies and technical communication" (p. 6). These allied fields make appearances in the excellently annotated selected studies and further reading suggestions cited by the authors at the conclusion of each chapter. Of all citations provided in the book, two titles include the term *rhetoric*. Of writing studies sources cited by the authors, more articles seem to hail from *Written Communication,* the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, and *Technical Communication Quarterly.* These end-of-chapter references may tell a story about the place of coding within rhetorical scholarship and among rhetorical scholars.

Coding Streams of Language reaches beyond writing studies to engage researchers in multiple fields. Relatedly, in *The Journal of Writing Analytics,* in his "Letter from the Publisher: On Launching and on Learning Analytics," Palmquist (2017) recognizes the prevalence of rhetoric and composition/writing studies within analytics research (p. i). Just as *The Journal of Writing Analytics* achieves multidisciplinarity, Geisler and Swarts also envision an audience from multiple fields. For example, in their advice on writing research analyses, the authors note that "the conventions of your discipline, your readers' expectations, and your own intentions will guide your decision on how fully to describe your initial design and questions" (p. 387). Though their background may be in writing studies and technical communication, Geisler and Swarts draw wide circles around this target discipline, however, writing that "Any field that deals with humans as social beings, that collects naturally occurring language data or elicits such data from participants, will find a use for coding," before providing examples ranging from applied linguistics to education to human-computer interaction to public health (pp. 6-7). This commitment to multiple disciplines is apparent in the *Google Scholar* citations for the book; as of this writing in December 2021, while most of the book's citations are related to writing studies, scholars in sustainability and medicine have also used Geisler and Swarts (2019) to guide their coding projects.

3.0 Value Contribution

Geisler and Swarts provide readers with the information needed to collect data, code it in methodologically sound ways, and write an analysis geared toward peer-reviewed publication. To do this, the book discusses higher-order concepts of research design, shows (via procedural directions and screencasts) how to enact the analysis, and provides source material for readers looking for studies related to a particular conversation. As mentioned before in this review, the annotations attached to the cited sources are particularly helpful. For example, at the closing of Chapter 2, the authors select studies that echo the sampling types covered in the chapter. Similarly, at the closing of Chapter 3, the authors select articles that show segmentation by paragraph, sentence, idea unit, genre element, t-unit, and sentence. These annotations help readers realize the possibilities of coding research.

Additionally, with its frequent procedurals, including screenshots, exercises to test understanding, and memoing reminders, the book's value also lies in teaching scholars how to code. The screencasts themselves are brief, provide accurate closed-captioning, and are easy to both comprehend and recreate. This pedagogical scaffolding further supports the authors' initial envisioning of two audiences: one audience who has yet to construct a research project and another audience who has yet to construct a means of analyzing the data collected. *Coding Streams of Language* provides the framework for both audiences to construct research projects and methods of data analysis that suit their coding needs.

4.0 Directions for Further Research

The heading for this section, "Directions for Further Research," is apt, as the final chapter of *Coding Streams of Language* guides readers along that path. In illuminating the many procedural details of coding research, Geisler and Swarts "make [your] phenomena easier to handle and easier to understand" (p. 361). However, as the authors acknowledge, "it is our engagement with the phenomenon in the world that initially impels our research and it is to that phenomenon, in all of its richness and detail, that we much return" (p. 361). In *Coding Streams of Language*, this return involves sorting data; ordering reflections, aided by memoing; and detailing the results before writing the draft itself (p. 362). Even when simplified to serve the publication conventions of multiple fields, the section on writing the draft (pp. 385-390) explains the parts of a written analysis: The Literature, The Phenomenon, The Design, The Data, The Analysis, The Patterns, The Discussion, and The Significance.

The authors also provide directions for further research at the conclusions of chapters, where they cite studies and why those studies are useful—a goldmine for readers looking to justify methodological choices. As well, research examples and anecdotes from the authors prove particularly useful as readers are gazing down the path of their next research project. Geisler and Swarts provide examples ranging from online social activism (p. 28) to legal mediation practices (p. 31) to the design of engineering capstone courses (p. 34). These examples encompass the complexity of coding research and support the authors' argument about the necessity of a rhetorical approach to coding. The authors might consider including more of these research anecdotes in subsequent editions of the book, as examples of this complexity in action are always welcome and provide readers with more ideas for further research.

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