

Sounds as Indexical Signs:

From the Perspective of Silverstein's Theory of Communication

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This paper aims to build up a theory of communication around sounds and their contexts. To this end, the author will indicate the significance of indexical (non-semantic; or non-referential) aspects of sounds which mediate human communications. The first section focuses on the way in which human voices mediate communications which have no semantic basis. In order to explain why these communications can be understood by each other, some linguistic anthropologists focus on the non-semantic aspects of the voices. The theoretical basis, Silverstein's perspective, will be introduced in the second section. He shows the importance not only of referential signs with semantic meanings but also of non-referential signs, or indexical signs, which include such as intonation and voice quality with (meta)pragmatic meanings. The third section critically discusses Brigg's analysis on healing ritual, which based heavily on Silverstein's theoretical perspective. The last section indicates some implications of the discussion on current ethnomusicological studies. In this discipline, especially since 2000s, researchers tend to emphasize the cultural factors surrounding sounds, rather than to depend upon their unique musicological studies about sounds themselves. In contrast, the author claims that it is significant to refer to Silverstein's theory of communication in order to explore the way how sounds and contexts which they indicate interact each other.