Conversational analysis of chatroom talk

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Glossary

(*TN) following a term is a new glossary word devised by the researcher (Terrell Neuage) for this thesis.

Applet Window A program designed to be executed from within another application in which a small window opens within the larger window.

Casual Chatroom Chat (CCC) *(*TN)* A conversation in a chatroom which is not serious or intended to discover details on a subject. Most casual chatroom chat, similar to non-formal pub casual chat, consists

of conversation typical of, "hi" "hows everyone".

Chat Events (CE) *(*TN)* These are all the individual turn-taking texts of a particular participator in a chatroom, including entering, leaving and lurking.

Chatroom graffiti *(*TN)* The messages conveyed through the work of graffiti artists are often highly political and deliberately aggressive. Some people will go from chatroom to chatroom leaving messages but not particpating in actual chatroom conversation: I refer to this as chatroom graffiti.

Chat Utterance Sentence Structures (CUSS) *(*TN)* These are the sentences of a chat turn-taking. Unlike sentences which use nouns and verbs to establish a complete thought, chat sentences are typically made up of two to five words or emoticons. I have averaged the amount of words in twelve chatrooms, consisting of 1357 lines (turn-takings) and found the average word count, including abbreviations and emoticons to be 3.7.

Chatter's-Event-Response-Gaps (CERG) *(*TN)* This is the pause between chatters who are "speaking" with one another. There are often other voices which fill these gaps.

Conversational "lag" *(*TN)* Conversational lag is a pause where the next speaker has been selected but it may be filled with responses from others in the chatroom responding to other turn-takings. The "lag" may be caused by many other factors, as I have alluded to above.

Cut utterances *(*TN)* Due to hitting the entrance key an utterance is cut between turn-takings in a chatroom. In some cases several turns of other chatters could occupy this space.

Event Pause (EP) *(*TN)* This refers to the break between utterances of a user in a chatroom. The most usual incidence of this is when the server places an advertisement in the chatroom and it appears between utterances. It also occurs when no one writes for a specific period of time.

Lag is the distance between speech events of a speaker in a chat situation, a pause between utterances.

Metaphysical-chat-linguistics (MCL) *(*TN)* is anticipating what will be said before the completion of the utterance, either due to the writer-speaker hitting the "enter" key on the keyboard or the chat server not allowing more than a couple of lines at a time to be shown on the screen, thus breaking the conversation before it is completed.

Multilogue are the many conversations happening at one time within a chatroom as well as the overall conversation of all who are present.

Multiple Selves Chat (MSC) *(*TN)* Is a feature of chatrooms. The author is able to have several

different representatives of his or her self in conversation at one time. As only one person can log on a chatroom at a time the person wanting to have multiple representation in a chatroom would need to have several windows open of the one chatroom but be logged on as a different username in each window.

Online Discourse Analysis Method (ODAM) *(*TN)* The method I am developing to study the language of online communication using abbreviations, misspelled words and emoticons.

Online native speaker (ONS) *(*TN)*. Speech behaviours are established first off-line, and are then modified for online use – most notably by the current technology which at least demands that texted formats intervene in the "chat" processing.

Person2Person-off-line (P2P-off) (*TN)*

Person2Person-online (P2P-on) (*TN)*

Readerly and Writerly Texts These are translated from Barthes' neologisms *lisible* and *scriptable*, the terms readerly and writerly text mark the distinction between traditional literary works such as the classical novel, and those twentieth century works, like the new novel, which violate the conventions of realism and thus force the reader to produce a meaning or meanings which are inevitably other than final or "authorized." (Keep, McLaughlin, Parmar, 2000). http://www.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hfl0250.html

Speech Act Disruptions (SAD) (*TN)* Sponsorship ads appearing in chatrooms are a performative speech act disruption.

Speech Act Community Online (SACO) (*TN)* is where people come together to exchange information. What is exchanged is dependent on the chatroom topics. The ability to share meaning and continuous conversations within the SACO is what makes it a community.

Speech situations (chatroom situations) are composed of "speech events" (chatroom events) (Hymes, 1974) and these activities have rules governing the use of speech getting, for example, getting to-know-you conversations (Gudykunst and Kim 1997 p. 328).

Tangent Topic Thread (TTN) (*TN)* This occurs when the original chat topic is taken over by others in different strands of unrelated chat.

Text-Based-Chatrooms (TBC). (*TN)* Text-Based-Chatrooms are a blip in the history of human writing and only represent a short time period of computer-mediated communication (CMC). As more and more chatrooms

add multimedia attributes, writing may become a minor or even a non-existent form of online communication. With voice-boards and voice-forums such as available from Wimba (http://www.wimba.com/) and chatrooms being 3D with virtual worlds which use voice and keyboard commands to move around the screen and with the growing use of avatars, TBCs may fade into a past genre of electronic writing peculiar to the period from approximately 1993-2003.

Thread is a line of conversation.

Thread-framing   Thread-framing is a phenomenon in chatrooms, where a topic beginning and ending are marked. In a chatroom these framed pieces of conversation are not necessarily sequential. They twist around, stop and start, and several may occur at one time in a seemingly chaotic fashion. Framing gives a starting and finishing point to a thread.

Virtual-Mindfield (*TN)* Creations of one's world-view online.

Abstract

This study of online communication situated in chatrooms reveals the importance of investigating this medium, at this time. The chatrooms of the late 1990s were at the beginning of a shift in texted electronic communication to a system where meaning exchange is often fused between the text-messages of the sender and the receiver – or, given the text basis of the electronic exchange, the writer and the reader. The resultant complexity of this new electronic means of communication has the potential to change, or at the least to interrupt, the otherwise casual "flow of conversation" used in Internet chat, to a point that a new language and a new set of behaviours are emerging. In order for there to be a means of interpretation of these part conversational, part text exchanges between participants, close and detailed observations are required. But in order to extend analysis beyond mere observation, the full repertoire of analytical theories and methodologies for examining "talk", and text construction and exchange, must be pulled into the ambit of the investigation of online chat. Internet Relay Chat in all its variability has one standard feature: it is a hybrid or "fusion" form of communication. It requires hybridity and fusion in its analysis.

In this study I start in purely empirical mode, "capturing" seven primary chatroom dialogues. I chose several of these sites randomly, based on the ease of their access. As the study progressed, I selected several other chatrooms because of my slowly focusing interest in the varying "talk relations" I was encountering, and my

suspicion that chat users were themselves making chatroom selections anticipating the online social relations offered in various sites, according to the subject matter of the chatroom as signalled in its name. While this sometimes was or sometimes was not a safe prediction, it extended the range of sites, techniques and behaviours I was able to collect and analyse, and required only occasional supplementation with sampling from sites outside the core selection. For the most part, this study concentrates on seven case studies, each based on a saved piece of representative dialogue from one very distinctive chatroom. Together, these case studies demonstrate features peculiar to online chat which make it very different from the face-to-face chat of everyday conversation – but also from any forms of text-based communication. In the broadest sense chatroom "texted talk" combines face-to-face chat with text-based communication.

There are however a number of central and distinctive features that disrupt what might otherwise be considered a simple, conversational, communication model. There is far more in Internet Relay Chat than can be explained in a "sender-message-receiver" relation. Most obviously such features include for instance the use of avatars to replace or to represent the physically absent "speaker"; text-graphic "emoticons" as interfaces to replace words or aural elements representing emotions; the fleeting motion of scrolling text; silence or "lurking" by participants as itself a form of message; the complex "braiding" and overlap of various conversational "threads," and the need to compensate and interpret discontinuity of posted messages; as well as new forms of word structure, such as standardised abbreviations and idiosyncratic mis-spellings. Each of these – and the many more complexities each of them conceals – signals major shifts in the communicative activities of online "chat" communities.

To test ways in which these new communicative forms might be examined and understood, in this study, I capture and sample a moment in time of online exchange behaviours, and look at them through the lens of a wide range of linguistic and discourse theories. The theories tested in each of the seven case studies move from Reading Response Theory interpretation to technologisation of online talk using Computer Mediated Communication, and then to examining how talk is managed and represented online using Semiotic Analysis. Speech Act Theory is used to examine the practical and goal-related uses of online language, and so extends the study into how chat participants online direct their communicative activities towards social actions – and whether these vary in the online world from those used off-line. Discourse Analysis examines the message structures organizing an online community into consensual, resistant or negotiative communicative moments. Conversational Analysis, used to examine the structuring rules of natural or real-world conversation, has uncovered regulatory behaviours in talk, such as ways to perform sequential organization of talk, allocate turn-taking and negotiate repair in the event of conversational break-down, and here it is used to examine the distinctive breaks and repairs of online chat.

Finally, <u>grammar</u> in chatroom "talk" is tested to isolate how online talk is regulated, and check whether new rules are evolving.

These theories of language and their associated research methodologies demonstrate how, despite the differences in "chat" conducted online from that carried out face-to-face, online chat and "natural conversation" share some features. Analytical theories developed for inquiry into both conventional speech and print-based text reception, can be used for examining online chat, and are able to produce findings which help explain these new communicative acts.

Chat online is "global" only to the extent of accessing many varying "local" structuring references. A "global" or universal "chat speak" is not evident in online talk selections – for all the emergence of expressive repertoires in netiquette, emoticons or IRC/SMS abbreviation. In this study, I suggest that what is evolving here is not – or not yet – separated from speech in the physical world, to the extent of disconnection from dominant discursive framings: that online texted-talk "chunks" its interactions in familiar ways. I am also suggesting however that at the level of "chat" or interpersonal interactivity, new behaviours abound.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

All transcription from the Internet was undertaken by the author/candidate.

All chat logs are on the accompanying CD. They are listed under the name of the case studies they are used in, for example, the log for case study 1 is called 1a on the CD.

Terrell Neuage   Tuesday, 3 August 2004

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Nature of Conversation in Text-based Chatrooms.

My purpose is to describe in detail the conversational interaction between participants in various forms of online text-based communication, by isolating and analysing its primary components.

[1]

Conversational process, according to analysts in many fields of communications   is rich in a variety of small behavioural elements, which are readily recognised and recorded. These elements combine and recombine in certain well-ordered rhythms of action and expression. In person-to-person off-line confrontation there results a more or less integrated web of communication which is the foundation of all social relations (Guy & Allen, 1974, p. 48-51). Online chatrooms as an instance of electronic text-based communication also use many of these small behavioural elements, evolving at the same time system-specific techniques such as emoticons, abbreviations and even pre-recorded sounds provided by the chatroom (whistles, horns, sound bites or laughter). The full web of online exchange and exchange relational modulation devices however remains unmapped, and unless every word written online is captured it never will be mapped and analysed fully. In this study of seven case studies I capture and sample a moment in time of these online exchange behaviours, and look at them through the lens of several linguistic discourse theories.

[2]

1.1 Evolution of language from early utterances to chatroom utterances

The study of language is one of the oldest branches of systematic inquiry, tracing back to classical India and

[3]

Greece, with a rich and fruitful history of achievement (Chomsky, 2001)   . The basic building blocks of communication have changed little, but the methods through which we are able to use our linguistic abilities to convey ideas have changed drastically. From the era of pictograph accounts written on clay tablets in Sumeria

[4]   [5]

    5500 years ago, to the first evidence of writing during the Protoliterate period   (Sumerian civilization, to about 28 B.C.) it can be seen that forms of communication advanced and changed radically. For example, by 2800

[6]

B.C. the use of syllabic writing   had reduced the number of signs from nearly two thousand to six hundred

[7]

. Currently the English language uses 26 letters. Curiously, in the electronic era, with the use of emoticons in online communication, there are once again hundreds of signs with which to communicate.
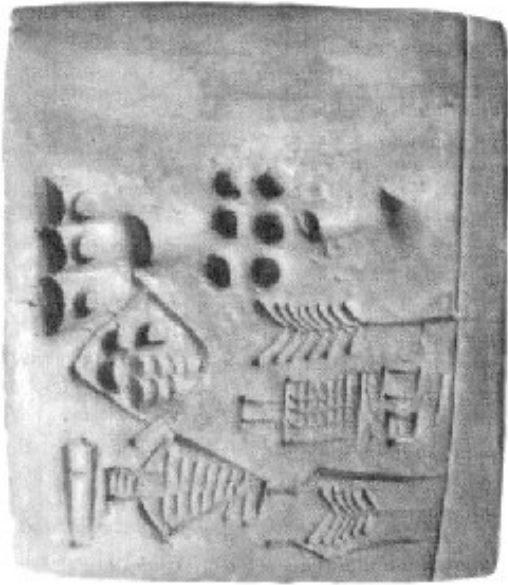
Sumerian Logographs -- circa 4000 BC

http://www.liveink.com/whatis/history.htm Copyrighted Walker Reading Technologies, Inc. 2001

Early writing from Abydos, 300 miles south of Cairo, has been dated to between 3400 and 3200 B.C. and was used to label containers.
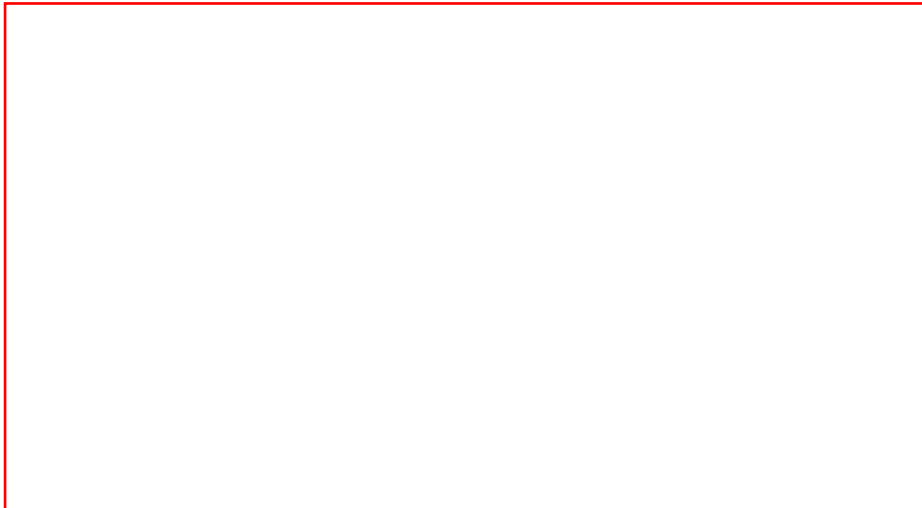
© 1999 by the Archaeological Institute of America
http://www.archaeology.org/9903/newsbriefs/egypt.html Günter Dreyer.

We cannot know what the world was like before human language existed. For tens of thousands of years,

language has developed to form modern systems of grammar and syntax, yet language origin theories by necessity remain based largely on speculation. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were several proposals with labels which tended to signal the desperation of their authors: "ding-dong", "bow-wow" and "yo-he-ho" theories (Barber, 1972), each attempting to explain in general social terms the origin of language. While such conjecture must always remain unresolved, the rapid changes in communicative technologies in the late twentieth century, together with their markedly social or participatory bias, allows us to glimpse once again the intriguing degree to which ordinary people are willing to push the limits of communicative systems. With chatrooms, language itself may be going through new and rapid development – or, on the other hand, enthusiasts may be taking advantage of a brief experimental moment, acquiring expertise in communicative techniques which prove to be short-lived. This period of intense activity is however one among many steps in the long process of human communication. Certainly, chatroom communication (and its more recent take-up in mobile telephony's SMSing) very obviously separates from traditional language through regulated processes of word corruption and its compensatory use of abbreviations and emoticons. (I explore emoticons in Case Study Three and abbreviations and other language parts in Case Study Seven). But how did these new forms emerge? What produced them? What does it mean that such innovation can arise in such a short time span? And are these limited, or generalisable, features of modern language use? These questions can only be answered definitively in the future, but they can be discussed and elements of the new practices and behaviours described now, as they are in this thesis.

It is thought that the first humans may have exchanged information through both aural articulation and gesture: crude grunts and hand signals. Gradually a complex system of spoken words and visual symbols was invented to represent what we would recognise as language. Earliest forms of telecommunication consisted of smoke signals, ringing a bell or physically transporting a memorised or texted message between two places. However, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, communication codes for meaning were exchanged at a greater distance across time and became accessible to more users. A standard postal system allowed people to send messages throughout the world in a matter of days. The development of the telegraph cable, including the development of radio, made real-time vocal communication over long distances a reality. The Internet is the most recent such advance in communication. It allows us, in a split second, to disseminate a seemingly limitless amount of information across the globe.

All communication however – from the earliest conjectured formations to the multi-media flows of today - involves interaction, and thus forms a basis for social relationships: webs of cooperation and

competition, expressiveness and message-conveying, play and work – social functions which treat even the human body as a tool for activity. Language itself, evolving as a secondary use of physiological apparatus with otherwise directed purposes – the tongue, teeth, lips, breath, nose, larynx – constructs a self willing to sacrifice time, effort and attention to others, by re-forming that self into a communicating being.

All consequent communicative developments have at one level simply elaborated on this drive to "re-tool", both within and beyond the body, as communities made more and more demands on socially regulated action. "Throughout the history of human communication, advances in technology have powered paradigmatic shifts…" (Frick, 1991). Technology changes how we communicate; big shifts in culture cannot occur until the communicative tools are available. The printing press is an example of this. Before its invention, scribal monks, sanctioned by the Church, had overseen the maintenance and hand copying of sacred texts for centuries (Spender, 1980, 1995). The press resulted in widespread literacy, with books accessible and more affordable for all. The spread of literacy in turn changed communication, which changed the educational system and – to some degree at least - the class and authority structure. Literacy became a demand tool: a passport to the regulatory systems of the industrial-bureaucratic state emerging in the modern era.

There are many different ways of analysing the history of the current dominant communication system. Whether one studies the historical, scientific, social, political economic or the psychological impact of these changes, depends on the analysis of the system. For example Lisa Jardine in *Worldly Goods*, (1996) studied the financial and economic forces of change. Elizabeth Eisenstein (1993) analysed the social and historical scientific impact, and Marshall McLuhan (1962) concentrated on the psychological impact of these changes. Jardine argues that the development from script to print was driven by economic, emerging capitalist market forces. For example, letter exchanging occurred between merchants who had an increasing need for reliable information and this related to economic exchange. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy,* McLuhan focused on the change from manuscript, which he saw as part of an oral society, to print, which transformed it into a visual culture. One of the main issues that arises with the shift from manuscript culture, to print, then to online culture, is accessibility. The more accessible communication is to a society, the more opportunities are present to exchange meaning, or as is often the case in chatrooms, to attempt to exchange meaning.

As new communication technologies advance, the individual using the technology has to come to terms with their identity when they are represented electronically instead of in person. Technology such as the use of computers and mobile phones can mask the identity of the user at the same time it reveals the person. With technological communication the individual's identity is not clear. Firstly, there is the opportunity to create

an identity that is different from the real life person. Secondly this identity can be tracked. There is a larger footprint [8] to identify an individual than there was with pre-online culture. The online user is no longer an individual but a multifaceted product – with a possibility of a never-ending array of identities. When there was only print, the communication process, despite offering contact with a multiple audience, was still considered an individual act. The communicator presented text and it was interpreted by the witness of the text, a form of deferred and displaced conversation. With online communication the text has moved further away from the identity of its originator, yet is still directly associated with a user – recognition of the "gap" opened between author and text signalled however by acknowledgement of the author as a self-created identity, to which the text remains linked despite its electronic capacities to wander and to change. The difficulty is that the communicator is now seen as not in fact present, but re-presented. Sociology Professor Sherry Turkle says in *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* that "The primary difference between oral communication and electronic communication is how we re-address the Self" (Turkle, p.56, 1995) and this feature of online presence is addressed throughout the case studies in this thesis.

Despite this problem of "absence", familiar from centuries of texted communicative practices, online communication is simultaneously "restoring the mode and even the tempo of the interaction of human minds to those of the oral tradition" (Harnad, 2001). With the rapidity of computers computer "talk" is most often seen as similar to oral communication, creating an oral-written text.

> …when reading on screen, the contemporary reader returns somewhat to the posture of the reader of Antiquity. The difference is that he reads a scroll which generally runs vertically and which is endowed with the characteristics inherent to the form of the book since the first centuries of the Christian era: pagination, index, tables, etc. The combination of these two systems which governed previous writing media (the volumen, then the codex) results in an entirely original relation to texts…. (Harnad, 2001).

A major feature of and influence on modern communications is thus those telecommunications systems that have been critical for the new revolution in communication. In the post-Gutenberg era this can be regarded as the fourth revolution in knowledge production and exchange, the first revolution in the history of human communication being talk, emerging hundreds of thousands of years ago when language first emerged in hominid evolution. Spoken language is considered a physiological and biologically significant form of human communication that began about 100,000 years ago (Noble and Davidson, 1996).

The second cognitive and communicative revolution centred on the advent of writing, tens of thousands of years ago. Spoken language had already allowed the oral codification of thought; written language now made it possible

to preserve the codes independent of any speaker/hearer. Reading is an invention that is only 6000 years old. Aristotle observed the fundamental difference and relationship between spoken language and written language, saying that "Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience, and written words are the symbols of spoken words." (Aristotle, 1950)

The third revolution took place in the immediate past millennium with the invention of moveable type and the printing press. Habermas considers the press as "the public sphere's pre-eminent institution" (Habermas, 1992b, p.181). With the printing press the laborious hand copying of texts became obsolete and both the tempo and the scope of the written word increased enormously. Texts could now be distributed so much more quickly and widely that again the style of communication underwent qualitative changes. Harnad, while perhaps dangerously close to a technological determinist mode of analysis, believes that while:

> …the transition from the oral tradition to the written word made communication more reflective and solitary than direct speech; print restored an interactive element, especially among scholars: and if the scholarly "periodical" was not born with the advent of printing, it certainly came into its own. Scholarship could now be the collective, cumulative and interactive enterprise it had always been destined to be. Evolution had given us the cognitive wherewithal and technology had given us the vehicle. (Harnad, 1991)

These three forms of communication had a qualitative effect on how we think. Our average speaking rate has a biological parameter; it possesses a natural tempo dependant on the individual speaker, but with hand writing the process of communication is slowed down. In opening itself to communication across space and across time, it also opens the possibility of receptive interpretation: a more than usually active role for the "reader". Hence, the adaptations which evolve in texted communicative practice become strategic and stylistic rather than neurological. The "performance" of text assesses its end-user: the reader, who is known to be dispersed in time and place, and so is less easily controlled than is the "present" and remediable listener to spoken words. With electronic communication however the pace of oral speech combines with the necessity for strategic control. While "linked" in an electronically-mediated relation of reciprocity (whether synchronous or asynchronous) the online communicator is still in an "absent" relation with co-communicators. While the brain can rapidly scan moving conversation as it scrolls in a chatroom, reading and understanding many conversations in progress at the same time, and the chatroom participant can engage any number of the conversations, no "authorising" presence validates or directs reception. This absence inherent in a texted communicative act invites compensatory strategies.

1.2 Internet-based communication systems

People are likely to do what people always do with new communication technology: use it in ways never intended or foreseen by its inventors, to turn old social codes inside out and make new kinds of communities possible (Rheingold, 1995).

Together, these accounts of a developing communicative social order show that it is through the interactive forms of the day that society changes. The more accessible communication becomes to everyone, the quicker ideas can be exchanged and new meaning developed and shared. Through the exchange of ideas and information, we become better-informed and thus able to make decisions, which affect not only ourselves but also the world in which we live. Twentieth century electronic media were a driving force of globalisation, producing an acceleration of contact (see Giddens, 2000). As globalised economic productivity arises to affect every person in the world the rapid flow of information gives the advent to instant communication to make instant decisions for governments and businesses. Personalized consumption of telecommunication products is driving production within the global market, and instant electronic digital computer-mediated communication (CMC – see Case Study Two) is keeping it all moving fast enough to keep "desire" consumption revolving (see Castells, 1996, 1997, 2000). Wireless LAN technology (Local Area Network) is expected to create the next boom for the networking industry, making communication anywhere, anytime, and further driving both production of communications technology goods as well as increasing the accessibility of communicative services for consumers. In 1999 the Internet turned 30 years old. The first e-mail message was sent in 1972. The World Wide Web was started in the early 1990s, and it went through an explosive expansion around 1995, growing at a rapid rate after that. (see *A history of the Internet:* Hobbes' Internet Timeline: http://www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/).

How then have we come to understand this new eruption of communicative activity into the core of our social and personal behaviours? James Carey (1985) has proposed that we have come to an explanation of what communication is, through two forms of theorisation: a *transmission* view and a *ritual* view of communication. The central theme of the transmission view shows how information is conveyed or exchanged between communicators, within a simplified and linear model of communication. Carey writes that the transmission view of communication is the commonest in our culture. It is defined by terms such as "imparting," "sending", "transmitting", or "giving information to others". It is formed from a metaphor of geography or transportation (p. 45). Computer-Mediated communication is seen to serve these functions of transmission at an increasingly rapid rate – frequently its dominant promotional claim.

Because of the paradoxical distantiation of Computer-mediated communication, for all its vaunted ease of access, the individual is left to decipher the information. Given the rate at which it is transmitted, there is the question of whether information is being communicated - or merely uploaded, and in such large packets that it becomes

useless. This "inhuman" pace has often been observed in chatrooms that have many participants. The text scrolls by at a rate that is almost impossible to decipher in order to respond to a particular utterance. A transmission success may simultaneously be a communication failure – an observation which invites a more complex view of what communication actually is.

Carey's ritual view of communication focuses instead on the information transmitted. This information is directed toward the maintenance of society in time, and not toward the extension of messages in space. In a communication community the act of imparting information involves a representation of shared beliefs, and a confident expectation that even new experiences and observations can enter a common field of interpretation. Once again, online communication raises problems, however. Not all chatrooms can guarantee that their "communities" actually do share beliefs, interests or any other commonality. Language alone no longer specifies common interest, as culture fragments into specialist strands of knowledge, belief and practice in a pluralist context. While topic specific chatrooms often form into restricted communities, controlling entry so that only the same participants may re-visit the chatroom, in open, non-topic specific chatrooms visitors are random communicators passing through the particular communicative repertoire, able to participate to greater or lesser degrees, according to what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would call the "pre-dispositions" established across their personal "cultural capital" (1977; 1992). For Carey, that "cultural capital" and the behavioural and attitudinal "pre-dispositions" it engenders are the core of the communication "ritualised" within most modern media texts.

> ...If one examines a newspaper under a transmission view of communication, one sees the medium as an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge...in larger and larger packages over greater distances. Questions arise as to the effects of this on audiences: news as enlightening or obscuring reality, as changing or hardening attitudes, as breeding credibility or doubt.
>
> A ritual view of communication will focus on a different range of problems in examining a newspaper. It will, for example, view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one. What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world. Moreover, as readers make their way through the paper, they engage in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus (Carey, 1985, p.175).

Electronic communication has been important to globalisation and the rise of modern society, not simply for its capacity to "transmit" neutral information globally and in real time, but as a stage for the enactment of modernity itself, with all of its contending views and forces. The evolution of the media has had

important consequences for the form that modern societies have acquired and it has been interwoven in crucial ways with the major institutional transformations which have shaped modernity. John B. Thompson argues that:

> The development of communication media was interwoven in complex ways with a number of other developmental processes which, taken together, were constitutive of what we have come to call "modernity". Hence, if we wish to understand the nature of modernity - that is, of the institutional characteristics of modern societies and the life conditions created by them - then we must give a central role to the development of communication media and their impact (Thompson, 1995, p. 3).

In particular, the reinforcement within modern communications media of an individualised transmission and reception – an increasingly personalised rather than a massed or communal pattern of use – has produced the sorts of pluralism, selectivity and inclusivity/exclusivity witnessed in CMC use. It is arguably these same features which have contributed to the rise of "interactivity" as a dominant CMC form – one suited, I will contend, to the "personalised" and "responsibilised" user-consumer central to contemporary economic productivity and social order. It is within an analysis of how "chatrooms", as among the latest forms of communication, "work" or do not "work" that I explore electronic conversation as a force of social change.

[9]

The World Wide Web is one of many Internet-based communication systems   and the source of this thesis. This study examines in detail examples of the communicated message within the online environment, and seeks in particular to find how meaning is shared within text-based chatrooms. I am interested in the current online interactive environment, its departure from the culture of a print milieu, and changes affecting both the reader and the writer in that environment.

Of the many online practices that are available, such as e-mail, newsgroups, virtual learning environments and chatrooms, both text-based and multi-media enhanced environments, I have concentrated on text-based chatrooms during the period 1995 to 2001. This is an historical and time bound communicative environment, caught at the moment before solely text-based chatrooms began to change, as they currently are, to include sound and video. As online chatrooms grow in popularity and importance and as the possibilities of these applications increase, so too, will the analysing of these environments, both in depth and range. This study offers preliminary ways of conducting such analysis.

My exploration of the establishment of at least some of the rules operating within a "natural" language for the "unnatural" location of text-based chatrooms will extend to how such communication is constructed, within multi-user chatroom exchanges, in one-on-one Instant Messenger services, and within discussion group environments such as listservs and Bulletin Boards. Eggins and Slade in *Analysing Casual Conversation* (1997),

write that "Interacting is not just a mechanical process of taking turns at producing sounds and words. Interacting is a semantic activity, a process of making meanings" (p.6). It will be in the analysing of the "naturalising" processes which have been establishing text online as just such a communicative activity that I hope to find and describe new processes of meaning making in participants' conversation.

The main differences I hypothesize at the start of this study include the view that communicative systems among online discussion groups are not as casual as those evident in Instant Messenger (IM) or chatroom conversation. In discussion-groups people observably take more time and care with what they contribute. They may use a spell/grammar check, and think before posting their text. There appears to be a more formally "textual" format with discussion groups. Instant Messenger and chatrooms appear, at least at first sight, to be less disciplined and more varied, with the relative spontaneity of casual interchange unsettling many more formal communicative conventions.

At the same time however, I am aware that Conversational Analysis (CA) has itself already shown that this apparent "formlessness" is not exactly the case even in casual conversation (see ten Have, 1998, 1999, 2002; Schegloff, 1977, 1991; Eggins and Slade, 1997; Tannen, 1984). Within even "spontaneous" person-to-person talk there are clear conventions and rules, such as Sacks's influential discovery of the rules for "turn–taking" when one person talks at a time before responding to the speaker, including "Adjacency pairs" (knowing what comes next), when one turn is related in predictable ways to the previous and next turns; and "repair" (when there is a mistake there is a correction). Within each such category of talk many variables are observable: as for instance in repairing a mistake, where the speaker may correct himself or herself, or the hearer may correct the speaker, or the hearer may prompt the speaker by not responding, or the hearer may prompt the speaker, by repeating back what he or she just said. There is however clearly observable limitation to such variability – and even predictability in technique selection, expressive, at least in the Sacksian hypothesis, of the social relations between speakers. My own research suggests that there are similar, contextually based, regulatory forms at work in online chat, and that any differences my analysis can establish will be more a matter of degree than of essence.

1.2.1 E-mail, discussion forums

At the outset it should be established that even this study cannot include all the forms of Internet communication. E-mail will be discussed below and compared to chatrooms throughout this study as well as discussion groups. It would be impossible to cover every Internet communication device. I am exploring primarily

synchronous communication, which is "talk" in real time. E-mail and discussion groups are asynchronous formats. Chatroom "talk" can be viewed by anyone who has access to the chatsite – while e-mail is only possible [10] to read if it has been sent to the viewer one message at a time. Many forms of discussion forums such as Google groups which have absorbed many older online groups are now online. Google offers a complete 20-year Usenet Archive with over 700 million messages dating back to 1981. I will however only refer in passing to these other online forms of discourse in this thesis. For instance, in Case Study One I will give examples of message boards in comparison to the chatroom "talk" on the topics covered in those case studies. In that study I compare emergency messages left during a hurricane with the discourse in a chatroom about the same hurricane. The more formal postings of the newsgroup discussions will be used as exemplars against which to further analyse and isolate the features of IRC styles and practices. In other words, I am hypothesising that there are already established conventions in online communication which distinguish between a more "texted" communicative act, most often asynchronous and designed to endure for at least some degree of extended time, and more direct and "talk" formatted postings, usually synchronous, which obey many of the same regulatory moves as speech, and which are posted within relatively transient and fast-changing electronic frames.

The most common form of Internet communication, e-mail, is replacing much of traditional letter writing, its primary difference being the rapidity of response expected when an e-mail is sent. Unlike letters, which often are not answered for a varying period of time, it is assumed that e-mail will be responded to within a day or two. Therefore, e-mails tend to be answered in haste with at least a short response, maybe even just a "got your e-mail, am too busy to answer now, but will in a few days". Though e-mail can be a form of turn-taking with people writing back and forth immediately after receiving correspondence, it does not provide the conversational turn-taking choices chatroom communication does. John D. Ferrier did his PhD thesis at Deakin University on e-mail in education. His findings were that there was a high level of e-mailphobia amongst university staff (at least between 1990 and 1994) and that few wanted to engage with the activity at the time. The results from a survey of 354 staff showed that 94.3% were infrequent e-mail users and 97.6% were not frequent users of electronic bulletin boards. There were no surveys done on chatrooms (Ferrier, 1998). Since 1995 however the use of the World Wide Web has increased vastly as I statistically show below. Wireless e-mail and chat servers have grown in popularity at the beginning of the new millennium with 36% of all firms using it and an additional 49% of all firms planning to provide it in the future, according to "Global Wireless IT Benchmark Report 2002". In the period 1999-2001 the proportion of all practicing physicians using the Internet has grown, in the clinical work area (from 34% to 40%), in their personal offices (from 51% to 56%) and at home (from 83% to 87%). More

doctors are communicating by e-mail with both professional colleagues (up from 51% to 55%) and support staff (up from 25% to 34%) (Pastore, 2001). Across the world early resistance to CMC systems has been increasingly overcome. For instance, the number of Koreans using the Internet has increased rapidly: 0.14 million in 1995, 1.6 million in 1997, 10 million in 1999, 19.04 million in 2000, and 22.23 million in September 2001 (Park, 2002).
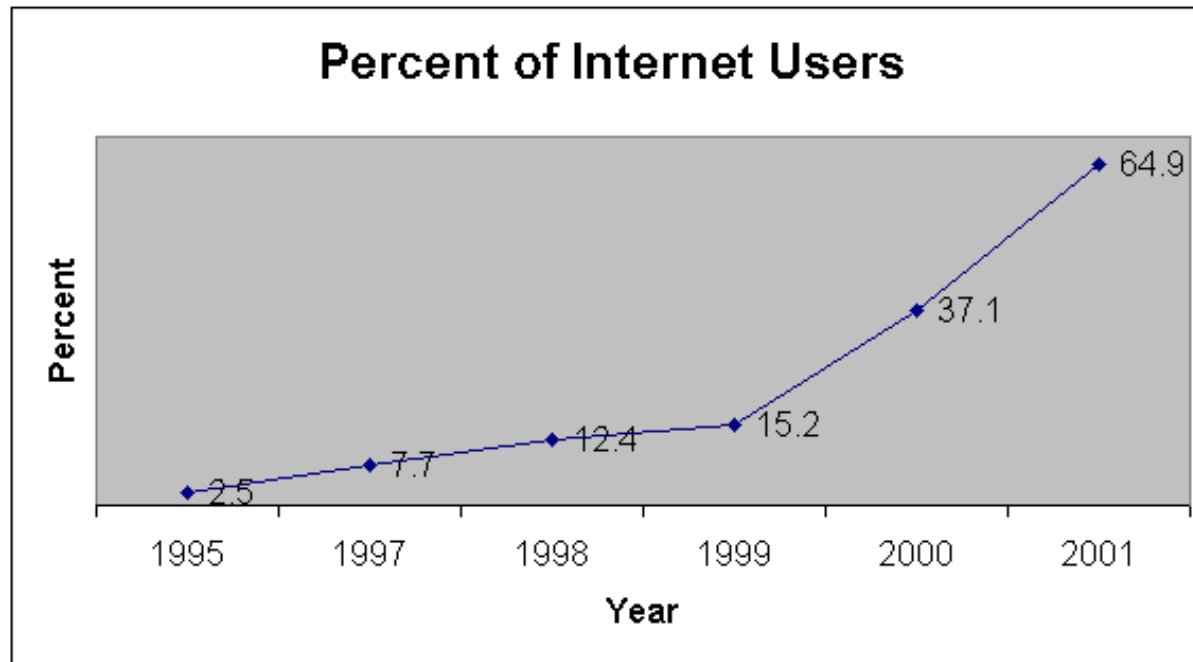
Per centage of Internet Users in South Korea (1995-2001)

While e-mail is most often the first CMC service experienced by new users, it does not always remain a preferred choice. Sending and receiving e-mail was the dominant online activity in 12 countries over the first six months of 2002, according to the Nielsen//NetRatings: First Quarter 2002 Global Internet Trends report. Nielsen//NetRatings found that at least 75% of households with Internet access participated in e-mail (http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/).

The China Internet Information Centre (http://www.china.org.cn/) however reports that e-mail usage in China has been decreasing for the past two-years:

> "China has seen a continuous decrease in the number of e-mails during the past two years", Beijing Youth Daily reported Thursday. "The average number of e-mails sent every week by each web user in China dropped from 10 in July 2000 to 8.2 in July 2001 to 5.3 now", according to the latest report by the China Internet Information Centre.

"The decrease is due to a decline of the number of free e-mail boxes available, a more rational use of web resource and an increase of various ways of communication," said Wang Enhai, an official with the Centre. Many websites accelerated their pace to charge e-mail service and web users began to give up superfluous e-mail boxes. The average number of e-mail boxes owned by every web user dropped from 3.9 two years ago to 2.6 last year, and to 1.6 now (Shanghai Daily August 9, 2002).

At the same time an increasing number of young Chinese people are reported as going online to collect information, "find love" in chatrooms and play games.

Statistics from China Internet Network Information Centre showed that by the end of last year, Internet surfers in China numbered more than 22.5 million compared to a figure of just 15,000 in 1995.

More than 50 per cent of teenage cyber-surfers in big cities across China want to surf the Internet more frequently, a survey conducted by the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) has revealed. More than 62 per cent of interviewees said they play online games and 54.5 per cent use online chatrooms. The CASS study shows 56 per cent of senior middle school students in big cities across China are Net surfers while 36 per cent of junior middle school students and 26 per cent of primary school pupils are Net surfers (China Daily 09/17/2001).

Chinese teenagers spend an average of 30 minutes each day browsing the Internet, the survey shows. Outside of China there are (or were at the time of writing!) Internet cafes in Baghdad, North Korea, Libya and all Middle East countries (Gallagher, 2002) as well as most countries of the world, where users can check e-mail or go to chatrooms in more than 4,500 Internet Cafes in 170 countries (Larsen, 2002 [11]   ).

1.2.2 Electronic chat

Early forms of text based interactive sites began in the mid to late 1980s with Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and MUDS (Multiple User Dimension, Multiple User Dungeon, or Multiple User Dialogue).

1.2.2.1 IRC

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is the most used online chat software and has many individual server companies. The figure below shows IRC net in comparison with several other IRC servers. The table below helps show the popularity of different chat clients. What is central to this thesis is that as more people begin to connect to online chatrooms the social and cultural importance of the transferring of meaning via texted chat will increase – and so will the variations to standard communicative techniques.

Year	DALnet	EFnet	Galaxy Net	IRCnet	MS Chat	Undernet	Webchat	
Max. 2000	78333	63985	16737	84231	15288	74945	17724	**IRC-Statistics showing three**

| 3rd Q. 1998 | 21000 | 37000 | n/a | 24500 | n/a | 24000 | n/a | years of growth |

in IRC usage. Kajetan Hinner (http://www.hinner.com/) through the year 2000. (The statistics above are from the individual IRC servers as of November 2002)

Efnet (http://www.efnet.net/) is the oldest IRC network. DALnet (http://www.dal.net/index.php3) claims to be currently the largest Internet Relay Chat (IRC) network, with over 140,000 concurrent users and 600,000 registered users, from all over the world. The Undernet (http://www.undernet.org/) is one of the largest real-time chat networks in the world, with approximately 45 servers connecting over 35 countries and serving more than 1,000,000 people weekly and GalaxyNet (http://www.galaxynet.org/) has about 25,000 users. Internet Relay Chat has formed a connectivity base in a single decade that took the telephone more than one hundred years to make. People are using the Internet to expand their social world. As well as uniting cultures and nations when one has access to an Internet, communication can take place at any time. This thesis seeks to discover how this communication amongst so many people, often of mixed social backgrounds, is maintained. Internet Relay

[12]

Chat gained international fame during the First Gulf War in 1991 , where IRC users could gather on a single channel to hear updates from around the world as soon as they were released. IRC had similar uses during the Russian coup against Gorbachev in August 19, 1991, where IRC users from Moscow were giving live reports about the unstable situation. The tendency for radical or alternative political information flows to operate through such non-institutional systems as e-mail and IRC has continued into the current US-Islamic conflicts of today. Since the start of ArabChat in 1999 it has become one of the most famous IRC Networks

[13]

World Wide, with more than 40,000 users and rising, and is now one of the biggest IRC Networks in the World .

IRC (Internet Relay Chat) consists of various separate networks (or "nets") of IRC servers, machines that allow users to connect to IRC. Once connected to an IRC server on an IRC network, one is able to join one or more "channels" and converse with others there. On EFnet, there are more than 12,000 channels, each devoted to a different topic. Conversations may be public (where everyone in a channel can see what you type) or private (messages between only two people, who may or may not be on the same channel at the same time). Conversations rarely follow a sequential pattern, "speakers" following one after the other. There are often jumps to an earlier speaker, or someone beginning their own thread. This is the first departure point from "casual conversation". When there are many "voices" at once, conversation becomes chaotic. The only way

to follow who is "talking" is through the log-on names. To analyse conversation between two or more "speakers" I need to "cut and paste" the "speakers" I wish to analyse. Even then it is not always clear who is speaking to whom, unless the "speaker" names the addressee in their message. The speech is then, seemingly inevitably, a "multilogue" or multi-directional system, rather than the more conversationally organised "dialogue" we find in print text (see Eggins and Slade, 1997). Mutlilogue discourse brings together many "voices" with their variant streams of ideas into one stream of "talk". The many "voices" seem as one when viewed together but on isloation from the rest of the dialogue and paired with a "voice" on the same topic each pair is observed as a dialogue.

Public IRC is a text-based, international, message-handling program that is on many Internet servers. Multiple communication channels (similar to radio channels) can be created. Between them, these created channels and their range of topic-specific channels, their text-mediated messaging and their capacity to conceal as well as to express identity have introduced "communicative rituals", which have in turned introduced the meta-message: "Let's make-believe and suspend disbelief" (Ruedenberg, Danet, & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1995). Allucquere Stone, professor in film and media at University of Texas, claims that most computer users think of their computers not just as tools but as "arenas for social experience" (Stone, 1995, p. 15). Fantasy invitation is prominent on IRC where "the other" can be as real as the "self". (Hamman, 1998; Calvert, 2002; Saarinen, 1995). The fantasy aspects of online chatting are discussed throughout this thesis, as the new rituals of online communicative exchange are examined.

Generically the channels which facilitate the more conversational forms of online communication are variously designated "chatlines" or "chatrooms" and provide for discussion on every conceivable topic. Access via a client program allows users to join and listen in on (read) conversations on multiple channels on multiple servers. With experience, four or five different channels can be attended to at one time. Once the user logs in and writes, one line at a time, the "talk" is distributed, via the servers, to everyone logged on and reading that particular channel.

Jarkko Oikarinen in the Department of Information Processing Science at the University of Oulu, Finland developed Internet Relay Chat (IRC) in late August, 1988 [14]. His original goal was to create a communications programme which would allow users of OuluBox [15], a public access bulletin board service (BBS) administered by the department, to have real time discussions online. Previously, synchronous online communication had been limited to two participants – a process which is now popular with Instant

Messenger services (see Case Study Two). When Oikarinen began his work, OuluBox already had a programme called Multi-user Talk (MUT), developed by Jukka Pihl. MUT allowed users to chat in real time, but lacked the channel concept central to IRC. The existence of channels on IRC allows users to join in specific discussions by connecting to the channel where the discussion is taking place, just as a user of a citizen's band (CB) radio tunes into a specific channel.

1.2.2.2 MUDs

MUDs as well as other constructs on the Internet, such as MOOs (MUD-Object-Oriented), MUSE (Multiple-User Dimension), MUCK (Multi-User Collective Kingdom) and MUSH - the "H" stands for Hallucination (Harry Potter: Alere Flammas is a MUSH based on the Harry Potter universe at http://digital-web.net/~hpotter/) are computer programs, which allow users to log in and explore text and sometimes graphics based virtual environments. Multi-User Dungeons, or MUDs present a world through text descriptions; players move around by typing sentences. In MUDs, a user can simulate or "text" such physically impossible activities as communicating telepathically, shape-shifting, teleporting, creating little machine selves, and conjuring birds and pleasure domes out of thin air. Curiously, despite the magical aura of self-determining expressivity this suggests, second person narrative is the viewpoint of choice for text MUDs, the user able to type in a direct command to a character. It is the reciprocity of this unusual modality – the capacity to respond to and outwit the "actions" and orders of others online – which builds intensity and attraction into a communicative relation which is otherwise mostly reserved for unequal power relations in "live" or embodied conversational exchange. First person narratives, more conventionally the stuff of expressive creativity, alienate the MUD user, since within this particular texted universe a character focusing all actions on "I" will be perceived not so much as enhanced in autonomy, but as disconnected from the creative dialogue of action development. The first-person text becomes similar to a diary or journal, the other users placed in the role of passive readers instead of active (co) directors. Within such text-relations we can clearly see the degree to which and the speed with which online "chat" participants have evolved new, surprising, yet powerful "ritualisations" of communicative activity. While information is clearly being transmitted in such MUDs, it is not flowing in anticipated or neutral ways – nor in ways dictated solely by the technology. Complex social communicative patterns are in evolution here.

From these MUDs have in turn evolved MOOs, which allow the players to manipulate the (virtual) world of the game, creating texted or graphic objects and new computer programs that run within the MOO. Users "read" these text-constituted virtual realms rather than only view them graphically – much as one might read the extended scenario texts at the beginning of a *Star Wars* film. "Action" is performed via keyboard, either as texted

instruction/description, or as key-command implementation of graphic repertoires or special effects involving programming solutions. At core both the MUD and the MOO are imaginative constructs: the players must render all scenes and actions mentally, from text typed in during the course of play. Text is however an efficient medium online, as with experience a few words can evoke a rich response in the mind of the user. Text MUDs rely more on cognition than on sensory perception. Spaces and avatars (online characters) are not – or rarely - viewed on the screen, but in the player's mind. Text MUDs are abstract and cognitive since the characters and scenes are conveyed symbolically rather than sensorially (Lisette, 1995; Turkle, 1995, 1996; Utz, 2000; Bromberg, 1996; Cicognani, 1996, 1997, 1998). For example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* ("Welcome to Hell! We hope you like it here!") is now a MUD. A popular and very creative MUD is "Aetolia" (http://www.aetolia.com/):

"Come to an intricate world where shadowy influences battle for power in the realm of mortals. Join one of the many classes, and perhaps practice the combat arts alongside your brother monks, wield the power of the elements as a mage, or succumb to the dark delights of the vampire. Dedicate yourself to the Divine Order of one of the ever-present Deities, or rise to the highest stations of leadership.

Will you manipulate and scheme your way to power and influence? Will you work to build a vast personal fortune? Will you make your stand in the light for Truth and Renewal? Or will you strive for that to which few mortals may aspire, to join the very ranks of the Divine?

Join us now in the Midnight Age, and step into a realm of intrigue that will test your resolve, where you have the power to tip the balance in the struggle between light and darkness.

Here, the fate you make is the only fate you deserve." http://www.aetolia.com

Each user takes control of a computerized persona, avatar, character or object. Once each has created a "self" they

can walk around, chat with other characters, explore dangerous monster-infested areas, solve puzzles, and create rooms or worlds and the action within them. When you join a MUD, you create a character or several characters. You specify each one's gender and other physical and psychological attributes. Other players in the MUD can see this character's description. It becomes your character's self-presentation, or "avatar" – the online persona who carries out actions for you. The created characters need not be human and there may be more than two genders. Players create characters that have casual and romantic sex, hold jobs, attend rituals and celebrations, fall in love, and get married. In many MUDs, players help build the virtual world itself. Using a relatively simple programming language, they can make "rooms" in the MUD, where they can set the stage and define the rules. (Turkle, 1996, p. 54).

MUDs and MOOs are used in education as well as in social skill development. AussieMOO (Theme:AussieMOO) is an open-styled, experimental and research based MOO for social interaction. There are MUDs for conferencing, computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW), lifelong education (beyond just K-PhD), experimental psychology and philosophy. BioMOO is a virtual meeting place for biology professionals; Cheshire Moon (Theme: CheshireMOOn) represents the beginning of an important transition from the traditional classroom lesson to computer-assisted learning, and CollegeTown (Theme: COLLEGETOWN) is a text based virtual Academic Community. Its purpose is to serve as a platform for the scholarly pursuits of students and faculty from around the world. COLLEGETOWN is a place for folks to meet, hold classes and seminars, do research, carry out class projects, and exchange ideas. "Folks who share our academic vision are most welcome to apply for membership in our community! The COLLEGETOWN server is located on the campus of Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa".

1.2.2.1.1 MUDs vs. IRC

MUDs and MOOs as with IRC and World Wide Web chatrooms can be totally text-based. Multimedia (programs introducing graphics, audio and video) are becoming available in all these programs but text is still the primary means of navigation and communication. What makes MUDs and MOOs different from IRC is that in addition to being able to talk with other people, the user is able to move around in an environment that he or she helps to create. With IRC, someone opens a channel, others connect to the channel to chat, everyone enters lines of text in order to communicate, and the channel is closed when the last person leaves. With MOOs, the user connects via telnet to a program that is running on one computer, enters lines of text to communicate, and disconnects when done. Chatrooms do not have virtual structures to move around in and unless the user leaves the room and goes to another room there are no locational moves within an individual space. With IRC there is

little more than scrolling "speech". With MUDs the user must also know commands in order to communicate. In both applications users can chat in real time, talk to many people at once or send private messages, and show actions and emotions. Chatrooms however are much simpler spaces in which to communicate, resting on foundations of everyday conversational practice, as this thesis will demonstrate – albeit with additional layers of communicative practice already beginning to emerge. Despite many fascinating features of MUD and MOO communicative practice, this thesis is centred on the performance of users in text-based chatrooms and not MUDs or other role-playing or virtual environments where participants act out character roles in imaginary worlds, all described in text. Like IRC, MUDs provide real-time chat, usually accessed by telnetting into a remote Internet-connected server, whereas IRC can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The technical difference between the two is essentially that a MUD or MOO can be programmed, compiled, and saved while it is still running. This means that the MOO does not have to be shut down for work to be done on it. In order to program in IRC, however, it must be shut down, hacked, recompiled, and started up again. And when an IRC channel is closed everything shuts down and all communications contributed are lost. However when a MOO is closed any visitor can re-open it and have an environment still in place, with all the objects left by others. At this point the technology itself influences the durability of the creation – and so of the autonomy of the users, and arguably at least, of their focus into and commitment to the site. It is perhaps in real world terms, the difference between casual visits to an established social setting, such as a bar or café, which may or may not become a preferred regular meeting place, and joining a special-interest club, set up for and controlled by members. As French theorist Henri Lefebvre (1995) has pointed out, it is the social geography of locations which facilitates the various forms of social engagement experienced in everyday life, and the insight appears no less true of the virtual "spaces" and "sites" of online communication. But how have we come – and come so quickly – to regard these "texted" or mediated, symbolic worlds as able to constrain and shape communicative relations? And how might we be able to employ analytical techniques evolved to uncover the regulatory systems behind communicative practices in the physical world – talk relations between co-present speakers – to scripted or programmed "talk texts" exchanged between non-present participants in a CMC space?

1.3 New paradigm shifts

1.3.1 Print to computerization

Evolving techniques to analyse the specifics of Internet conversation, whether in chatrooms, America Online's Instant Messenger (IM), discussion groups, or in role playing games such as MUDs and MOOS, involves consideration of two new paradigm shifts: the extension of print or text based communications into the far more direct and interactive modes of CMC media, and the changes within the already complex field of linguistics-based human communications research, where descriptive systems-based work within pure linguistics has moved on, to accommodate the social, cultural and political considerations which have produced the contemporary focus on discourse analysis. Consequently, bringing into being an "electronic interactive conversational analysis" requires a cross over between print and conversation-based analyses and theorizations, and a move into the broader socio-cultural emphases of discourse.

Firstly, there is the shift from print to computerization. Print relies on hierarchy and linearity, technologising itself into organizational categories which privilege the producer or author over the receiver or reader. With their focus on durability through both time and space, print texts must carefully direct the use-patterns of their "remote" user, to ensure that their messages remain intact. While CMC technologies have moved to create a direct and seemingly intimate contact for users, they do so through a communicative form soundly grounded in techniques of distantiation – a move which can at times appear curiously regressive; for instance in the return to screened text messages on mobile phones, a medium with more than a century long tradition of direct oral contact. Those new forms of texting which are emerging within CMC media thus seem to call for consideration of both print and oral communicative practices – as well as of marked changes in the ways we have traditionally conceived of text-based communication as separated into the acts of production and reception.

CMC texts mix print and conversational modes, in both production and reception. Online texts can be hypertextual as well as hierarchical and linear. Webpages for example are hypertextual, with the viewer becoming the author of how the content will follow, so that the medium promotes an especially active "reception" of text messages, which many are arguing amounts to a form of co-production (see Landow, 1992; Poster, 1995, 2001; Bolter, 1991). Yet in a chatroom milieu, a communicative site often considered the least formal or regulated in terms of genre control, there is only the simplest of sequential patternings to structure the text exchanges. Chatrooms differ from other forms of the World Wide Web in that only one line of text or one graphic can be observed at a time, with the next following rapidly in sequence and acting to de-focus what precedes it. Print media have by definition allowed reading ahead - skipping the present and reading to the end, or reviewing sections to

check meaning - whereas in chatrooms the near-real-time onward flow of communication limits acts of review or preview. Textual chatrooms are not clickable hypertextually, except for entries to other rooms or to leave the Internet all together. Chat-text is not static like print text, but flows across a relatively small screen space, and disappears above or below the scroll capacity at near uncontrollable speeds.

In this sense then, while chatrooms at first sight appear much like any print form where one line follows another, the key difference comes from the control the user has of the medium. When the chatroom texts scroll by there is nothing the viewer can do to prevent the next line from appearing - unless he or she leaves the chatroom. Print media works on a flow of conversation or writing directed to an organised progression, and a stable retention of accessible text permitting revisiting through time. Online chat-texts retain as their organizing principle only the sequencing learned from conversation, and even with many participants co-existing on one screen space, provide no further "technologised" means for controlling or categorizing the "braided" texts which result. Unless users select a preferred line of talk from the screen, and negotiate to shift their talk-partner into an alternative software service – such as one-on-one chat via Instant Messenger – chat-texts fragment into the sorts of multi-directionality which most speakers have trouble with even in oral conversation, with its repertoire of compensatory "focus" cues. Online, as text scrolls by at near conversational speeds, are we already developing similar strategies? If so, are these talk-based, or text based? And how can we extend current techniques of both print critique and conversation analysis to witness, capture and understand such devices as they arise?

Within the very broad field of literary text analysis there has been a continuum of ideas that have progressively led towards a major debate over how to define the roles of author and reader (see the Case Studies in this thesis for further explanation, especially Case Study One, which uses Reader-response theory to describe the communicative process). In Communication Studies terms more generally, this dual focus on "production" and "reception" of messages – terms which admit oral, text, graphic, audio and screen imaged communications into consideration – has followed the same developmental paradigm, moving throughout the twentieth century towards admission of an increasingly active "audience/user" of mediated messages, and an increasingly problematised concept of "authorship" or "production".

Chatroom texts in many ways represent a peak enactment of the dilemmas of this new paradigm of the "active user/absent producer". Chat-texts at the level of individual "postings" are near anonymous. Just as some texts don't require, or create, an "author" – texts such as legends, myths, folk stories, fairy tales and jokes – "users" or participants in chatrooms have become accustomed to operating without the sorts of social and contextual information provided for live conversation by the "author-ising" presence of the speaker, and in

the conventions of print texts, by the complex apparatus of author name, publisher reputation, critical review, indices, contents listings, glossaries, and arrangements into such structural codings as narrative sequencing, chapters, headings, paragraphs, quote marks, footnotes, titles, etc.

Due to most-often coded or abbreviated usernames (usernames are discussed throughout this study, see for example: Case Study One, Three and Seven) the author of a chat posting is not known, except through what she or he reveals subsequently about her or him self - and notoriously, this is not necessarily who the author is, but a created identity. The chatroom situation is a paradigmatic case of "the death of the author" as proclaimed

by poststructuralists such as Foucault (1969) and Barthes (1972). For Foucault, the author is decentred within a text: no longer its originary source and guarantee of its meaning, but only a part of its structure. So too in chat postings, where what Foucault describes as "the author function" remains in the tag to each posted line, which attributes each texted utterance to a particular participant. It is the degree to which chat users still consider this a guarantee of self-expressive authenticity or sincerity which creates the chatroom dilemma – and much of its reputation for moral danger and duplicity: issues taken up elsewhere in this study. If (or perhaps when) chat-texts become viewed as on a par with movie representations or fictional print texts – products removed from their originating "authors" by the apparatuses of production and distantiation – this particular "author function" will change.

Just as Barthes and Foucault deny the traditional view of the author as the only authority for interpretation and the origin of the text and its meaning, my own study suggests that chat users are already moving to both produce, and in turn demand from others, augmented interpretive repertoires of an especially active "reading" of online texts (see Case Study One which uses Reading-response theory to analyse the chatroom). Barthes in particular puts into question a way of reading related to the author as an authority. In 1968 Barthes announced "the death of the author" and "the birth of the reader", declaring that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1977, p.148). For Barthes as for Foucault, the roles of reader and writer are historically contingent, and open to change. According to Barthes, "the author is a modern figure, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation" (1977). Roland Barthes refers to the writer of a text as the orchestrator of what is "already-written" rather than as its originator (Barthes, 1974, p. 21). With this "death of the author", a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text then is a collaboration of lines or a "conversation" between this and prior texts – a point at which the second element put into question within chat-

texts presents itself: its problematic abandonment of the sorts of structuring conventions used in other "print-based" communicative forms.

For Barthes and Foucault texts are framed by other texts in many ways. Intertextuality is a concept used to assert the idea that each text exists in relation to other texts (see Kristeva, 1980; Chandler, 2001). Landow in his early work on CMC texts (1992) finds authors and their stories to be at a point of crisis:

> This technology -- that of the printed book and its close relations, which include the typed or printed page -- engenders certain notions of authorial property, authorial uniqueness, and a physically isolated text that hypertext makes untenable. The evidence of hypertext, in other words, historicizes many of our current assumptions, thereby forcing them to descend from the ethereality of abstraction and appear as corollaries to a particular technology rooted in specific times and places. (Landow, 1992, p. 33).

Not everyone thinks that this change from print to electronic publishing is progress. Many critics, such as Sven Birkerts (1995), view this change as a potential disaster for literary culture and society in general, suggesting that more is lost than a printer's bill when books move online. In *Writing Space* (1991), J. David Bolter has declared the electronic word as "The fourth great technique of writing that will take its place beside the ancient papyrus roll, the medieval codex, and the printed book". Similarly, Paul Delaney in *The Digital Word* (1993) has proclaimed that "the most fundamental change in textual culture since Gutenberg is now under way".

Florian Brody in "The Gutenberg Elegies" (1999) argues that people are moving away from books for enlightenment and turning to the Internet or the electronic text.

> The printed word is part of a vestigial order that we are moving away from - by choice or by societal compulsion… [We are moving away from] … the patterns and habits of the printed page and toward a new world distinguished by its reliance on electronic communication (p.118).

If we are moving from "the culture of the book to the culture of electronic communication", Brody sees this as being a loss instead of a gain, largely a result of the lack of distantiating detachment allowing reflection and critical reading when e-texts move remorselessly forward, as do chat-texts. The degree to which the electronic accessibility of text however also permits a broadened "authorising" of viewpoints: cuts across the categorising and regulatory control of text messages, both as author-status and structural predictability, further enhances what could be called "the reader function" – an opening of text to far broader ranges of interpretations. In other words, while Brody and Birkerts, from well within the high-culture conventions of complex literary structures and high-status authorship roles, see the open and active audience/user/reader figures of electronic texts as a cultural lapse, others – especially those within a Communication Studies and Cultural Studies tradition focused on popular media and on a commitment to broadening cultural interpretations ("reading against the grain") – have

urged an equal if different degree of cultural power in the relatively unstructured and anonymous or collective texts of the new media.

To follow this debate beyond the confines of established literary textual study – dominated as it was by high-culture genres – both moves focus back from print-based to the more fluid, conversational formats of electronic text, and admits into the subsequent analysis of chat-texts those considerations of social and cultural influence which Barthes and Foucault, among others, have shown as creating both the structuring principles and the "authorship" status of the print tradition. In both cases this moves us to review those theories which critique the workings of language in both print and conversational modes: the still quite loose and various conceptualisations of language in use as "discourses" (Van Dijk, 1986).

1.3.2 Notion of "discourse"

The second paradigm shift crucial for this study is taking place around the notion of "discourse", parallel to the shift from print to active electronic texting on the Internet (see Landow 1992, pp. 1-11). While studies of "language" have consistently taken us from actual communicative acts – speech or text – in the direction of those structuring principles which regulate and enable such communication (Pennycuick, 1988) more recent focus on discourse has moved to show how socially and culturally regulated language selectively endorses or pre-disposes social groups and individuals towards preferred activities, behaviours and attitudes. Discourse is thus important in this study of online communication. Not only did the Internet arrive with just such sets of predisposed discursive framings around its re-technologisation of communications (Castells, 2000), but within each of the variant communicative activities that it enabled (e-mail, IRC, MUDs, listervs, BBSs); "virtual communities" of users rapidly established innovative discursive cultures of their own.

In this study I focus on chatrooms - rapidly forming and disbanding communities – which of necessity, in discourse terms, must be annexing – and perhaps to some extent establishing – strong discursive frameworks in order to function as communicative sites. Often participants have never met and will never communicate with others except in these instant, momentary communities. How then do chat communicants establish the principles on which their messages will be exchanged? Since participants and analysts both report insistent "policing" of certain selective and preferred chat behaviours online, by both tacit and active means, how have such behaviours become established, constructed around which models and criteria, and signalled in which acceptable or unacceptable practices – given the limitation of behaviour to texted language?

1.4 Purpose of examining online conversation

This research on electronic communication is being undertaken at the same time as chatrooms are being used more (Mogge, 1999; Langston, 1996; Harrison, and Stephen, 1995; Communication Institute for Online Scholarship - http://www.cios.org/). Online communication has become common practice. Online statistics change rapidly and there are several companies that track moment-by-moment usage of Internet usage and participants in chatrooms. (See: Cyber Atlas, http://cyberatlas.internet.com/; Internet Statistics, http://www.internetstats.com/; Nielsen net ratings, http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/; Internet Society http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/). What is really happening in this new form, and why is it spreading from specialist to broad social categories of users? Are all chat users experiencing and producing the same discursive forms in their chat use? Are there universals or sub-cultural differences – and how far can discourse analysis help us to see how, and why, these might be emerging?

Like other areas of the Internet, chatrooms rapidly established regulatory sets of etiquette, and rules of cybersense are continuously evolving. Netiquette customs and practices began in the late 1980s with the widening use of e-mail and have been adopted in order to promote effective electronic communication [16]. Netiquette has different rules for different online formats. The most generally accepted Netiquette behaviours are based on having respect for others in the online community. For example, using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS is considered shouting and is hard on the eyes; "Flaming" or attacking others in the online community or inciting or provoking an argument are considered unacceptable to other users and often evoke banishment from sites by site supervisors, and "Spamming" - posting something in many places at the same time – is both actively discouraged and open to technical blocking via protective software.

Beyond these relatively extreme sorts of unacceptable communicative behaviour however lie many more subtle instances of misapplied online communication. Jill and Wayne Freeze point out in their book "Introducing WebTV":

> ..what is written is not always what is meant. A fair amount of meaning relies on inflection and body language. It is best to clarify a person's intentions before jumping to conclusions or getting defensive. (1998, p. 135).

Since "rules" are already widely established in online communication - for instance, the convention that capitals imply shouting has extended from e-mail to text-based chatrooms – it is worth examining whether other regulatory impulses are becoming equally consensual and universal in e-communication practice. Other, more subtle conventions may be developing, as well as widespread conventions for the abbreviated "talk" of CMC

sites. This thesis will propose that such regulatory behaviours are arising not at random, but in ways which reflect the discursive framings of contemporary social and cultural realities – which include for the first time significant formational influence from the "virtual" realm of mediated CMC activities. What may have seemed small and insignificant conventions, established who knows when or why, operating on the specially reserved space of the Internet screen, have spread rapidly, extended immense regulatory power, endured, jumped communication channels (eg from IRC to SMS on mobile phones) and thus declared themselves meaningful or discursively active – for discourse, by definition, constrains both concepts and actions. If we find ourselves accessing punctuation keys to add a small smiling face to an e-mail, or moving into numeral keys to produce phonetic abbreviations, we are forcing both our text-composing minds and our keyboarding/ screenscanning bodies into a discourse – and anticipating that our correspondents will too. How universal may these new behaviours become – and will they attain the power to move beyond CMC usage and impact upon older communications genres and formats – as contemporary press reports suggest?

1.5 Online usage

More and more people are communicating through electronic online services. It is difficult to estimate the number of users online at any one moment. A large number of surveys of online usage are available. According to Nua Internet[17] an estimated 513.41 million users were on line as of August, 2001. Netsizer (http://www.netsizer. com/) has a counter in real-time on their site showing both how many hosts and how many users are going online every second. During the re-write of this thesis as of Thursday, June 13, 2002 there were 832,774,438 users and 203,592,240 hosts online and a few minutes later the number of users had increased by 500 more. Their real-time chart showed that as of June 13th, 2002 the ten fastest Internet growing countries are: Ukraine, India, Indonesia, Chile, Spain, Romania, Thailand, Brazil, Portugal and Mexico. Another survey showed that 84% of US Internet users have contacted an online group (Nov 01, 2001), according to research from the Pew Internet & American Life Project[18]. Pew Internet also reports that of the 59 million Americans who go online daily, 49% send e-mail, 10% send instant messages and 4% use a chatroom daily. More than 2.4 million Americans or about five million world-wide are in a chatroom communicating daily. As of 24/02/2005 there were more than 115 million registered users of the chat server ICQ around the world, according to ICQ.com. Other research results in January 2002 gave these figures: between 6% (Chilton Research) and 35% (American Psychological Convention) of online users participate in chats, roughly 4% of all online time is spent in chatting (Price Waterhouse) and 88%

[19]

of teenagers dubbed online chat "cool" in a recent survey by the author of "Growing Up Digital" . For a timeline of the Internet see Hobbes's Internet Timeline at http://www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/. The sheer mass of participation, and especially those use figures which demonstrate the keen interest from younger users, suggest that what evolves within CMC communicative exchanges has at least the potential to exert broader influence on social interactivity and communication techniques. But before such claims can be made, it is essential that a broad sweep of online texted-talk behaviours be examined, and in detail. Random or minority patterns of online communication practice need to be distinguished from techniques in widespread consensual use – those which can be said to be arising as dominant practices; seen to be being patrolled and regulated across the various communities of online users, and can be shown to have features which act to the advantage of CMC technologies. In other words, such communicative behaviours should be demonstrable as discursively "powerful", in Fairclough's terms (1989; 1992): arising within and in turn reinforcing the communicative values, strategies and interests of their locations. But how might such behaviours be isolated and quantified – and what new problems arise alongside these new research opportunities? While research into online community behaviours might seem more than usually accessible: BBSs and IRC sites for instance freely illustrating "natural" communication settings on a 24 hour and multi-ethnic basis, online research presents

[20]

its own difficulties: practically, technically, methodologically and ethically .

1.5.1 Problems of researching online

Research online is different from face-to-face research. In investigating Internet based communication one comes across a different set of problems - such as the researchers not being able to verify who the writer of the text is, thereby determining whether the writing has any validity to it, and not knowing if what is read is a cut-and-paste of several other writing sources. Chatrooms offer even more complications to research.

Firstly, I have identified during this study four key problems of researching online: identifying the "speaker's" intent in joining the chatroom; selecting from the enormous range of chatroom material for analysis; identifying those people in cyberspace using multiple names, and a consequent inability to do follow up work with participants. The distantiation of the "texted" online talk; the capacity for and so invitation to identity concealment, together constitute advantages for the self-protecting online communicator – but problems for the conventional social-science researcher. Those assumptions arising from "author function", as outlined above,

mean that expectations of sincerity or authenticity in online communication must be moderated – if not abandoned. While the personalisation and informality of online texts invites disclosure and spontaneity, these are no guarantee of authenticity – and, as this study, alongside many others, will confirm, there is a great deal of counter-evidence for online communication as a performative and calculated activity.

Add in the problems of intertextuality and the technical ease of cut-and-paste message composition, and expectations of authorial intent and expressiveness become very problematic. The dilemma is compounded in IRC by the "multilogue" nature of the discussions. With multiple online "authors", each with decontextualised origins, who may or may not be reproducing others' texts, how are the discursive framings established?

Secondly, there is the sheer enormity of the task in analysing chatroom "talk" as if it were one, stable entity. With millions of chatrooms there is a wealth of material. Any "sampling" must acknowledge its specificities, and the impossibility of establishing "universal" rules for all (chat) spaces or eras. I have narrowed this topic to a very few chatrooms, concentrating on seven chatrooms in seven case studies - although I have used several other chatrooms to show a characteristic that may not have been obvious in one of the chatrooms I "captured". But this is a minute sample of what is available. The study therefore is designed not to outline for all time what online chat "is" or how it is "produced" – since the conditions I uncover may already be past. For instance, one problem with a study of anything involving a consumer technology is the inbuilt obsolescence and the subsequent brevity of its relevance.

In this thesis I argue that text-based chatrooms are already being augmented by other CMC technologies, to the point that currently chatrooms have many features in common with telephone and Internet conferencing communicative devices. But at a moment when both of these are moving to video services, much of what I establish here as "communicative enhancements" to supplement a visually-deprived communication, may also change. Instead, what I hope to achieve with this study is to persuade communications scholars and Internet users generally that what may seem transient, trivial or temporary, was in itself richly meaningful, and that even the most fleeting of communicative regulatory systems in one of the most seemingly reduced or fragmentary forms – which I propose Internet Chat to represent – is still formed within predominant discursive systems, and able to carry complex communicative intent.

How then can "communicative intent" be considered, when, as I admit in my third problematisation of online research, people in cyberspace often change their name for use in other chatrooms, and sometimes even within a single chatroom? For example, in an academic chatroom where there is scholarly discussion about an issue a

person may log in as "laProf". In a sex-chatroom, the same person may be "lovelylegs". In a political chatroom the person may choose to be "senator". One's online character is only part of one's online repertoire. A person can be a feather, fire hydrant, cloud or a riverbank. How the person's "speaking" persona changes in different chatrooms is an area I explore throughout this study, not to pursue the theme of online identity formation, common in first-generation Internet study (eg Turkle, 1995, 1996; Rheingold, 1991; Castells, 2000) but to examine how far language itself shifts with persona change. My first assumption (see Methodology, 3.2. Key Assumptions) that people change their text-self in different chatrooms will bring to the fore some of the ways in which such changes might be described and identified. And it is in doing so: in shifting critical attention away from the problem of online identity as always at least potentially performative rather than fixed and essential, and instead focusing on how such performances are enacted, that this study re-routes around the dilemma of intent. My focus is on what occurs, rather than on what might be intended - and on how regularly recurring patterns of "occurrence" may be able to reveal consensually established communicative "rules".

One methodological constraint which online research at first sight appears to have the potential to overcome is the capacity to "return" research findings for verification by research subjects. Given the speed and ease of file exchange, it might be anticipated that research results online could be quickly and accurately assessed by the original data providers. But in the event, as I indicate in my fourth aspect of online research shortcomings, there is an inability to do follow-up work with participants in chatrooms. Unless a research subject is identified – accurately – online, and their e-mail address is noted so that they can be tracked within chatrooms, they become lost to the researcher. Rarely are the same people in the same chatroom at the same time, so that online chat studies cannot be replicated. And while in early pilot studies I intervened in chat sessions to outline my project and seek cooperation – a technique which research ethics required throughout this study – it rapidly became evident that for many if not most online communicators this acted as an intrusion into the flow of communication: one which they did not necessarily reject, but which altered, at least for a time, the communicative dynamic. Their response raises a further contradiction in online communication: its curious and perhaps unprecedented status, somewhere between the personal and the public.

1.6 Are Chatrooms Public or Private?

One of the first issues that must be addressed by the researcher who examines chatrooms is whether chatrooms

[21]

are public or private spaces (see articles in the journal of online studies, Cybersociology)   . All exchanges within chatrooms, accessible to the public, are legally public, unless there is a notice saying all the dialogue

is copyrighted. A chatroom where the participant has to log on as part of an organisation such as a university, company or government web site can be regarded as private and confidential – at least to that specific community of users. The behaviour of the participants on such sites may be different from a chatroom that is open to the public without any registration details, e.g. e-mail address, and where participants make up usernames which do not reflect or identify them – although there is increasing evidence from this and other studies that a strongly-emergent "chatroom style" often overcomes site-specific communicative regulation .

This issue of public access versus privacy is one I had to consider in regard to ensuring that methods I chose for my study complied with the principles of ethical research. Mark Poster (1995, p.67) argues that "the problem we face is that of defining the term 'public'" and he posits that "The age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over". However, chatrooms can be private also if two people agree to talk in a room and not allow anyone else in. I thus define the term "public" in relation to my work as referring to what is available to be seen on the computer screen by anyone with an Internet connection, leaving the implications arising from such matters as "disclosure-talk" or use of limiting "private" codes – common among "regular" chatters on a specific site - for analysis as the study progresses.

There are two primary categories of text-based chatroom communication. Public channels or chatrooms on the Internet that allow anyone to enter without registration are an open conversational arena and what is said is clearly public. But it is also possible to set up a chatroom which is by invitation only, such as those people set up on their computer [22] for IM or ICQ interaction, and these chatrooms are not displayed on the Internet unless the owner of the chatroom chooses to do so. This allows a number of participants to get together for a conference without anyone else knowing. Some chatrooms similarly allow chatters to use a "whisper" or private message mode, preventing unwanted chat inhibitors from witnessing the communicative act. Such activities clearly signal a belief in and desire for "private" chat, and might be expected to reveal different chat behaviours in their usage. Since it is – perhaps perversely – easier to negotiate permission to study the texted chats in such spaces (presumably because the relation of "trust" which occasions the shift into private mode also facilitates the granting of research access) this study will be able to undertake such comparative analysis.

1.7 Is cyberspace real?

There remains the ongoing question within Internet studies as to whether cyberspace is "real" and therefore worthy of study. Judged from the energy and fervour with which they participate, to most participants, chatrooms are "real" created space. People are able to express ideas, ask questions, and even to make arrangements to meet physically. Many of the same experiences can be gained within the chatroom environment as among people at a meeting, party or at any social gathering; "chatrooms are suitable places for developing the self socially, mentally and culturally, as well as shaping the character traits of the self" (Yee, 2000). Virtual communities can be as important to those who visit the same chatroom as any community in RL (Real Life) would be (see Rheingold, 1994, 1999; Turkle, 1995, 1996; Poster, 1999, 2001; Vallis, 1999 and 2001).

Real social interchange in person-to-person or real-life situations with "real" communication does however change abruptly once in an online chat environment where the "other" is not known. The purpose of most communication is not the exchange of factual information, but the establishment and maintenance of social ties and structures: Carey's "ritual communication" prioritized over "transmission". Online, when we cannot identify the "other" we do not know whether there is credibility in what the "other" has to say, and they have the same problem with what we say. The traditional philosophic approach holds that sincerity and competence are the underpinnings of credibility (Audi, 1998), and while the distantiations of mediated and especially CMC communication have eroded both confidence in and expectations of the former in favour of the latter, online chat, like other communicative modes, proceeds as though such guarantees were still in place. We still need to know something about a person's social identity in order to know how to act toward them. Even if, as Bourdieu suggests, it is the "cultural capital" displayed in talk itself as much as anything else which controls our communicative relation, we interpret this as in itself part of "character" or "personality." It is this consensus over social interaction conducted within language which enables us to operate within online chat, in the absence of other cues – and even to "chat" with those AI (artificial intelligence) entities emerging to service our information and entertainment needs (for instance, the online news avatar called Ananova at http://www. ananova.com/).

With animated images (a machine attempting to pass as human) now "communicating" in chatrooms as well as in commercials and even television talk shows, we can no longer know with certainty whether we are speaking with another human or a computer program.

Virtual stars translate internationally. They don't age or throw tantrums; they can master any language or skill, and can appear in more than one place at the same time. "Real people have limits", (Lewis, 1992), but Horipro has created the world's first virtual teen idol, Kyoko Date. Kyoko Date is an interesting subject. It/she stands on the

edge between technology and society, and yet is capable of carrying on conversations online.
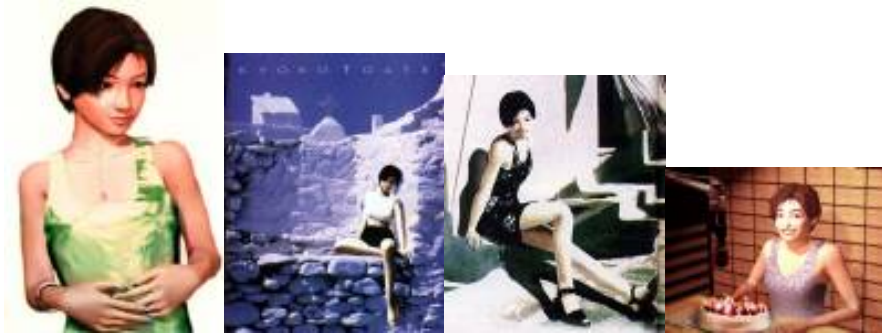
KYOKO DATE: The world's first virtual idol is eternally 17. She's the daughter of a Tokyo couple who run a sushi restaurant, where she helps out, and has a younger sister. She was born near the US Army's Yokota Military Base not far from Tokyo. She spends most of her day taking dancing and singing lessons and has always been athletic. She was a soccer player in high school and liked to play three-on-three basketball games, too. She's a big Mariah Carey fan and has a crush on Christian Slater. (HORIPRO, INC. http://www.wdirewolff.com/jkyoko.htm)

Kyoko's capacity for convincing chat is the ultimate illustration of my contention that not communicative intent – since it/she can have none – but communicative competence is the dominant marker controlling our online communicative practice.

This thesis sets out only to examine actual communicative practice. It defers considerations of whether online chat is "true" communication, seeking rather to merely clarify some of the subtle distinctions between real life and online virtual communication, describe how they work, present some new research findings regarding online conversations that take place within our current forms of electronic communication, and outline how some of the analytical techniques evolved for codifying and understanding both "natural" conversation in real life contexts, and texted communicative genres presented for "reading", may be extended to consideration of online "chat". (Hymes, 1974)

It explores seven text-based chatrooms during the period of April 1998 and October 2001, using theories evolved in analysis of conventional face-to-face conversation, to develop methods of analysis of text-based chatrooms.

1.8 Personal interest in researching online conversation

This thesis is the third phase of my academic research into new discourse genres. The first was my BA Honours Degree (Deakin University, 1995) with the thesis entitled, "Graffiti as Text: How youth communicate with one another through street art," and the second phase, moving into new electronic communicative genres, was my Masters thesis (Deakin, 1997), entitled, "How the Internet changes literature". Since 1965 I have been

exploring genres of writing as an artist, combining writing and art forms as an expression of poetic communication.

My interest in electronic communication is first and foremost an interest in communication. How do people exchange, relate and create meaning? Having done the 1960s in the United States of America I came in contact with others who were interested in a global mindset. I lived in Greenwich Village in New York City in the mid-1960s. Listening to Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, Joan Baez, Alan Ginsberg (I read my own poetry with Ginsberg at St. Marks Place Church on East 9th Street) I became part of the wave of protesters at the end of the 1960s [23]. Being young and idealistic I followed the trek of those who were seeking change to San Francisco in 1967 to engage in the summer of love and to seek ways of communicating with people from other cultures and backgrounds. In 1969 I found myself in Hawaii and before long had joined a new age cult, the Holy Order of Mans. This Order was an extension of my beliefs and searching for a better way to communicate as an integration of a world mind (an "Over-Soul") which connected the parts to make a whole.

It is my belief that out of this mixture of 1960s idealism, 1970s new-age spiritual explorations, 1980s multinational marketing and globalization and the growth of the Internet of the 1990s, a desire to communicate with ever-broader social groupings has emerged. The paradigm has become "we are the world". With the growth of the personal computer, the Internet and then chatrooms, my once idealistic pursuit of communication with different mindsets and various cultures became a reality (for similar expressions of an intensified expressivity, see Giddens, 1991; Turkle, 1995). After a study of 35-years of astrology, metaphysics, literature, art and philosophy I felt as if I had found the sort of social space I had always been looking for; a way of turn-taking in conversation where there was not an immediate dominance of culture, gender, philosophy, nationality or age. This thesis examines whether or not such a possibility has indeed arrived, delivered by what we so frequently dismiss as "Internet chat".

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Abstract

In examining the literature of conversational analysis and related techniques for describing language in use, it is my intention to discover what these techniques can tell us of how chatroom "talk" works. In what ways is chatroom "talk" similar to or different from natural conversation? Is it, even within its short history, one or many communicative forms? Are there common, "core" elements, present on all web-based chat sites? Are

there specialist elements on specialist sites – and if so, is this limited to lexis, or does it extend to other elements of "texted-talk"? Firstly I will explore the research on electronic chatrooms that is available, seeking existing insights into how texted-talk works, and whether these can be extended by a fuller deployment of any of the language-in-use theories I have examined. Secondly I will draw on the current theories of conversational analysis to see whether it is possible, and useful, to establish a theoretical framework and methodological focus for examining how dialogue in electronic talk operates as a system of social meaning making within cyberculture.

I will critique books and articles by researchers in linguistics and social anthropology which pertain to the special features of chatroom discourse, including, in the field of *Reading-Response theory*: Wolfgang Iser (1974, 1978, 1989, 2000), Stanley Fish (1980, 1990), Umberto Eco (1979, 1986, 1995), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1994) and Julia Kristeva (1980); *Computer-Mediated Communication* (CMC): Charles Ess (1996, 2000), Mark Poster (1988, 1990, 1995) and Michael Stubbs (1996, 1998): *Semiotics*: Roland Barthes (1970, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1981), Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), M. A. K. Halliday (1978, 1994), Robert Nofsinger (1991) and Chandler (1998, 1999, 2001); *Speech Act Theory*: John Austin (1962), John Rogers Searle (1965, 1969) and Deborah Schiffrin (1987); *Discourse Analysis*: Deborah Tannen (1989, 1998); Norman Fairclough (1982, 1989, 1995) and *Conversational Analysis* (CA): Paul ten Have (1999), Suzanne Eggins & Diana Slade (1997), Donald Allen and Rebecca Guy (1974), Erving Goffman (1959, 1971, 1974, 1981), George Herbert Mead (1934) and Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff (1973). Theorists are not strictly always in one "camp". For example, I discuss Eco both in Case Study One, where I use Reading-Response theory to analyse the chatroom dialogue, and in Case Study Three, where I use Semiotics to look at my data. Here I aim to construct a general theory of how the interactivity of chatroom talk-texting relates it to both the "readerly" or the "lisible" elements of dialogism, emergent in mid-twentieth-century reading theory; and an account of how far the socio-linguistic theories of post-Saussurian language studies (including especially "speech act" theory, Halliday's "Systemic and Functional Linguistics", and Harvey Sacks's "Conversation Analysis") can provide explanations of the communicative strategies observable in a chatroom's (quasi) synchronous talk-texting.

In the more specific area of direct or primary research into chatroom discourse, I have located and systematised more than three hundred articles online on chatroom communication, seventy-one of them discussed in this literature review. In particular, I wish to re-focus the direction of many of these studies, from the specifics of their research goal – most often to "explain" a particular chatroom "culture" – to the more generalised and methodological goals of this study. For example, though much has been written about forms of person-to-person communication in the areas of cybersex, cyber-communities, and gender online, (Cicognani, 1996, 1997,

1998; Rheingold, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2000; Turkle, 1982, 1984, 1995, 1996 and Bays, 2000), very few researchers have applied those conversational analysis theories which are used to examine real-life social interactions to chatroom conversation itself. While chatroom analysis is a rapidly growing area of academic research and more

is available online daily, most studies are directed away from general studies of this type [24].

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is an overview of the literature both found in print and accessed online. The nature of my research and the nature of rapidly changing technology have meant that the majority of sources have been found online, and furthermore, that some of these sources are no longer available. I have included copies of all e-journal articles in my appendix for this reason.

To establish means for rigorous analysis, I "export" my investigation of chatroom talk into the established linguistic methodologies of work on off-line analytical linguistics. There is a growing body of print material on hypertext, the Internet and the World-Wide-Web but there has been little work done on analysis of interactive online texted-talk, which is as seemingly borderless as other online texted realms. My field literature borrows from previous research into MUDs (Multi User Dimensions) and Internet Relay Chat (IRC), which I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis (see 1.2.2.1.1 MUDs vs. IRC).

Overall, work in this new area of study postulates two major features of the field:

1. That new ways of thinking about conversation will emerge with the growing widespread use of computers as a form of communication. (Ess, 1996; Stubbs, 1996).
2. That chatrooms involve exchange more hastily done than in any other form of electronic talk-texting, and so therefore more likely to respond to and reflect back the particular pressures and influences of online communication (Spender, 1995).

But how might such new forms of communication be captured, or new ways of thinking about communication itself be constructed? E-scholarship has provided one possible answer, in what is becoming known as the "re-mediation hypothesis" (Grusin, 2000). Working to find ways to describe the evolution of the graphic design and textual navigation pathways of websites as they resolve into convention, Bolter and Grusin draw on earlier hypotheses concerning the establishment of new literary genres. Watt (1957) famously demonstrated that the novel, a comparatively new form of literary production accompanying the rise of extended literacy and a largely unclassically educated leisure readership in the eighteenth century, was built over a base of related

textual forms: the essay, the sermon, the drama, the political pamphlet, the scientific report, the romance. Bolter (1991) and Grusin (2000) demonstrate how similar forces operate to produce website conventions, from magazine and press layout for the "self-directed" reader, to the "windows" formats of familiar software applications, to the screen conventions of television: "fenestration", the "talking head", image fades and dissolves.

If users of the new web-based chatrooms and related "docu-verse" sites are able to establish meaningful communication within these new realms, some degree of "re-mediated" familiarity must operate. Further, we can anticipate that this will arise only in part from the "production" work of technology designers and programmers. As with work from Watt to Bolter and Grusin, users extend and innovate within the frameworks provided, finding new ways to "use" the product in an active reception. Such a view is a truism of electronic textual theory, Landow for instance suggesting an unparalleled compliance between CMC designers and avant-garde literary theorists in the last four decades of the twentieth century.

But this is to suggest that to "license" the online chat user's practices into a full developmental role in producing new communicative forms, we will need to examine the highly regulated field of literary theory. Landow indeed shows clear convergence between online practices – at least as directed by technical innovations – and high-cultural literary theories of text production (authorship) and reception (reading). But Landow was, and is, involved in constructing online hypertextual aids to the study of conventional high-culture texts. His work focused on intertextual and contextual studies into nineteenth century literature. While it may seem curious to deal first with text, in a study which aims to show the relative fluidity of online chat as a form of talk, it does seem necessary to consider the degree to which comparatively recent moves to acknowledge the active role of readers as opposed to writers of literary texts have established legitimacy for views of language itself as made meaningful as much in reception as in production. Given the distantiation of online text, as noted in the Introduction above, the "talk" relations of online chat rest more securely on text reception than those of their real-life equivalents. Active interpretation in reception is as central to chat practice as Landow has established it is for contemporary literary theorists.

There are many literary theories; so many that theorist Joseph Natoli has labeled the field a "theory carnival", (Natoli, 1987, p. 5, 8, 13, 22). Literary theories overall have become more scientific and specialist, according to theorist Terry Eagleton, "… as North American society developed over the 1950s, growing more rigidly scientific and managerial in its modes of thought, a more ambitious form of critical technocracy seemed demanded." (1983, p. 91). By the 1980s what emerged is what were called "the theory wars" – a period

of theory debate which raged across all Western academic fields in the humanities and social sciences, but established only a loose consensus on a paradigm shift to poststructuralist theories, without establishing a common set of epistemologies or investigative methodologies. Indeed, the position taken up within poststructuralist theory is in itself opposed to any possibility of stable or universal epistemology (see Foucault, 1994). Even within specific fields of study, such as linguistics, there is no agreement over study goals or tools.

One aspect of this period of conceptual turmoil centrally relevant to the current study has been the focus on what has been termed "the reader's liberation movement" (Reid, 1996). Co-terminous with the rise of hypertextual logic and CMC technologies has been a move to replace interpretive focus on "authors" as agents of meaning, with consideration of the "active reader" (see Foucault, 1969 and Landow, 1987, 1992). Arising first through literary theory (Holland, 1975; Iser, 1978; Eco, 1979, 1986, 1995; Kristeva, 1980; Fish, 1990; see Case Study One
[25]
in this study) and later extending to the concept of the "active audience" in media studies   (Ang, 1996; Nightingale, 1996; Tulloch, 2001) this theorises the act of "reception" as richly interpretive, and as firmly central to any communicative act as the "production" of that text in the act of writing or media construction.

This active interpretation has been extended to contemporary understanding of the role of the online "reader".

> In a hypertext environment a lack of linearity does not destroy narrative. In fact, since readers always, but particularly in this environment, fabricate their own structures, sequences or meanings, they have surprisingly little trouble reading a story or reading for a story.

> As readers we find ourselves forced to fabricate a whole story out of separate parts… It forces us to recognize that the active author-reader fabricates text and meaning from "another's" text in the same way that each speaker constructs
> [26]
> individual sentences and entire discourses from "another's" grammar, vocabulary, and syntax (Landow, 1997)   .

This helps us to position a review of active reception of print based texts alongside subsequent examination of the interactivity of conversation, the two uniting as joint influences on e-texted chat, in unprecedented ways. But before either strand of review can be implemented, it is necessary to examine those studies of web-based communication which have already been undertaken, and to isolate the sorts of theorisation which have dominated web studies to date.

2.2 Technology of conversation

Initially, studies into web communication focused on the innovations introduced by the new technologies themselves (see Blommaert, 1991; Crystal, 2001; Featherstone, 1996). Case Study two introduces technology

into consideration of the online texted communicative act. However, a survey by WorldLingo [27] in April 2001 showed that as much as "91% of Fortune 500 and Forbes international 800 companies cannot respond correctly to a foreign language e-mail," showing that Computer-Mediated communication is very much in its infancy, and that even technologies which have been available for some time have not necessarily been assimilated into the everyday repertoire even of professional communications practice. It seems that take-up of CMC technologies has been selective, and that actual practice must be examined to establish the influences of these new technologies on communication. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has itself evolved to permit the analysis of any number of aspects of the use of computers in communication fields, such as education or language learning, as well as in its own distinctive interactive communicative acts such as e-mail, bulletin boards and chatrooms. Within CMC studies, methods such as Computational Linguistics [28] and Text and Corpus Analysis make archives of texts and use computer programs to read and analyse large pieces of data. To this extent CMC technologies can be shown to have impacted directly on communications use – and even on communications research. But while many claims have been made for the transformative qualities of CMC, there has been far less certainty, consensus, and even in many cases, methodological rigour in the collection or analysis of research data on CMC uses.

2.2.1 The World Wide Web

My initial search of literature spanned the period between July 1998 and November 2000, though I have added to this search somewhat during the remaining years of writing this thesis. The proportions of articles that I have accessed that are available on online interactions are in themselves interesting. Appendix 1 on the accompanying CD shows that fifty-six articles are directly about online interaction.

Of these 62 per cent are research articles about relationships online and related issues. Thirty-one per cent are about cyber community and MUDs. Three per cent are about the development of the online self. Twenty-three per cent are about MUDS and only 4 per cent are looking at online discourse from a linguistic point of view. So by the year 2000 we had a marked lack of studies in this last area, with a heavy emphasis instead on discussion of interactivity and community establishment – for the most part without any methodological techniques for establishing or illustrating either of these qualities or practices, beyond the assertion that they exist. As the Internet has become more widely used, especially at the academic level, the number of available researched articles continues to grow. In the current studies on the World Wide Web, I have found research done on

online-communities, gender issues, discussion groups and cyber sex.

2.2.1.1 Online communities

Many academics have explored the online communicational milieu, including Anna Cicognani [29], who built her Ph.D. around the design of text-based virtual worlds (1998) and Dr. Sherry Turkle [30] (1995) who looks at computer "talk" from a clinical psychologist's perspective. The field literature is growing, with several people a month e-mailing me to inform me that they are doing post-graduate study into computer-mediated communication. There are several unpublished theses and papers that explore online environments such as MUDs and MOOs as well as many discussion groups, but once again these discussion groups look at the topic mainly from a sociological or psychological perspective. Other writers who are working in an academic milieu are Bechar-Israeli (1998), Camballo (1998), Cicognani [31] (1996, 97, 98 - Cicognani develops an analysis of the architecture of MUDs, 1998), Cyberrdewd (1999) [32], Hamman (1996, 98, 99) [33], Turkle (1984, 1995, 1996), ten Have (1998, 1999) [34] and Collins & Murphy (1999) [35]. There is a growing body of online journals (e-zines) which contribute to cyberculture and I have reviewed these further down in this literature review (2.2.2).

Howard Rheingold (1985, 1991, 1994), according to his own homepage, is the acknowledged authority on virtual community. In his book, "The Virtual Community", he tours the "virtual community" of online networking and questions whether a distinction between "virtual" communities and "real-life" communities is entirely valid. "The Virtual Community" argues that real relationships happen and real communities develop when people communicate upon virtual common ground. He describes a community that is as real as any physical community. Rheingold gives examples of virtual communities where people talk, argue, seek information, organize politically and fall in love. At the same time he tells moving stories about people who have received online emotional support during devastating illnesses, yet acknowledges a darker side to people's behaviour in cyberspace. Rheingold goes as far as to argue that people relate to each other online much the same as they do in physical communities. It is this relating to each other that I explore in my case studies as I attempt to determine how meaning is exchanged between chatters.

Anders in his online article, "MUDS: Cyberspace Communities" (1999), explores many forms of MUDs, such

[36]

as "AberMUDs" , MOOs (Multi-user Object Oriented), MUSHes (Mult-User Shared Hallucination), MUSEs (Multi-User Shared Environment) and MUCK (Multi-User Collective Kingdom). Like Rheingold, Anders found parallels between real-life and MUDs, and concluded that people behave similarly to how they do off-line. This is in contrast with other writers on the topic of MUDs who say that people behave differently in MUDs from how they would in person-to-person real-life situations (see for instance Turkle, 1996, pp. 50-57).

Those few examples of linguistically-based research into online communications report similar "mixes" of real-life and online-specific practices. Discourse analyst Paul ten Have for instance finds chatroom titles indicating to users both social contextual information – place, race, culture – and content:

> A first look at this collection of room names suggests two broad classes of categorisation: first a local/national/cultural/ ethnic class and second one oriented to topics, with a large dose of sexual ones. For the first class, different kinds of indicators are available, such as naming as in Australia_Sydney_Chat_Room, and the use of a local language as in hayatherseyeragmensürüyor, or in combination: german_deutsch_rollenspiele. (Paul ten Have, 2002).

Ten Have's discussion suggests both a sophistication in selection and "coding" of information online, evolving very quickly as part of CMC practice, and a "remediation" process in play, using existing off-line communicative experiences to construct and regulate online behaviours. The "virtual" seems in many ways to be interpenetrated by the "real" – so that researchers can expect to find online issues and practices familiar in physical social communication.

2.2.1.2 Gender issues

Identity concealment online acts to confuse issues such as gender, age, social background and race (see Turkle, 1995, 1996; Mantovani, 1995, 1996; Spears & Lea, 1990, 1992; Coates, 1998). Gender is not always discernable in person-to-person off-line interactions. Online, it becomes even less possible to tell whether a person is male or female, even if the person claims to be one or the other. For example, Cherny in *Gender Differences in Text-Based Virtual Reality* (1994) speculates that "women's use of physically aggressive emotes with male characters is an example of women adapting to the different discourse style in male-dominated groups. Recent work on language as gender performance by Butler (1990) and Coates (1998) reveals that linguistic strategies that are acceptable and prevalent in our culture-society shape how we present (or "perform") our selves and our gender. Online identity is especially fluid as users are able to shift who they are. Gender performativity online is especially interesting and it may be acting as a space for social experimentation. Therefore chat can be studied as an important space for research into identity work through language, and for a space indicating early signs of social change. Gender is not

a primary focus in this study, but since it is so central to social identity; it will recur and be picked up from time to time in my analysis.

M. C. Morgan's "A First Look at Conversational Maintenance by Men and Women in Computer Discussions: The Maintenance and the Meaning" is a study carried out in a classroom setting where the gender was known. However, people may behave differently when they know they are being observed. The researcher uses Pamela Fishman's argument that the "responsibility for maintaining oral conversation between men and women falls disproportionately to the women" (1978, 1980), and supports her findings. But can such gender-identified research apply in chatrooms, where gender may be disguised, or not indicated except in subtleties of online behaviour? The question becomes important as researchers report conventions of gender – differentiated behaviours transferring into virtual space. Daphne Desser's *Gender Morphing in Cyberspace* (2000) is another well researched paper with a lot of data. Desser concludes that "It is clear to me that the ability to mask one's off-line gendered identity and to "morph" among various gender instructions does not necessarily empower women or create safer spaces for them. Rather, these online experiments present a bewildering array of possibilities to learn more about how the power of sexism, racism, and homophobia persist despite even our most conscious attempts to eradicate them."

Attempts to evade or re-route gender preconceptions prove difficult, even in virtual environments. Lara Whelan experimented with giving her students gendered names such as Duck, Drake, Hen, Rooster, Doe, Buck to try and discover whether the male or female students chose which animal for their username (see Whelan, 2000). Whelan did not come up with a definitive answer, and found that there was a problem with students firstly not wanting to say which they chose, and secondly with some of the animals not being known by the students as female or male animals: terms such as "drake" and "doe" were too unfamiliar to cyber-savvy youth to drive gender behaviours.

2.2.1.3 Discussion Groups

Another source of useful information was the online discussion groups which can be found in great numbers on the Internet. I have been an active participant in one of these, called "the Languse Internet Discussion List" [37] . This discussion list is described as being:

> … dedicated to issues relevant to the study and analysis of discourse, conversation, talk-in-interaction, and social action in general. As of April, 2002, over 1,700 people, worldwide, have subscribed to Languse.

While working on Case Study Six, in which I drew upon the theory of Conversational Analysis, I posed the question to this discussion group, *In chatrooms would a person signing in and lurking be considered a TCU?* *(*Turn-Constructional-Unit, the name for the units out of which turns are constructed.) As lurking is an important feature of chatroom "talk", but there are as yet no complete studies of it as a phenomenon, I have used a selection of responses from Languse participants who are actively doing work in this area of conversational analysis (ten Have [38], Noblia [39], Vallis [40], Bays [41], Rintel [42] and Lerner [43]). I have discussed these responses in Case Study Six where the theory of Conversational Analysis contributes to the development of my ODAMs (Online Discourse Analytic Methods). In this discussion group, I was involved in an interesting and informative discussion on the question of lurking (see on CD, *lurking.htm* for the complete transcripts) showing the ways research can proceed in a chatroom process:

> …I think the expression "notable absence" fits very well here. That's from the early papers on adjacency pairs, prob. Schegloff & Sacks, 1974, or Schegloff 1968… (ten Have)

> …when I was doing my thesis on chatrooms I wondered about the same thing and in the end I decided to go with treating "lurking" as members oriented to it. That is, the members in the chatrooms I studied seemed to treat 'lurking' as "presence" rather than a "turn" in conversation… (Rhyll Vallis)

> …a lurker prefers to remain "silent" at least in the public arena, because we don't know really if he or she is pursuing a private conversation on a different level… (Hillary Bays)

> …Whether "turn-taking" "exists" in chatrooms is a difficult question. I agree with Rhyll Vallis's answer (glib generalization: "it depends on how members orient to it") and Hillary Bay's answer (glib generalization: "the system's technical structure makes turn-taking very different from FTF interaction turn-taking, so it needs to be evaluated on its own merits"), but think that a more interesting question is what work (for academics, for users, for designers) would proving that it "does" or "does not" exist (and "is" or "is not" similar to FTF turn-taking) do? What do we gain from the answer (explanatory power, political power, etc) Afterall, almost ALL of the interaction is visual and cannot be spoken, contrary to the definition given by SSJ and by Paul ten Have, more recently, have expressed…" (Sean Rintel)

There was little agreement on whether lurking in a chatroom is a form of "speech", and Rintel's response in particular alerts us to the ongoing difficulties of linguistic analysis in chat spaces, where so much of contemporary linguistic analysis encounters just such problematic differences. Any analytical study of online communications, such as that proposed here, must return to examine CMC practices with all their specific qualities, before attempting to apply research techniques transferred from the otherwise rich resources of sociolinguistic – or any other – study. And online experience itself, as with the discussion above, remains a useful illustration of this as a research problem.

2.2.2 The literature of CMC

There is an ever growing mass of literature (Rheingold, 1985, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2000; Stubbs, 1996, 1998; Herring, 1994, 2002; Jones, 1995, 1997; Donath, 1998, 1999; Schiano, 1997) which addresses CMC techniques and compares them to other modes of communication.

The first issue addressed in contemporary CMC studies is the insistence that CMC is not in itself an isolated "driver" of communicative innovation. Most theorists are opposed to technological determinism, and consider rather that CMCs are in themselves driven by precisely the same processes which structure those communicative acts, which they subsequently enable. Charles Ess (1996), in "Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication" may talk about how "Rhetorical Theories derive their basic orientation from the modes and technologies of communication that prevail in a given society, and new technologies and communication practices propel the evolution of new forms of consciousness and culture" (Ess, p.237), but other theorists (see especially Landow, 1992) see only a simultaneity in the rise of new technologies and new cultural theories, while UK technology historian Brian Winston (1998) reminds us of the length of time new technologies – among which CMC technologies are prime examples – take to achieve cultural centrality. Without some "supervening social necessity" Winston suggests, many technological innovations remain inert. And when a technology achieves the centrality witnessed in recent CMC uptake, it must also demonstrate cultural sympathy to dominant conceptual paradigms – of the type uncovered by Landow. While discussing Nelson, Derrida, Barthes and van Dam, Landow (1992) states:

> All four, like many others who write on hypertext and literary theory, argue that we must abandon conceptual systems founded upon ideas of centre, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them by ones of multi linearity, nodes, and networks (1992, p. 63).

When technical writers and cultural or textual theoreticians speak at the same time in the same frame, it is easier than usual, Landow suggests, to detect a dominant cultural paradigm in play. It is possible then to concede that online chat, one among many forms enabled by CMC technologies, may reveal equally dominant cultural formations within its otherwise distinctive meaning-making processing. But, as Landow recognises, meaning-making within the interactive paradigm enabled by CMC may permit and even participate in concepts of cultural dominance, but it does so from within a Gramscian view of "hegemonic" or contestational cultural formation. Castells (1997) points out that central to CMCs is a strong shift away from "institutionalising" identity formation which he terms "legitimation", and even beyond "resistance" identity, towards the "project" self of late consumer-led capitalist production, in which constantly shifting and multiple meaningful identity formations

are made and remade daily, within variable and mobile locations. Within this intensified variability, CMCs themselves act as agents of intensification, providing not only so many more cultural "spaces" for meaning-making transactions, but marking those spaces with increased consciousness of the "virtual" or experimental basis of the activity. To this extent CMC technologies can be said to "legitimise" interpretive work: text production and reception – as a newly dominant cultural activity. And if so, then it becomes more urgent to consider the exchange relations in play within that activity: exchanges conducted in virtual space, with diminished social markers available to participants, and a commensurably enhanced focus on language use.

2.2.2.1 CMC and online talk-texting

There are several prominent journals on CMC online, including the *Journal of Computer-Mediated*

[44]

Communication   from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California and from the School of Business Administration at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and *The Electronic Journal of Communication* based at the University at Albany, New York (Terrell Neuage, online editor). The *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* however has only one article on text-based chatrooms, focusing mostly on topics not relative to text-based chat, such as Computer-Mediated Markets (5,3), Electronic Commerce and the Web (5,2), Searching for Cyberspace (5,1), Persistent Conversation (4,4), CMC and Higher Education, 2 (4,3), Online Journalism (4,1), Virtual Environments, Part 2 (3, 3), Designing Presence in Virtual Environments (3, 2), Studying the Net (3, 1), Electronic Commerce (1, 3), Play and Performance in CMC (1, 2), and Collaborative Universities (1, 1). An article by Judith Donath, Karrie Karahalios and Fernanda Viégas at the MIT Media Lab, Massachusetts Institute of Technology is of interest to my work in chat. They have constructed a new way to carry on chat online by having:

> … each person who is connected to the chat's server appear as a circle. When the user posts a message, their circle grows and accommodates the text inside it. Postings are displayed for a few seconds (the exact time varies depending on the length of each posting) after which they gradually fade into the background. This approach mimics real life conversations where at any given time the focus is on the words said by the person who spoke last. Over time, those words dissipate and the conversation evolves. The sequence of growing and shrinking circles creates a pulsating rhythm on the screen that reflects the turn-taking of regular conversations. By building visual interfaces to online conversations and their archives, our goal is to increase the ability of this medium - computer-mediated discussion - to carry subtler and more nuanced messages, both by giving people a richer environment in which to interact and by providing them with greater insight into the underlying social patterns of their virtual community.
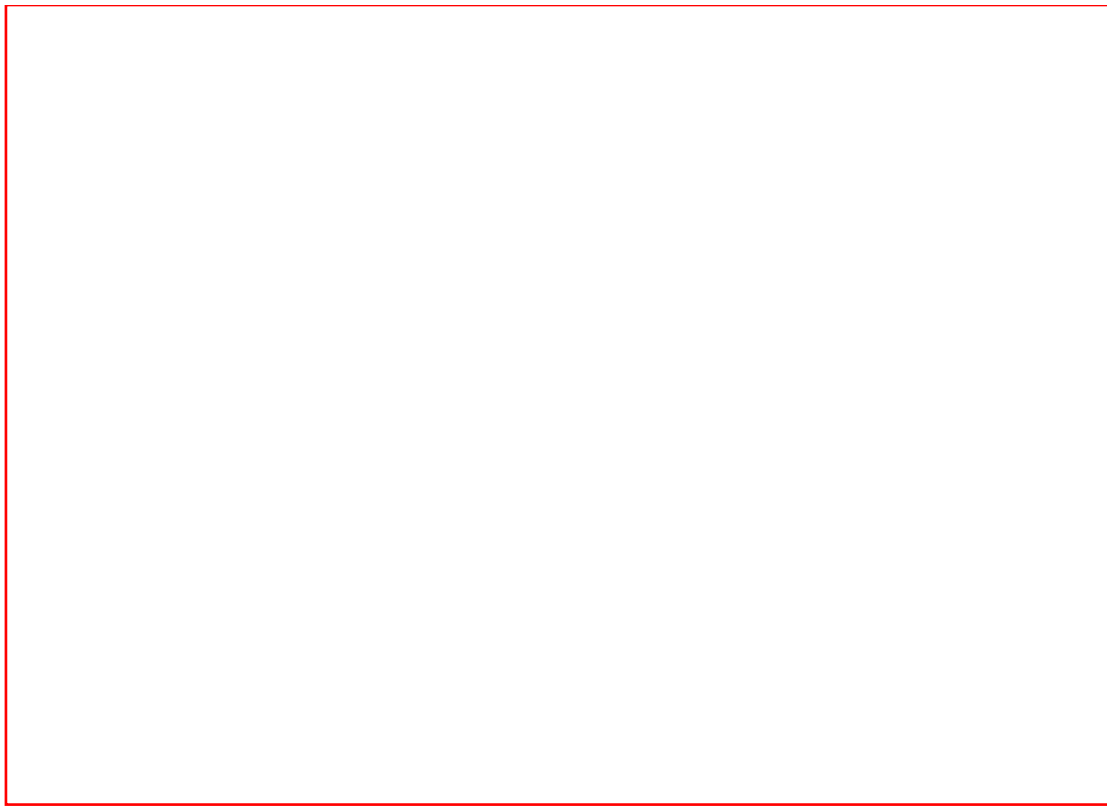
The point of view is that of the red circle (shown saying "Hello I'm Kate"). As she moves from one location to another, different conversations are brought into focus.
http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue4/donath.html (viewed online 05 July, 2000).

I have not however found any chat site with this model of presentation, and the two models which are thriving in Internet communities, text-based chat and 3-D chat sites, continue with the limitations on "subtler and more nuanced messages" – suggesting, as I consider throughout this study, that there are in fact expressive and interpretive systems in play which can be picked up with careful analysis, and shown to satisfy existing users.

[45]

One of the world's first peer reviewed electronic journals, *The Electronic Journal of Communication* is a part of the large online site, "Communication Institute of Online Scholarship" with articles and links to many studies being carried on in the area of electronic communication. Several of the journals that have been useful in this thesis include: "Computer-mediated communication", Volume 3 (2) April 1993 (edited by Tom Benson); "Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis", Volume 6 (3) 1996 (edited by Susan Herring); "The Future of the Internet", Volume 8 (2) 1998 (edited by Peter White); "Community Networking: Mapping the Electronic

Commons", Volume 11 (2) 2001 (edited by Joseph Schmitz); and two issues of The Electronic Journal of Communication with the article, "A Digital Divide? Facts and Explanations" to be online early 2003: (edited by Jan van Dijk) and "Liberation in cyberspace…or computer-mediated colonization?" (Ess and Sudweeks).

[46]

Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine   ran issues from May 1994 to January 1999, reporting about people, events, technology, public policy, culture, practices, study, and applications related to human communication and interaction in online environments. The only issue that is particularly useful for this study is *Organizer Participation in an Computer Mediated Conference* Volume 5, Number 6 / June 1, 1998, in which the author hypothesizes that there is a relationship between the number of messages posted to an online conference by the organizers of such a conference and the number of posts made by the participants. Organizers must continue to actively participate in their conference in order to insure that participants will also actively participate. I have found this to be true in moderated chatrooms (see Case Study Six) where the moderator, like the organizer in an online conference, needs to keep the "talk" going by contributing, and answering each turn taking. The insight confirms the interactivity central to CMC and especially to chat, returning the active user to the core of the equation. The "computing" part of the CMC formula is useful for the analysis of CMC usage as the researcher is active during the collection phase of data by being in the research. Computing can be used to assist in the minute and detailed examination of the reams of chat exchanges produced daily on an ever-expanding list of sites by collecting and sorting the data instantly.

2.2.2.2 Analysing electronic textual data

Computational linguistics involves the use of computing and its powerful capacity for measurement and detection of recurrent patterns, in the analysis of complex networks of language construction. In *Foundations of Statistical Natural Language Processing*, Manning and Schütze (1999) give an overview of one form of computer analysis of language: natural language processing (NLP). Their work presents all the theory and algorithms needed for building NLP tools. While such models may seem ideal for handling the vast numbers of talk-transactions within daily chat use, research into text-based conversational analysis is not yet encompassed in NLP. At one level, I share Manning and Schutze's concern with analysis of real language, focusing on language in (online) use.

Analysing patterns of words and grammar in chatrooms, Instant Messenger, and within discussion group environments, will present challenges not faced in other forms of textual analysis. Linguistic researcher Michael Stubbs begins his book, "Text and Corpus Analysis" (1996), with the question: "How can an analysis of

the patterns of words and grammar in a text contribute to an understanding of the meaning of the text?" (p.3). Stubbs continues with an explanation of text, which will be the working definition of text I will use in my own research:

> By text, I mean an instance of language in use, either spoken or written: a piece of language behaviour which has occurred naturally, without the intervention of the linguist. This excludes examples of language which have been invented by a linguist merely to illustrate a point in a linguistic theory. Examples of real instances of language in use might include: a conversation, a lecture, a sermon, an advert, a recipe... (Stubbs, p.4).

Chatroom talk, despite its apparent artificiality in that it is constructed through CMC and represented in script, is such a form of "natural" language in use. And, since it is already transported by the complex algorithms of CMC, why not re-apply them to help explain its techniques? The problem with NLP is in its focus on "processing", or the reconstruction of individual pathways of meaning-making. Without tracking individuals it is impossible to know how an individual is dealing with language – and chatrooms move too fast and are too enmeshed in cultures of anonymity and even active identity concealment and experimentation, to conduct ethnographic follow-up on meaning processing. Such work is useful for people doing research into text-based chatrooms in areas such as education, where students can be accessed in person to find out how they process what is on the screen. But for online chat analysis, at least at this period of its history, study cannot depart from what is available on the screen. Further, with chat-texting (and its mobile telephony variant SMS texting) having so rapidly and so recently developed an entirely new repertoire of linguistic abbreviations and codes, online chat must be described and codified, before it could be accessible to NLF structuring codes of analysis. In its current developmental phase, such work seems especially problematic – yet another illustration of the degree to which online chat seems to be producing qualities which defy easy application of existing communication theories or means of analysis. Are we then able to conceive of the current CMC literature as beginning the groundwork for establishing the specifics of CMC practice, and use at least the dominant threads of CMC scholarship to date, to focus the central dilemmas for analysis of online chat?

2.2.2.3 Online writings on CMC

There are already many articles on CMC and in recent years the literature online has been rapidly growing [47] . Search engines on the Internet result in the discovery of any number of articles one wants to review, many of them grounded in actual practice, and keen to extrapolate to overviews of how online communication "is".

That said, it is also important to realize that not every form of online talk provides equal access to

productive techniques of analysis. For instance, Edward A. Mabry in "Framing Flames: The structure of argumentative messages on the net" (2000) hypothesizes that "framing strategies are related to the emotional tenor of a disputant's message, and that a speaker's emotional involvement with an issue should be curvilinearly related to the appropriation of framing as an argumentative discourse strategy." Mabry carried out an analysis of 3000 messages, obtained from a diverse sampling of computer-mediated discussion groups and forums. He wanted to find a correlation between online argument and off-line person-to-person argument. The obvious conclusion was that without physical cues arguments online cannot be fully determined as effective. This work may seem immediately relevant to tracking meaning-making in chatroom talk – yet Mabry's work was on online discussion groups, where long postings are common, and where topics are very clearly focused. I found I could not translate his findings into a text-based chatroom as the feature of fleeting-text (see Case Study Five) and the constantly appearing and disappearing authorships (chatters coming and going and lurking – see Case Study Six) make it impossible to track arguments. While argument clearly exists in online chat, the format restricts its full development.

In text-based chatrooms not only are the two categories of initiating messages and continuing messages present at all time but because of the nature of threads (see Case Study Four) the multilogue of chatters and the presence of lurkers (see Case Study Six) and the never ending chat (chatrooms can be going for years with no stoppage) it is difficult to determine the path of messages, especially whether they have "dead ends". Mabry's arguments do not hold up when one considers that the Internet never sleeps and neither do mailing lists; making it difficult to say that there is a beginning or an end to any online communication. Simple conceptual structures will not transfer from CMC application to application, and are eroded by the very conditions of CMC technologies themselves: their boundarilessness and incessant interactivity.

2.2.2.3.1 Universal language

In the Volume 12 Number 2, 2002, issue of *"The Electronic Journal of Communication"* several papers were published from those presented at the second biennial conference on Cultural Attitudes towards Technology and Communication co-chaired by Fay Sudweeks and Charles Ess, and held in Perth, Australia, 13-16 July 2000. The journal issue entitled "Liberation in Cyberspace … or Computer-mediated Colonization?" raises the question of whether CMC can be effective on a world-scale, as there are severe cultural differences that make

[48]

communication via computers on the Internet and the Web difficult to maintain and understand   . Though there is much written on CMC the effect between cultures has had little attention paid to it. I address how

different languages are to be auto-translated so as to be readable in any language in the discussion of this study (see 5.3, "Will chatrooms as part of an online discourse become a universally understood language?"). But problems remain in relation to cultural contextualisation of communication systems and exchanges – a further indication of how far simple or reductive commentary on Net communication in its early phases, may prove inadequate as increasing numbers and increasingly diverse communicative "communities" come online. Analytical work of the detailed kind urged in my own study: linguistically rigorous, yet attentive to social and cultural contexts, must attend to inter-cultural and cross – cultural communications, rather than postulate "universalist" explanations of online practices.

2.2.2.3.2 E-mail

[49]

Next to e-mail communication   , chatrooms are of primary CMC importance, in terms of both use rates and the complexities of communicative exchange – and yet even e-mail services are only in their infancy, in terms of our understandings of what is actually achieved in this form of online communication. Kirk McElhearn's

[50]

Writing Conversation: An Analysis of Speech Events in E-mail Mailing Lists (2000*)*   expands on Gruber's (1996) four possible types of message posted to a mailing list. Gruber outlined strategies such as: initiating messages which successfully stimulate a new discussion; initiating messages which fail to stimulate further discussion; continuing messages which cause further discussion, and continuing messages which are "dead ends". This set of categories can be used to define chat-types as well (see 5.2 Features of chatrooms) – but even in the early phases of chat, is it a sufficient analytical categorization? As chat matures, and especially as different social and cultural groups – real life or online developed – begin to assert identity, will these categories continue to be meaningful, or to convey all we need to understand of how chat works?

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According to "Consumer Technographics Brief Online", chat has three times the users it had in 1999   . With the use of the Internet, distance and time differences seem to play a more important role within chat practices – features unimportant for asynchronous e-mail. An e-mail message can be read at a later time, however, for chatrooms people need to be physically present, although usually at different locations – and the complex interaction of these complex modes of "absent presence" is still not clearly described or analysed in communications terms. My research shows that in CMC literature the least discussed is the "real-time" communication and this study undertakes to bring this form of CMC to the forefront.

Trevor Barr breaks down the different kinds of interaction on the Internet into six categories:

- one-to-one asynchronous remote messaging (such as e-mail);
- one-to-many asynchronous remote messaging (such as "listservs");
- distributed asynchronous remote message databases (such as USENET news groups);
- real-time synchronous remote communication (such as "Internet Relay Chat");
- real-time synchronous remote computer utilisation (such as "telnet"); and
- remote information retrieval (such as "ftp", "gopher" and the "World Wide Web") (Barr, 2000)

As more services evolve within each category, the need for descriptive and analytical techniques to capture and understand differences both between categories, and within categories as used by different populations, increases in urgency.

2.2.2.3.3 Role playing chat sites

"Your words are your deeds; your words are your body." (Turkle, 1995)

"Multiple-User Dimensions", also known as "Multi-user Dungeons" (MUDs) are role-playing chatsites which have played a large part in the development of what has become the popular current text based chatrooms. There has also been more research on this area than any other area of the Internet, beginning a wave of research and discussion on Internet interaction at the end of the 1990s. MUDs are more behaviourally oriented than most chatrooms, and so have been studied extensively by sociological and psychological researchers, because they have more to do with gender, sex and role-playing than simple text-based chatrooms. Chatroom users may not even respond to someone else or indeed be involved in any discussion (see Case Study Six on lurking), however MUDers tend to display high levels of commitment and focus on their site activities. Most MUDs are text based, i.e. all activities online in this environment are based on keyboard commands. As technology advances more MUDs as well as chatrooms will have a more multimedia presence; people will add sound, graphics and animation to their interactions, but in the meantime such sites have much to offer researchers seeking to understand the innovations and practices arising within texted interactive communication.

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Online there are several academics and researchers who have written on MUDS   . Frank Schaap's thesis for the Master of Arts Social Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, March 2000, titled, "*The Words That Took Us There: Not An Ethnography*" is actually an ethnography, based on research in MUDs. Schaap examines MUDs and gender roles, whether real or imagined by the players, and like many other researchers, e.g. Turkle, discusses the effects of words on identity creation, even though there is no way to know who the

"speakers" are:

> In chatrooms conversations are informal and often experimental with participants experimenting with various personae as virtual conversations can have little to no real life significance… (Turkle, 1995).

The popularity of MUDs and other role playing areas can be seen by going to some of the larger sites which list many MUDs available on the Internet, such as, http://www.mudconnect.com/, which provides a frequently updated list of text-based MUDs. On this site over 1400 MUDs were described and listed (as of 16 February 2001). On http://mudlist.eorbit.net/ 3000+ MUDs are described and listed (16 February 2001). One of the many sites on offer

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is Achaea   , which has many towns and cities through which people move using text. One of the early writers on MUDs is Sociology professor Sherry Turkle who studied the way people interact in MUDs. There is a growing

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list of academics who have published books   which refer to MUDs to date with Sherry Turkle being the most often cited academic on MUDs. Sherry Turkle's book, "*The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit Life on the Screen*" is not about computers, but about people and how computers are causing us to re-evaluate our identities in the age of the Internet. Therefore, though it is a useful book to examine the sociological aspects of online communication, the chatroom "talk" in which this identity work is conducted is not in itself a prime focus for study. Turkle says of MUDs:

> We are using life on the screen to engage in new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, politics, sex, and the self. When I began exploring the world of MUDs in 1992, the Internet was open to a limited group, chiefly academics and researchers in affiliated commercial enterprises. The MUDers were mostly middle-class college students. They chiefly spoke of using MUDs as places to play and escape, though some used MUDs to address personal difficulties. By late 1993, network access could easily be purchased commercially, and the number and diversity of people on the Internet had expanded dramatically. Conversations with MUDers began to touch on new themes. To some young people, "RL" (real life) was a place of economic insecurity where they had trouble finding meaningful work and holding on to middle-class
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> status. Socially speaking, there was nowhere to go but down in RL, whereas MUDs offered a kind of virtual social mobility.

Her interpretations are psychological as well as sociological. Sherry Turkle's 1995 book, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet,* postulates that "the personal computer is an "object-to-think-with" for understanding the changes computers are inducing in our minds". And in *Seeing Through Computers, Education in a Culture of Simulation*, Turkle writes:

> "RL is just one more window, and it's usually not my best one." These are the words of a college student who considers the worlds he inhabits through his computer as real as RL--real life. He's talking about the time he spends "being" four

different characters in three different MUDs--multi-user domains--as well as the time he spends doing his homework on the computer. As he sees it, he splits his mind and "turns on one part" and then another as he cycles from window to window on his screen. The computer and the Internet allow him to explore different aspects of himself. As another user puts it, "You are who you pretend to be."

Such commentary, even when ethnographic, takes user understandings and comments on their online activities at face value. If a user suggests that "You are who you pretend to be", then it is so. But research at this level risks a form of universalisation or essentialising, which runs counter to the very diversities and self-directedness which CMC enables. If, as Turkle and her research subjects assert, CMC has opened a new realm for social play and psychological development of self/selves, then the innovations produced will in and of themselves be introducing new and unpredictable – even indescribable – behaviours and understandings. It is these which my own project sets out to detect, by applying more detailed forms of textual analysis to the actual CMC modalities as they evolve.

2.3 Analysing online conversation

I next look at the literature of those varying methods used to capture and analyse language in use, with a special emphasis on conversational analysis, firstly in the narrowest sense of classic Sacksian CA, and then broadening it progressively, to include other text and socially based accounts of how CMC might be operating. By examining chatroom communication and adding the theories below in parentheses to a chat-analysis lexicology, I will establish further dimensions for electronic dialogue.

- The reader (reader-response theory)
- Computers' role in communication (computer-mediated Communication, CMC)
- Introduction of socially embedded elements (pragmatics)
- What is the language "doing" (speech act theory)
- The reasons people enter chatrooms (discourse analysis)

- Details of communicative exchanges (conversational analysis)

2.3.1 The Reader

The most fundamental difference between face-to-face communication and chatroom communication is that is that in the latter, a reading of text is essential. I have therefore chosen to begin my Case Studies (see Case Study One) and the continuation of my search of the literature with contributions addressing reading.

2.3.1.1 The Reader as interpreter

What does the literature say about the role of the reader of a text and can this be applied to the reader in the

chatroom milieu? There are many researchers, writers and schools that concentrate on reader-response theory.

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One such researcher is Norman Holland   who is a scholar in English at the University of Florida, where he teaches and writes about psychoanalytic psychology, and cognitive science. He uses Freudian psychoanalysis as the basis for his theories on reading, which he formulated in the 1970s. He asserts that the reading process is a transaction between the text and the reader. He believes that we develop an identity theme based on what we received from our mother at birth and through our life experiences we personalize this identity. We use this identity to view the world, including the mediated world, and textual interpretation becomes a matter of working our fears, desires, and needs to help maintain our psychological health (Holland, 1968). But the reader transforms the text into a private world where he/she works out his or her fantasies.

In *Poems in Persons, An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature,* (1973) Holland gauges student responses to poems by H.D., Swift, Keats, and Frank O'Hara. He reveals that each reader recreates the poems in accordance with his or her own central myth. In the analysis section of Case Study One I will discuss how this could be seen to work within the chatroom milieu, where the reader is similarly left alone to interpret what is written on the computer screen.

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Holland himself is still writing as a Freudian and today views the Internet as phallic   . In his online article *The Internet Regression*, (2000) Holland says, "Talking on the Internet, people regress. It's that simple. It can be one-to-one talk on e-mail, or many-to-many talk on one of the LISTs or newsgroups. People regress, expressing

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sex and aggression as they never would face to face   ." Holland talks about "flaming", sexual harassment, yet also describes an openness and generosity, which seem to occur when people are online. Without wishing to take up his psychoanalytic concerns, the present study will – along with almost all other studies of online practice (see for instance Turkle, 1996) – comment upon the very strong degrees of identity play evident in online talk texts. At minimum, Holland's work shows us the ways in which text reception is as active a process of meaning-making as text production – and in the instant reciprocity enabled by CMC, that is a key insight.

2.3.1.2 The assumed or implied reader

What Holland's work does reveal is that when a person enters a chatroom, he or she brings his or her own experiences to the interaction. To move beyond Holland's Freudian "fantasy enactment" view of text interpretation however, it is useful to examine the reception theory of Wolfgang Iser. Born in 1926, Iser is a

German theorist and literary critic who later taught at the University of California at Irvine. Iser takes a phenomenological approach to reading. Iser argues that the text in part controls the reader's responses, but contains "gaps" that the reader creatively fills. There is a tension between the actual reader and "the implied reader," who is established by the "response-inviting structures" of the text. This type of reader is assumed and created by the work itself. In other words, rather than seeking the entire act of interpretive reception in the psyche of the individualized reader, Iser allows us to detect strategies inside the text itself which pre-dispose not only certain readINGS, but certain "preferred" readERS.

Iser reveals some of what we are looking for when we speak of "The Reader". He begins by noting two broad categories of readers: real readers and hypothetical readers. Iser refers to real readers as those who have been documented; their responses recorded in some way, while hypothetical readers are those "ideal" readers predicted within the text. Interestingly for the present study, this is very much the case in chatrooms, where there is "documentation" of the "real" reader's response by noting their response-utterance, as well as textual recording of the "hypothetical" reader, presented in the initial text evoking response (and requiring it in "preferred" ways). Iser however further subdivides the reader, saying that hypothetical readers can be broken down into two groups: the ideal reader and the contemporary reader.

There is no escaping this process, for the text cannot at any moment be grasped as a whole. But what may at first sight have seemed like a disadvantage, in comparison with our normal modes of perception, may now seem to offer distinct advantages, in so far as it permits a process through which the aesthetic object is constantly being structured and restructured (Iser, 1978, p. 112).

By reading we uncover the unformulated part of the text, and this very indeterminacy is the force that drives us to work out a configurative meaning while at the same time giving us the necessary degree of freedom to do so (Iser, 1974, p. 287).

> ...The significance of the work....does not lie in the meaning sealed within the text, but in the fact that the meaning brings out what had been previously sealed within us. Through gestalt-forming, we actually participate in the text, and this means that we are caught up in the very thing we are producing. This is why we often have the impression, as we read, that we are living another life (Iser, *The Act of Reading,* p. 157).

Not only then does Iser give text reception an active role within reading, but he sees that there are certain types of text strategy which optimize the chances of this "indeterminacy", and so invite interpretation at a level of self-consciousness which reaches out to identity-formation:

> The ability to perceive oneself during the process of participation is an essential quality of aesthetic experience; the observer finds himself in a strange, halfway position: he is involved, and he watches himself being involved. However, this position is not entirely nonprogrammatic, for it can only come about when existing codes are transcended or invalidated (Iser, *The Act of Reading,* p. 134).

Iser does not analyse actual readings of texts, but proceeds from an ideal "implied reader" to valorize readings both with and against the predispositions of the text. For Iser, the reader does not mine out an objective meaning hidden within the text. Rather, literature generates effects of meaning for an actual reader, in a shared virtual space created between reader and text. Although reader and text assume similar conventions from reality, texts leave great portions of that "reality" unexplained to the reader, whether as gaps in the narrative or as structural limits of the text's representation of the world. This basic indeterminacy itself "implies" the reader and begs her participation in synthesizing, and indeed living, events of meaning throughout the process of reading.

Iser writes of the interaction between a published text and its reader. If then we take this phenomenological approach to the reading process in a chatroom, we see how an interaction between the text and the reader can occur, and how it focuses attention onto the text. For meaning to occur [in a Chatroom] according to Iser, the underlying theory of a piece of work first consists of its author and an "aesthetic" (reader) situated at equal poles, in equal measure, with meaning production situated somewhere in between, as a result of that interaction. The main motivation for the interaction between text and reader is for the "space"- the "fundamental asymmetry" that exists between them, to be filled. All texts (and this is very evident in a chatroom) are thus made up of numerous spaces ("gaps") in the dialogue, which I refer to as "the chunk and chat segments", and these spaces denote that a piece of information has been omitted or only made implicit. This has the resultant effect of making the reader (the witness of the chat event) find connections and implications in what has been written, and thus become in turn "the writer". It is this combination of what has been written and what has been left out, that permits the completion of the whole picture, enabling the production of meaning. Moreover, this process is also dependant on certain terms set by the chatroom protocols i.e. there is some structuring of the blanks and spaces, which the reader-witness-writer-witness has to follow. In other words, chatroom "texting", by both "author" and "reader-as-author", is as complex and as reciprocal as Iser suggests of the reading act – and as close to identity formation. Yet at the same time it is distinctively different, arising as it does within a CMC space, and influenced by the technological dictates of that space.

Iser has further explored how literature functions in the human experience, saying that:

> … if the reader is to identify with a text, then he or she must combine the artistic, which is the author's creation of the text,

and the aesthetic, which is the realization that the reader brings to the text. Once the artistic and the aesthetic   are united then the reader will enhance the text, by allowing his or her intimate experiences to flow through the text. As the reader becomes more involved with the text, then meaning, which comes of experience, can be used to interpret the text (Iser, 1974, p.45).

Reading is thus an active and creative process (Iser, 1974; Holland, 1992; Kristeva, 1989) with the imagination always the final interpreter. Even with no knowledge of who the person is who is playing, in both the reader or the writer's role, one can find whether other writers and readers in a chatroom share views by following responses to what is being written. A person will be enticed to enter or continue the dialogue in a chatroom based on how this person reads the text, bringing his or her own experiences to the reading. "The reading process is an interaction between the text and the reader's imagination". (Iser, 1972, p. 34).

2.3.1.3 The background of the reader ("mosaic of multiple texts")

Kristeva in *Desire and Language; a Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980), and *The Kristeva Reader* (1986) builds on the works of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin to examine the speaking subject and the signifying structures of social practice. It is Kristeva's work on intertextuality, which is useful in this study of Internet "conversations".

The concept of "intertextuality" was first developed by Julia Kristeva, in connection with the numerous implicit references in each text to other texts. No text is written in complete isolation from other texts nor can it stand entirely by itself. Hypermedia technology can express such intertextuality by linking selected parts of a text, image, sound or other multimedia format with other texts, image, sound or other multimedia format (Bolter, 1991; Landow and Delany, 1993; Landow, 1992; Nelson, 1965, 1993).

Kristeva, like Holland (Holland being a Freudian and Kristeva, at least initially, a Freudian Feminist theorist) speaks of the child who must learn to differentiate self from other if it is to become an individual. I discuss Kristeva in more detail in Case Study Four, when I use a semiotic approach to reading the text in a chatroom and examine her idea of Intertextuality, developed in part from Bakhtin's writings. In her writings, Kristeva (1986) charts a three-dimensional textual space whose three "coordinates of dialogue" are the writing subject, the addressee (or ideal reader), and exterior texts. Kristeva describes this textual space in a Saussurian paradigmatic/syntagmatic way familiar in semiotics, as intersecting planes that have horizontal and vertical axes.

> The word's status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is orientated towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus) ... each word (text) is

an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read ... any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (p. 37).

Essentially, every text is informed by other texts which the reader has read, and the reader's own cultural context. The simplest articulation of intertextuality can be seen in the footnotes that indicate source materials to which a given text is alluding, or which are known to have influenced the author. A constructive hypertext can make this notion of intertextuality an externally accessible "mosaic" of multiple texts, placing the internal connections about which Kristeva theorizes into a visible forum, which can be expanded by each subsequent reader.

My own work seeks to extend Kristeva's modelling of the layering of text, into the ever more complex and shifting systems of talk-texts. By combining her highly theorised models with the analysis of conversation and discourse linguistics, I establish both a theory-rich, and methodologically complex, means of analysing contemporary electronic talk-culture. And in particular, I demonstrate that the "syntagms" or text-to-text comment-response patterns which in Chat are fragmented across multiple postings, are similarly paradigmatically fractured – not always relating to shared cultural contexts, even if "coded" within the para-linguistic online markers of consensus, such as syntactic abbreviations and emoticon graphics.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) uses the term heteroglossia (Emerson, 1981) to describe the inscription of multiple voices engaging in dialogue within the text. Paul Taylor (1992) points out that "heteroglossia focuses on the production of meaning through dialogue except that heteroglossia avoids the emphasis on (narrowly defined) consensus and explicitly celebrates diversity" (p. 138). Baktin is useful in this study to show how many varying meaning-makings intersect with the rapidly moving voices and constantly changing threads of the chatroom conversation.

2.3.1.4 The role of the reader

From Kristeva's idea of a text as a "visible forum" occupied by cross-referencing textual elements pre-disposing [60] the act of reception, we move to the work of Stanley Fish, who suggests that if texts are crossed by multiple interpretive potential, so are "readerships" as "interpretive communities". Stanley Fish in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric in the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (1990) extends Vandergrift's belief that "interpretative communities are meanings internally experienced in the consciousness of the reader and not necessarily shared" (1987), seeing it as mirroring what Fish himself says, "…interpretative communities are no more stable than texts, because interpretative strategies are not natural or universal, but learned" (Fish, 1990, p. 172). Immediately we become able to see that in chatrooms,

unless prearranged meetings are agreed to, "communities" are actually instant gatherings of strangers, and only if the flow of turn-takings has a shared meaning, i.e. others in the chatroom know what is being said, can there be shared dialogue which will continue as conversation. Fish reminds us that for all the talk of "liberation", play or individualizing interpretive reception, "reading" – on which chat depends – is a learned, acculturated behaviour. Not only can we expect to see such regulatory behaviours in action in online chat; without them no communication would occur. How then are those behaviours taught and learned? Which techniques and activities monitor them, control them, reproduce them? And since online chat is, potentially at least, non-proximous and even global, how overt must the regulation of its interpretive communities become?

Italian semiotician and cultural analyst Umberto Eco moves further, developing a somewhat complex formula to show how the reader engages in constructing meaning when reading a text. In *The Role of the Reader* (1995), Eco states that natural language (or any other semiotic system) is articulated at two levels: the expression-plane and the content-plane. On the expression-plane, "natural languages consist of a lexicon, phonology and syntax". These are the regulatory foundations from which we draw in any expressive act. The concepts which we can express however are on a distinctive content-plane (Eco, 1995 pp 20-24). To explain the difference, Eco further subdivides these two planes into "*Form, Substance* and *Continuum*". How we think and express ourselves, according to Eco, is dependent on our *"content-form"* – the distinctive ways we twine content into the expressive repertoires available in our language community.

In chatrooms where the content and depth of content are both fragmentary and extremely reduced, *Content-form* is more than usually reliant on the "expressive plane" established by an "interpretive community". In Case Study One, I examine the role of the reader in a particular sample of chat discourse to discover how users must read a previous text in order to be able to express meaning. Before meaning can be expressed; in Eco's terms, before a *Content-form* can be established, an earlier turn in the chatroom must be interpreted. Chat is establishing an "expressive plane" of possible talk-text strategies – or in Fish's sense, delimiting its particular "interpretive community" of actively-receiving "readers". How far might such a specialised "interpretive community" be established through the sedimentation of daily acts of talk-texting; how far by technical limitations set up within the design of the "applications" software which enables internet chat to occur?

2.3.2 Rules of chat

In theory, we can say anything we wish, however, in practice, we follow a large number of social rules (many of them unconscious) that constrain the way we speak (Crystal, 2001, p. 120-122). Pragmatics is the study of

linguistic communication, and so of actual language use in specific situations, and as such can assist in my research. It studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others (Levinson, 1983, 1996; Nofsinger, 1991). It offers the possibility of extension of its regulatory features into the new interactive or interpersonal speech formations of chatrooms – and the chance of discovering whether what occurs there constitutes new regulatory features.

Amongst the many areas of linguistic enquiry however, several main areas overlap. Pragmatics and semantics both take into account such notions as the intentions of a speaker, the effects of an utterance on listeners, the implications that follow from expressing something in a certain way, and the knowledge, beliefs, and presuppositions about the world upon which speakers and listeners rely when they interact. Pragmatics also overlaps with stylistics and sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics, as well as with discourse analysis. In attempting analysis of an extended field of language use, is one school of inquiry adequate – or does each have something to offer? To the degree at least that these are considered complementary rather than competing theories of language in use, this study will take the position offered in van Dijk's monumental five-

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volume study (1986)   of the foundations of the linguistic methods constituting discourse analysis: that each technique borrows from the others; that some, like discourse analysis itself, borrow from all in an otherwise-directed methodology (in the case of CDA, an ideological commitment to social reform) and that it is often in the areas of overlap that the most fruitful discoveries and insights occur.

2.3.3 Symbolic activity in chatrooms

It is just such moments of overlap or cross-disciplinary study which are most fruitful for CMC and especially chat study. Patrizia Violi in *Electronic dialogue between orality and literacy. A semiotic approach* (2000) comes the closest to my research. Her research is on e-mail as a specific genre and she looks at it as a "rebirth" of letter writing, but with some very different features. She talks about writing itself as a technology, as well as computers as a technology. This makes e-mail a "double technology", which reveals practices drawn from both: a fusion form, altering many of the accepted modes in other more conventional communicative practices. For instance, Violi discusses what she calls the "sloppiness" of spelling in this genre, and the high tolerance for poor spelling. This is an issue which I explore further in Case Study Seven, suggesting that what at first appears a speed-impelled lapse in regulatory communicative behaviours is already evolving into something quite new. She touches on the issue of emoticons, which I explore in Case Study Three, with mention of "smilies", a conventional form of communication, codified for the electronic medium, and displaying similar forms of

innovation and creative renewal.

2.3.4 The language/action approach

A return from texted to spoken communication reminds us that language is a dual form: expressive as well as representational. Speech is not just representing information or ideas. Speech is action. When we make an utterance we are performing an action. In chatrooms the chatter is trying to achieve goals, e.g., making a request, giving an instruction, asking a question. Even stating the obvious has a function. (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Speech Act Theory is based on Austin's (1962) work, *How to do things with words*. Austin showed that we use language to accomplish actions, and not just to make true or false statements. Austin attempted to prove the validity of statements by describing the characteristics of performative sentences, or utterances designed to carry out acts. Some of the distinctive ways that words and symbols are used in chatrooms are discussed in Case Study Four.

In MUD conversations there have evolved several conventions for expressing feelings, gestures and facial expressions verbally through writing. Language alone is used to create situational, real time events – actions and responses enacted only through the talk-texts generated by players. But such interactive constructs also make the transference of a speaker's authority possible, dependent, of course, on the situation and relation between the interlocutors. Speech acts created in MUDS as current technology stands will never be physically rendered, as in the real world. But by adding non-verbal signs like face-expression and feelings through emoticon commands chatters come close to signaling intent. "Written discourse cannot be rescued by all the processes by which spoken discourse supports itself in order to be understood - intonation, delivery, mimicry, gestures" (Ricoeur, 1981). But in MUDs players have learned not only to adapt new modalities of command, but to enact and acknowledge relations of power, respect for skills or status, and ways to represent levels of passion or intent which help assess other players' moves and strategies. Deceit, duplicity, conspiracy, disguise have all become possible in this texted world, as players become more and more skilled in representing and interpreting "characterized" or properly motivated action.

Anna Cicognani's PhD, *A Linguistic Characterisation of Design in Text-Based Virtual Worlds* (1998) constructs the architecture structure for a MUD system. Her thesis considers the "organisation of the virtual environment, *virtual space architecture*, which defines the relationships between entities. The virtual environment organisation is approached with the view that language is the *matter* for its construction." As her primary work is on the technology of a MUD room I have not used her work in this thesis, other than to understand MUD constructs, and

the ways in which they draw on texted language interaction.

Anna Cicognani's *Design Speech Acts: How to do things with words in virtual communities* applies the theory of speech acts to text-based virtual communities, such as MOOs (MUDs Object Oriented). Cicognani (1996, 1997, 1998) notes several performative verb forms used in a virtual communities, stating, "In a VC, I may be able to open the door simply by typing the command 'Open door'". What subsequently "happens" is that co-players accept the instruction as having enacted the command; they apply to a world which "exists" in language only, the same performative relations as those experienced in the physical world, where real doors can be opened by really present persons. In a situation reminiscent of the professional actions represented in television dramas, where actors both carry out the physical processes of a medical emergency routine or move their spaceship to warp-drive, and "speak forth" these activities so that viewers can understand the procedures, MUDders and online chatters learn to "enact" through language.

In a virtual community verbs that are not considered to be performative verbs in face-to-face talk can act as performative verbs. For example in a text based chatroom verbs such as move, close, open, enter or leave all work to perform those actions that they represent. To "enter" another room means a chatter is accessing and activating software to represent themselves electronically as "present" in a new electronic screen-space, and to potentially at least participate in the activities and conversations of that space. While the illusory term "enter" may originally have drawn its performative power from use of the "enter" key often used to activate a software command sequence, it has conventionalized as a new online performative verb, with the power to command response and adaptation from others "present". Greetings sequences from existing MUDders or chatters have already evolved and are used to acknowledge newcomers. But the performative repertoire already extends well beyond this. Anna Cicognani and Mary Lou Maher use the following performative verbs in an experimental MOO (StudioMOO) that they are using as support for research activities and education, which derives from the LambdaCore:

- communication (say, whisper, emote, page, think, etc.)
- navigation (go, teleport, move, etc.)
- manipulation (open, close, move, give, take, drop, lock, etc.)
- design (create, dig, recycle)

These categories identify four different types of actions in a VC. The communication acts are developed to provide flexibility and expressiveness in text-based communication that mimics the gestures and body language that are used in speech-based communication. The navigation acts provide alternative ways and modes of

moving around the VC environment. The manipulation acts allow the user to do things with (and on) the objects in the VC. The design acts are less developed than the other three categories, since so far the emphasis has been on effective interaction with other objects/people in the VC rather than in the design of the VC.

Already Cicognani and Maher have found categories of performativity which extend this speech act mode – and as the informational environments and the interactions around them evolve further, regardless of the technologies or formats used, usages will change too. What is emerging already though is an understanding that virtual communication as a field is directing our linguistic creativity into new areas which are extending our traditional categorisations of language use. For analysts of online communication, which existing theorisations and descriptive systems for language use offer the best means of capturing, describing and analysing these new ways of communicating.

Sociologist G. H Mead (1934) in *Mind, Self and Society* together with philosophers John Austin (1962, 1975) and J. R. Searle (1969) carried out studies into verbal communication. While Mead looked at conversation from a sociological perspective, developing symbolic interaction theory as a means of examining how social roles are enacted and represented through social relational work, Austin and Searle, focusing on the performative or pragmatic and illocutionary element in meaning, drew attention to the many functions performed by utterances as part of interpersonal communication. From this base of work arose the detailed capacity to examine interactivity in language, most influentially developed in the work of Harvey Sacks and his followers.

2.3.5 Conversational Analysis

Current Conversational Analysis (CA) builds on the earlier works of the American sociological movement of the 1970s, most notably that derived from the works of Harvey Sacks in collaborations with Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (1974) in their work within ethnomethodology (1974, 1977, 1979). Sacks's major studies into CA were in the early 1970s while teaching at the Linguistic Institute, University of Michigan. His lectures (1974) are still used today as his followers elaborate ever more complex analyses and applied studies of various conversational uses and contexts.

CA advocates Eggins' and Slade's work on how conversation consists of "chat" and "chunks" is particularly useful when talking about turn-taking in a chatroom setting. Their isolation of "chat" segments focuses on those where structure is managed "locally", that is, turn by turn, which is essentially how text-based chatrooms during the period I examined them function. The "chunks" are those aspects of conversation which have a global, or macro-structure, where the structure beyond the exchange is more predictable. "Chat" equals move-by-move

unfolding of talk. "Chunk" segments need an analysis which can capture the predictable macro or global structure (Eggins and Slade, 1997. p.230). The distinction allows for both turn-by-turn examination of individual postings, and acknowledgement that there is already in existence a generic or consensual set of models by which such postings are constructed, received and interactively managed by chatters.

Eggins and Slade, working on "natural" or informal language use, provide a useful set of clues to the notoriously "unstructured" features of online chat. While such analysis continues the work of the Conversational Analysis (CA) theorist Howard Sacks, it is more focused to revelation of the evolving and changing regulatory systems of specific speaking groups, and less to the establishment of CA as a theorized systematics for language analysis. Like my own study, CA for Eggins and Slade is a tool for discovery of how a given group communicates, and not – or at least not primarily – to promote a perfected and universalist means for language analysis. I explore how Sacks's CA can detect change in the rules of engagement in chatrooms, where conversation is moved from an oral environment of physical presence to an online texted environment of virtuality. At the same time, Eggins' and Slade's work on "chunks" takes us closer to DA or Discourse Analysis: a means of analysing language as it relates to cultural paradigms and as it deploys certain favoured frames of explanation. DA's driving focus is on establishing ideological positions for its (talk) texts. My study locates "chunking" impulses within some – though by no means all – chatroom speech – but when it does, finds high variability in the directedness or selection of "global" or "macro" structuring repertoires. In other words, chat online is "global" only to the extent of accessing many varying "local" structuring references. A "global" or universal "chat speak" is not evident in online talk selections – for all the emergence of expressive repertoires in netiquette, emoticons or IRC/SMS abbreviation. I intend to suggest that what is evolving here is not – or not yet – separated from speech in the physical world, to the extent of disconnection from dominant discursive framings: that online texted-talk "chunks" in familiar ways. But I am also suggesting that at the level of "chat" or interpersonal interactivity, new behaviours abound. CA, with its fine-focus analysis on relational talk, is an ideal tool for such inquiry into isolating new texted-talk gambits and techniques in use.

Allen and Guy (1974), writing on conversational analysis before it became a widely-used technique, in "*Conversation Analysis: The Sociology of Talk"* define the verbal act "as a word or group of words which functions as a separate element in the verbal stream" (Allen & Guy, p. 162). What might such a separable "element" involve? In particular, are there identifiably new structurings and usages for words or groups of words in online chat? CA has for instance observed that within "real life" speech, support for a statement, as agreement or disagreement, can vary in length from one to dozens of words. Within chatroom conversation fragmented conversation is the

norm. Rarely are full sentences made – however "conversation", argument, discussion, debate, all continue within an intensely abbreviated communicative interaction. My analysis aims at revealing the often complex issues dealt with through these elliptical talk-strategies, and hopefully to tease out how some of them are constructed. In contrast to the behaviourists' view that language and thoughts are identical, my examination of IRC's condensed interactive speech formulae will suggest that "screened" communicative elements: visual codes added to text and working semiotically, as well as adapted linguistic modes operating at the "chat" level, are conveying thought and patterning social interaction, even (and perhaps especially) in the most reduced forms. To behaviourists, there is no "non-verbal thought"; all thought is seen as determined only by the language used (see for instance Watson, 1930; Sapir 1929; Whorf, 1940, 1956). The problem of describing how verbalisation conveys thought rests in the complexities of measuring the techniques used. Thought anchored in a complex phenomenon such as language can contain thousands of discreet elements within a short time span. Allen and Guy for instance have identified some twenty types of basic elements in the action matrix of relatively simple two-person conversation.

Yet many of these elements are not available to current chatroom speech, as they rely on the physical cues of co-presence for interpretation. As a result, those linguistic markers for social relations which ethnomethodologists and CA analysts have demonstrated as imposing limits on conversation are not useful in chatroom analysis. In face-to-face conversation participants must be concerned with the impressions which they make on the others (Goffman, 1959, p. 33). The absence of such regulatory features in electronic talk is said by many to be marked by the emergence of the practice of "flaming", or intense escalations of abusive exchange (Turkle, 1996). Yet online chat can and does also produce daily and extended sequences of consensual discussion, with finely-tuned practices of inclusivity and mutual support – much of it increasing in complexity as a chatroom "community" establishes itself and asserts identity through patrolling the boundaries of "acceptable" linguistic relations – all carried in the abbreviated online codes. If it is the fragmentation of chat that marks it out from "real life" conversation, then this must clearly not be conceived as regressive, primitive or unsophisticated.

In interactive Internet "speaking", especially through chatrooms and Instant Messenger, Bakhtin's concept of the utterance builds upon the work already done in Conversational Analysis. Bakhtin identifies "utterance" as the primary building block of dialogue; utterance is to dialogue what lexia is to hypertext. Without more than one utterance there can be no dialogue for, as Michael Holquist (1990) argues, every "utterance is always an answer to another utterance that precedes it, and is therefore always conditioned by, and in turn qualifies, the prior utterance

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to a greater or lesser degree" (1986, p. 60)   . It is this sense of multi-connectedness my work seeks in IRC/IM

talk, where the "flattened" screening of postings renders the selection of response patterns difficult, and so directs chat towards the multi-threading structure of hypertext. How then does social relationality – that "politic of power" discovered within such CA categories as turn-taking – work in online chat? How is language oriented towards both self-assertion within a group, and the different behaviours and speech selections which act to structure speech relations?

Astri Wold in "*De-coding oral language*" (1978) emphasizes the importance of whom we are speaking with. In direct oral communication we have the cues of the other person, either from sight or from hearing their intonations, tonal variations, vocality and so on. We then choose our words in a way which we perceive will suit (or occasionally not suit) the other person. For example, if we know our listener is from a higher or a lower social background than us and we want to appear as of the same social grouping we will take on the air of their social background. This could include such utterance selections as slang, accent (accent referring only to distinctive pronunciation, for example, sounding as if from East London, Brooklyn, or Queensland) or speaking a particular dialect (dialect referring to grammar and vocabulary as well; for example saying *"He done it"* or saying "*He did it*").

Wold (1978) adopts an explicit social-psychological approach to language, similar to that of Ragnar Rommetveit (1972, 1974). This communicative perspective implies that as communicators we have to consider definite constraints on language selection, both with respect to the ways in which an individual expresses him/herself and to the information then interpreted. A chatroom social-psychological approach to language differs though in several ways from Wold's view, since the cues of the other person are not so readily available, and as participants we have to work in other ways to know "who" we are speaking with. The ways we choose to understand human behaviour have become inextricably linked to the ways in which our understandings are linguistically represented (Garfinkel, 1972) and in a text-based chatroom this can only be done through the interpretation of what appears on the computer screen.

Taking an existing methodology into a new area such as online chat creates an initial problem of project definition and data corpus management, in that since no other analyst has tackled the field, there is no established approach to follow. This is not however a problem without precedent. For instance, in the field of Conversation Analysis itself there is a similar dilemma, and a productive methodological solution. Ten Have (1999) suggests that with CA, what counts is the project's selection from within the CA methodological repertoire – a selection which is entirely at the discretion of the analyst, and in the final accounting, a mark of their expertise in applying the most suitable elements of the method. There is no distinctive protocol to be applied; no guide to the extensiveness

of the data to be sampled; no set rules about the order of procedure, or the ways to display findings.

My research design builds on this advice from ten Have, using his ideas about "good CA"; and not following prescriptive protocol, but rather devising my own methodological practice from elements most useful to my forms of data and means of data collection.

In extending an existing method into a new field of text, CA thus offers a way of viewing online conversation. Conversational turn-taking is, for example, according to conversation analysis, integral to the formation of any interpersonal exchange (Boden, 1994, p. 66). Boden compiles a succinct list of the "essential features of turn-taking" which also applies to chatroom talk:

- One speaker speaks at a time
- Number and order of speakers vary freely
- Turn size varies
- Turns are not allocated in advance but also vary
- Turn transition is frequent and quick
- There are few gaps and few overlaps in turn transition.

When Richard Parrish in "Conversation Analysis of Internet Chatrooms" (2000) talks about chatrooms as having a role in the way people discuss politics, he is able to show turn-taking in IRC as influencing patterns of debate. IRC gives people the opportunity, he says, to discuss issues without the usual constraints of power relations exerted between authority and audience. He talks about the egalitarianism of chatrooms and how people are able to construct their own personal and group perceptions of a situation. He writes a few paragraphs on conversational analysis, and lists some essential features of turn taking, analysing a 15-minute segment of chatroom talk. He makes the observation in his discussion (amongst other things) that chatroom conversation, unlike group conversation off-line, is not dyadic; that is, the speaking does not tend to break down into two party talk. Parrish concludes that this more open and hyper-linking system suits a consensual and cooperative model of political discussion – a proposition that my own research into more varied IRC settings and their equally variable language uses will test. His work however asserts one instance of an extrapolation from "chat" to "chunk" – from specific instances of talk relations, to their linking into broader forms and formats constituting recurrent chat behaviours – and it is at this point that IRC analysis moves from the micro-analysis of such techniques as CA, to the paradigmatic work undertaken in Discourse Analysis.

2.4 Conclusion

As can be seen by my discussion of the literature, though there has been significant research done on aspects

of chatroom and other forms of online discourse, I have not been able to find research using conversational analysis as a lens to examine the broad diversity of chatroom talk, nor the finer complexities of its structures and patterns of use. I use the next chapter to describe established linguistic methodologies on off-line analytical linguistics and outline how I propose to apply them to an online analytical linguistic study of the chatroom milieu.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

From a conventional perspective, referring to the data samples in this study in terms of "conversation" is a misnomer, as what is currently considered conversation has a history as an interchange through speech: an act requiring physical proximity to permit audibility – and an act therefore precluding written text. In this section I will describe the theories that I will use to establish an interpretation of conversation for use in this study of online, texted-talk. Chatroom "talk" in this study is analysed in accordance with the general requirements of conversation analysis, i.e. turn-taking, sequential organisation, repair organisation and turn construction design. Other researchers have found conversation analysis to be a good tool for studying CMC (see for instance Dingley, 2000; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter, 2000; Garcia and Jacobs, 1999).

From the outset it is clear in all CMC studies that methodology in cyberspace is different from that used in studies conducted in any other environment. Sherry Turkle writes for instance in relation to her own ethnographic work into online communication:

> Virtual reality poses a new methodological challenge for the researcher (Turkle, 1995, p.34, quoted by Hamman, 1996).

The communicative relation online – including that for researchers – changes in both predictable and unpredictable ways. Some of these we may still be unable to determine, leaving much uncaptured for analysis by current techniques. Online "conversation" falls partially inside, and partially outside, the specialized repertoires of conventional linguistic and social research. Not only then does any attempt to examine its already observably rich repertoires of communicative practice demand a hybridized and appropriative methodological practice, but even then it seems likely that many aspects will remain obscured. What is evident though is that whatever strategies are adopted (or adapted), these must optimise a critical and reflexive practice: one which can critique the potential of whichever techniques are utilized, within the inquiry act itself. The dilemma thus appears to demand a qualitative or even post-qualitative-experimental approach.

3.1.1 Qualitative research

Not only does the researcher-research subject relation change online, but problems of validity and verification of results occur, since it is impossible to guarantee either participant identity or ongoing site-access for replication. Criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln (1989, 1994) focus on truth, value-credibility, auditability, fittingness and neutrality-conformability within qualitative research. Over the past two decades qualitative social inquiry has developed both approaches and instruments for assessing the validity of its techniques. Methodological rigor in online qualitative research is however difficult to carry on, not least due to its recency. Given the diversity of the online activities under question; the widespread debate over and suspicion of the authenticity behind online communicative acts, and the lack of consensus about rules to which online behaviours should conform, the research object itself appears notably unstable. Meanwhile, the fast feedback loops of CMC informational flows mean that quantitative research is an inherent dimension of online usage – so that the territory is enmeshed within methodological practices contested within qualitative work. Why then attempt to conduct such research, given such a seemingly intractable research object?

To some extent the broad field of qualitative research methodology has of itself resolved these issues. The view that there is in fact nothing special about qualitative research, and that it should be evaluated by the same criteria as quantitative studies, with mechanisms for validity, reliability and generalisability (Jasper, 1994; Cavanagh,

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1997; Appleton, 1995   ) has become commonplace. Yet this newly developed confidence changes with cyber-ethnology, due to the constancy of advances in CMC technology. While it is perfectly possible to propose application of a research design arising in now quite conventional models of qualitative social inquiry, drawing for instance on established methods used in socio-linguistic or communications research, online communications presents unprecedented instabilities and insecurities, even at the most basic levels of observation or data collection. For example for this study I have 'captured' conversation from chatrooms by cutting and pasting the chat turn-takings, to archive a secure and revisitable data corpus of chat. But in the java script chatrooms rapidly coming to dominate the mode, the only way to save the chat texts is either by writing down the chat – which is difficult if the chat is scrolling by at a rapid rate – or by taking a screen-shot of the chatroom, which would show only a few lines of chat captured at a particular time.

While it is possible to design and provide text-saving chat services, technical designers presumably do not consider the act of research collection a sufficiently dominant demand to provide such a function. Instead, chat, like its off-line social equivalent, is treated as an ephemeral and perhaps trivial activity, not worth preserving. The rapid scrolling of speed-entered postings; the de-structured sentences and incomplete spelling; the crunching into abbreviations and semi-graphic compounds, and the mixing of unrelated "threads", all signal a scrambled and ill-valued communicative form, operating at a basic and seemingly underdeveloped level. And yet the demand for space in these new facilities simultaneously signals them as of significance for increasing numbers of online participants. And while quantitative research can, and does, provide statistical evidence in support of this observation, it cannot inquire into why chat has evolved so rapidly, and is in such demand. Nor can it observe or categorise the online behaviours developing inside the new communications space. Qualitative research, with its observational-descriptive foundation and its subsequent analysis calling on increasingly rich repertoires of socio-cultural explanation, offers a much greater chance of both recording and explaining what is going on in online chat, and why.

Qualitative research, using multiple methodologies, is at core about the behaviours of people studied in their own social settings and understood in terms of the meanings those people themselves bring to their situation (Lincoln and Denzin 1994, p. 2). Chatrooms are "momentary" social settings created not to last further than the immediate "talk". Pursuit of these online participants beyond these fleeting moments of their talk is difficult. Qualitative research however, arising primarily within the broad field of social sciences, has more recently allied itself to the critical textual techniques of inquiry typical of the new humanities. Turner (1994, pp. 205-219) outlines the development of this dual focus within varying traditions of the study of communications media.

In the US for many years, the study of the mass media occurred in the behavioural sciences, while in Europe it was the domain of the humanities, particularly English, and of certain approaches to sociology. Further exacerbating the debate between the paradigms, though, was an essentially political dispute between the liberal-democratic US tradition and the Marxist European tradition (Turner, p. 208).

While acknowledging the ongoing usefulness of the semi-quantitative empirical methodologies on which US media study was based (in particular, the power of Content Analysis to locate powerfully repeating narrative structures and selective representations), Turner sees the textual turn as supplying some key deficiencies in the ongoing analysis of communications media.

The idea of the text, then, corrects precisely the flaw in empirical or social sciences-based communication theory

and its dealing with "the message": it problematises the ways meanings are generated. It interests itself in the various textual forms employed (television genres for instance), and it privileges the reader-text relationship over the sender-receiver relationship (Turner, p. 219).

For Turner, this renewed and re-theorised communication studies, by adopting the stances outlined in European structuralist philosophy, opened a whole new set of "close reading" analytics for media forms, and re-oriented understandings of what mediated communications activities enacted, socially and culturally.

A couple of key moves made within the various streams of structuralism are relevant to the methodologies we are dealing with here. Firstly, there is the work within structural linguistics which reorients the study of language so that it is understood as a system of relationships rather than a system of nomenclature. Understood in such a way, language does not *describe* reality, it actually *constitutes* it. Our language system determines, delimits and shapes the way we understand the world. Therefore, to examine the structures of our language is to examine the structures of culture in general (Turner, p. 219).

Extending outwards from the linguistic structuralism of de Saussure (1916) and the theorization of the US semiotician C S Peirce (1966), a generalized semiotics allowed for the examination of the multi-formatted communication systems of the modern world: speech, text, audio, graphics, each contributing to the acculturative processing of the various selves and social sectors and pre-dispositions within the relatively loose social formations operating after the "de-legitimation" of social institutions from the mid-twentieth century onwards (Castells, 1997). Returning to the inquiry paradigms proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), we can see that social science has in itself followed a similar trajectory of transformation, moving from the relative certainties of positivism, to a more open and reflexive set of methods under postpositivism, a re-examination of the social embeddedness of social inquiry itself with the introduction of critical theory, and finally an assimilation to the structuralist and post-structuralist positions on the *constitutive* role of knowledge, as expressed and exchanged – *communicated* - through language and texts. With this arrival at what social sciences terms constructivism, the inquiry paradigm stresses not which meanings are present, but how they are formed, and what their presence signals about the society and community of users from which they arise, and to which they return significance. Following this lead much qualitative research today is construed as interpretive inquiry within a constructivist paradigm.

3.1.2 Research techniques

Such a position legitimates analysis of the new texting-enterprises of CMC – but it also anticipates that these too

will have powers of social and cultural formation. With the growing attention paid to CMC and to the Internet, as well as to other technologies of instant communication such as mobile phones (cell phones) and hand-held devices, establishing ways to analyze text-based "talk" will involve multiple methodologies, as discussed in the previous literature review chapter – yet in all cases, with an emphasis on the social constructivist role of those repeating tendencies uncovered through the text-analytic techniques. In this study I am using a different analytical approach in each case study of a particular chat community, to examine what works with describing online talk, at the same time as I outline those varying forms of online talk already evident from site to site. Using one approach for communication processes as complicated as chatroom "talk" is not sufficient. Nor is there yet in evidence any strong disposition towards a particular or preferred method for online communication analysis. Scholars from various traditions have contributed to early examinations of online communication, without dictating or even privileging any one technique.

This study thus proposes not just a mixed set of approaches, but intends to problematise the entire issue, testing the strengths of a range of existing language and text based methods, against a selection of different CMC styles of online "chat". In some cases, the analysis will move in close to the talk techniques, annexing for instance Conversational Analysis in the Sacksian ethnomethodological tradition, to capture how speech exchange is regulated online, and to assess whether this new "technologisation" of talk relations alters the regulatory practices and systems established within real-world or physically present speech. I similarly use Discourse Analysis in Case Study Five to examine the message structures organizing an online community into consensual and resistant or negotiative communicative moments. How chat is organized, how it is used and how is it understood are each newly problematic when the social and possibly cultural contexts are stripped away, along with the negation of physical proximity and accompanying cultural cues. How are we able to string words together to make meanings acceptable to a given online chat community? How far do such communities display specialist chat repertoires of language selection and use – and how do these relate to off-line usage?

Discourse Analysis is the analysis of language beyond the utterance: the meaning systems annexed in a given set of utterances, which in their turn work "constitutively" to transform or reinforce meaning systems. Since the capacity to enter an online "site" is so "unnaturally" heavy in its reliance on linguistic cues, this study must anticipate the display of certain language behaviours and practices co-extensive with those operating off-line – perhaps generally, within a language group, and perhaps specifically, demarking select or specialist communities within a language group. Yet, in spite of the relative recency of the evolution of online chat and its communicative relatives (SMSing for instance), there is also strong evidence for an emergent yet already rich set

of online language behaviours – and this too must be examined, often in the absence of any descriptive categories from within linguistic analysis. Owing to chatrooms having a strong emphasis on special communicative forms such as abbreviations and emoticons, one of my case studies (Case Study Three) uses semiotics to examine online communication. Its potential to cross-communicative formats: to analyse within the same repertoire images, words and mixed-mode forms, such as conventions of abbreviation, allows a more thorough study of this emergent communicative format.

Beyond such attempts to capture new and hybrid communicative formats for examination, lies the need to find analytic techniques to assess what such formats are enacting, and why online users have moved to them. I use both semantics and pragmatics to study the meaning of the language of chatters, each oriented to a different aspect of the formation of meaning. Pragmatics is more concerned with what people intend to communicate in real life situations than semantics, which is concerned with what language selections (online, abbreviations, emoticons, usernames, ikons) "mean" in isolation from its social context, and in relation to its positioning within an overall language system. Semantics and pragmatics are concerned with two types of questions, respectively: Semantics: "What does X mean?" and Pragmatics: "What did you mean by X?" (Leech, 1983, p.6). Speech Act Theory (Case Study Four) examines the practical use of language to achieve a goal, and so extends the study into how chat participants online direct their communicative activities towards social actions – whether in the online or off-line "world". A speech act is a basic unit of language not just used to designate something; it actually does something – and the recognition that language in the "virtual" world of the chatsite enacts outcomes just as it does in the physical world, is central to a study which ranges as far as Discourse Analysis, and which is founded in constructivist social inquiry. Overall therefore, this study will be arguing for a wide-ranging and mixed methodology in its examination of seemingly trivial "chat" activities, hoping to reveal both some of the complexities of online communication, and the potential of existing linguistic techniques, in combination, as a means of explaining the attractions of chat. Finding commonality in conversational practices and ways of analysing them, along with differences, is a way of establishing an online discourse analysis method (ODAM) – simultaneously recognizing the challenges of such a task:

> Multiple methods give a fuller picture and address many different aspects of phenomena, however multiple sources of data demand multiple data analysis skills (Silverman, 2000, p.50).

In sum, this study is embedded not within any one specialist tradition of language-based research, but seeks instead a general overview of chat usage, deploying more focused linguistic-based techniques to approach specific issues, within specific sites. Overall, it remains an ethnographic study, collecting, observing and reporting on

the specific social and cultural practices of a specified population: online chat participants.

3.1.3 Ethnographic approach

My proposal creates specific theoretical and methodological "focus points" within this multidisciplinary study, and establishes a new direction for study of online communicative practices.

I have taken an ethnographic approach to researching text-based chatrooms as it provides a method for learning about, and learning how to talk about, chatroom cultures, by placing the researcher in the research. I am inevitably

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part of the research I am investigating, as I need to enter a chatroom in order to "capture" the dialogue   . Most research conducted online uses ethnography as a methodology (see Hamman, 1996, 1998, 1999). Ethnography at its simplest is just writing about cultures. Online cultures are discussed throughout this thesis (see Hamman, 1996, 1998, 1999; Rheingold, 1991, 1993, 1994; Stubbs, 1996, 1998; Cyberrdewd, 1999; and Turkle, 1995, 1996). Ethnography is one of the approaches within anthropology that emerged in the late nineteenth century (for histories, see Stocking, 1968, 1983). A linguistic observer in a cyber-ethnography field studies the chatroom as a cultural field, makes records, and interprets some aspects of the taken for granted culture of the people in the chatroom.

There is however ongoing debate within ethnography over the relationship of the researcher to the research object, and especially to the research subjects, given the researcher's presence within the data field, and the problem of their influence on that field (see Schaap, 2001; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Seiter, Borchers, and Kreutzner, 1989; Moerman and Sacks, 1988 and Hymes, 1974). To capture chatroom data, I had to be present myself. So I became a participant in each cited chatroom, albeit mostly a silent one. A direct response was made to my presence in only one chatroom. There may have been indirect responses, but they were not clear enough for me to have responded to. In the sole instance of a response, after informing the participants that I was doing a PhD and conducting research, someone asked me what I was doing and why. The other participants stopped talking, so I logged out. Unfortunately I was unable to capture this segment as it was all done in Java script. In two other chatrooms (see example on the next page) the lines following my words could have been responses to me, but they also could simply have been responses to what had been said earlier. In all the other chatrooms I was simply ignored, or at least not spoken to.

In Case Study Five, these two responses follow my utterance:

<Neuage> ''I am saving this dialogue, as long as I am in this room, to use in research on Internet Chat for a postgraduate degree. If anyone is opposed to me saving their conversation say so and I will not save the chat'.

1. 1a. <SluGGiE-> lol

2. 2a. <Mickey_P_IsMine> LoL

Whether, <SluGGiE-> and <Mickey_P_IsMine> were responding to me or to something said before I entered

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the chatroom is unclear. The abbreviation "lol" has several interpretations   in English speaking chatrooms:

LOL	Laughing Out Loud -or- Lots of Luck (or Love)

Any one of these might or might not have applied to my announcement of intention to study the chat texts, so that my impact on the communicative environment remains unassessable – a timely reminder of the degree to which all ethnographic research remains problematic in relation to the issue of researcher presence, and of the relative fluidity of utterance-response relations within chat generally (see Case Studies, below). But, as throughout the field of ethnographic research generally, these issues should continue to be foregrounded as the research continues: that is, within analysis, as well as during data collection. Indeed, chat participation is in itself shot through with issues concerning varying possible or actual, levels of surveillance, control, and regulation – the same sorts of influences attributed to ethnographic research.

There are for instance various "types" of text-based chatrooms. For example, chatrooms can be divided into either moderated or non-moderated, altering the expectations among chatters as to their freedom to post whatever they wish. Moderated chatrooms can be further subdivided into chatrooms where people submit questions and answers are provided. This is most common in cases where people who are publicly known are in the chatroom, i. e. sport stars, politicians, and experts on a particular topic. Moderated chatrooms are "controlled" by a particular person who controls the movement, the turn-taking, of chat. For example, if there is inappropriate language, which is considered offensive to others in the chatroom, the participant infringing can be prevented

from continuing in the chatroom. Or if the "speaker" wishes to dialogue on a topic that is not the assigned topic at that time, the moderator can block the "speaker's" messages from appearing in the chatroom. Nine of the chatrooms that I investigated were however open, non-moderated chatrooms, as these provided the opportunity to analyze flowing chat interactions, where participants did not anticipate regulatory intervention – although, as will be shown, such interventions do spontaneously arise within chat communities – and for varying reasons. The remaining three chatrooms were moderated, providing the opportunity to compare communicative behaviours within chat known as under surveillance, and that considered more open. The issue of my own role as a possible inhibitory influence remains less resolvable, however.

Adapting the conventions of minimal interference standard in ethnographic research, I enacted my role as online participant observer by "lurking" and not attempting to direct the flow of the conversation. But more subtle levels of influence on the study are undeniably present. The list of chatrooms observed for instance has a clear bias to its selection. I chose a chatroom about Hurricane Floyd as I was an American living in Australia, and when I wished to have a chatroom that was on an emergency, I felt more competent in assessing user responses and behaviours under the pressure of extreme events when those participating shared my own cultural predispositions. I similarly chose a baseball chatroom because of a pre-existing interest: my son, at the time of data collection was a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers. But given the focus of interest in these studies, unabashed subjectivity in relation to topic selection is less relevant than may otherwise be the case. Here the goal is not to construct some objectively justifiable account of online communication practices in "representative" samples of online communities, but to collect texted-talk from a range of chat sites, and submit it to a number of linguistic descriptive and analytical methodologies. The participation of the researcher under these circumstances – and the circumstances of the site selections   are therefore not only less problematic, but able to provide added insights into the activities encountered within the chat communities:

> I had also moved on to a more complex mode of fieldwork known as participant observation, and I was getting an education I hadn't expected. Their experience of the world, their ethical sense, the ways they interpreted concepts like work and play were becoming part of my own experience (Stone, 1995).

In cyber-ethnography, the advantages of participation are less than usually counter-weighted by researcher influence on community interaction. While in chatrooms, using technology hardware and software, the user is invisible: not a social actor in the usual sense of communicative relations, but a new form of social actor, intersecting actual and technologised or mediated communication: an "actant". Akrich argues that an actant is "whatever acts or shifts actions, action itself being defined by a list of performances through trials; from these performances are deduced a set of competences with which the actant is endowed" (1992). This view

of communication as situated somewhere between the user and the machine requires a constant movement between the technical and the social, a trajectory experienced as usefully by the participant-observer as by other community members, and perhaps more so, given the problems of recontacting online actants for reflective comment.

The technologisation of chat however produces other problems in relation to data analysis. Major theoretical studies have examined conversation as interaction between participants with conversation understood as spoken communication (see Stone, 1995; Goodwin, 1981). One primary characteristic of conversation is that it is fully interactive; at least two people must participate in it, and they exchange messages in "real-time". Participants take turns in exchanging these messages, so conversation is fundamentally a sequential activity (Nofsinger, 1991, p.3). However, online sequential activity is rare. Conversation is often similar to bumper cars in a sideshow amusement park. Dialogue seemingly bumps and weaves, often without any discernable reason for its existence. The participants seem to be "thinking out loud", expressing, without directed communicative intent. In a chatroom, turn-taking has to be isolated and re-ordered in order to assemble conversation into meaning. My "gridding" of utterances in the case studies reveals problems and mis-directions in the flow of "talk". I experiment with arranging the turn-takings in rows and columns, looking for clusters of threads. I elaborate on those theories and methods of empirical research that already exist for assessing conversational exchanges in Internet-based communities (see Bays, 2000; Bechar-Israeli, 1998; Rheingold, 1991, 1994, 1999, 2000).

"The ethnographic approach emphasises the understanding of behaviour in context through the participation of the investigator in the situation being studied as an active member of the team of users involved in the situation" (Whiteside, J. 1988, p. 805). Ethnography is defined as "the acts of both observing directly the behaviour of a social group and producing a written description thereof" (Marshall, 1994, 158). At one level it can be argued that online chat produces its own written description: its own archive of talk exchanges. But, as outlined above, what appears in the screened dialogue box must be rearranged: re-sequenced, in order to reconstruct dialogic structures. And, as I will argue, it is not only researchers who undertake such rearrangements. For online chat to work at all, participants have had to evolve new skills at recombining dialogic sequences: a major key to the discursive codes of this new communicative form – and one most often reported by "newbies" as initially alienating. In this study I will observe, analyse and present these and other discourse structures of chatroom and online discussion group cultures. In ethnography the "description of cultures becomes the primary goal... the search for universal laws is downplayed in favour of detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture and the beliefs and social rules that are used as resources within it" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 10). My study anticipates not one, but many "particular cultures" online, and seeks the

possibility of generalisable regulatory system-wide behaviours only as a final outcome.

Culture's influence on conversational styles in systematic ways or the search for a totalizing "ethnography of communication" is a central tenet of Conversational Analysis, which examines how culturally-generated rules determine the underlying structure of conversation (see Wittgenstein, 1965). Net communities have not for the most part yet problematised either the sociological or the linguistic issues associated with online communication: that is, asked "what the rules of language let us say" or "how language is organised to let us say these things".

Yet these communities are in some circumstances concerned with deepening their sense of cultural connectedness, establishing additional tools for intensifying the information flows. On some chatroom servers such as America Online (AOL) and Microsoft Messenger (MSN) there are methods of obtaining data on the number of people using a specific chatroom and of determining the total number of chatrooms at a given point in time. With Instant Messenger (IM) servers, as discussed in chapter one (Introduction), there is also a way to access a "profile", a personal biography stating characteristics such as age and gender as well as listing hobbies and other interests, for chatroom participants who wish to make their personal details public.

The researcher's data on the parameters of the population of online chatroom users is however so far at least, limited to the above. Unless the user reveals such data within their chat, it is not possible to know the age, race, or gender of chatroom users. We don't know how many people, over an extended period of time, use online chatrooms. There is no data on how long each individual user spends engaged in online chat, and we don't know at which times they are likely to come and go. Demographic information that we do have about users of online chatrooms is self-reported and unverifiable (Hamman, 1998).

An understanding of internet cultures is extended by the work of this thesis by recording and interpreting some of the ways in which meaning is produced and interpreted by strangers who know nothing more of one another than the characters they see passing on the computer screen. As I have shown in my literature review in chapter two, there has been other work done on Internet culture that addresses it as community (Rheingold, 1985, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1999 and 2000; Stubbs, 1998; Cyberrdewd, 1999; Turkle 1982, 1984, 1995, 1996) as a place of power

[66]   [67]   [68]   [69]

(Poster   , 1990; Rola   , 2000; Schneider   , 1997) or a place to explore one's self (Hamman   , 1998;

[70]

Albright   , 1995). While each of these contributes to an understanding of online "talk-texting" as the relational

base of Internet chat, none acknowledges the foundational act of Internet communication: in this case, its contact mechanism of rapid text exchange.

Essentially, I am interested in the meaning-making capacities of the marks on the screen as they appear, and in turn how meaning is derived from the often rapidly passing text on a screen, whether a computer or a device as small as the screen on a mobile telephone. I am concerned in this study with text-based chatrooms; however a possible heir to chat communicational conversation, SMS, is a growing field close to IRC in its techniques of using abbreviations and emoticons to communicate. One can send, reply or forward e-mail from mobile phones and users can gain access using any browser and computer connected to the Internet in the world. One particular "snapshot" (shown below) of who was connected via the Internet to their mobile phone showed twenty users, between the ages of 13 and 34, in ten different countries and these figures are similar to surveys of who is in chatrooms [71]. The advantage to doing research on a site that profiles users currently online is that the users' location, age, sex and interests are revealed (providing the user provides their details accurately) whereas in chatrooms they seldom are.

Location	Age
London, United Kingdom	22
Karlsruhe, Germany	34
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	24
Derby, United Kingdom	14
Sandwell, United Kingdom	19
Wollongong, Australia	13
Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom	16

Sydney, Australia	26
Dubai, United Arab Emirates	24
Stuttgart, Germany	24
Kolkata (Calcutta), India	24
Kelang, Malaysia	27
Birmingham, United Kingdom	23
Leeuwarden, Netherlands	14
Liverpool, United Kingdom	25
Ankara, Turkey	16
Cairo, Egypt	19
Benoni, South Africa	34
Kota Baharu, Malaysia	20
Chichester, United Kingdom	34

It is this current text-based form of communication through writing online that I believe will affect the future of communication. For example the speed of communication amongst people of different cultures, ages, gender and countries has been rapidly increasing with the use of non face-to-face interaction (see Internet Statistics. http://www.internetstats.com), as shown in the chart below:

	E.U.	U.S.A.	Japan	World	Source
Number of computers1	93	141	36	387	ITU
Per cent of total	25	52	29	6	
Web pages2	13,9	65,9	4,5	94,3	Netsizer
Per cent of total	3,7	23,9	3,9	1,6	
Internet Users3	98	154	39	407	NUA
Per cent of total	26	56	31	7	
Mobile Phones4	147	86	57	481	ITU
Per cent of total	39,1	31,7	45	8	

1 Millions in 1999
2 Millions in October 2000
3 Millions in November 2000 4 Millions in December 2000

Source for the above table is from Global Experts: http://www.globalxpert.net copied January 2001.

3.1.4 Conversation Analysis

My study focus is on the utterances in text-based chatrooms where chatters engage in screen-texted dialogue as if it were conversation. There are other text-based chat areas, used in education and in entertainment, where character development and role-playing are more important than just turn-taking "talk" sequences. Those studies that exist however focus mainly on MUDs (see Reid, 1996; Warshauer, 1995; Bromberg, 1996; Churchill, and Bly, 1999; Lisette, 1995 and Utz, 2000). These studies show that MUDs used for entertainment or education give the user the ability to construct a complex linguistic self that is in constant communication with others. These constructs are at first sight more complex than the communication in chatrooms as they also construct environments to communicate in (see Introduction to this thesis). The pragmatics of such communicative action have produced a focus on cooperative communications and community-building, which has detracted from other aspects of online talk-texting activity. A lot of research has for instance been done on the use of chatrooms for "cybersex" (see Gilbert, 2000; Hamman, 1996, 1998). It is from these studies of MUDs

and cybersexual domains that this study builds the sorts of interrelational work and collaborative structures, which can be carried into the fine-focus work of analysing text-based chat. But some of the less well analysed areas of chat: its inherent discontinuities; its capacity for exclusivity as well as communality; its adaptation of combined verbal and visual codes and the elaboration of these into distinctive communicative forms – all of these are still under-examined.

The purpose of my selection of a "language-in-use" methodology is to discover the structuring principles behind chatroom language. Internet communication is a form of rapid conversation. It is rarely "frozen" for analysis, as it is when the chat is saved to examine. In other words, while my selection of chat-text makes it available for subsequent examination, it also tends to "reify" it into scripted text – a direction contrary to the principles established in my earlier account of linguistic and "reader reception" theories, in which I endorse a strongly active role for the act of interpretation in reception of internet chat "utterances" – even suggesting that the less "formal" the setting and technique, the more active and creative the meaning-making inside the exchange. By developing an analytical framework to study chatroom conversation on its own terms, as a set of distinctively different "speech act" genres, I will show how the communicative act is represented when the source of the communication is unknowable. I will for instance identify differences between casual conversation used for entertainment and that found in information-seeking dialogues. For example in the first case study, "Storm", because there is an emergency as the basis of the chatroom conversation, utterances occur mainly as information-seeking dialogue, whereas in several of the other case studies information seeking gambits are not present (Case Study Two, 3, 4, 5 and 7) and the "conversation" tends to drift- or is at least differently oriented.

As online conversation is a casual form of communication, denoted by the term "chat", analysis differs from studies in other generic structures (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 268) such as narrative (Labov and Waletzky, 1967), gossip (Eggins and Slade, 1997) and opinion (Horvarth and Eggins, 1986).

The primary concern of conversation analysis in genres other than chat is with sequential organization, or the ways in which speakers organize their talk turn-by-turn. With online chat there is no obvious organization. It is to help focus this non-sequential organization that a method to describe this conversational genre will be developed.

Most conversation analysis of face-to-face dialogue is in the tradition of ethnomethodology, which is the careful and detailed study of how different social groups cohere around consensual behavioural practices – including the conversational exchanges used to elaborate and confirm and reinforce that consensus (see Schegloff, 1979, 1987; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Jefferson, 1972).

Jellinek and Carr (1996) identify three broad purposes of conversation:

Transacting: conducted for the purpose of negotiation or exchange within an existing problem setting;

Transforming: conducted when individuals suspend their own personal opinions or assumptions and their judgment of others' viewpoints; and

Transcendent: where the purpose is to move beyond or "leap out" of existing mindsets.

Within chatrooms we find all three purposes used, often appearing at once, given the technologisation of the technique of "posting" or entering text into dialogue boxes. Transacting or negotiation is more apparent in purpose-driven chatrooms such as in the examples I use of "Storm", "astrology", "baseball" and "web-3D". As there is more purposive turn-taking in these sites, for example, to discover or exchange information, participants will often wait for a response. In Case Study One, Storm, a person inquires about the current location of the hurricane.

[turn 74] <guest Tom> does anyone know where floyd isnow

To find out something involves a process of negotiation. In chat however, such negotiation is more than usually complex. In this turn-taking example above, the answer, to <guest-Tom> could be

[turn 83] <davesbraves> 120 mi. se of cape look out nc

But maybe the answer is

[turn 103] <Werblessed> In Bladen County Outside of White Lake.

Is the answer to <guest-Tom> number 83 or 103? It would be assumed that the answer is turn-taking number 83 and not 103 just because there are nine turns in between the turn 74 and turn 83 whereas there are 29 turns between turn 74 and turn 103. However, without reading all the turn takings in between we cannot know for sure, as neither <davesbraves> nor <Werblessed> addresses <guest-Tom> by name. This indeterminacy of response is just one of the new complexities in online communication.

Transforming and Transcendent turns are the least used of Jellinek and Carr's three broad purposes of conversation, but in online chat, even transacting turns are difficult to detect and manipulate. How then can analysis move beyond this most basic of communicative relations, to evaluate the more complex elements of

online meaning-making?

The methodology I propose to pursue for the textual analysis within this project is a selective mixture of several approaches to linguistic studies. As what I am proposing includes several fields of study, as shown below, I have to be clear at all times that what I am doing is at core a linguistic study. My approach to this study therefore differs from a psychological or sociological approach to the use of language. The psychologist asks why we have conversation the way we do and what are the needs of the individual which drive them to engage in a certain chatroom. Sociological conversation analysis asks what governs how we perform a given conversation, what processes are involved, and what social relations result. Linguists ask, "How is language structured to enable us to do conversation" (Eggins & Slade 1997, p.7). By extending the detailed analysis enabled by this third linguistic approach into electronic interactions, I can retain for my study a focus on evolving practices within a sphere still loosely considered textual rather than talk-based. In other words, I anticipate the possibility of being able to capture emergent conventional patterns of use within Internet chat behaviour, as my original contribution to this field of study.

Key Assumptions

As a result of my review of the literature on chatroom talk, I begin my study with a number of key assumptions which I have set out to test throughout my research.

1. That language used in chatrooms is more deliberate and calculated than the predominantly "informal" styles might suggest.

One notable feature of chat is the heavy use of compound forms in "tags" or online user names – a source of intensive creativity in most cases. A chatroom can be like going to a costume party where no one knows who the masked participants are. The "theme" of the chatroom can influence the username of the participants. For example, in Case Study One <IMFLOYD> is in the Hurricane Floyd chatroom. And because of the username and the chatroom the utterance, <when i pass into the colder north atlantic.......i will lose energy and die> has meaning. In Case Study Three the user < baby_britney1 > is in the Britney Spears chatroom, while <AquarianBlue> is in an Astrology chatroom (Case Study Four) and in the baseball chatroom (Case Study Seven) <MLB-LADY> is representative of Major League Baseball. If users are "texting" selves in these ways at the level of designing user names to suit their contexts, how else might they be developing and tailoring their talk-texts? At the very least, such activity is evidence of a carefully chosen texting, and suggests that all aspects of online talk need to be examined in detail.

2. That conversation within Chatrooms changes how we come to "know" others, and therefore demands a highly sensitized "reading" of texted-talk gambits from participants.

Taking away physical cues and having only written text in a turn-taking milieu creates new demands on communicative groups. Studies of people who have met off-line after developing an online relationship are one indication of the changes in how we come to know someone differently with online interaction. Because communication is textual it is also self-evidently performative, which liberates the self from any concept of authenticity (see Turkle, 1995, 1996; Rheingold, 1991, 1993, 1999; Hamman, 1998, 1999). The most obvious difference between in-person meetings and virtual meetings is the separation of distance, but the synchronicity and interactivity create an illusion of contact which has proven very compelling.

3. That observational study of chatroom conversation can capture adaptations to conversational behaviours.

In one instance analysed in Case Study Seven below, communication revolves not only around self conscious use of the texted form of online chat, but utilizes the keyboarded techniques of chat entry. In turn number 98 of the recorded baseball chat <NMMprod> asks < if you like the yanks press 3> and a series of responses offers only numbers as the answering utterances. While the Case Study will make more of this episode, here it is introduced to indicate the presence of a markedly creative approach to deployment of the otherwise limited range of communicative and expressive gambits available to chatters. As with many of the behaviours collected in the data corpus for this study, it signals a new set of impulses in the chat repertoire.

4. That this work gives us a better understanding of how, and why, chatrooms are an important area in which to extend current conversational research theory.

Without a method soundly grounded in language-in-use analysis, there can be no bridging through examination of the language used in CMC exchanges, into the social contexts or consequences of these speech acts: in other words, no understanding of chat as related to and productive of discourses, and as impacting on broader social issues. Chat will remain an online curiosity: part of the moral panic responses to communicative innovation, with its content abstracted from the special circumstances of its enactment – a dissociation which can distort the chat experience in the service of many interpretive agendas.

5. That "chat" does not differ from natural conversation in certain key aspects.

In other words, this study postulates that chat is open to ordinary users and to specialist linguistic analysis, since it is grounded in existing "live-talk" experiences – yet increasingly is developing its own range of divergent

and specialized codes and behaviours.

A useable definition of chatting for this study describes chat in the following terms:

> On the Internet, chatting is talking to other people who are using the Internet at the same time you are. Usually, this "talking" is the exchange of typed-in messages requiring one site as the repository for the messages (or "chat site") and a group of users who take part from anywhere on the Internet. In some cases, a private chat can be arranged between two parties who meet initially in a group chat. Chats can be ongoing or scheduled for a particular time and duration. Most chats are focused on a particular topic of interest and some involve guest experts or famous people who "talk" to anyone joining the chat. (Transcripts of a chat can be archived for later reference.) http://www.whatis.com.

This definition describes chat in its simplistic form: one which emphasizes the conversational origins of the form. What is lacking in its "unproblematised" view is the shift from talk to text: the need to read to establish the context and regulatory systems behind the chat of a certain site, and to replicate at least the basic formatting conventions in order to be "heard" and to gain response. So, while chat continues to be interpreted as and to represent itself as talk, its text base also needs acknowledgement.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Because of the developing diversity of chatroom talk-texting practices and their clear formation around both textual and conversational styles, this study encompasses several linguistic descriptive and analytical methods. The theories, and the chatrooms in which I apply them, include:

Reading-response Theory (*Case Study One*),

Computer Mediated Communication (*Case Study Two*),

Semiotic Analysis (*Case Study Three*),

Speech Act Analysis (*Case Study Four*),

Discourse Analysis (*Case Study Five*),

Conversational Analysis (*Case Study Six*),

and several linguistic theories relating to discourse theories, and Linguistic schools of thought, which explore grammar in conversation and the construction of meaning, such as the Prague School of Linguistics (*Case Study Seven*).

Together these methods provide sufficient range to enable me to develop a combined method for chatroom analysis, which encompasses more of the various attributes of this set of communicative behaviours than is possible within any one of the existing "off-line" frames. By selecting from descriptive and analytical techniques which can capture different facets of what is distinctive about online chat, this project hopes to create a compound strategy for chat analysis. And by selecting from methodologies which investigate language not only as a communicative system but as a tool for activation of ideas and establishment of social relations, this study aims to demonstrate that online communication has communicative efficacy: that is, operates as a significant element of contemporary social and cultural activity, rather than providing a space for trivial – and perhaps even self-delusional – "compensatory" social connectedness. While still under formation, and yet while already demonstrating a diversifying range of sub-genres, online chat demonstrates distinctive discursive features. The method I will develop in this thesis I term an "Online Discourse Analysis Method" (ODAM) which combines traditional conversational analysis theories with several features and behaviours (lurking, fleeting text, online grammar, special graphic and text-based symbols) that are particular to chatroom talk. By attending not just to the technological features which structure and constrain online communication, but to the adapted speech practices which result, I hope to reveal a richer set of adaptive talk behaviours and regulatory developments than has so far been demonstrated.   With this method I will show for instance how a specialist online turn-taking is related to the establishment of a distinctive online discourse, as well as linking to various broader social and cultural discourses. The ODAM construct and its uses in examining online talk-texting behaviours will be shown in the conclusion of this study, in the hope that some of its techniques may assist in other studies of other online sites – either as these continue development, or as a record of a special moment of Internet communications history (and possibly both).

3.3.1 Assumptions

Assumptions about conversation which remain necessary to the proposed ODAM construct arise in various contexts.

Gudykunst and Kim (1997) make several assumptions while conceptualizing communication (pp. 6-13) which hold true in my analyses of text-based chatroom communication and are a useful guide toward a method of understanding online talk.

ASSUMPTION 1: *communication is a symbolic activity*

Gudykunst and Kim (1997) identify symbolic activity as occurring when "all have agreed on their common

usage" (p. 6). Due to the rapid communication aspects of chatroom dialogue graphic symbols are frequently used as well as abbreviations. Because a symbol such as :) to represent a smile has no particular cultural basis in any given language, everyone easily adopts it. However, an abbreviation such as "btw" (by the way) may not be as easy

[72]

for someone not used to English. Therefore, chatroom conversation in other languages   is able to follow a pictographic symbolic convention, depicted by emoticons (see Case Study Five in this study on emoticon similarities in other languages), while the abbreviation of words and phrases will be language specific. However, the evolution of these two systems; the degree of conventionality across and within chat "communities", and the ways in which conventions evolve and are applied, will all be examined, adding to the semantic load of messages. Studying chat, in which conventions are still establishing, offers the opportunity to observe "common usage" under new pressures, and still depend on practice – that is, on actual social use, where communication-location specific symbolic systems are only partially available. To this extent, chat must be regarded as either only partially within a symbolic system or straddling dual systems of off line and online communication – or else the view of communication as a symbolic activity must in itself be modified, to accommodate the   influence of material aspects – such as the technologisation of talk, or new interventions from within material culture or social contexts.

Robin Hamman's work (1996, 97, 98, 99) on chatroom participation attempts to show how online speech is constructed, and his work will be added to the analyses enabled by the range of language-in-use

[73]

analytical techniques introduced in each case study   .

ASSUMPTION 2: communication *is a process involving the transmitting and interpreting of message.*

Gudykunst and Kim identify transmitting messages as "the process of putting our thoughts, feelings, emotions, or attitudes in a form recognizable by others. We then refer to these transmitted symbols as a message. Interpreting messages is the process of perceiving, or making sense of, incoming messages and stimuli from the environment" (p. 7). With the multivocal changing threads of online chat it is necessary to identify individual chatters' interactions to find chat chunks of an individual's conversation. As "meaning is not static.... during the on-going flux of conversation, what will follow the speech event that is happening now is unknown" (Barnes & Todd, 1977, p. 18). Thus chat in its turn-taking and technologisation problematises a simple producer-receiver model of communicative exchange.

Nor do the communicative conditions of online chat tend towards certainty in message exchange. Transmitting and interpreting several messages at once can cause confusion. If people leave the chatroom as we are quickly typing out what we want to say, we have "hanging" conversations. To add to the confusion, a person may log on three times into the same chatroom using different log-on names. At some points the chatroom can disintegrate into nonsensensical communication. One aim of this study into chatroom conversation will be to establish the limits of conversational analysis within the chatroom environment. One limiting conclusion to three years of online chat analysis is that, due to the instabilities within the chatroom milieu, the analysis of conversation is not always conclusive - a limit on the ODAM research paradigm, which will be revisited in the concluding chapters of the thesis.

ASSUMPTION 3: *communication involves the creation of meaning*

Let us revisit here the Gudykunst and Kim proposition (pp 20-23) that only "messages" can be transmitted from one person to another. Meaning cannot be transmitted, due to its ambiguity, and to the degree of load contributed within the act of reception. With this assumption the channel used to transmit a message also influences meaning, at least in as far as it predisposes interpretation, or selects participants liable to interpret in certain ways (thus the communications technologist's argument: "the medium is the message"). Within chatrooms there is rarely formality in conversational exchange, which affects the form of the dialogue. There is often a sense of instability, as people come and go, at times without greetings or salutations. Texts are fleeting, moving across the limited display screen quickly. It is a medium wherein one can express whatever one is feeling at the time and not worry about the immediate social consequences of the words written. Precisely how the medium itself contributes towards or evokes such uses and behaviours will emerge within the case studies.

Gudykunst and Kim point out that if we do not know others, we use our stereotypes of their group memberships to interpret their meaning, such as their culture, ethnic group, social class and age. In chatrooms we seldom have such clues readily available, although we may still be able to decode such matters from within the utterances posted – a proposition tested within the case studies. We can also stereotype chatters by the room they are in; for example, in Case Study Seven "baseball chat" we would assume participants are baseball fans or players and not ballet enthusiasts. Despite the comparative brevity of chat postings, there is rich evidence for complex semantic layering: plenty of space and detail for provision of cultural cues.

And yet many analysts, along with new chat participants, comment on the reduction in talk forms online. Conversations in chatrooms with others are usually carried on with short sentences. There are several

reasons for this. Firstly if several people are "speaking" at once, then it is necessary to respond quickly. Unless paragraphs of text are available to cut and paste, one is limited by both the speed at which one types, and the number of people in the chatroom. Secondly, if we do not know anyone in the chatroom short sentences may be "spoken" in order to decrease misinterpretation as much as possible. The nature of the conversation, and its context, will always determine how brief the conversation can be. Before we say "the Indians suck" we have to be comfortable with whom we thought was in the chatroom, otherwise we would find ourselves being misinterpreted. Was the chatter referring to the Cleveland Indians baseball team, Native Americans, people from India, a sorority or any number of things? If we further qualify our conversation then there are fewer chances for misinterpretation. "The Indians will never make it to the World Series", "The Indians show no interest in baseball", "I reckon Pakistan will nuke the Indians". Any variation of the word "Indian" can clarify a conversation: Indian club (but a club as in a group of people or a club which is shaped like a large bottle used singly or in pairs for exercising the arms?) An "Indian pitcher" could mean a pitcher for the Cleveland Indians baseball team, or a native American waterpot, or to a person from Newfoundland it could represent their home (it is the floral emblem of Newfoundland); or to a botanist it could be the plant Sarracenia purpurea found east of the Rocky Mountains. Abbreviation in particular is culturally contextual in just such ways, and must therefore be examined within particular chatrooms, as well as for the whole field of chat.

Gudykunst and Kim (1997 pp 124 - 126) list Beck's (1988) five reasons why misinterpretations occur within communication, and these reasons also show at least part of the range of problems to be dealt with in chatroom conversation:

1. We can never know the state of mind - the attitudes, thoughts, and feelings - of other people.

This is clearly shown in text-based chatrooms, where we have no indication of who the other chatters are and what they are feeling or thinking, except by what they decide to post.

2. We depend on messages, which are frequently ambiguous, to inform us about the attitudes and wishes of other people.

Many messages are ambiguous in chatrooms, and because they are offered in a multilogue situation, they may be differently received by different participants – or even as is often seen online, by the "wrong" participants.

3. We use our own coding system, which may be defective, to decipher these messages.

This is discussed extensively in Case Study Three, using the analytical techniques of semiotics and pragmatics to decipher how meaning is read from signs such as emoticons.

4. Depending on our state of mind at a particular time, we may be biased in our method of interpreting other people's behaviour.

 Since we are unable to access or assess the context in which postings arise or into which they arrive, the text-talk itself carries a heavier than usual load. Reception is thus more than usually active in online chat, and must be traced wherever possible

in responses.

5. The degree to which we believe that we are correct in divining another person's motives and attitudes is not related to the actual accuracy of our belief (Beck, 1988, p.18).

As various Case Studies will show, some participants in chatrooms achieve dominance, such that their responses and interpretations prevail over others'. But this does not always imply that their "readings" are correct, or that they lead a conversation along the lines intended by original posters or all contributors. The "power relations" deployed in texted-talk need to be examined, and techniques drawn from both Sacksian CA and Fairclough's CDA will be used and extended to do this work.

ASSUMPTION 4. *Communication takes place at varying levels of awareness.*

"A large amount of our social interaction occurs at very low levels of awareness" (Abelson, 1976; Berger & Bradac, 1982; Langer, 1978, 1989).

Chatroom conversation is not necessarily a routine part of everyday life, because a person is rarely in a chatroom because they have to be. Chatroom conversation is intentional conversation. Unlike conversation in which we engage because we need to: i.e. the person is there in front of us (a partner, supervisor, friend, neighbour, family member or shop assistant) or because we have received a letter or e-mail and need to answer; chatrooms are where we go when we really don't need to have communication with anyone in particular.

As we do not know with whom we are speaking or their background in a chatroom, our awareness of the act of communication is heightened. To be a part of a chatroom conversation we need to pay attention to what others are saying. However, due to the speed of conversation in chatrooms there is rarely the opportunity to ask someone to clarify what they are saying. People either intuit conversation or respond in whatever way seems to fit at the time. Chatroom conversation may appear to us to be one of the rare instances in human communication where there is little retribution for saying the "wrong" thing – however as Case Studies will show, this is not always true in online communicative relations, which display as much abusive deployment of communicative power as all other forms of communication.

ASSUMPTION 5: *communicators make predictions about the outcomes of their communication behaviour*

"When people communicate, they make predictions about the effects, or outcomes, of their communication behaviours: they choose among various communicative strategies on the basis of how the person receiving the message will respond" (Miller and Steinberg, 1975, p. 7).

Communication in chatrooms is based on each participant's pre-conceived concept of what types of people are in

the chatroom. The nature of the chatroom will dictate the sort of conversation one is engaged in for the most part. Whether the chatroom is an Orthodox Christian, sexual, political, sport, or educational site, will make the conversation much more predictable. For example, a physicist wishing to chat on string-theories or wormholes in space may not find the people to speak with in an Eastern-Orthodox chatroom. The communicative strategy is to be in the chatroom that appears to be of the same mindset – or in general chatrooms, to "read" the likely responses to one's own postings, from those of earlier contributors. Analysis of online chat needs to evolve strategies to capture the "reading" strategies of participants, as displayed in how they manoeuvre within the chat strand topics.

ASSUMPTION 6: *Intention is not a necessary condition for communication.*

At the same time, Gudykunst and Kim argue that intentions are instructions we give ourselves about how to communicate (Triandis, 1977, p. 11). Intent exists in all speech situations; what is different in a virtual space is that intent is more than usually opaque, and the anticipation of concealed or subversive intent is heightened by the lack of physical contact and non-linguistic cues. Are participants there to gather information, exchange information, or play performance games? Finding intent in a chat is to determine, by following a user's turn-takings, what the participant is doing in terms of their linguistic or discursive enactment of the communicative repertoire. To establish a method to research what is being accomplished in a chatroom I will work to identify standard categories of chat utterances, such as greetings, responses to other chatters or initiating statements. But beyond this, the often multiple possibilities of talk relations and response sequences mean that new categories need to be considered: ways of assessing utterances and sequences as less determinate than is usual, operating within a dynamic field of talk, under the pressures of a new and unstandardised technologisation, and evoking speech behaviours which may or may not establish themselves within a permanent communicative repertoire.

3.4 Protocol of a transcription methodology

Chatrooms with many interactants are "multilogue" (Eggins and Slade, p. 24) environments. Separating these voices as conversation is a focus of this study, and something of a methodological challenge, involving the creation of new transcription protocols. As I have "captured" small numbers of turn-taking exchanges in these chatrooms I

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have not made use of Qualitative Data Analysis Software packages   .

In developing a transcription system to accommodate and "capture" IRC multilogue, I will use symbols to indicate categories of utterances between participants. I have based these categorisations on relatively established human interactions of greetings or salutations, and either questions or answers (see table below). But it

is important to note that to assess turn-taking in chat according to conventional systems, there must be an addresser and the addressee who must submit to one primary turn and sequence management protocol – that of only one person "speaking" at a time, as utterances are displayed on the computer screen in order of their insertion. Immediately, turn-taking in online chat complicates this relation. Nor is this the sole processing of talk which is altered by the conventions of online communication.

 Assessing the addressee of an utterance is one way of guaranteeing the talk relation – yet this too is less determinate in chat. Possibilities can be coded using the following categories, to include addressing either an unidentified participant (where it is not clear who the speaker is addressing), and addressing all participants in the chatroom - which can of course also mean addressing nobody, since the indeterminacy of the relation often means that no-one feels directly addressed, and so no response is offered. The table below shows the different types of conversational relation that I have identified, which occur in a chatroom, as well as the transcription method in

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the table below. I will indicate when there is a change of topic   and an introduction of a new topic. Each case study uses the same coding as below:

| A/ = greetings or salutations |
| B/ = statement- open; addressed to no one in particular, just whoever is in the chatroom |
| C/ = statement - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker |
| D/ = answer - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker |
| E/ = answer - open - to whoever is in the chatroom |
| F/ = question - open - to anyone – whoever is in the chatroom |
| G/ = question - to someone specific or previous (earlier) speaker |
| ?/ = undetermined or not classifiable by one of the criteria above |

** = users' abbreviations such as lol
*) = users' emoticons in places of words
#/ = new thread or direction of talk

- A/ = greetings or salutations

According to Erving Goffman (1972, p. 79), greetings and farewells put "ritual brackets around a spate of joint activity". Greetings result in increased access between persons and the farewells result in decreased access. Goffman collectively designates greetings and salutations "access rituals" (p. 79ff), a subspecies of which he terms "supportive interchange ceremonies" (p. 64) or "supportive rituals" (pp. 62-94). As a form of interactive behaviour, greetings are a universal phenomenon. In any communication the desire to establish relations between "self" and "other" within an intercommunity greeting dispels the tension between strangers. Within a chatroom devoid of knowing who else is online a greeting shows the others the user is not going to just lurk but desires to be part of the chat community.

Opening a conversation in a chatroom with a greeting is standard, with <hi> showing a high degree of frequency. In face-to-face meetings greeters usually have the first topic, "How are you?" and so in the beginning, whoever greets controls the conversation. This control from greetings is problematic in a chatroom, due to the chatter being able to give a greeting at any point in time – even after having been in the chatroom (with or without the knowledge of others) for a long period of time. As the two turns below (see Case Study One) demonstrate, a user can simply say <hello all>, or he or she can add more information, as <guest-Jojo> does in turn 96. Turns 96 to 186 frame all of <guest-Jojo>'s conversation (five-utterances) in the chatroom with a greeting and a salutation.

96.	A/	24a	<guest-Jojo>	Hello Folks~~Greetings from Canada~~ How are you holding out down there?
97.	A/	25a.	<KBabe1974>	hello all
186.	A/	24g.	<guest-Jojo>	gotta run....y'all take care down there...be safe

- B/ = statement - open; addressed to no one in particular, just who ever who is in the chatroom

Opening speech functions are conversational moves which open up new exchanges (Eggins and Slade, 1995, p. 192-195) between participants. Opening moves can be greetings as noted above, or they can be used to change the topic, as discussed below in "new thread or direction of talk". In a chatroom an opening move can be to get anyone in the room to respond. For example in Case Study Six <Justin> is making her or his opening, not with a salutation but with a question directed at the room:

| 4) | B/ | 4a. | <Justin> | my first visit here; what's normal? |

- C/ = statement - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker

In Case Study One, for example, the highest incidence of what I refer to in this study as chat behaviours involves statements to whoever is in the chatroom, as the table below shows.

storm chat
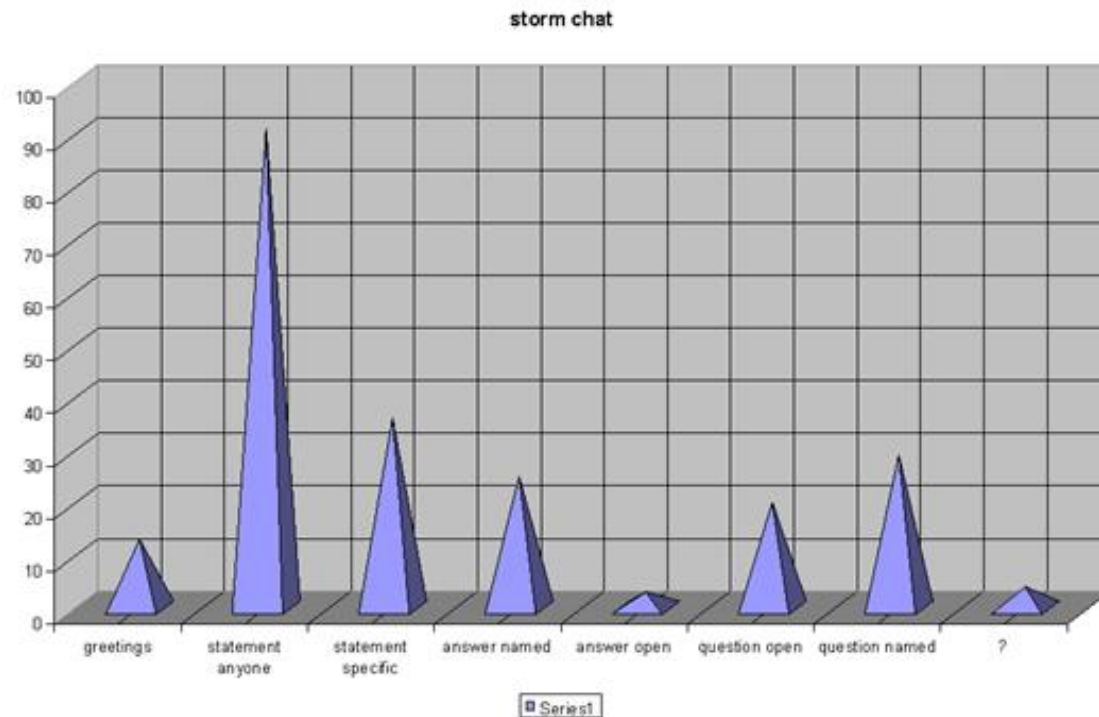
36)	C/	7d.	<Miss Zena>	I believe this storm will weaken

This statement type does not address a specific person. As the conversation in this chatroom was about a storm <Miss Zena> is addressing the chatroom in general, stating that it is her or his belief that the storm will weaken, and opening to any number of possible responses.

- D/ = answer - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker

48.	B/	6c.	<ankash>	Tornadoes in Pender Count

<ankash> in Case Study One is answering <guest-mandy> in turn 39 who has asked <any tornados>? The difference between this utterance and the one above it in turn 36: <I believe this storm will weaken> is that no one has asked whether the storm would weaken. <Miss Zena> is just offering an opinion.

In answer to chatters earlier in Case Study One who were inquiring where Hurricane Floyd was, <Kitteigh-Jo> in turn 13 says:

13)	B/	4b.	<Kitteigh-Jo>	We have rain n NJ

Here a generally addressed comment also has a specific response relation.

- F/ = question - open - to anyone – whoever is in the chatroom

In other instances however, open comments invite responses, rather than offer them. For example in Case Study Six <Justin> is making her or his opening, not with a salutation but with a question directed at the room:

4)	B/	4a.	<Justin>	my first visit here; what's normal?

181)	B/	14j.	<SWMPTHNG>	WHERE IS THE BLASTED DEVIL AT RIGHT NOW

- G/ = question - to someone specific or previous (earlier) speaker

Questions inviting response from any participant can also be delimited to specific respondents – but to do so must use direct address:

189.	D/	36a.	<guest Beau>	Calvin, your last name wouldn't be Graham would it

171.	G/	31d.	<ger3355>	Where you at EMT?

- #/ = new thread or direction of talk

New threads or Topics are usually accomplished by a putting a space between the old topic and the new, and then opening the new with some sort of question or statement as a topic introduction.

| 104. | D/ | 6h. | \<ankash\> | /\94 | Hi guest JoJo......I'm from Wilmington the hurricane bullseye. |

An example of a complete turn

This posting can also indicate the different types of notation this study will use to capture the complex enmeshing of individual postings within a complete chat sequence. Here, "104" means the 104th turn in this segment. In the turns I have "captured" this is the 104th turn. What went on before these turns is not knowable, however as it is turn 104 in the captured sequence, we know that it not the first utterance in this chatroom. In fact it is the eighth turn by this person, as denoted by 6h – the 6 being the sixth person shown to speak in this extract from this room. Rarely is a log available for the complete chat. I do however have a complete log in Case Study Six, in which eight speakers entered 511 utterances – so that position 6 in an extended chat sequence could well be at the upper limit of a given chat community.

An example of a captured conversation arranged with these indicators in place shows how far the notations can assist the analyst in reconstructing the flows of postings. It should be remembered however that to the participants, sequencing and response design are decided far more quickly, and with far less information:

27)	G/	/\23	2c.	\<dingo42\> its in the AIR
28)	G/	/\26	3f.	\<AquarianBlue\> she wont be in orlando?
29)	C/	/\26	3g.	\<AquarianBlue\> sniff sniff
30)	D/	/\27	6f.	\<Nicole528\> oh yea ok
31)	D/	/\28	5h.	\<judythejedi\>i don't think so..she's bringing amtrack down maybe
31)	G/	/\27	6g.	\<Nicole528\> whats your sign dingo?
32)	F/		10a.	\<Night-Goddess_\> anyone cool in here?
33)	A/	/\32	5i.	\<judythejedi\> hi night
34)	D/	/\32	3h.	\<AquarianBlue\> hmmmmmmmm

In each sample, some of the indeterminacy of online talk relations can be witnessed. What is offered to participants – and so to the analyst – is the "turn" based on the pressing of the "enter-button", and not necessarily the complete utterance intended. The enter button cut-off does not always constitute an utterance, since it can be mistakenly – or deliberately - pressed midway through an utterance, as the example from Case Study Six

below shows. Here turn-197 is continued in turn 200:

197)	B/	/\191	6p.	Gordon the funny thing is
198)	B/		3nn.	brian sgi visual workstatio demos by sam chen are great
199)	C/	/\198	2zzz.	web3dADM yeah the new SGI NT boxes come with a great VRML intro
200)	---		6q.	Gordon that when I try to view those SGI vrml, or any VRML with .gz extension to it

This fracturing of an utterance is similar to "repair conversation" in CA, where someone corrects what he or she has said. There are often instances of either self-initiated self-repair or of other-initiated self-repair in chatrooms. However, in a chatroom the repair may not occur for several turns. Whatever one says lies dormant and does not appear in cyberspace until the utterance has arrived through the network. Unlike person-to-person conversation when what is said is heard instantly, even if momentarily disregarded, in a chat dialogue what is said is not "heard" until the speaker-writer wishes to reveal the content to the chatroom, and until it has traveled the distance through the system. Once the enter button is pressed there is no taking back what was said. If the chat can be saved, either by saving the screen shot of the chat or by copying and pasting or by reading the chat logs the dialogue can be "captured" for future reference. Two examples of repair from my case studies are given below. In the first, from Case Study One, we see an example of self-initiated self-repair with <EMT-Calvin> realising that the last word of his or her utterance ended in the typographical error "worl". He or she changes it in turn 72 to "work", but only by posting the single letter "k". In Case Study Six an example of other-initiated self-repair in chatrooms occurs when <Leonard>comments: <Sort night for me tonight. Gotta take my oldest to scouts> and is immediately questioned in the very next turn. Three turns later he or she responds with an apologetic explanation of what was meant by the original utterance.

self-initiated self-repair	other-initiated self-repair in chatrooms
71. B/ 1f. <EMT-Calvin> dont have to worry about someone telling me to report to worl 72. ? 1g. <EMT-Calvin> k	1. B/ 1a. <Leonard> Sort night for me tonight... Gotta take my oldest to scouts 2. D/ /\1 2a. <web3dADM> sort night? ahhhh 6. D/ /\02 1b. <Leonard Sort> == new term for Short

"D" shows that this is an answer to a previous question or statement, in this case both turns 2 and 6 responding to turn 1.

Only if the whole chat is logged and analysed can we know how many turns the person has taken in most chatrooms. In some chatrooms the time of the person entering is placed before the utterance, but this has not occurred in any of the chats that I have used in the seven case studies. Some spaces also indicate automatically when a participant arrives, but this too is not standard – one reason why chatters often announce themselves formally.

	14:56:50											Sascha just entered this channel
	14:57:06	MissMaca: the first plane to hit?
	14:57:12	oscar: sascha, ere you from NY?

**This chat was "captured" from a chatroom on the 911 event in New York City
(See New York City chat on CD)**

To conclude the outline of transcription codings of talk exchanges, a number a codings are used to move beyond the simple counting of participant postings:

speaker	# of entries
1. <EMT-Calvin>	34
2. <TIFFTIFF18>	1
3. <Werblessed>	11
4. <Kitteigh-Jo>	6
5. <RUSSL1>	1
6. <ankash>	16

- I use letters to separate from numbers, i.e. "h" is the 8th letter of the alphabet so that "h" after the participant number (eg "6') shows the number of times this "speaker" has spoken thus far – in this example, this is this person's eighth turn.

> 106. D/ 6h. <ankash>/\94 >12Hi guest JoJo......I'm from Wilmington, the hurricane bullseye.

<ankash> - the brackets indicate the user name; in this case the user name is "ankash"

"/\" means "relates to posting above".

"/\ 94" would refer to turn 94 above. I do this to show that the person is referring to turn-taking 94 above, answering or making a comment, or asking about the chatter in turn 94.

These codings allow the research to unpack some of the multi-dimensionality of online chat, indicating if nothing else, the complexity of its interweaving format.

3.5 Data collection

The data for each chatroom is online at the URLs below and on the accompanying CD:

- Case Study One http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a1.html
- Case Study Two http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a2.html
- Case Study Three http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a3.html
- Case Study Four http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a4.html
- Case Study Five http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a5.html
- Case Study Six http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a6.html
- Case Study Seven http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a7.html

There are diverse possibilities for online text collection and collation. Firstly, there are several text data

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mining software packages available with varying methods of collecting and collating chatroom text. Technological packages maintain a permanent record of exchanges that occur in computer-mediated communication; data that is recorded automatically can be stored for future analysis (Gates and McDaniel,

1999; Mena, 1999) making computer-saved text easier to scan for patterns than verbal conversation, where CA researchers must obtain tape recordings. There are however, problems with doing online research.

Firstly, there is the problem of verification. With the volume of communication in e-mail, newsgroups, and chat, manual techniques of information management are difficult to cope with. A "sampling" protocol must be established, since entire flows of text are unmanageable for research purposes. It has been estimated that over

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430 million instant messages are exchanged each day on the America Online network   . The obvious reductions in sample size necessitated by any qualitative method call for alternative techniques of verification – for the most part, as argued within the qualitative research paradigm, internally arising justifications built upon the rigorous application of the research analytic, and its demonstrated link into previous applications, achieving similar or related outcomes in related studies. Given the very open "sampling" technique proposed for this mixed-methodology study, such links and cross-referencing of results will also be attempted across case studies, in the attempt to build up not only an extensive survey of different sites for online chat practices, but also an intensive testing of the various methodological strategies for talk and text analysis.

Verification to this extent, seeks to establish the legitimacy of findings through comparative location of coherences from study to study – in the hope that this may help overcome the problems of verifying sources, and duplicating studies. It is for instance difficult to "triangulate" inquiry methods in online research, as recommended in Denzin's calls for "rich description" and multiple sampling techniques. Such triangulation seems ideally structured for communications research, given its capacity to survey the classic "sender-message-receiver" processing, or in Hall's culturalist formation, moments of "encoding" (the production process) and "decoding" (reception or audience response), each locatable within the central "codes" of the text. But the constant flow of online chat makes it difficult to detach and extract such fully "encoded" or formed texts, while the instability and transience of online communities makes it unlikely that "reception" can be studied – at least in particular instances. Once again, this returns the researcher to the texts – but with the appropriate cautions in place, both from the methodological strictures of describing the limitations of sampling, and aware of the special difficulties of studying online behaviours, given the well-established literature on the culture of identity play and even deceit, online. So, while online data collection offers some advantages - Data Mining for instance being a pattern recognition technique that does not require consent of the individual – there is at the same time a set of new problems for the online researcher. There is no method to ascertain the identity of chat participants, other than requesting an e-mail account, password and username. Data mining can assist the researcher in

discovering previously unknown patterns about the word usage and topics or threads in the chatroom, but it can say nothing – or at least nothing reliable – about whom those users "are", where they are from, and how their online practices arise in and impact upon their off-line cultural locations or selves.

Secondly then it is necessary to accede that with online data collection, the sample is not secure in its representation of any particular population (see Kehoe and Pitkow, 1996; Bradley, 1999). It is however possible to probe this issue. This study for instance deliberately chooses several special-topic chatrooms likely to attract a certain type of person, and assesses the talk-texts for distinctive patternings and recurrent behaviours. For example in Case Study Three I chose a chatsite dedicated to pop idol Britney Spears and in Case Study Seven a chatsite dedicated to baseball. By choosing topic specific sites I sought to find particular language usage and to suggest its connection to language behaviours and discursive practices reported elsewhere, in studies of off-line communicative groups.

Thirdly, even beyond this focus on the "talk" of online chat, there is no universal method used to research online projects, generally. By some estimates, the number of studies on the Internet is more than doubling each

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year. The American Psychological Society   (APS) for instance now lists more than 80 links to online psychology experiments, up from just 10 links in 1996, the year in which the list was started. But this is still a research mode, which is under development – drawing, as does this study, on methods established off-line, with all the associated limitations. Each online researcher encounters anew the problems of fitting the research tools to the research object, weighing down the inquiry process with ongoing discussion of the specifics of online conditions. For this study, given the open appropriative strategy of testing various language and text based analytics across a range of chat behaviours, this is less a problem however than a central part of the study aim. Not only is online communication of every type constrained, and perhaps differently enabled, by the conditions of online technologisation, but this study has as one of its two goals, the intention of submitting these conditions to the descriptive and analytic powers of the various research methods employed.

Fourthly, it is difficult to control the study environment online, given the broad variability of circumstances available to those who access the World Wide Web. Web users use unlimited types of software, hardware and Internet connections – so that there is no reliable way to ensure that either production or reception of online texts is the same for all users. While this study is very likely to encounter some of the communicative consequences of these variable conditions, it cannot either reduce them, or codify their presence. If online communication is often indeterminate for the user, it is even more so for the analyst. Here the sorts of constraints operating generally upon the ethnographic researcher must apply, since the data as observed and collected can only be

examined and categorized in good faith, as offered to a generalised online participant, represented in this case by the researcher. This is why the analysis in this study is limited to the "texts" entered and retrieved from the sites. What participants intend, or understand, is not retrievable, except insofar as their talk strategies and techniques represent them. And while the various passes made over this text data can help clarify those representations, these are complex and often laborious analytical techniques, not available to the everyday online chat user. For instance, unraveling threads as topics or changes in topics is one challenge in identifying what a user is saying. I approach this by using several methods. Firstly I separate postings in the text by a particular user. For example, a few lines from <EMT-Calvin> below from Case Study One show that he or she is working through a self-continuing thread without much change produced by whatever else may be going on in the chatroom. In this thread <EM-Calvin> has made five utterances during a 20-turn block in this chatroom, and these can be read as a relatively coherent statement:

Chat turn	Utterance
153	folks my God is able
158	i have faith in jesus
163	if he aint done with me
164	i wont get hurt
173	thats whty i have such a peace in my heart tonigjt

But this is not the coherence offered to the chat user with their interrupted readings. Further, to read this as the sort of statement of faith it represents here is to assume that it was produced in an integral way, while ignoring the intervening postings of others – a proposition which would have to be checked against the actual sequence of scrolling turns. Add to that the fact that the intervention of these comments within other conversations may well alter them, either in relation to accidental meaningful juxtapositions, or confusions – and these too may well influence subsequent postings. In other words, both the extraction of chat sequences by the researcher, and their subsequent analytical repositionings, are part of the reception processing of ordinary chat itself – albeit at a more complex and much slower level.

In some cases data may be excluded and disregarded altogether, for technical reasons. It is not possible to save chatlogs on some sites, due to the use of java programming or 3D software that will not produce a sequential

log to research. If - as certainly seems possible – such sites are among the more up-to-date or innovative, this could well exclude whole categories of chat and chat behaviours from such as study as this – and may in turn skew results.

I collected my raw data by copying the transcription (chat-log) in each chatroom and notifying the participants. I then saved each transcription to the relevant appendix, which is online with this thesis. My data ranged from eight-minute sessions with 70 turn-takings of chat to more than one-hour sessions that had several hundred turn-takings. I saved only the text-based chat in non-java scripted chatrooms as some chatrooms preserve chat logs

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of what is said in the chatroom which can be viewed at a later time   . However since mid-2000 most chatrooms

[80]

are written in java script and appear in an applet   which disappears once the chatroom is logged off.

I have chosen 12 examples to try to capture a wide variety of chatrooms. The chatrooms were selected at random; however I sought themes in order to differentiate them as communities. The chatrooms were found by using the search engine "Google", at the time of the study the most used search engine service online, and so most likely to be used by potential chatters, seeking a themed and so sympathetic chatspace and topic. In Case Study One I copied an emergency based chatroom, where people were discussing ways of dealing with an impending hurricane in the USA. In Case Study Two, I used an "Instant Messenger" chat, involving only two participants. For Case Study Three I used a chatroom bearing the name of a popular music star. In Case Study Four, I went to an astrology chatroom. Case Study Five was a general chatroom found on *talkCITY.com*. I used randomly the first chatroom which appeared in my search. In Case Study Six, I went to a chatroom in which expert discussion on "computer animation" was taking place. I received permission from the owner of this

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site to use the material.   For Case Study Seven; I used a baseball chat site, found by typing "baseball chat" into the "Google" search engine. I have also used three chatrooms "captured" shortly after the World Trade Centre attacks on September 11 2001 as comparative examples, showing differences between moderated and unmoderated chatrooms, as well as showing people's reactions immediately, and several days later, to a major disaster, and what online communication can offer and achieve. Two remaining chatrooms have been used to illustrate other aspects of chatroom practice as they emerge from the study. In my discussion chapter I tabulate and comment on each case study, showing the number of participants and per centages of types of conversation, such as greetings or statements to others in the chatroom.

3.6 Ethical issues

Online research presents a number of challenges to the researcher who seeks to obtain the subjects' informed consent while maintaining their privacy. Many of the traditional research techniques and their ethical safeguards do not adapt well for use on the Internet (see Roberts, 2000; Denzin, 1999; Frankel and Siang, 1999).

Image from http://legacy.eos.ncsu.edu/eos/info/computer_ethics%20/

In the first instance it can be argued that the anonymity of the Internet and the ease of use of pseudonyms blurs demographics, such as age, gender, beliefs, ethnicity, and country of origin, so that anonymity has extra guarantees. Some argue that capturing chatroom dialogue is not the same as collection of other online communication. As it is often impossible to know who is online in a chatroom there are no identification

issues, as there would be for instance with e-mail, where once a user's e-mail address is known they can be contacted later. Identifying the computer the person is using will not necessarily yield results as the user could be using a computer at a library or Internet Café that would show no identifying link with the actual person. And it is even claimed that this protective dissociation has impacted on how people communicate online. Studies have documented what they consider the tendency of people to become more open online than they are in person. Under a false or exaggerated expectation of privacy, participants may reveal more than they might have done under conditions in the physical world (see Reid, 1996; Childress and Asamen, 1998). If such hypotheses are correct, then ethical practices may in fact have to be even more rigorously applied, to compensate for the expectation of secure expression. However, this study, at least in part, examines whether "openness" online is universally a reality, or rests on more complex and variable foundations of discursively-established community. This research does not automatically accept therefore that the technologisation of online chat guarantees expressive security for subjects, and so takes up the usual off-line protocols for human subject ethics protection.

To collect data for this study I "lurked" in the selected chatrooms, making one entry at the beginning of each chat that I saved. When such a declaration is made, and no rejection is returned, the consent of the participants is assumed. This is standard Internet practice (see Parrish, 2000; Bechar-Israeli, 1998).

> "I am saving this dialogue as long as I am in this room to use in research on Internet Chat for a postgraduate degree. If anyone is opposed to me saving their conversation say so and I will not save the chat".

Ethical issues are an important facet of data collection and analysis. Traditional academic research that relies on human subjects is governed by ethical standards and laws designed to protect the privacy and anonymity of the individuals serving as research subjects. Because the nature of qualitative observational research requires observation and interaction with real-world social groups, ethical issues that arise in person-to-person contact are much the same as ethical issues within captured chatroom talk. Miles and Huberman (1994) list the following requirements when analysing data taken in real-life contact:

- Informed consent (Do participants have full knowledge of what is involved?)
- Harm and risk (Can the study hurt participants?)
- Honesty and trust (Is the researcher being truthful in presenting data?)

- Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Will the study intrude too much into group behaviors?)

- Intervention and advocacy (What should researchers do if participants display harmful or illegal behavior?)

This study undertook to remain aware of these issues, and to act to protect the interests of online participants over those of the researcher and research project, should such instances as those outlined above, arise.

Many online researchers currently take cyberspace to be part of the public domain, since newsgroups, bulletin boards and chatrooms are as accessible to anyone as a television, radio or newspaper interview. These researchers believe that the responsibility falls on the disseminators of the messages to filter out what they might consider revealing or private information. Hence, they adopt the position that this type of research should be exempt from the informed consent requirement (see King, 1996). This study however, given its appropriation of methodologies developed for off-line communications research, acknowledges a more integrated insertion of online talk into repertoires and expectations of other forms of social communicative exchange. It will therefore, as it begins analysis of its seven selected exemplar chat sites, work to remain aware of the very real people enacting the communicative exchanges which it will otherwise come to regard as "data".

4. CASE STUDIES

Case Study One

CS 1.0 Introduction

There are millions of chatrooms on the Internet, catering to a huge range of discussion topics. A majority of conversations in chatrooms however appear to have become stuck in the "hello" or "anyone want to chat privately?" categories. The chatrooms I am analysing have been selected to be rich in turn-taking and developed conversation. This chapter on "storm talk" is a study in chatroom language use during an emergency and is my starting point in working with real-time interactive discourse.

It is my desire here to focus in detail on the interactive complexities of on line talk which led me to discuss the ideas of five of the leading proponents of "Reader-Response" theory in my literature review (2.3.1): Fish, Iser, Holland, Kristeva, and Eco, and these authors have been a particular influence in this case study. I intend to begin my analysis of online "conversational" practices by examining the reciprocity and interactivity of this curious textual form of talk, where readers and writers reverse roles in the mutual construction of "talk-texts".

CS 1.0.1 Reason for choosing this chatroom

The first chatroom I examine was set up for Hurricane Floyd, a high-impact weather event in the USA on 15 September 1999, which occasioned full alert status for emergency services in the region. I chose this chatroom as the participants may be assumed to have had more urgent and compelling reasons to be involved in conversation than participants in most general chatrooms, and so might be anticipated as achieving focus and an immediacy of conversational engagement. I indeed found differences between how people relate in an

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emergency   and how they relate in other less urgent social settings. One of my hypotheses for this thesis is whether people create a different "textual self" for each electronic communications environment they are in, so that we cannot continue to regard all electronic textual practices as equal. For example, textual practices are different in a chatroom from in an e-mail. Chatrooms are multivoiced synchronous exchanges where many people often "speak" before there is a chance to answer. In asynchronous e-mail, on the other hand, there is time to respond without the dialogue scrolling by at a rapid rate. This study will show how chatroom participants adjust to the speech conditions of the general, or specific, chat situation.

A prior question arises as to the relativity of formational influences on chatroom behaviours. Put simply, does the speaker make the chatroom or does the chatroom create the speaker? It is certainly observably true that, just as in physical speech situations, the style of talk in chatrooms parallels the specific environment. For example, one may speak differently at a church supper and a brothel. Later in this study I explore this concept of developing styles of "speech as home" or how chatrooms can become a particular socially-regulated environment, even in the absence of a constraining set of architectural and culturally-binding physical cues: see Case Study Three, "Speech Acts as virtual places" (CS 3.3.1.2). At this stage however it is important to discover how, and how quickly, chatroom participants adjust to the communicative practices current as they enter a given chat environment – and especially so under unusual circumstances.

The first chatroom under investigation arose from an emergency situation; therefore I assumed when I first entered this chatroom, based only on the title, "Hurricane Floyd Chat", that only conversation dealing with the emergency situation would be conducted. I did not expect topics or spontaneous exchanges about relationships, politics or sports, for instance. One of my interests in this room was how a "textual self" was to be presented. I expected an emergency chat to be different from the casual-chatroom-chat (CCC) which constitutes the major part of most chatroom conversation. In an emergency, I expected those present to be seeking

information that they could use to protect themselves, or to reassure themselves that friends and relatives were safe. I remembered experiences from earlier emergencies, where authorities had often appealed to citizens NOT to use personal communications systems, such as telephones or even public streets or walkways, leaving them free for emergency services, and depending on official media channels for "reliable" information and advice. What I found was that indeed there were few deviations from the topic, and every contributor discussed the storm at some point. Though many different threads developed in the conversation, each of which I "captured", they were all related to the storm. Though there were no prescribed rules of etiquette for the use of this chatroom to focus talk on the storm, users, by entering and then subsequently remaining in this chat arena, were declaring a concern with the storm. The primary way to set up a structuring model for topic control in a chatroom is to have a chatroom that offers to address only one particular topic, as is the case with this chatroom, which had the issue of concern being the events surrounding Hurricane Floyd.

CS 1.0.2 Background to Hurricane Floyd

On Sept. 15, 1999, a one-two punch combination of hurricanes hit North Carolina. Earlier, Hurricane Dennis jabbed once at the Carolina coast before doubling back and coming ashore as Tropical Storm Dennis on Sept. 5, packing torrential rains and 70 mile-per-hour winds. Then came the knockout punch—Hurricane Floyd—ten days later.

Photo from NASA saved September 17, 1999

http://rsd.gsfc.nasa.gov/rsd/images/Floyd/Floyd_19990915_2015_md.jpg

Floyd was a large and intense Cape Verde hurricane that pounded the central and northern Bahamas Islands, seriously threatened Florida, struck the coast of North Carolina and moved up the United States east coast into New England. It neared the threshold of "category five" intensity on the Saffir/Simpson Hurricane Scale as it approached the Bahamas, and produced a flood disaster of immense proportions in the eastern United States, particularly in North Carolina.

"South Carolina's Governor Jim Hodges ordered a mandatory evacuation of as many as 800,000 people in coastal areas today as Hurricane Floyd aimed for South Carolina's coast, just a week shy of the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Hugo's destructive run through the state. Charleston South Carolina's Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. said that the entire city had to be evacuated, anticipating the eyewall of the storm passing over the metropolitan area." (North Carolina Register, September 15, 1999, p. 1).

CS 1.0.3 Research Questions

In attempting to tease out how participants negotiated their way into a chat transaction around the Hurricane Floyd issue, I aim to deploy some of the key research problems raised within reader response theory, as a way of thinking about how what a potential chat contributor understands of their selection of conversational gambits, from what they read of already existing chat postings. In reader response terms, my questions involve considering the following issues of chat initiation and continuation:

1. Is the reader also a writer who is writing the reader – in other words, do participants adjust to the speech acts of others, or to their own interpretations of those acts?
2. Does the reader or the writer produce meaning within "this" chatroom, or do they create meaning together?
3. How important is the particular chatroom context for the reader-writer interpretive relation?

These three questions, elaborated below, are based on Reader-Response Theory. This may appear a paradoxical framework for a study of "chat", even within this textualised talk environment of the chatroom. Reader-Response Theory evolved as a re-examination of Literary Reception practices, at a period which had over-stressed the authorial function of literary texts, focusing on author biography or the social context in which literary works were created, with little or no attention paid to the biography or context of the reader – arguably just as influential on the interpretive act of "reading" (see for instance Fish, 1990; Iser, 1989, 2000; Holland, 1968, 1975). Reader-Response Theory analysts study the ways readers' own life experiences and

situations influence the understandings they construct as they read, often tracing interpretive differences according to such social variables as age, gender, ethnicity, or educational background (see for instance studies by Schilb, 1990; Bakhtin, 1994; Holland, 1975; Vandergrift, 1987). The implication central to this view of the reading act is that a text is in fact "co-written" at the point of "reading", since the writer can offer only a potential reading – or set of potential readings – which the "reader" may or not be able to or choose to follow. To some degree, all readers will reconstruct a version of the text, to suit themselves – thus performing in the act of reading, an act of self-construction or transformation – which may or may not be of lasting influence.

Reader-Response Theory thus poses some interesting questions for the act of chatroom text-talk, where participants "respond" visibly and immediately to the text-talk of other – usually unknown – "authors". All participants are here simultaneously writers and readers, constantly adjusting their own and their interlocutors' texts, and so possibly "selves". With Reader-Response Theory practitioners then, my research needs to pose for chatrooms such seemingly impenetrable questions as:

"Is the reader the writer who is writing the reader?"

In other words, is a chatroom participant in the first instance a reader or a writer – and if they are a reader first, encountering others' chat before posting their own, is the act of reading a simple and unproblematic "reception" of what has been said/written ("posted"), or does this act of reading, like those of the literary texts analysed in Reader-Response Theory, involve the (re)construction of views about the writer, the context, the topic focus, to build a view of "what has been said". This leads to the second question:

"Do the reader or the writer produce meaning within 'this' chatroom, or do they create meaning together?"

And finally,

"Is there any role played by the location, "this chatroom", in the meaning-making processing of reader-writers in chatroom"?

That is, how important is the particular chatroom context for the reader-writer interpretive relation? Is it a standard or a location-variable process?

Each of these questions is important to the reading process as the written text creates a reader's response.

CS 1.1 Methodology

The dialogue under examination here was "jumped" in to as analysis began, in order to replicate the "immersion" experience undergone by most ordinary users of chatrooms – both in their first introduction to a given space, and in subsequent visits. The complete interaction that I "captured" lasted approximately 20 minutes, and left me with a transcription of 279 lines from 45 speakers. The participants did not all enter or speak at the same time as they would in a pre-announced moderated chatroom, such as in Case Study Six, when a certain topic was advertised to be discussed at a specific time. This very focused "present-ness" is one of the most obvious differences between a chatroom transcription and a transcription of a spoken conversation - but there are others. In chatroom transcription everything enacted is present: what is seen is all there is, whereas in taped transcriptions sound qualities and pauses, interruptions and "false starts" are significant, and must also be recorded. Casual live conversation may have several "speakers" talking at one time. This is also often the case in chatrooms, as contributors' text-utterances arrive in random order, even though they may have been entered and posted almost simultaneously, but are delayed by the technologies of packet-switching which operate across Internet communications. Because the "speakers" did not all arrive at the same time in the chatroom they are represented in what is possibly a false sequence – yet that is how they appear to participants, and so I have numbered them according to the CA transcription rules for sequential chat-events.

There is thus a visual representation in chatrooms of an orderly and sequential flow of "chat events". This is one of the contradictory situations in chats. They are at the same both structured and unstructured. This is also chat's chief departure from casual conversation. In casual conversation there is no going back to an earlier chunk of speech. What is said has come and gone and may be referred to only within memory, as it cannot be re-run as "captured" text. In most chatrooms one can at least scroll back to what was said earlier, and respond specifically to that. Below are several of the transcription methods I applied to this case study, and in chapter 3, Methodology (3.3 Protocol of a transcription methodology) I show transcription methods used across all of my study, suggesting some of the ways that this new complexity in such speech conventions as "turn-taking" or "code changes" is influenced by chatroom texting practices.

In this chatroom I have taken the raw material and represented it in several formats. First is the raw data as it appears in the chatroom: for example –

Table 5 Case Study 1.
173.   \<ankash\>   noworry in West NC

174.	\<guest-kodiak\> MANDY, whre did you hear that UNCC is closed
175.	\<guest-sweetthing\> no trees flying yet thank god
176.	\<EMT-Calvin\> thats whty i have such a peace in my heart tonigjt

It is immediately obvious that while all speakers can be said to stay focused on topic – even 176, whose comment on "peace in my heart" can be resolved in the context of a possible life-threatening experience from the Hurricane – the specifics of each contribution appear to be following a non-consecutive logic. Posting 174 for instance is not addressed to the poster of 173 – unless 174 knows something about "ankash" that we don't (i.e. that her name is "Mandy"). Posting 175 does not reply to 174, and 176 appears to be either "musing" across all or any of the other contributions, or else responding to some utterance outside this sampling. While all contributors here can be said to be "writers" by reason of the act of posting, which among them can be shown to be "readers", interpreting and responding to other text? The sequencing of dialogue is – at least arguably – entirely disrupted, so that little responsive or interactive logic is evident. How then are these "conversations" being constructed? From a sampling such as this, it is possible only to hypothesize that a) there is no dialogue: each participant is operating at least primarily in a monologic mode – a proposition which my subsequent analysis will suggest does have some validity in some cases; or b) that the dialogic mode has been stretched across much longer exchange relations than in live natural conversation, and will need to find a transcription method which can reveal it; or that c) chatroom "readers" are able to perceive and respond to very subtle or newly-coded forms of "topic focus", and so are "writing" within the "reading" act, in ways not yet analysed within traditional text studies, or linguistically-based conversation analysis.

Each of these hypotheses has some validity within this study, and will be taken up at some point of the subsequent analysis. At this stage however I want to pursue the problem of the extended "response" sequencing in chatrooms. Is it possible to actually locate an "initiation point" for all chatroom utterances: a clear "sourcing" statement, no matter at which degree of extension from the "reply", which can prove a logical dialogic ordering of the kind proposed for live speech, and required in the act of Reader-Response Theory's "writerly" or interpretive "reading"?

As a second transcription modelling, I have therefore isolated speakers within chatroom discussions, and grouped each speaker's text together. For example the chat-author, \<EMT-Calvin\> in the sequence below, even though saying as early as chat-event 45 that there will be no more dialogue, is still writing at turn-taking 275. I did not

record any more of this particular chatroom - but the speaker could have gone for much longer. The point to grouping individual speakers is to attempt to identify specific linguistic patterning within their language: in this case for instance a strongly assertive modality. Each contribution is an unqualified statement: <those folks WILL BE sent back…>; <the locals WILL BE the ones to get jobs>: <folks NEED TO BE CAREFUL>. A strong continuity in the contributions: both linguistic-structural: <And those folks…> and in the response structure: a progressing logic rather than a disruptive one – no "buts" or "on the other hands" - suggests a consensual discussion with co-contributors. Finally, there is of course a very clearly established antithesis being set up between <those folks> – Mexicans – and "the locals" (who in an interesting appropriation also become "folks": presumably "THE folks" as opposed to "THOSE FOLKS") – which supports the rather more overt politics of the equally strongly moralized <folks need to be careful for con artest [*confidence artists* – researcher's note] after the storm…>. In chatrooms there are chatroom-event response gaps which prevent the clear continuities of logic and style being surfaced, as they have been here. But they are clearly present, and equally clearly "readable", in a "writerly" or high-skilled interpretive way, to chatroom participants.

84. <EMT-Calvin> and those folks will be sent back to mexico

87. <EMT-Calvin> The locals will be the ones to get jobs

99. <EMT-Calvin> folks need to be careful for con artest after the storm

Even in instances of entry-corruption in a given posting – such as posting "99" and the use of the term "con artest" – respondents are able to maintain an interpretive flow and stay "on topic". In a third transcription protocol, I have isolated those conversational turns which were most clearly focusing a specific topic. In this case the protocol highlights a discussion topic about Mexican roofers that took place between turns "75" and "130":

104. <KBabe1974>   /\97 >5   i agree with emt-calvin

105.   <guest-MoreheadCityNC>/\ 97 >5   Fortunately our best friend

is a roofer!

106. <playball14>   /\97 >7 everybody out for a buck   ufortuneately

107. <SWMPTHNG> YOU AINT TALKING ABOUT MEX ROOFERS ARE YOU?

Here too, by grouping the various contributions which can be seen to be "responses" to this discussion strand, we can see very clear consensus being established – once again within the linguistic and political repertoires. <Kbabe1974> asserts openly: <I AGREE…> while <guestMoreheadCityNC> endorses the consensus (on the criminality of itinerant Mexican workers) by expressing relief that he can evade their services: <Fortunately our best friend is a roofer!>, while <playball 14> sighs over a moral judgement: <everybody out for a buck>. <SWMPTHNG>'s over-assertive (capitalized) entry can thus be read as a bid to join the consensus, rather than to actively oppose it: <YOU AIN'T TALKING ABOUT MEX ROOFERS ARE YOU?> suggesting the following gambit: "Thought I recognized the sort of complaints", rather than something more like "How dare you: my best friends are Mexican". This is thus another consensual bid, underlined by the abbreviation "Mex", one among a long, sad vocabulary of ethnic-marking diminutives usually found in racialised discourses, though in a chatroom "Mex" could be a a simple abbreviation for "Mexican" as often words are shortened to fit into the rapidly scrolling chat appearing on screen.

Grouping "response statements" in this way does then indicate the sorts of "interpretive reading" demonstrated in reader-response analyses. These respondents are working from cues operating at both the ideological level of content - such as lexical selection: "Mex roofers", and from syntactical positioning: <Fortunately…> … <I agree…>. Even the use of class or regional dialectical usages, such as "aint" or "folks", invites consensual identification at the level of community. "Folks" round here say "aint" – and are suspicious of "Mex roofers." "Fortunate" folks have friends who will do their roofing properly, and not just "for a buck". These "writers" are "reading" each others' cues in heavily reciprocal ways – especially given the quite restricted length of the utterances used.

Fourthly I have created a transcription protocol which can frame two speakers' interactions. This helps to display the inconsequence of all other dialogue being placed in the chatroom between the utterances of two interacting chatters, and so lets us see whether a) chatters appear to be uninfluenced by the interpolated strands of "other" conversations, or b) in some way respond to them as they formulate ("write-read") their responses to

are influenced by all utterances, and somehow display their reactions in their "returns" directed only to certain utterers. Below for instance, <ankash> jumps across 6 utterances to make her "second" contribution – but who is she addressing? The only possible answer is <guest-sweetthing>, assuring <ankash> that all is well in Concord North Carolina (NC) – presumably where <ankash>'s sister lives – and that <ankash> sends her respondent kisses ("XX") and intensifies her guest-name from <sweetthing> to <SweetNsexy> – perhaps even a pun on "NC". The response indicates a deeper relationship of familiarity than the text provides for the uninitiated "reader" – such as us – and reminds us that there are within this form of reading as many possible layers of past experience with these texts as with the literary texts of Reader-Response Theory. Here too there is a cumulative "intertextuality" of overt and covert references, which initiated and uninitiated, experienced or inexperienced, "readers" pick up. But here this inter-text also contains the clutter of other dialogues, which may or may not at any moment intrude upon and influence the reading/writing.

67.	<ankash>	<ankash> Jersey knows, my sis lives there and she is out of school tomorrow, she is a teacher.
68.		<Kitteigh-Jo> They are better than frogs spiders are my thing
69.		<playball14> oh really
70.		<guest-sweetthing> I AM IN CONCORD NC AND NOTHING BUT RAIN AND LOTS OF WIND RIGHT NOW
71.		<EMT-Calvin> dont have to worry about someone telling me to report to worl
72.		<EMT-Calvin> k
73.		<lookout4110> How ya holding up Werblessed?
74.	<ankash>	<ankash> Thanks XXsweetNsexy!

Here, <Kitteigh-Jo> may be contributing something completely irrelevant to any "hurricane talk" and impossible

to access by anyone except her immediate conversational interactant – or she may be commenting on folk beliefs in the pre-storm behaviours of various animal species, and their reliability as early-warning agents: a topic which could be picked up and recognized by other members of the chatroom. And it is also worth examining the small "corrective" contribution made by <EMT-Calvin> at utterance "72", where he recognises his previous mis-spelling of the word "work", and adds the <k>. This tiny incident shows very clearly the "reading" role of the writer, and the desire to clarify for other readers the comment being made. Chatroom "writers" clearly do read back contributions appearing in the chatroom dialogue box – noting even their own errors – so that the chances of all participants ignoring all contributions other than those from their direct interlocutor are thus diminished. It will be worthwhile examining the full sequencing of future transcriptions, to analyse the influence of the "clutter" between reciprocal strands, as well as the clearly emergent conversational dialogues. To borrow a term from genetics, this "junk" posting may turn out to be as significant and as meaningful as what was originally called "junk DNA" – the segments of gene sequences considered uncoded and undecodable, but which subsequently turned out to be as important as recognizable key sequences, embedding their codes and supporting their messages.

So what creates this clearly new and developing form of interactive "texted" talk exchange, and moves it towards the directions we are beginning to see in its distinctive development? Before one can engage in a chatroom conversation one needs certain technical requirements – and some of these technologically controlled contexts influence the posting behaviours we are seeing.

Firstly, chatroom "talkers" need a means with which to communicate such as a personal computer, or other transmission device. Currently mobile phones, palm computers, laptop computers as well as desktop computers are used in chatroom dialogue. Communicating via chatroom is available in many airports worldwide, as well as on planes, trains, buses and ships and within shopping centres, and even restaurants. This extension of a "private" or "personal" form of communication – a feature clear from its current formation around the talk-exchanges of casual "chat" rather than the more formal textual genres of business documents or "literary" writing – into mobile technologies and public spaces has already blurred the social contexts of this chat. "Private" talk on mobile phones is now quite commonly enacted in company of strangers, while as we have seen, strangers are able to achieve rapid consensual talk, in the midst of many surrounding but unrelated dialogic exchanges. The growing availability of access to these new talk-texting technologies – even the somewhat perverse emergence of texting via the audio-device of the mobile phone - will mean that eventually it will be as common to chat via computers and as easy as making a phone call.

Short Messaging Services, (SMS) like chatrooms are a rapidly growing way of communicating. Currently, there

are approximately 16 billion SMS messages sent globally each month. One-on-one dialogue is growing across all media. The tables below show the growth of Internet-borne instant messenger services (IMs are discussed further in Case Study Two):

Unique Users of Instant Messaging Services At Home-Work Combined in the US Source - Media Metrix (http://www.jmm.com - 2002)						
	Unique Users (in thousands					
	Nov-01	Dec-01	Jan-02	Feb-02	Mar-02	Apr-02
All Web and Digital Media	104,811	106,412	109,951	112,017	114,119	116,420
Rollup of Instant Messaging Services	61,199	62,823	68,080	68,164	71,826	72,130
AOL AIM	29,301	29,821	31,869	30,918	32,412	31,456
MSN Messenger Service	22,968	25,189	26,043	26,199	28,968	29,121
AOL Instant Message*	21,811	21,779	22,684	23,009	22,986	23,442
Yahoo! Messenger	17,084	16,865	17,827	17,396	19,406	19,165
ICQ Instant Message	8,599	8,524	8,351	8,222	8,335	8,113
Trillian	...	...	...	344	525	610

Media Metrix Instant Messaging Services-Average Minutes Spent Per Month Per Person At Home-Work Combined in the US Source - Media Metrix (http://www.jmm.com - 2002)						
	Average Minutes Per Month					
	Nov-01	Dec-01	Jan-02	Feb-02	Mar-02	Apr-02
All Web and Digital Media	1,273.90	1,250.20	1,399.20	1,307.80	1,424.00	1,398.80
Rollup of Instant Messaging Services	303.4	295.1	328.4	314.8	324.1	332.7
Trillian	...	...	...	366.9	532.7	433.6
AOL AIM	293.5	288.3	291.8	297.8	300.7	324.3
Yahoo! Messenger	204.1	240.4	284.6	272.4	264.3	284.4
AOL Instant Message*	170.3	169.3	170.1	157.6	162	155.3
ICQ Instant Message	139.5	120.1	129	112.8	125	119.8
MSN Messenger Service	120.1	86.8	116.6	107.9	115.9	109.6

Minutes Spent Per Month Per Person

Media Metrix Instant Messaging Services - Average Days Used Per Person Per Month At Home-Work Combined in the US Source - Media Metrix (http://www.jmm.com - 2002)						
	Average Days Per Month					
	Nov-01	Dec-01	Jan-02	Feb-02	Mar-02	Apr-02
All Web and Digital Media	15	14.6	15.6	14.5	15.9	15.6
Rollup of Instant Messaging Services	9.9	9.7	10.3	9.9	10.3	10.3
AOL AIM	10.3	10.2	10.3	10.2	10.6	11
Yahoo! Messenger	9.7	9.9	10.5	10	9.9	10.2
Trillian	...	...	...	8.4	7.8	10.2
ICQ Instant Message	10.2	9.8	10.5	9.6	9.8	9.8
MSN Messenger Service	8.3	7.6	8.2	7.7	8.2	8
AOL Instant Message*	6.2	6.3	6.3	6.1	6.3	5.9

But of more significance for this study is the degree to which chatroom participants must develop different communicative skills and strategies in order to participate in both forms of texted chat talk. One often overlooked is simple typing ability. The fast typist has an advantage – although perhaps one equalized by the necessity to learn new non-alphabetic commands on the mobile phone keyboard in order to SMS; a signal too that the emergence of the sorts of specialist "graphic coding" of such symbolic forms as emoticons and recombinant keyboard usage – for instance phonetic and acronymic compounds such as "C U 4 T @ 3pm" – is rapidly evolving completely new types of communicative ability. At the same time, there are clearly certain requirements of face-to-face conversation that need to be adapted in order to converse electronically.

The overt processes involved in language, the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (see CS 1.2.2 "Linguistic skills" below) change their focus dramatically in a chatroom. Electronic conversation is carried on most successfully through a process-task approach. The emphasis is put on reading and writing and the processes of listening and speaking are done through text on the screen we are reading from. This in itself adds to the complexity of the text-talk process – and to even begin to see its differences, we need to consider the act of

text creation and use in far more detailed ways.

Each of the process-tasks of reading and writing is composed of component sub-skills. Grabe (1992:50-3) lists six in particular in the case of reading. These are: 1) the perceptual automatic recognition skill; 2) linguistic skills; 3) knowledge and skills of discourse structure and organisation; 4) knowledge of the world; 5) synthetic and critical evaluation skills; and 6) metalinguistic knowledge and skills (McCarthy, 1999). Below I will consider the use of each of these sub-skills in the analysis of "Storm". But before moving to such detailed analysis, it is important to return to the major precepts of reader-response theory, to remind ourselves of the ways in which the variant "process tasks" we will uncover in the chatroom came into being in the service of these new communicative groups.

CS 1.2 Reader-Response theory

For Reader-Response Theory, there can be no pre-ordained ways of approaching and interpreting texts. No matter how far an author may attempt to control the reading of a text: no matter how overt his positioning of his preferred reader, for what he may think is the ideal reading, actual readers will create variant interpretations. And in the chatroom, where no posting can be made without an initial reading – where even the first participant of the day who "arrives" on site will "read" that circumstance and comment on it (perhaps with "Hi! All alone here: doesn't anybody use this space?"). The authorial role of the "utterer" is heavily dependant for its continuance on the ongoing act of reading.

Most simply put, it is the participant-observer in the chatroom, the writer-reader of the text, who influences and is influenced by the chat milieu. But while this is at one level a shared and negotiative act, it is at another a private and self-assertive one.

A group of readers together in a reading environment, often a classroom or a library, sometimes for extended periods of time may be thought of as an interpretive community. Although this is a community of readers, a particular reader's initial engagement with a text is ordinarily a private event with meanings internally experienced in the consciousness of that reader and not necessarily shared (Vandergrift, 1987, p. 34).

As Vandergrift states above, a group of readers together in a reading environment may be viewed as an "interpretive community" – perhaps producing the sort of consensus seen above in the "Mexican roofers" discussion during the Storm chats. In this case study I will argue that online chatters are just such a community of readers, who engage with one another, usually, after they have read and given meaning to a prior utterance. Even before they become engaged in a chatroom conversation, participants need to read the title of the chatroom, so

as to "go" to a particular chatroom, selected for one of many possible reasons: for example, to gather information, meet others or to proclaim a position.

Reading is as important to writing, and as prior to its enactment, as listening is to speaking (see Fiumara, 1995). It is the response to the text by the reader that evokes the written dialogue of the reader-writer-listener-speaker in a chatroom. For example, the two extracts analysed below show that one person reads what another has written and answers it. But it is how another person reads the turn takings which determine whether a correct response is given.

145 <BASSALE53> im from conn its heading our way

146 <guest-kodiak> where did you hear this

In turn 145 <BASSALE53>, making the first entry in what is thus far captured, is stating that the storm is headed toward Connecticut and <guest-kodiak> seemingly responds, asking where this information was gathered from. But this is an assumed answer, interpreted as such only if one were reading these lines sequentially and had just entered the chatroom prior to turn 145 and had not read any previous lines. However, scrolling back, an earlier utterance of <guest-kodiak> in turn 127 <does anyone know why UNCC has not closed> has a response in turn 138, <uncc is closed>, from <guest-mandy> and <guest-kodiak>'s response could be to <guest-mandy> and not to <BASSALE53>. A few turns later, at turn 148, it is revealed that <guest-kodiak> was indeed not responding to the turn before of <BASSALE53> but instead to <guest-mandy> and this is clear with <guest-kodiak>'s next response <i didnt know uncc was closed>. Putting together all the turns of <guest-kodiak> we see there is no concern about the storm heading toward Connecticut and <BASSALE53> makes no more contributions to this particular chat during the "captured" period. <guest-kodiak> is not reading carefully or he or she would have seen that <guest-mandy> in turn 140 has already answered the question, perhaps thinking that someone would ask where he or she had received the information and giving the source of the information <gocarolinas .com>. <guest-kodiak> makes three enquiries as to where this information was collected from, in turn 146 <where did you hear this>, turn 150 <it doesnt say it on any of the broadcasts> and in turn 174 <MANDY, whre did you hear that UNCC is closed>.

127 <guest-kodiak> does anyone know why UNCC has not closed

138 <guest-mandy> uncc is closed

140 <guest-mandy> gocarolinas .com

146 <guest-kodiak> where did you hear this

148 <guest-kodiak> i didnt know uncc was closed

150 <guest-kodiak> it doesnt say it on any of the broadcasts

174 <guest-kodiak> MANDY, whre did you hear that UNCC is closed

Not only is the reader reading a previously posted text, but as he or she becomes the writer, it is clear that they are also reading their own writing at the same time as they are writing. There is, in effect, a metatextual

[83]

awareness obvious. In some chatrooms   we can even see what is being written at the same time as everyone else in the chatroom does.

Furthermore, a reader may respond, even before the first utterance is complete. The responder anticipates the remainder of the writer's thoughts. This moves the chatroom's "conversational" style into yet another realm of Reader-Response Theory, involving more than simply reading the text.

[84]

I am concerned with online conversation which is text based   · When I began this thesis (1998) textual interfaces in chatrooms were the norm, following the early stages of direct online communication, when e-mail, newsgroups and chatrooms were developed (Zakon, 1993; Lynch, 2002). Text based chatrooms are easy to download to computers as they do not take a lot of computer memory to operate. As computers have become more powerful however, chatrooms have developed multimedia applications such as web cams and voice based systems for chatters to add to their conversation (See *Virtual Web Cams* at http://www.virtualfreesites.com/cams.html

which boasts more than one-thousand sites with web cameras for any topic). As a medium for exchanging ideas, communicating using text online has a number of qualities that are useful in exchanging information. The text

[85]

is highly adaptable. The alphanumeric keyboard is common   , and therefore people can assemble discourses on any topic. Using emoticons and abbreviations, discourse online can be quite expressive. Communication can be done in almost any situation.

Reader-Response Theory can be used to reveal the complex web of authorship, readership and intersubjectivity established in the chatroom texting activity. The first difficulty in using an unmodified Reader-Response Theory is however that it is often impossible to identify the author. The author may be using an avatar or username representative of some aspect of him or her self that is being revealed, stressed or constructed at that particular time. For example, <ANGELICSTAR> says <MY PRAYERS ARE WITH ALL OF YOU ON THE EAST COAST....takecare....bye>. The posting so suits the name as to suggest a careful crafting of an online persona, which colours the content and modalities of the contributions. But online, an author is even able to have a multiple-representation of him or herself within the same chatroom, by having several usernames at the same time (See Case Study Four for further discussion of multiple usernames). Another complication of reading chatrooms is the fact that not only is the author unknown, but the reader is equally unknown, and

[86]

therefore unpredictable in response   .

The reader of the text is defined variously by such theorists as Umberto Eco, who writes of "The model reader" (1979); Julia Kristeva: "The ideal reader" (1986), Wolfgang Iser, "the ideal "implied"

[87]

reader' (1978); and Fish's (1980) "informed reader   ," while Gadamer (2000) talks about the "original

[88]

reader"   , and Barthes gives total power over the text to the reader (1975, 1977), going as far as to say that the reader is "no longer the consumer but the producer of the text" in his writing on "the death of the author" (see Introduction 1.3.1). Barthes held that everyday culture in all its forms could be analysed in terms of language of communication (both visual and verbal) and culturally specific discourses. As this thesis progresses it will become clear that this same principle applies in the chatroom. There are others who offer variations on this construed "perfect reader", and almost any discussion of philosophy, psychology, or sociology will have discussions on who the reader is. But who is the proper reader in a chatroom? After careful examination of

many varying types of chatroom talk-text, I believe that any definition must include the idea that the perfect reader in a chatroom is one who is able to interact with what is written, so that others can in turn respond to what he or she writes. In other words, the chatroom reader is dually an author: in the Reader-Response Theory sense of co-constructing the "read" text, and in the sense of enabling the talk-text flows by enacting that "active-receptive" role.

The only way we can know if someone has responded in a chatroom to what we wrote is by what they write in answer. The person in the chatroom can perform one of two roles or both roles. One is the role of the witness, who is at one level the reader; the second is the role of the responder; the one who in turn writes, or speaks. Even before

[89]

the roles are enacted, there is the choice of whether to play both roles. For example, one can lurk   in a chatroom: read only, and not respond. In Case Study One, there were 48 participants who took 279 turns (Appendix One, table 10). However, four of the 48 people in the chatroom made only introductory comments - although it may be impossible to consider them as classic lurkers, as they entered toward the end of my recording of this event, and may subsequently have contributed. However, they showed they had taken on a lurker's attributes by commenting on earlier dialogue, such as at turn 208, <BayouBear> saying, "LA sent a bunch of crews today", signifying that he or she knew what the chatroom topic was about.

The classic convolution of the Reader-Response Theory question posed at the beginning of this chapter: whether "the reader is the writer who is writing the reader", is firstly explored for chatroom texts by asking "Does the reader or the writer produce meaning within this chatroom, or do they create meaning together?" Reading-Response theory claims that a text, any text, has no meaning whatsoever until it is actually read (Iser, 1978; Eco, 1979; Kristeva, 1989). Other writers examine such active or interpretive reading from a psychological perspective (Holland, 1975; Barthes, 1970; Fish, 1990) and take into account the reader's mindset and what they bring to the text from their personal experiences, which, in turn, influences their interpretation of the text. Language features that are common to all communication are what make interpretation possible. Using Reader-Response theory to bring meaning to a chatroom text is dependent on varying language skills.

CS 1.2.1 Language features

The following features of language common to all communication are relevant to an analysis of chat by means of Reader-Response Theory and will be discussed in this study: skills of shared language; linguistic skills; knowledge of the world skills and metalinguistic knowledge and skills. Each has relevance to our interpretation (Bruti, 1999). To be able to communicate effectively, one needs to have at least two of the four skills needed to

share language; reading, writing, listening and speaking. There are other means of communication that can be used in person-to-person communication, such as body language, but the overt processes involved in language sharing are some combination of these four.

CS 1.2.1.1 Skills of shared language

In text based chatrooms we take away the two skills of listening and speaking. We are left with reading and writing as the only means of sharing information. In this model, for an online shared language, I equate "listening" with reading and "speaking" with writing. Reading and listening are as active as writing and speaking are (see especially Fiumara, 1995 and Ihde, 1973, 1991). We have to combine reading and writing with the understanding of symbols and abbreviations to correspond with the chatroom language. If people are using the same emoticons and abbreviations as others in the chatroom but they ascribe different meanings to them then the communication will fail. It has been noted that the links between reading and writing, for example, have been emphasized to such an extent that it is now normal to see them referred to as "literacy" (Wray & Medwell, 1991, p. 3). It is not difficult to say the same thing about online communication. As chat-languages (this includes

SMS Messaging [90]) become more widely used they will be accepted as online-literacy. In Case Study Three I will use semiotic analysis to examine how "rich" in significations such literacy can become. Within the frame of Reader-Response Theory however, it is enough to indicate that, in the absence of those intonational and gestural cues available in live speech communicative relations, the "active" or "writerly" reader will be open to any enhancements which can help enrich their reception of a talk-text element.

Each of the "four skills" of reading, writing, listening and speaking are composed of sub-skills, according to

Grabe [91] · I have adopted the following six skills necessary in order to create a meaning sphere from

chatroom readings [92] : the "perceptual automatic recognition skill", "linguistic skills", "knowledge and skills of discourse structure and organisation", "knowledge of the world", "synthetic and critical evaluation skills" and "metalinguistic knowledge and skills". "Perceptual automatic recognition skill' demonstrates the semiotic argument that perception of a meaningful new system of coding is a "language" in evolution.

> "Recent findings on language processing suggest that basic strategies focusing on the most important words in a text for example, and activating background schemata are the same in listening and reading..." (Danks and End, 1985).

Despite the wealth of experience this offers chatroom participants in relation to "reading" chaotic texts: those

more akin to "multilogue" live chat in crowded social settings; chatroom technology limits the degree to which "complex" texts can be uttered: those with sufficient richness to alert recipients to complexities in their meaning. With the fast paced conversation in most chatrooms, if someone writes a long text, others in the chatroom are not able to read and grasp the whole text before dozens of new texts make the message disappear on the screen. Therefore, in an active chatroom with dozens of people speaking, only the words which stand out are noted. Below is an example of a contribution with too many words, and a response to it, which raises interesting questions about the interpretive relation between participants. It cannot be assumed with certainty that <guest-MisterD1> is responding to <SWMPTHNG>, although the response can be read that way. Because <guest-MisterD1> has not made any contributions since turn 45 it could also be assumed this response was made to some element in regard to any of the last dozen or so turns, and although <SWMPTHNG>'s posting is the most likely, even then the reader has to work to extract/construct a meaning. Interpretable at several levels, the posting below indicates above all the impossibility of addressing all levels at once: the racism of the content; the complexity of the complete message, coded by its relative length, and the over-assertive nature of its "shouted" use of capitals – and each of these alone could be evoking <guest-MisterD1>'s "sigh".

91. <SWMPTHNG> WHOSE GONNA SEND THEM CLIMBING ALL OVER EVERY HOUSE ON THE COAST SE HABLO ESPANOL

93. <guest-MisterD1> sigh...

Thus we confront a multiple problem of interpretation: that of <guestMisterD1>, "reading" from somewhere on the site a posting which produces an emotional response; and subsequently that of all other participants – ourselves included – left to find an explanation for both postings. Which literacy skills are called forward to handle such communicative situations? Can we operate from within a conventional range of skills, learned outside CMC encounters – or are there new pressures acting here, and demanding new repertoires?

CS 1.2.1.2 Linguistic skills

In normal reading situations one is able to re-read a statement, passage, chapter or even a whole book to locate what the author is saying. In writing, even in e-mails, we can change what we wish to say, and edit the text – even re-run our comments after posting, if we need to correct things. There is control over what is conveyed. However, in chatrooms we seldom have the time to reread, let alone rewrite text. Are we to trust the words we read?

What about the words we write? If we are in a conversation on the Internet, and we want to have an exchange of meaning, and our spelling and typing are a disaster, how do we say what we have to say? What linguistic skills do we need to communicate effectively on the Internet?

Observation shows that the ability to communicate in a chatroom is not based on conventional assessments of command of language, but on an entirely new set of skills. As these evolve, the formal rules governing the language in use are overturned and adapted. At some point in our language acquisition, we learn for instance rules of sentence structure and word order. We learn how to use pronouns to replace noun phrases, or the order of adjectives before a noun or when to use plurals. In chatrooms we seem to pay little attention to such rules of grammar. I investigate conventions of grammar in Case Study Six (CS 6.2.3) and will only mention this in passing here, as an illustrative point to the creativity of how people communicate online, under the constraints of a high-paced keyboarded texting.

In turn 176 <EMT-Calvin> writes,

> 176. thats whty i have such a peace in my heart tonigjt
> thats whty i have such a peace in my heart tonigjt

and in turn 217 he or she writes,

> 217. i am one of the carteret county personal for ems and fire we
> evacuated the beach and barrior islands
> today   i
> am one of the arriot county personal for ems and fire we evacuated the
> beach and arrio islands today

The two examples sound almost as if they could be two different people. Turn 176 is not particularly literate, in conventional terms, compared to turn 217, although there seems to be more accuracy in grammar and textual structure, and even a literary turn of phrase. It would take longer to write the 20 words in 217 than the 11 words in 176, and yet the spelling is correct, even for complex lexical items such as the Latinate "evacuated" or the proper nouns for place names. Because we have no idea of what someone is doing when communicating in

a chatroom - any number of simultaneous tasks is possible - we cannot know why a participant writes the way they do. What produces the shifts in formal literacy levels between postings 176 and 217 is impossible to fathom – but for the reader such individual elements as the dropping of punctuation in "that's"; of capitals in "Carteret"; the use of uncapped abbreviations: "ms"; spelling errors: "personal" for "personnel"; run-on sentences "… we evacuated the beach…" can all be over-ridden in the act of reconstructive reception. There appears to be no sense of discontinuity as linguistic control over formal presentational levels shifts in quality: yet another way in which the interpreting "reader" contributes actively to the formation of these texts.

Within a given language system and its social contexts of use, we also learn various social aspects of language usage, such as when to use slang, whether we make racist or political statements, and when not to. Here, Grabe's category involving knowledge and skills in discourse structure becomes relevant. To contribute meaningfully to a discussion, it is necessary to be familiar at some level with the understandings and terms used within that topic: to understand and be able to deploy its particular language practices. For example, in turn 77, <SWMPTHNG> writes,

> 77. THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF MEXICAN ROOFERS IN N CAROLINA NEXT
> WEEK

There were no statements about Mexican roofers or anything to do with roofing prior to this utterance. Furthermore, <SWMPTHNG> had contributed four turns in the chat which I captured, and nothing implied that he would begin a conversation about Mexicans, with a racist tone. To initiate such a discourse in the absence of previous explicit cues indicates that <SWMPTHNG> sees himself as comfortably amongst friends, or like-minded individuals, and so able to begin this thread. Indicators from the previous talk exchanges however reveal only reciprocal flows on other topics, suggesting that <SWMPTHNG> reads the easy and fluent FORM of these exchanges as equivalent to a linguistic "habitus", perhaps similar to his experience of both his "lived" speech community, and/or to other chat spaces, in which the politics he is about to reveal – the racialised discourse he is about to enter – are permissible and expected. I will discuss this issue of "linguistic or discursive comfort level" more when I speak about the theorist, Holland, who takes a more overtly psychological approach, and says that we may infer what we communicate, with our individualized self. <SWMPTHNG> is revealing that he or she is comfortable with expressing these opinions, and whether it is racial slurs or not it does not matter to him/her. The author in this chatroom is free to speak, as there is no one monitoring the room. I discuss moderated chatrooms in Case Study Six.

Certainly then we need to apply prior knowledge and experience when trying to make sense of utterances. The goal is not to understand words, per se, so much as to understand the ideas behind the words. And yet, in a chatroom, words are all we have: words from many different contexts and so arising within many divergent discursive frames – and yet all scrolling in standardized form across a standardized screen in a standardized font. Communicating in a chatroom is akin to learning a new way to apply language. Yet beneath our use of it as either reader or writer lies the standard social expectations of communication: that there will be at the foundation of each text-talking gambit an intention to communicate something: a rationally motivated and executed act, which can be interpreted accurately and responded to.

> The core of psychological understanding revolves around the notion of motive—desire, want, wish, reason. We understand an action when we know what motivated it. The motives for action are usually clear, since action itself usually indicates the motive that prompts it. Why am I paying money to the cashier in a supermarket? So that I can buy food and eventually eat it. We generally act in order to fulfill our manifest wishes. Sometimes the motives for action can be obscure, as when you see me searching frantically in a drawer and don't know that I left a lot of money in there and now can't find it. Motives are internal mental states that cause action and that make sense of actions; action is seen as rational in the light of motives that lead to it. We apply this reasoning to both the motivation for the ideas of a text as well as to the author's motive for writing that text. (McGinn, 1999).

The motivation for a text in a chatroom is not easily known, since it can only be interpreted from the text on the screen – filtered through the "reader's" own experiential pre-dispositions. Is the writer attempting to change the course of the dialogue, upset others who have a topic of discussion in process, sell something or use any of an array of tactics for a personal reason? Motivation can only be assumed. In the Hurricane Floyd chatroom the overriding motivation appears to be to find out information on the whereabouts of the storm. Within that chat however, there are personal beliefs stated by several users that take the topic of the storm into a much wider area of discussion. For example, even though the discussion is on the storm, one chatter below shares his or her religious belief in regard to the dangers of the impending storm, while another presents yet more opinions about Mexicans. As responses one to the other, these exchanges make little sense - in fact invite a reading suggesting the rather alarming view that Jesus will intervene to fight off marauding Mexican roofers. Within the "local" context of the scrolling exchanges however, there has been enough "experience" of this debate so far, to permit participants to "read" each posting from within its correct thread – just as, within the "local" contexts of religious faith and racialised politics, participants are able to recognize a particular discursive strategy being deployed.

121. <KikoV> we got gun laws to deal with them.........

161. <EMT-Calvin> i have faith in jesus

CS 1.2.1.2.1 Knowledge and skills of discourse structure and organization

Discourse structures refer to the specific levels of skill in reading and writing which involve the analytical capacity to determine and select in response the "correct" phonology, morphology and syntax for use in a certain communicative context. Discourse structures mediate the interrelationship between language and society, allowing <EMT-Calvin> to assert his religious belief with such suitable terms as "faith", and to offer such a comment at the suitable moment in a talk exchange, where issues of danger and deliverance are being discussed. They are the bridges built between what language systems offer, and that category titled "Knowledge of the world", which Grabe (1992) suggests allows us to reciprocate in conversation: to build in our own minds a sense that we are sharing meanings with others.

In this Case Study, the knowledge of the world is localized to knowledge of the East Coast of the United States of America: a place of storms, but also a place of religious faith, and of ethnic tension – both of which are evoked as discursive frames by varying participants, as if "natural" within talk about such a "local" topic. Notice the constant flow of specific place names and location cues, acting to anchor this talk around its event – but also to ease it into likely "local" discourse selections. Though there are chatters who say they are from California and one from Canada, they are still knowledgeable about the storm. Whether or not they are able to quite so comfortably move into the extended discursive positionings on race and on religion which we see here, is more problematic. To be able to converse fully in a chatroom we need to be able to both share topic matter and be part of the discourse.

CS 1.2.1.2.2 Metalinguistic knowledge and skills

At first sight, chatrooms seem as close to being pre-literate as they are to being an advanced literate textual state. Language appears to be in a process of being broken down to its simplest rudimentary format. At the same time there is a certain advanced form of communication involved, when one is limited to a few words to state irony, belief structures or humour, and so required to have a command of enough emoticons and abbreviations to create meaningful interaction. Metalinguistic ability is the capacity to think about and talk about language, or the function of language in referring to itself; cf. metalanguage which is called by Jakobson the "metalingual" function:

> The metalingual function is focused on the verbal code itself, that is, on language speaking of itself, its purpose being to clarify the manner in which the verbal code is used… (Jakobson, 1960 p. 365).

In the Reader-Response Theory critical approach, the primary focus falls on the reader and on the process of reading rather than on the author of the text. There are two basic theoretical assumptions in Reader-Response Theory. The first is that each reading is a performance, similar to performing a musical work. The text exists only when it is read, giving rise to a new meaning, which in this case, becomes an event. The second assumption is that the literary text has no fixed and final meaning or value; there is no one "correct" meaning. Textual meaning and value are "transactional," or "dialogic," created by the interaction of the reader and the text.

There are many reasons why a person may be in a chatroom and this may determine how the text is read. For example:

Pleasure (this person does not live in the storm area but seems to be just saying hello: extracting pleasure from social contact),

Turn 96. <guest Jojo> Hello Folks~Greetings from Canada~~ How are you holding out down there?

Identification,

104. <KBabe1974> i agree with emt calvin

Information seeking,

89. <lookout4110> Have the winds been strong?

Looking for companionship,

198. <ankash> ImFLOYD would you like to chat privately?

Assertion of personal beliefs, (Gun laws - see CS 1:8)

121. <KikoV> we got gun laws to deal with them.........

Beliefs.

161. <EMTCalvin> i have faith in jesus

We can also see chatroom turn-taking as a transaction, much as Louis Rosenblatt did with her transactional theory model for literary analysis. In *Literature as Exploration* (1938) she saw reading as a transaction between reader and text. For Rosenblatt, as for other proponents of Reading-Response theory, meaning is as dependent upon the reader as it is dependent upon the text. There is no universal, absolute interpretation of a text; rather, there can be several probable interpretations, depending in part upon what the reader brings to the text. In other words for Rosenblatt, the reader is not passive. This is obviously the case in chatrooms where the reader shows his or her assertiveness through writing a response to an earlier text, or by submitting a statement, opinion or question to the chatroom.

 Participants are able to scan back to earlier contributions, or perhaps hold them in memory, and to add in a reply specific to a particular comment, no matter the sequencing of contributions arriving since on the site. While the direct sequential juxtapositioning of texts creates an "intertext" of one type (chaotic, random, inconsequential) the capacity to "suspend" these "random" flows, and to selectively create meaningfully responsive ones, lies at the core of the chatroom ethos. For example in the table below <guest-kodiak> asks a general question to anyone in the chatroom [i.e. there is not a user name in the request], in turn 138, <guest-mandy> answers and in turn 146 <guest-kodiak> questions <guest-mandy>.

127 <guestkodiak> does anyone know why UNCC has not closed

138 <guestmandy> uncc is closed

146 <guestkodiak> where did you hear this

There is more discussion on this matter in the next hundred turns I recorded. However, this is an example of meaning generating within a chatroom where a simple question elicits an answer. Yet <guest-mandy> makes no more contribution to this chat and we can assume perhaps he or she left the arena of chat.

Stanley Fish (1990) like Wolfgang Iser (2000) focuses on how readers adjust to the text. Fish is interested in the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words of sentences as they follow one another in time [93]

. This perspective is useful for an analysis of chatroom talk in many ways. One interesting and quite frequent

case is where the writer, usually through pushing the return or enter key on the keyboard by mistake, says only half of what they had intended to say, and the remainder of their utterance appears several turns later. For example,

Turn 278 <IMFLOYD> i've got a sister........want to see
Turn 281 <IMFLOYD> her she is again

In a sex chatroom, turn 275 would have received a different response. Here no one commented on the oddness of this phrasing. Reading this text it is possible to use the context of the ongoing discussion to see that <IMFLOYD> is saying he is concerned about seeing his sister. Knowing this is a chatroom about a hurricane we can assume, as other online readers appear to do, that <IMFLOYD> is hoping to see his sister because the storm may have a bad effect on her. So it seems that there is evidence enough to show that readers are able to use at least the current context of discussion to reconstruct meaning where only partial contributions are presented. And from the analysis above (dealt with in more detail in Case Study Three below) of the shift to a "racialised" discourse during conversation ostensibly on the approaching storm, (the Mexican roofers chat sequence), we can deduce that chatroom "readers" are also able to make assumptions about broader social, cultural and even political contexts, to the extent of believing that they are operating in an environment of shared belief.

How is it then that we process such textual cues? Is this learned from the practices of intertextual linking, established within our reading background and acquired alongside literacy – or is it a part of our dialogic skills developed in talk: a central feature of "natural conversation", rehearsed in everyday chat, and transferred across into text-based chatroom behaviours? How much more can our text-based "reading" traditions tell us of the chatroom texting act?

CS 1.2.1.3.3 Phenomenological approach to reading

The phenomenological method accounts for the reading process by focusing on what happens in the reader's mind as he or she reads (Iser, 1990; Fish, 2000; Holland, 1968). Fish defines his own phenomenological approach as "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time" (Fish, 1980). This definition of how a reader assesses meaning could accurately be applied to real time, written, Reader-Response Theory in a medium such as a chatroom or SMS messages on a mobile (cell) phone. Where the "flow" of words suits the already-established contexts of both the chat session itself, and the "chatters" in their broader social settings, a consensual flow of "developing responses" occurs – as we have seen

in examples above. More indicative of how chat practice differs from other forms of "conversation" or writer-reader exchange however, are those moments at which a writer introduces a directional change. In chatrooms this change can drag several others along. For instance, speaker <SWMPTHNG> begins to speak about Mexican roofers in a negative way in turn 75,

> Turn 77 <SWMPTHNG> THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF MEXICAN ROOFERS IN N CAROLINA NEXT WEEK

which leads <EMT-Calvin> in turn number 82 to say

> Turn 84 <EMT-Calvin> and those folks will be sent back to mexico.

During this exchange, with the topic being offered by <SWMPTHNG>, six other people added comments. There were a total of 23 speakers during the turn-taking between 75 and 130 (see table 5 in Appendix One) with seven, 30 per cent, being part of this thread regarding Mexican roofers. This dialogue was thus 20 per cent of the chat during this time. How <SWMPTHNG> leads close to one-third of the chatters to follow his/her views is strategically and technically similar to how topics are changed and people follow in face-to-face conversation. In Case Study four, where I look at chatroom talk using Conversational Analysis, I discuss the rules for turn-taking in conversation, using the work on CA by Eggins and Slade (1997), Austin (1962), Nofsinger (1991), Sacks (1974), Schegloff (1979), and Tannen (1989).

In phenomenological studies of language meanwhile, speech (the particular signifying act) is considered to precede writing (the field of signifying possibility), in that an utterance must exist as a "phenomenon" to which the interpretive receiver responds. Such interpretation, calling on multiple repertoires of contextual cultural experience, is thus in itself a form of "writing": a linking of the uttered "clues" back to their possible significatory referents. However in a chatroom, speech itself – the act of uttering - becomes the written text. Writing in chatrooms is thus always a signifying act at the same time as it is filled with signifying possibilities, i.e. one can initiate or respond in any number of ways, with the expectation of intersecting the "preferred readings" of at least some of the many participants present.

> The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering the literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text (Iser 1978, p. 43).

In chatrooms this analytical consideration of the act of reception of a text extends forward, into a complex mesh

of "pre-consideration" of that reception process. This is conversation OVER-heard as well as heard, and at least
semi-archived, in that while contributions scroll quickly through dialogue boxes, they do remain on screen
long enough for experienced chatters to run multiple threads simultaneously. Isolating one speaker, <EMT-Calvin>,
in the turns below we can see he or she goes from telling what the weather is, to discussing Mexican roofers,
to answering questions, to giving information.

speaker	turn	Turns
<EMT-Calvin>	1	hahahaha lol
	16	That weather building in cherryt point says it s 126 degrees in cherry point
	37	well folks im signing off here
	44	i need some sleep
	65	i like being self employed
	71	dont have to worry about someone telling me to report to worl
	72	K
	84	and those folks will be sent back to mexico
	87	The locals will be the ones to get jobs
	99	folks need to be careful for con artest after the storm
	114	i aint worried our new 99 home is under warrentyu
	120	morehead guess how many tie downs are on here
	123	68 tie downs
	137	well our home is really not considered double wide
	156	folks my God is able
	161	i have faith in jesus
	166	if he aint done with me
	167	i wont get hurt
	176	thats whty i have such a peace in my heart tonigjt
	182	so howdy neighbor
	191	but i know alot of graphms
	196	i am a member with beaufort ems
	203	folks dont worrry we have got power crews comiong from other states
	217	i am one of the carteret county personal for ems and fire we evacuated the beach and barrior islands today

	225	and a mandatory evacuation for folks in flood prone areas
	234	Swmp are you near paris and
	242	morehead you got a plane at beaufort air port
	255	Hmmm
	262	and yes i been to topsail beach just last month to unlock a car
	265	hi wes
	266	Im a talkcity op also
	275	i am a room op in room called fire-4-God

The sophistication here rests not in the first instance in the "writing" as "utterance", but in the phenomenological reception "writing" of attaching those utterances to conversational and broader cultural contexts: to "receive" them as meaningful. The phenomenon of chatroom communication thus doubles the phenomenological "status" of each participatory act, to produce not "writers" and "readers", but "writer-readers", who consider the reception of their posting and pre-dispose its possible interpretive ambits, and "reader-writers", who actively connect the utterances they scan to known contextual repertoires, to render them meaningful. Once again chatroom texts, seemingly so reduced and basic in semantic loading; so primitive and abbreviated in linguistic form, prove to be the complex constructions of a carefully considered communicative processing.

CS 1.3 Discussion

> The reader is left with everything to do, yet everything has already been done; the work only exists precisely on the level of his abilities; while he reads and creates, he knows that he could always create more profoundly; and this is why the work appears to him as inexhaustible and as impenetrable as an object (Jean-Paul Sartre, What is Literature, 1949, p. 176).

The sorts of pre-dispositioning of interpretation or "reception" involved in chat-reading are captured here in Sartre's attempt to describe the complex processing of literary texts. Interestingly however, Sartre here, like Eco rather later (1979), glimpses the degree to which the literary texts he is discussing are already heavily invested with what later commentators called "preferred readings". These pre-empted interpretive strategies are built in to serious literature, which attempts, as Sartre puts it, to already do everything: to make certain that the reader "gets it right", or reaches the same interpretive conclusions as the writer. Eco goes as far as to suggest that those "popular" literary creations which critics consistently accuse of being "formulaic" or over-simplified in their techniques, actually offer the newly creative and "liberated" reader of the post reader-response moment, MORE freedom to interpret than those of high-literature. In popular texts, according to Eco, everything has

NOT "already been done". The formulaic structure leans heavily on prior texts, inviting memory to make comparisons. Plots are often ill-knit, and character motivations unexplained. There is indeed much for the active reader to do: part of what Barthes described as the openness to interpretive "pleasure" in such texts, which he called "writerly" (scriptible), in that they leave the reader to "co-write" in the otherwise incomplete spaces.

Is this part of the "doubling" in role which operates inside chatrooms? While the term "scriptible" or "writerly" is useful in describing the work done by the heavily interpreting chat reader, its opposite: "lisible" or "readerly", is used by Barthes and Eco to describe not the "active" interpreting reader of the "open" text, but the "disciplined" and more "passive" readers of literary texts, in which in Sartre's formula, "everything has already been done". In chatrooms, where everything is very much still to do – where the rapidity of text entry and scrolling and the multiplicity of strands produces especially "scriptible" texts, entries are far from "lisible". We thus need not the "either/or" of the old postructural binaries in which Barthes and Eco were at that time working, but the "and-and" of poststructuralism, to allow both "posting participant" and "reading participant" to work on texts which are heavily "scriptible". Here, I argue that we have both a "writerly writer", and a "writerly *reader*".

CS 1.3.1 Two readings of a chatroom

CS 1.3.1.1 Chat title

There are two actual moments of reading which a participant undertakes in understanding meaning within a chatroom. Firstly, the title of the chatroom is read. Chatrooms are divided into what could be closely referred to as communities and within the communities there are further divisions or rooms. This is like being in a section of a city that appeals to us. Chat servers are large entities with many areas for people to engage in chat [94]. For example, TalkCity.com is one of the larger chat servers and it has divided its services into three areas [95]. TalkCity reports more than 10,000 chat sessions a month, and with over 5 million active participants each month it can be seen as a significant city [96]. There are rooms for any topic imaginable and my purpose in visiting the various rooms within the TalkCity arena was to get a "feel" for the variety of conversations in different rooms. I hoped to find whether the chatters carried on conversations which were reflective of the chatroom title. Does the "specific use" chatroom I have been analysing above, the emergency chatroom for Hurricane Floyd, display the same reading techniques as a general chatroom?

I was unable to "capture" dialogue in TalkCity as their rooms appear in java applets, which will not allow cutting or copying and pasting. My comments therefore will not discuss cited examples of actual text as I do in the chatrooms in this and other case studies. Instead I will give a general overview to identify whether there is turn-taking as described in the individual case studies above. I was not looking for actual turn-taking in these rooms but to discover whether topics of conversation were based on the title of the chatroom. Here, I sought to find how the writerly-writer who initiates a conversational thread, and the writerly-reader who responds, can be shown to demonstrate especially "open" and "active" strategies of initiating text and responding to it, based on the title of the chatroom. Barthes would see this turn-taking as ever present:

> The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages (*S/Z* 1975 p. 5).

The eight TalkCity rooms I visited: dealing-with-disability, diddling'n'doodling, flippinchicks, massachusetts_flirts, not-necessarily married, married-lonely-hearts and sexy-adults-who-arent-shy, displayed something of the experience of rejection frequently reported when readers with a predisposition towards "lisible" text enter a chatroom and encounter the apparent chaos and impenetrability of "scriptible" texting. There is so very frequently no neatly-waiting, well-formatted, accessible text to "read". Chat seekers have to work hard even to find that "already done for you" site, selecting from variously titled offerings, which may or may not be comprehensible to the uninitiated "newby". In this case I had selected the site called dealing-with-disability. I checked into this room on several occasions and there was no one in it. The time of day I visited was between 9 AM and Noon Australian time which meant the middle of the night in the United States of America. There was a set topic, "Showing we care", but as there was no one to chat with I moved on to the next room, my expectations of a topic-focused session thwarted – and since this was not the sort of space in which one "hangs", motivated simply by a desire to encounter others, I moved on – and assumed that others had done the same. In the next room, diddling'n'doodling, I expected a far more "open" topic, the sort of invitation towards "script ability" which would entice chatters - yet no one was in this room either, and there was no one in the flippinchicks room either. I am unsure what either of these titles represents; in fact my only reason for entering them was due to their unusual names, so that in the total absence of any chat-in-progress cues to topics and behaviours, I was unable to contribute even an opening gambit.

It is possible then that even the very undirected titles of these spaces discourage the "writerly writers" of chat, who seem much more drawn to the totally opportunistic exchanges offered by rooms titled around social relations.

For chatters, these spaces are not places for texting around topics, but for talk directed to "meeting people". In the chatroom, *massachusetts_flirts* there were 21 visitors. In *massachusetts_flirts* there was a lot of "talk" with no more than the usual chatroom greetings, "hi", and the usual predominance of people enquiring whether there were "any females who want cybersex". There were a few topic-strand initiating statements, such as "I will never eat McDonalds again", with no follow up, even by the same person. It seemed in this chatroom people were just passing time without an obvious purpose to communicate – or perhaps wishing only to communicate their boredom and opportunistic "cruising", awaiting the arranged or spontaneous interest-fixing gambit. This curious semi-engagement, half cruising half lurking, is one of the features of chatrooms, which makes it a new genre of social engagement. It is unusual in other forms of conversation, such as person-to-person at a public gathering, for everyone to continuously say hello and to ask if anyone wants to talk – but since this is the foundational means of representation of presence in chatrooms, participants are learning to code and decode social availability around these very basic conversational cues.

When in the *not-necessarily married* chatroom, which had five participants, I said I was doing a PhD on "Conversational analysis of chatrooms" the five people already in the room used that topic to dialogue on my PhD for about half an hour. It became a question and answer chat and shows that whatever was being discussed in a chatroom can be changed – as well as suggesting that in these "social-relational" spaces, there is most often an absence of topic.

Of course, I don't know what was previously said, but for the approximately 200 turn takings I was involved in questions and answers which were almost sequential. Someone would ask a question, and I would answer, effectively de-tracking the chatroom-title focus activities of the site, and yet perversely creating a very centred and active talk-text. If the goal is simply to encounter others, my otherwise irrelevant or at the very least marginal discussion topic achieved that. Indeed, the frustrations of this lack of topic focus have already translated for many chatroom users into a ritualesque exchange sequence, as motivated users attempt to cut through extended chat and select chat-partners directly to their purpose. The a/s/l coded question so common in chatrooms ("Age? Sex? Location?") is at a social level produced by the restrictions of a texted exchange, and has been interpreted by many commentators as the residuum of the need for physical or embodied cues in negotiation of social relations. But from a reader-response perspective, it indicates the problems of the *drive to the scriptible* in chat talk-texting, where participants want not to exchange talk in the service of topic, but to achieve sociability.

The *!sexy-adults-who-arent-shy* room had seven participants – and once again, when I entered, everyone wrote

in something to the effect of "neuage are you a male or female?" As a possible "sexy adult" I had to be "screened" for compatibility: literally "made to appear", in texted-talk, as the physical entity desired – or at least a convincingly text-coded facsimile. The fact that the embodied features "revealed" by my (claimed) gender were unverifiable remains irrelevant. What matters is that I perform the required exchanges, in the required categories. While my physical anonymity is guaranteed by the technology, it must appear to be breached in my talk. And while in topic-focused chatrooms that anonymity is unproblematic, since the topic and not the person is central, in the seemingly topic-generalised spaces for sociability, a persona must be enacted – and to truly satisfy, as richly as possible.

The chatserver Chatropolis (http://www.chatropolis.com/whochat/x.html,) had 1684 users when I visited. The rooms on this server, unlike the ones in Talkcity, appeared at first glance to be very topic-specific, and certainly the users participating were interested only in the topic in question. Chatropolis is very much a sexual encounter service, with a number of specific areas: Cybersex, Image Exchange, Alternative Lifestyle, Vampires, Bondage, S&M, Fetish, Gorean Lifestyle, Role Playing and Bars, each with many rooms. Cybersex for instance itself has sub-rooms such as [Analopolis "*Anal Sex Chat"*], [Bed & Breakfast "*General Chat"*], [Bits of Tits *"Breast Chat"*], [Five Knuckle Shuffle "*Masturbation*"], [Gang Bang *"Cyber Sex"*] and [Hairless and Horny "*Shaved Smooth"*]. As with TalkCity above these can be read as topic-specific rooms – yet in each the persona-presentation is demanded in the same ways listed above. Rather than a central topic dominating conversation and rendering persona-projection secondary, what might at first sight appear to be a topic-focus is instead a location for initiating persona-performed inter-relational talk. When these spaces are active, newcomers are cued less by topic than by behavioural observation of talk strategies – and are "positioned" within the ongoing flows by the anticipatory responses their arrival produces – and most often in intensely coded ways. But when these spaces are inactive, no relational strategies are available to cue incomers. In other words, it becomes possible to hypothesise that in topic-headed chatrooms the topic itself acts as a lisible and a scriptible space, forming and structuring a first texted-talk gambit. But in social-relational spaces the "topic" is the relation – and until activated, can be neither "read" nor "written".

I explore this more in Case Study Two when I use a pop-celebrity site on Britney Spears, to explore how people in a topic-headed room focus on the topic of that room. But where the chatroom's title invited chat for the purposes of establishing social or personal relationships, the texting was in fact minimalised.

Before anything can be understood in a chatroom what is being said needs to be read. There are thus two readable texts available within chatrooms that are important to guide a person who is new in a room. Firstly, the title of

the chatroom draws one to it, and establishes some predispositions towards both initiating postings, and responses to any chat already posted. However, unlike the title of an article or a book which gives an indication of what the subject matter is, the title of a chatroom may be unrelated to what is actually there. For example, in Case Study Three the title of the chatroom is *Britney Spears Chatroom* but in the 70 lines I "captured" there was only one mention of Spears, in line 39,

> Turn 39. <Joypeters> hello.....is.the real brittany spears on line

So was this title misleading, or could there have been discussion of Britney Spears for days, while the few lines I captured had nothing to do with her? Discussion of that site in Case Study Three will demonstrate the degree to which chatters may be seeking more the social context of "Britney" chat, than its actual enactment – in effect, seeking fellow Britney fans as social companions, rather than information about the idol herself. In such cases, it is this second, social-relational "readable text" which new entrants to a chat space use to orient their subsequent postings, through the reading of the first few lines seen when the chatroom is first entered.

Everyone who enters a chatroom has an agenda or reason to be there. It could be because they simply want to be part of an online community, or because they want to experiment with a persona, or with writing styles, or to share or gather information. Not all motivations are central for all participants – and nor are all utterances "readable" as related to all postings. With these conventions of talk-sequencing suspended by the multiple posting and the randomized entry points into the dialogue box, it is often impossible for participants to assess whether the responses are for them. When I entered the Hurricane Floyd chatroom I pasted in my initiating explanatory statement, which the ethics committee at the University of South Australia requested that I make before saving any dialogue in a chatroom for research.

> <Neuage> "I am saving this dialogue, as long as I am in this room, to use in research on Internet Chat for a postgraduate degree. If anyone is opposed to me saving their conversation say so and I will not save the chat".

The first utterance I saw after submitting my above statement was;

> 3. <EMT-Calvin>   hahahaha lol

How should this be read? Was this chatter commenting on my statement about saving chatroom dialogue or is <hahahaha lol> in response to something said earlier? Chatrooms are discourses already in process and so one

is entering into an established conversation. What is "read" is not necessarily what is being "said". The same problem would occur if we were to begin reading any text at random in a book. Until more is read one cannot correctly enter into discourse. For me, the next few lines clarified that this chatroom discussion was about the hurricane, as the title indicated:

4. <TIFFTIFF18> DO U MOW IF ITS GONNA HIE JERSEY AT ALL
5. <Werblessed> Where your hous thilling
6. <Kitteigh-Jo> near Princeton
7. <RUSSL1> right over my place
8. <ankash> New Jersy in under Tropical Storm Watch now Right?

Listing the first few lines I "captured" from each chatroom however gives an indication only of what is being discussed at the time. Along with the reading of the title to the chatroom, the reading of these first few utterances seen in a given chatroom determines how the new participant will respond. Because most text-based chatrooms are already conversation in progress the first lines seen are rarely the starting point of the chat, yet must act so for the newcomer. It is at this moment that the accessing of "scriptible" text - already entered utterances which are both meaningful, yet open to interpretive contribution – is crucial to successful, and maybe to worthwhile, participation.

I examine this issue, applying different analytical tools, in the next case studies. In Case Study Three, the Britney Spears chatroom, the dialogue is very much the reduced, relationally-oriented chat exchange that one would expect in a very general non-topic-specific (NTS) chatroom – suggesting that the topic-specific/non-topic-specific rule for anticipation of chat behaviours is heavily modified once participants "read" a site's talk-texts. The Britney Spears site shows heavy use of abbreviated codes and SMS styled exchanges:

1. <SluGGie->   lol
2. <Mickey_P_IsMine> LoL

In contrast, Case Study Four is titled "Astrology Chatroom" so we would expect to find a discussion on astrology occurring here. In the first two lines I read as I entered this was the case.

> 1. <gina2b> everyones a know it all!
>
> 2. <dingo42> nicole wahts your sign ??

What is shown here is that the users in this chatroom were first and foremost interested in the title of the chatroom, wished to discuss astrological analyses, and did so in a discursive frame established outside general talk-texting codes: within the specialist terms and phrasings of astrology itself. While the tensions and demands of chat exert various influences on this talk, it remains centred in topic.

In contrast, for Case Study Five I chose a room at random from one of the thousands of rooms available on the TalkCity.com chat site. It was simply called "room #50". The lines I first read upon entry confirmed that this might indeed be a non-topic-specific chatroom.

> 1. <tab_002> HI nice to see you too Jennv :)))))))
>
> 2. <Leesa39> ooooo my sweetie jake is angry

In this chatroom there was no specific topic and with no expectation of what the subject matter would be the visitors to this room seemed not to have a set agenda – at least, beyond the saturating relational play of their talk, which suggested ongoing familiarity and long-term chat acquaintance. Thus the almost complete non-referentiality of the chatroom title: significant only to those already "in the know", or sponsored onto the site by a regular user ("meet you in room# 50").

I chose a software development site chatroom for Case Study Six because I particularly wanted to collect topic specific chat from a moderated chatroom. In this case study however it was not until turn ten that the topic of software was brought up. The nine turns before were greetings and utterances unrelated to the topic of the chatroom. Turns 10 and 11 mark the beginning of a chat on 3D animation which continued for five-hundred more turns.

> 10. *<web3dADM>* just got the Cult3D folks to agree to show up on March 3
>
> 11. *<Justin>* what's cult3d

Here, the topic appears to have controlled the talk behaviours to such a degree that entrants to the site meet at pre-arranged moments. The social-relational work is formulaic, even phatic, in socio-linguistic terms, acting to re-establish cooperative talk-texting relations, before the "real work" of the discussions begin.

For Case Study Seven I have used a chatroom on baseball. Here, not only are the usernames related to baseball, but the statements are all about baseball teams:

| 4. <BLUERHINO11> sox beat the tribe |
| 5. <NMMprod>   Nop |
| 6. <MLB-LADY>   no clev fan but like wright |

In this space I suggest that a combination of the intense specialist expertise of the participants "focuses" the talk – but since this is a general or socially widespread expertise, as opposed for instance to that of the software specialists above, the tags or online "handles" of participants' names act as part of the script ability processing.

If, as I therefore hope to establish in ensuing case studies, there is such variability in "writerly-readings" of chat practices, are there then any standardized techniques which could be said to particularly mark chatroom texting from that encountered in other online communicative spaces?

CS 1.3.1.2 Three different Hurricane Floyd discussion strands

I have saved three samples of non-chat approaches to online communication for this topic-focused case study, to illustrate some of the ways in which chatroom "talk" differs from other Internet based conversations. The first is a bulletin board of one-way communication, where people were able to leave messages for others in the "1999 Message Line of World Wide Inquiries Lost and Found Hurricane Floyd Review". An example from this communication shows that the writers are not engaged in real-time conversation, i.e. there is a day in between

[97]

the correspondence, and yet they are still leaving messages to describe their situation   '

| 09-14-99 | Graham,D
East Bay St., Charleston, SC | Gone to Atlanta, am fine
I will call; cell phone dead.
Went by and picked up Betsy. |

09-15-99 - 11:23 AM	Greene,G Effingham, SC	Am fine, hatches battened out, going to Mother's

Here the text, while reduced in terms of syntactical formulae, shares little with online chat. It is "corrected" in the sense of using standard spelling, capitals for proper nouns, complex punctuation, and interestingly a strongly verb-dominant selection of strong-modality assertions. It's "telegraphese" signs it in semiotic terms as a message of urgency, while its use of referents ("Betsy"; "Mother's") indicates a selectively limited set of addressees in each case. The contributor's name is - unusually in online text – formal and geographic. Yet despite the specific directedness and even exclusivity of the text, it is lisible in its familiarity to audiences more broadly. This is a regulated communicative genre, built around written memos and notices and perhaps their more recent audio extensions (phone messages) – with all of the codings intact for conveying that status. We may not know "Betsy", but we know what she is being told, and why.

The second online message shows the difference between a chatroom correspondence as in Figure CS1.31 and a

[98]

text which may have been planned before sending online. This too was on the Hurricane Floyd Messages board ,

By <wpapas> on Monday, September 13, 1999 - 08:45 am:
Significant safety concerns for family, friends, and property on San Salvador, Rum Key, Turks & Cacos. If anyone is on line there Please post to messaging board, I know there are those monitoring short wave radio on San Salvador; Please radio The "Pitts" Sandra & Nick on San Salvador and forward any request or messages. There was very little news before after and during Dennis.   Sincerely. Wp

48. <ankash> Tornadoes in Pender Count

The difference between a text-based chatroom and the bulletin board and message board above is shown in the immediacy and shortness of statements in the chatroom. There is little Reader-Response time to evaluate what is said in text-based chat. Word usage to transfer meaning must be short and comprehensible by others in the room. However, as those "others" become more familiar, either by constant participation or by the hardening of practices into communicative codes – general across chat spaces or topic specific – talk-texting can become

more and more reduced: less generally lisible, but more powerfully an invitation to writerly participation. With BBS or e-mail, texting remains more formal and closer to traditional "written" communicative genres. Often there is not an expected immediate response with bulletin board or e-mail messages, as the others addressed may not be online. The time lag acts as a pressure towards more generally readerly textualising: it opens access to more users, even when still specifically addressed to one.

Put another way, the role of the reader in a chatoom is ultimately to become the writer of a text. If the person is only an observer or lurker, then the role of the reader can involve any number of motives. But when one participates fully in a chatroom, strategies must come into play in order that the reader may find meaning not only in the words, with their misspellings and often improper grammar, but also in the use of much reduced forms such as emoticons and abbreviations.

One of the features of "Reception and Reader-Response Theory" as I am using it in chatrooms is that it shows how a reader brings certain assumptions to a text, based on the interpretive strategies he/she has brought to a particular talk-texting community, from other social-cultural contexts. Increasingly, such socio-cultural contextual experience and therefore capacity for interpretation involves online communities themselves. "The community" here then is the Internet community, and every chatroom is an individual textually based social community. Interpretation of a text will depend on the perceived purposes or dynamics or cultural sphere of the chatroom community. And reactions to specific instances of chatroom utterance will depend on general regulatory features established within that talk, even if nowhere else. The fact that such "talk" within a community can at times be "policed" by others within the chatroom, indicates that users are consciously developing special regulatory systems. For example, a "speaker" may be harassed into either conforming or leaving a chatroom if their talk is inappropriate for that room. In this regard, the extended "greetings" sequence used by the specialist software developers on their moderated board can be seen as reconfirming the cooperation and collegiality necessary to their task of specialist information exchange.

A mild form of this is present in the lines I have been working with in this first section. The "speaker" on the Hurricane Floyd chatroom, <SWMPTHNG> in turns 107 and 117 is starting a process of getting the chatroom interested in talking about Mexican roofers. The "speaker" <Zardiw> in turn 125 makes a short sharp comment to let <SWMPTHNG> know that his/her lines of dialogue are not necessarily appropriate. Of course this is a very mild rebuttal compared to when several participators push a person out. Nevertheless <Zardiw> deploys direct address (smptthing>) – even with an enraged stutter on the keyboarding of the "t" – as well as a "shouted" punning insult on the respondent's name, to express rejection of <SWMPTHNG's> views.

107. <SWMPTHNG> YOU AINT TALKING ABOUT MEX ROOFERS ARE YOU?

117. <SWMPTHNG> i SAW A BUS LOAD HEADING ACROSS THE GEORGIA STATE LINE THIS MORNING

125. <Zardiw> smptthing................go back to your SWAMP

Clear from this small exchange is the capacity chat participants have already evolved to work within the regulatory systems of online chat, to patrol the boundaries of their online community. <Zardiw> rejects racialised political views being expressed on a non-political site – even though, as shown earlier, <SWMPTHNG> has felt enabled to express these views by the very communalism which the supportive information exchange during a crisis has evoked. In other words, what <SWMPTHNG> reads as consensus and safety and therefore shared social values, <Zardiw> demonstrates is only to be read as a temporary informational communality. As a reader, <Zardiw> "re-scripts" <Something's> contributions, and shows a clash of social discourses – yet all without abandoning the specialist codings of online chat itself. A semiotician might feel compelled to note even the "space" opened by <Sardis's> multiple points of suspension ("………..") and see in it a deliberate distancing. Later case studies will apply a semiotic analysis to chat, to pick up exactly such moments. But at this point it is clear that the pace of online chat has proven no barrier to sophisticated strategies of reading and of writing – most often simultaneously applied.

CS 1.4 Answers

The Reader is the writer who is writing the reader ♩ .

The Reader is the writer who is writing the reader ♩   was my original question for this chatroom. To write in a chatroom is to seek to be read, to provoke recognition and the response which guarantees socially constructed identity. It is an existential act – perhaps even more demonstrably so than the physically embodied exchanges of "rl" communication.   The reader's response is also the response the writer seeks – and works to provoke.

A reading of any text however produces a set of responses or gives us variation in feedback, as I have shown in this Case Study. Even my question above, "The Reader is the Writer who is writing the reader :)" can produce a large number of sequences of textual responses – and especially so online. For example in a search engine we can get thousands of websites just by putting in almost any words. If I put in "Hi" into Google, I get,

"20,800,000" responses (as of January 2002 by March 2004 there are more than double the pages for that entry, giving "50,900,000" responses). How difficult is it then in a chatroom, when there are so many ways to group our two to six words, to interpret the words or phrase we write?

129. <guest-Jojo>	pretty freaky

"Pretty freaky" has 128,000 responses in Google as of March 2002 and two years later there are 297,000 responses showing that it will always be increasingly more difficult to find what we are looking for online. It is only in context that our words can mean anything and it is this, content in relation to context, which I attempt to explore in each of my Case Studies.

In relation then to my final research question for this section: "does the reader or the writer produce meaning within this chatroom, or do they create meaning together?" an answer has become clear. As with the central precept of reader-response theories, both the person writing and the one reading are co-language-meaning creators. Meaning cannot exist in a vacuum and the only time a vacuum of communication exists in a chatroom is when there is only one person present – and even then, in some circumstances, their response to the "cues" of the chatroom, such as title, can be significant. I could be present in a chatroom and write my whole thesis, with questions and answers and text continuing forever. However, if no one joins me or even if someone does join the chatroom and only reads my writing and does not write anything, then there is not a conversation. Chatroom text takes us further than Sartre's comment: "The reader is left with everything to do, yet everything has already been done…" (1949, p. 138). Of course he was not anticipating the type of reading done in chatrooms, where not everything is done for the reader. Later commentators come closer to the interactive or inter-textual work enabled by chatroom technologies, seeing the rather more active role played by readers as (at least) co-authors of texts. The passive reader is no longer passive. In a chatroom even the one who reads and does not engage with other's occasion's response, being denounced or at best tolerated by participants, and called by the derogatory title of a lurker: one not involved, but considered close to the socially unacceptable role of the voyeur or stalker. For this thesis I have been nothing more than a lurker in all my Case Studies. I have saved the log files of the chatters and not contributed once in any of the chatrooms. I have sought to be a reader only, defending this role as observer-researcher who is tracking conversation to develop a theory or theories of how people communicate online. Yet ultimately even the very extended and indirect "writing back" of my thesis analysis and commentary produces interactivity: a long delayed, but nevertheless culturally and socially responsible, "response".

Case Study Two

CS 2.0 Introduction

Computer technology in and of itself impacts on the "interactive" writerly-reader/writerly-writer who is responding to the reading of online text, as shown in Case Study One. This impact changes the exchange of information. Chatrooms have much in common with oral folk telling. The story is not put into print, to be archived and resuscitated at whim. It is written, and then lost. Ideas are written and read and re-written without "readers" often knowing where they originated. What differs between computer technology and oral folk telling is that computers can "capture" the story and allow readers to examine it - and yet unless oral speech is recorded there is no permanence to its existence. Memory alone allows it to be reviewed, critiqued, reconstructed – or even to achieve its intended outcomes in affecting or motivating listeners.

In chatroom postings the fusion form of the "talk-text" has qualities of both speech and writing. As was established in Case Study One, how meaning is given to the utterances in a chatroom is dependent on the reader of the text as well as on the writer of it – a processing which is arguably more clearly understood in this combined communicative form than it is for conventional speech. The "distantiation" effects of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) act to problematise chat texts: requiring us to think more carefully than is usual about what is going on, and to act more creatively than usual in ensuring that our intended messages are received. CMC provides the technology for speech communities to exist with no more than typed characters to hold the chatters together. Into these few standardised characters we pour all the complexities of our selves and our social interactions. It should then be no surprise that complex codings are so rapidly evolving, to convey at least something of those complexities.

At one level, CMC systems are themselves diversifying, providing more and more distinctive services, with users selecting multiple specialist channels for different communicative tasks and situations. One such aspect of CMC I will discuss in this Case Study is Instant Messenger (IM). "Over 41 million people (40 per cent of Internet users) use it at home. Almost 13 million people use it at work (nearly 31 per cent of the work population), spending 45 per cent more time on it than at home. Approximately 63 per cent of all Internet users

[99]

are regular participants." According to Nielsen *NetRatings*, approximately 63 per cent of all Internet users are regular participants. So what is distinctive in Instant Messenger as a CMC service? When are users selecting it – and how are they developing its functions into their communicative repertoires?

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CS 2.0.1 Choosing an IM chatroom

Because Instant Messenger (IM) chats cannot be viewed by anyone outside the specific cyberspace of two participants, unless permission is granted, it is impossible to save an IM chat. I received permission from the two participants to use this in my work providing I did not identify them in person. For this case study I "captured" two Instant Messenger conversations. The first is an Instant Messenger conversation in 1999 between mutual acquaintances, (A and B) who have never met physically. They had been connected to the same religious cult in San Francisco toward the end of the 1960s and they had "met" each other thirty years after

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the cult became defunct, in a chatroom about the ex-Order . I "met" the two of them in the same chatroom and maintained correspondence with them for three years, physically meeting one of the two in Los Angeles in April 2001. The second Instant Messenger conversation I saved was between myself and one of the participators (A and C) in the first conversation. It is difficult to save this sort of chat under normal circumstances, as it is impossible to view the screen of another person. I gained permission from both person A and B so that I could copy and save their conversation for my study. Furthermore, this gave me the opportunity to compare aspects of conversation between A and B and then between A and C. The absence of physical cues meant that the interaction in both cases was solely reliant on text messaging.

CS 2.0.2 Questions

I approach this case study with two questions related to Computer-mediated communication.

1. Do computers change conversation?

2. Are Instant Messenger chatrooms closer to off-line-person-to-person conversation than dialogue in a multivoiced chatroom?

Does the technological design of computers in itself change conversation? In asking such a question, is it worth considering whether Instant Messenger chatrooms, with their one-to-one talk relations, are closer to off-

line-person-to-person conversation than dialogue in a multivoiced chatroom? In other words, is chatroom talk more affected by CMC interventions, than by its approximations or deviations from familiar speech relations in the physical world?

My first question seems obvious in the light of knowing that many of the person-to-person cues of conversation are removed with text-based chat. A study of the medium people use to communicate through, such as this case study will attempt, is important in answering a subsequent question: see 3.2 question 3 "*how is electronic chat reflective of current social discourse*?" As the inter-relational elements of communication pressure CMC to expand its service modes – from BBS (Bulletin Board Systems) to IRC; from IRC to IM, and so on – how is each new mode formed from existing practices – and what pressures, in turn, does it exert on its users?

CS 2.1 Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer-Mediated Communication is the process of one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communicative exchange using a computer-based communication channel; currently at least, taking place predominantly in a text-based environment (Oshagan, 1995; Boudourides, 1995). Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is today being theorized within multiple disciplinary frames, including: Spears & Lea's *SIDE Model*, Speech accommodation theory, Walther's Social Information Processing model and Fulk's Social Influence model. Each attempts to locate what is specific to computer-mediated communicative exchanges, as distinct from their "real life" counterparts – but given the disciplines in which each arises, a different emphasis ensues. What then does each have to say about the rapidly diversifying forms of CMC – and which are of most use to this study?

Lea and Spears (1992) in their *SIDE Model* (social identity model of de-individuation effects) explore the social-psychological dimensions of CMC. One of their observations of most significance to this study is that

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groups communicating via computer sometimes exhibit more polarization than equivalent groups communicating face-to-face, but less polarization on other occasions (Lea & Spears, 1991; Spears, Lea & Lee, 1990). Spears and Lee found that "*True co-authoring* stresses the need for support of multiple writers which have equal control over the text and within the interaction". It is evident that communicating via computers is more time consuming than face-to-face as in face-to-face communication participants are able to quickly shift from person to person. Galegher and Kraut found that "the greater amounts of time that people in the restricted communication conditions spent working and communicating about the project can be seen as adaptations to a difficult set of circumstances" (1994). As is discussed throughout this thesis, chatrooms can become a

community, where the individual takes on the chatroom single-mindedness. Fish's (1980) "interpretive community" and Bizzell's (1982) "discourse community" are appropriate models by which to explain the acquisition by the group of shared meanings and understandings – shared cognition – which are vital elements in community formation (Giordano, 2000; December, 1993). For example if the topic in a chatroom is very specific: perhaps sports, sex, politics or religion, as I have shown in these Case Studies, chatroom users tend to display similar thinking; in time even coding responses in specialized forms. A "speech community" can be identified by linguistic convergence at a lexical and/or a linguistic structural level. Because Computer-Mediated Communication is strongly oral in nature, even in its texted modes, (Giordano, 2000) the turn-taking that builds discussions, and from them, communities of consensus, is often performed in a playful manner. One form taken in this play across words is the way people in chatrooms accommodate others in the room by "speaking" the same language: mimicking one another's lexical selections, modalities, specialist codes. I show this in several chatrooms, specifically Case Study Seven, with the chatters using baseball-related usernames and discussing baseball at an intensely referential level, so that only those who understood the game could follow. What emerges is a linguistically-defined community, where only those who can access the codes of exchange can access the communality. In Spears' and Lee's terms, the polarization in such groups is especially low – except in relation to attempts by non-experts to "enter" the space and contribute to the discussion. Social identity and de-individuation are high – but demarked purely in language, since that is the only available register. To return to the research frame of the previous case studies, this is a discourse not *lisible* to the general reader, and that alone seems to attract the *scriptible* or writerly participant: someone who wants not to consume, but to help enact this discourse. Paradoxically, entrée to such online communities appears more accessible as the discursive modes become more specialized – they offer higher levels of de-individuation as they demark themselves more clearly from "everyday" registers. To first time or casual Netizens this is a curious and frustrating phenomenon: either you encounter specialist chatrooms where you cannot easily "read" the evolved and evolving local codes, or you enter general social spaces in which no codes dominate, and so must exchange unprofitable and even phatic conversational gambits before a "scriptible" relation can emerge.

One complex and as yet under researched issue in relation to this perversity of site-accessing practices lies in the dominance to date of linguistic behaviours arising in English. It must be anticipated that non-English speaking communities online have based their chat practices on their own culture, and that they will be demonstrating specific practices arising out of the structuring systems of their own language traditions. Online communities have to date been dominated by English speakers, because of the work done by Microsoft

and other English centred software companies. However there are many language-cultures entering the computer age of communication – and even some experiencing renaissance because of CMC services supporting diasporic interconnectedness. After English the most common language on the Web is Spanish, followed by Japanese, according to the "Courier International" (July 5, 1998) – and with China expected to be the dominant online nation by 2005, English can be expected to decline. There are projects in development that will make it possible for foreign languages such as Arabic to have their own presence on the Internet (see the online Center

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for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University   ) and others now complete, accommodating such languages and variant scripts as Tibetan.

But even without entering the "macro-level" variations encountered by changing entire language systems on the Net, specialist researchers in linguistics are able to provide ways of investigating in detail how particular specialist speech communities, even within one language group, and even in aberrant "speech" communities such as online texted-talk, can be revealed as adaptive and responding to new circumstances. Speech accommodation theory or "accommodative processes" (Giles and Powesland, 1975) in person-to-person talk involve the changing or learning of elements of language-centred behaviours such as accents, in order for a speaker to "fit in" with their environment.   In chatrooms we find change in language, just as would be found in oral communication. "Language is not a homogeneous, static system. It is multi-channelled, multi-variable and capable of vast modifications from context to context by the speaker, slight differences of which are often detected by listeners and afforded social significance" (Giles, & Clair, 1979). People make themselves accommodative to those they are with (Edwards, 1985; Fouser, 2001, p. 268). And while features such as "accent", an audio performed technique, cannot (yet) appear in online chat, there is plenty of evidence in the chatrooms selected for these case studies to reveal the invention and widespread use of substitute codings in texting. Indeed, as users play across language to display their communality with other chat participants, they create many elements of online texted-talk which make it a distinctive new *set* of linguistic creations, and not a single entity, replicable and recognizable in every case – as it often seems to be now.

Already some evidence for this is occurring. According to the Social Information Processing Model (Walther, 1992) people will be able to learn to verbalize online that which is nonverbal off-line, by using emoticons and images (Utz, 2000). The use of verbal paralanguage becomes an important factor in the development of impressions. Walther and others (see also Hiltz & Turoff, 1978; Rice & Love, 1987) have constructed models which explanations of communicative behaviours which allow us to see that online presence may not be

entirely similar to off-line communication. People are motivated to exchange social information with others only if they are able to decode the verbal messages of the communicative partner. Walther argues that with enough time spent together, people – here including online participants - will move to form relationships by decoding one another's messages. This includes those who persist in the "general topic" or social-encounter chatrooms, mentioned above as problematic to many new entrants, because they are so loosely topic-defined, and display too few behavioural cues. The popularity of such spaces, even after many reports of negative experiences, suggests that clearer sets of cues and discursive strategies will evolve and become commonplace. In fact some commentators are certain that such spaces are the latest in a long line of socially-evolving cultural locations controlling and forming communication. Computer-Mediated Communication is regarded by some as the fourth age of civilization and its prime new model of communication (Strassmann, 1997). Ferrara refers to synchronous CMC as interactive written discourse (IWD) and suggests that it represents an emergent linguistic register (Ferrara, 1991).

Period	Medium	Economic Organization	Civilization
1 million BCE-10,000 BCE	speech	tribal	hunting
10,000 BCE-1500 AD	script	feudal	agriculture
1500 AD-2000 AD	print	national	industrial
2000 AD-	electronic message	universal	information

From "Information Systems and Literacy" by Paul A. Strassmann (1997).

There are already several online journals dedicated to Computer-Mediated Communication, each indicating the seriousness of communicative activities across a wide range of social pursuits. The Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication (http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/) published by the University of Southern California and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has had numerous specialist articles, focused around specific communicative uses, such as issues on CMC and Higher Education, which show the value of using computers for distance education; or Play and Performance in CMC, an edition discussing the use of Chatrooms. The largest and third oldest online journal on communication is *The Communication Institute for Online Scholarship* (http://www.cios.org/) based at the University of Albany, New York (SUNY) containing thousands of links to academic institutions and scholars who write on topics of CMC. Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine ran issues from May 1994 to January 1999, reporting about people, events, technology, public policy, culture, practices, study, and applications related to human communication and interaction in online environments. Volume 5, issue 1,

(January, 1998) had a special focus: "Disability and CMC" to shows the value of communication through computers for the disabled; while Volume 5, issue 1 had a Special Focus: "Online Relationships", focused on the meeting of people online and couples who had later met off-line and formed relationships. This proliferation of studies suggests an already rich variability in online communicative repertoires – as well as a flurry of academic and analytical attempts to describe and explain these new processes. The very existence of such a rich new literature supports a view that diversity in CMC practices is likely to expand rather than to standardise across all formats.

What follows then is an attempt to add to this diversity of inquiry, as well as to the growing awareness that online communication and its texted-talk is already not one but many phenomena, each with special responses to the particular pressures of the technologisation of the speech relation enabled in the software, but also with evidence of creative re-positionings around those pressures. In pursuit of my programme of the testing of a range of existing analytical tools for understanding speech relations and practices, in this Case Study I intend to review speech behaviours in a one-on-one use of the IM or Instant Messenger site. And in the first instance at least, I seek to uncover and foreground those distinctive speech practices which are either appearing only within IM, or are especially heavily used there. Without wishing to imply that such changes in linguistic behaviour are technology driven, I do want to assess how far the software appears to restrict or enable certain types of communicative act – and whether such preferred IM forms are sufficiently recurrent as to characterise this type of texted-talk.

CS 2.2 Discussion

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"It is in the history of any particular communication that the utterances can be studied for their mappings"   .
For example, grammar could be derived from distributional analysis of a corpus of utterances without reference to meaning. What is reflected is the consensus users establish at a certain social and cultural moment and location, as to what is or is not utterable, and as to how it may be uttered. The World Wide Web however, as we have seen, brings new ways of engaging in conversation which are emerging with the growing wide spread use of computers as a form of communication. How much people begin to rely on the Internet or other computer-based mediating devices as a source of communication will determine many of our future practices in communicating – even impacting on person-to-person conversation. There have already been surveys suggesting that the amount of time some people spend on the Internet in chatrooms is disproportionate to the amount of time

they communicate face to face with others   .

In Case Study One I discussed how chatroom users respond to reading chatroom text. In this case study I consider in more detail the technology which mediates the communicative act. The introduction of computers has changed the communicative act of "conversation" by allowing for new forms of discourse exchange which are not possible with physical off-line person-to-person contact. The most obvious is the ability to speak with others over large distances through synchronous textual dialogue, providing an "interactive written discourse" (Allen & Guy, 1974, p. 47). Without the physical cues associated with off-line person-to-person conversation, in a chatroom, the "speech splits off from visual co-presence" (Hopper, 1991, p. 217). Other ways of transferring meaning then become important, including specific chatroom features, such as emoticons, abbreviations and font style, size and colour of text. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) with its new repertoire of possibilities has several functions to play in the chatroom communicative act. Several researchers have found for instance that the more emoticons a person uses, the more friendships he or she builds (see Ultz, 2001 and Roberts, Smith, and Pollock, 1996).

Firstly, computers can be considered to enhance or to hinder person-to-person communication. Computers can for instance enhance communication for individuals with disabilities, who cannot easily converse; for people who do not have access to other forms of communication or information sources due to distance or social restrictions; and for people who have social difficulty in communicating with others in face-to-face situations (see Grandin, 1999; Rheingold, 1991, 1993, 1999; Turkle, 1984, 1995, 1996). Computers can however also hinder communication: because of technological problems such as networks malfunctioning, or people hacking into computer systems and disrupting discourse flow or sending information as someone else (Harvey, 1998). Social interaction skills can be underdeveloped within real-world encounters, leading to equal or even intensified inhibition with computer communication (see Perrolle, 1998). As society becomes more dependent on computers those without them may be disadvantaged in communicating with others. And as is discussed throughout this research it is the interchange in online communication that may have the most impact on how we "speak" in the future.

Secondly, computer exchanges are now fast enough and their repertoires similar enough to physical real-time communication to replace or be an adjunct to off-line person-to-person talk. Because of the capacity for anonymous communication in a chatroom environment fellow chatters have little to judge an individual by, except his or her statements (Kollock, 1996, p. 109; Schegloff, 1991, p. 49). Chatrooms are a virtual

"mindfield" where only the mental activities of chatters are known. It is not possible to know about the other chatters in a chatroom except from what they choose to tell us in their written statements. Therefore, "the most important criterion by which we judge each other in CMC is one's mind rather than appearance, race, accent, etc" – at least insofar as the text can be thought of as equivalent to or representative of, "the mind" (Ma, 1996, p.176). Therefore computers, as an extension of at least the socially represented self, become part of the speech act (see Case Study Four).

And thirdly, CMC embraces several genres of communication, with the multi-layeredness of online communications such as e-mail, or discussion lists, as well as chatroom interactions. Together, these provide a range of new genres for the transference of ideas, information and creativity. There are many ways to create new textual landscapes within the possibilities of collaboration available with online communication. This study will suggest however that linguistic, lexical, and stylistic convergences form faster in chatrooms than in discussion groups and newsgroups, due to the instant collaborations between chatters. Asynchronous study allows time for reflection between interactions: it offers the same forms of critical "distantiation" offered by print-based media – in effect merely dispatching printed text more speedily than physical means, and making it more readily available for transformational use in reception than in competitive contemporary text transfer systems, such as faxing. Synchronous interactions allow real-time interactive chats or open sessions among as many participants as are online simultaneously, creating for the first time the possibility of immediate text based reciprocal exchange – and so for very rapid consensual development of new linguistic behaviours and codings.

CS 2.2.1 Is electronic talk comparable to verbal talk?

Chatrooms are close to combining "spoken" and "written" language. Computer-Mediated Communication is still largely a narrow-bandwidth technology and it will be another decade before world- wide usage of fibre optics or 4th generation WAP will be available to carry videos and the amount of data needed to enable full oral and visual communication world-wide (Technology Guide, 2001). Much of the information we obtain in face-to-face interaction is from body language, sound (phonetics and phonology), and other physical codes. In narrow-bandwidth communications, such as on the Internet of 2000, this information was not transmitted, causing frequent misinterpretation. When cam-recorders are mounted on the top of computers and combined with text-based chatroom "written" language, and participants can see one another and write at the same time, we will have other tools to analyse how language between people is exchanged. In the meantime, it is important to assess existing techniques for observation and analysis of the emergent new "talk" of this interactive

communicative format.

The Internet provides the link for an electronic interactive conversation – and so its hypertextual format has an immediate impact. Electronic digital technologies lack a sense of linearity; in fact, they are based on a nonlinear structure that tends to facilitate a more associative way of organizing information, through the hypertext principle (Landow, 1994 and 1997; Bolter, 1991). While print media work as a flow of conversation or writing directed in an organized progression, online conversations fragment multi-directionally. Conversation on the World Wide Web, whether in chatroom, Instant messenger (IM), discussion groups, or even in role-playing games such as MUDs and MOOS involves two new paradigm shifts (See Introduction 1.2.4). Firstly, there is the shift from print to computerization. Print relies on hierarchy and linearity (see: Comte, 2002; Landow, 1994; Chandler, 1999). Critical theorists point out that traditional print is linear, while human thought is not (Edwards, 1985; McElhearn, 2000). With computers and hypertext we can leap from thought to thought without a sequencing event.

Computer interactivity however can be either asynchronous or synchronous. Instant Messenger, ICQ, and PalTalk have only two voices at one time, but not necessarily following one another. In text-chat only one line shows at a time, unlike the overlaps in voice-chat or in real-life chat. People still "talk" at the same time. One does not always wait for a response. If two people are typing rapidly back and forth, they can return and respond to something which was said while the other was typing. But their typed lines appear as if in dialogue. The software mimics a conversational relation, at least in its reciprocal relation on the screen. Therefore IM and its variants are a synchronous CMC format.

Asynchronous communication is communication taking place at different times or over a certain period of time. Several currently used examples are e-mail, electronic mailing lists, e-mail based conferencing programs, UseNet newsgroups and messaging programs. Asynchronous communication requires computer conferencing programs and electronic mailing lists that reside on a server that distributes the messages that users send to it. Any computer user with e-mail and a connection to the Internet can engage in asynchronous communication. Web-based conferencing programs that distribute many messages, or messages containing attachments, require more system power and a current model computer with a sound card and speakers and a fast connection to the Internet (Aokk, 1995; Siemieniuch & Sinclair, 1994).

Synchronous communication is communication that is taking place at the same time. Several voices can be going at once or there can be multiple conversations involving multiple subjects happening at the same time.

Several currently used examples of synchronous communication are: Chatrooms, MUDs (multiple-user dungeons), MOOs (multiple object orientations), videoconferencing (with tools like White Pine's CUSeeMe and Microsoft's NetMeeting) and teleWeb delivery systems that combine video programs with Web-based resources, activities and print-based materials.

To use synchronous communication in a text-based environment one can have the chatroom on their server or the chatroom can be imported into their Web site as an applet. An applet is a program written in the Java programming language that can be included in an HTML page, much in the same way an image is included. These programs open in a separate window from the main source window being used. Real-time interactive environments like MUDs and MOOs are Unix-based programs that reside on servers. In both kinds of synchronous communication, users connect with the help of chat-client software and log in to virtual "rooms" where they communicate with each other by typing onscreen. Because MOOs and chatrooms frequently attract many users, it is advisable to access them using a high-end computer and a fast connection to the Internet. MOOs and chatrooms often have their own sound effects to denote communicative gestures (such as laughter and surprise); to use or hear them; the computer must be equipped with a sound card and speakers.

World Total	544.2 million
Africa	4.15 million
Asia/Pacific	157.49 million
Europe	171.35 million
Middle East	4.65million
Canada & USA	181.23 million
Latin America	25.33 million

As we have familiarized ourselves with all of these new possibilities, a second paradigm shift is currently taking place around the changing environment of on line discourse, parallel to the shift from print to the Internet (see Introduction 1.4.2). Within the Internet interactive environment, there is a shift from e-mail and discussion groups, to chatroom and "Instant messenger" and ICQ by users of online technology (Cassell, 1999; Atkinson, 2000). E-mail and discussion groups are more or less a one-way road. For example, one usually waits for a return e-mail, which often is a complete response with several paragraphs: a considered and edited "textual" piece. Conversely, chatroom environments are composed of one or two lines of text from one person followed by a response of one or two lines from another person. Chatrooms thus consist of spontaneous and casual "conversational" text, while discussion groups are e-mailed "texted" responses, which are usually thought out and spelling and grammar checked before they are sent to the discussion group. Discussion groups, I hypothesize, are even more controlled and planned than e-mails, more "textual". In other words, the Internet has already produced its own set of "text-talk" genres and practices. The online universe of discourse is rapidly diversifying.

Because of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), the World Wide Web activities of ordinary users have taught a new form of communication to hundreds of millions of people in less than a decade. Such learning is a social and interpretive activity in which multiple members collaboratively construct explanations and understandings of materials, artifacts, and phenomena within their environment [106].

In the past five to ten years millions of people have learnt how to send e-mails and use computers to participate in chatrooms. As the figure above shows there were approximately 544.2 million people online at the beginning of 2002 [107], while an estimated thirty-million people were online world-wide in 1995. One in twelve people world-wide have learnt a new communication technology and its associated texting and talk-texting behaviours over the past six years.

This case study then introduces the technology into consideration of the new online discourse between people. To summarise: the technology used for text based interactive chatroom discourse is CMC based. As technology advances and changes so too does communication – and CMC techniques are proving no exception. One of the primary changes away from the text-based-chatroom (TBC) is the move to new technologies which replace text with talk and multimedia capabilities of videos, DVDs, webcams and sounds as well as 3D animated worlds and author/avatars. In the new chatrooms the text is replaced by sound waves, which may not be the author's actual voice, but a simulation of his or her voice, tone and mood: a constructed "other" as substitute "self". Already in graphics enabled chat "habitats" the author's username is replaced with a representational avatar. Even the simple one-to-one messaging services of ICQ and IM are now multimedia communication tools which contain features such as file transfer [108], voice chat, SMS paging, post-it notes, to-do lists, greeting cards, and birthday reminders. Chatrooms which were once text-based only are in the process of incorporating virtual worlds and the use of "intelligent agent" avatars [109] instead of just usernames. Meanwhile, each variant within the new sets of online interactive communications media is establishing its own sub-culture of use.

CS 2.2.2 Instant Messenger

Computer-Mediated Communication which uses the Internet takes users via e-mail, discussion groups and chatrooms beyond the immediate physical world. Within online communication a user becomes socialized by

learning a number of new "socio- technical" skills such as typing, reading and writing at the same time and learning the protocols of online discourse which includes emoticons and abbreviations. The different forms of interactive or "conversational" CMC genre such as e-mail (see Hawisher and Morgan, 1993), Homepages (see Dillon and Gushrowski, 2000; Chandler and Roberts-Young, 1998; Döring, 2002), discussion groups (see Giordano, 2000) and chatrooms each have different talk-texting behaviours. Spooner and Yancey (1996) for instance argue that e-mail is "pre-genre, i.e., in the process of becoming genre" because "the material conditions of the late 20th century have enabled a group of generally well educated, relatively affluent people to communicate in a new medium". So which genres are under development in IM?

Within the chatroom genre the Instant Messenger chat arenas are the closest to one on one off-line dialogue. The popularity of the format is already some guarantee of the likelihood of a generic (re)development in process. ICQ which began in November 15, 1996 has grown to an online communication network with more than 120-

[110]

million registered users by 2000 (Niese, 2001) and is available in nineteen languages   .
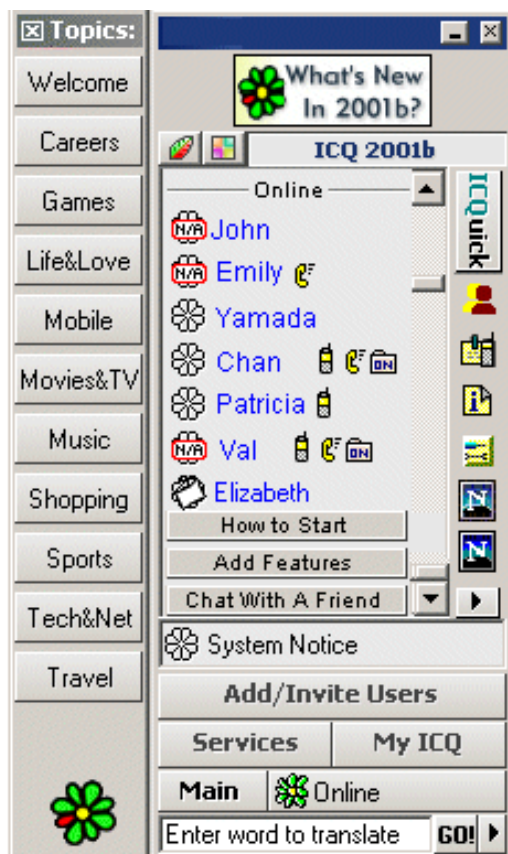
ICQ Screen

The importance of online communication has been highlighted by a study released by Jupiter Media Metrix (http://www.jmm.com, November 2001) which found that Americans in the previous year spent over 18.5 billion minutes, or 309 million hours, logged into IM services such as ICQ and Instant Messenger. Accurate world-wide studies of how much time people spend online in chatrooms are not currently available but one would assume the amount of time spent world-wide, with people logged into IM services would be high, since the number of people logged into online chatrooms of all kinds is growing. The Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2002 reported that half of Australians now use the Internet, and a third of all households have Internet access. About ninety per cent of 16-20 year olds use the Internet regularly. Almost 55 per cent of all Australians, or 10.6 million people, had Internet access in January 2002, according to Nielsen NetRatings (http://www. nielsen-netratings.com/). These are higher levels of penetration than most European countries. E-mail/chat remains as the Internet's "killer application" since 92% of the users reported using e-mail/chat and 71% of the users ranked it as the most frequently accessed application (http://www.abs.gov.au/). One study reported in BetaNews (Niese, 2001) estimates that more than one-hundred million people are in chatrooms each day. Computers as a form of communication thus affect many aspects of human discourse from daily correspondence to entertainment and information purposes.

The sheer mass of such activity once again raises the question: do computers in and of themselves change how people communicate? Firstly, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) can be expected to promote more diversity of thought than off-line communication primarily because people from so many cultures and social groupings, i.e. age, race, gender and beliefs, are able to be together without the hindrances of physical presence. As my subsequent analysis will show, such discourse is already observably different from that between people in off-line-person-to-person conversation. It has been argued (see Berge and Collins, 1995; and

[111]

work by Sloman, 1978), that Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) enhances dialogue . A study by Ruberg, Moore and Taylor (1996) reveals that the CMC discourse encourages more experimentation, sharing of early ideas, increased and more distributed participation, and collaborative thinking compared with face-to-face communication.

Instant Messenger Services are an outgrowth of MUDs and MOOs which are textual created games and learning environments, as discussed in the Introduction. Chatrooms, ICQ and IM especially, are reader/writer driven interactive sites. One participant enters and writes text and another person responds. Often there is the

feeling that one is writing and reading at the same time. In chatrooms this can become chaotic due to the near impossibility of following the rapid scrolling of text, and it is especially difficult in a room where there may be dozens of people waiting for one person to say something then answering that one person. What differentiates "speakers" within chatrooms is their logon names. If there are several voices, none following any particular protocol, all "talking" at once, the question becomes, "what is being said?" and at the same time "what is being heard?" To date, no explicit protocols have emerged for managing the flows of talk, or even for identifying the flow of talk, though for my analysis in the individual case studies, I have developed a transcription methodology to examine online chat flows and types of speech.

Instant messenger services however come closer to an off-line-person-to-person conversational turn-taking environment. Unlike multi-voiced chatrooms and discussion groups no one else can enter the dialogue. Here the "talk-text" dynamic comes especially close to that isolated in the "turn-taking" categories of Conversational Analysis, so that IM can operate as a foundational text for other Net forms, such as the multi-voiced Internet Relay Chat (IRC) services. But is IM "the same as" live dialogue? Are alternative behaviours and functions emerging from its use?

One other aspect of Instant Messenger "talk" that is different from the multivoiced chatrooms is that with some computers there can be a voice wave used. Instant Messenger utilizes Text-to-Speech technology. When a new message appears the computer reads it aloud in a chosen voice. You can hear the voice while running any program, such as a graphics or word program, and do not have to bring AOL IM to the front to hear it. The voice is however not the other person's actual voice, but a simulation by the computer, that is picked from a limited range of options, by the user. For example, I was using an Apple brand computer during my dialogues with the person I have referred to in this case study. I was able to choose from a large range of voices and chose a voice called "princess". Every time my IM buddy wrote words the computer would read the words back to me in the "princess voice", which was a soft feminine vocalisation. Over several months I equated this person with the voice of my computer. After nearly six months of daily correspondence in Instant Messenger she telephoned me. She lived in California and I was in my office in Adelaide. Her "real" voice, her off-line physical voice, was much different from the "princess voice" I had heard on the Internet. Instead she had a deep husky voice and swore every other word, something she has never done during our Instant Messenger chats. It was difficult to associate with her off-line voice, and my impression of and indeed future relationship with her changed.

In the film "You've got mail", (1998, Warner Bros.) Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan dialogue through an IM environment. However, people still have to find one another online before they pair off - unlike in a chatroom

where people meet through the random chance of entry at a particular moment. One of the features of chatroom "talk" I am interested in is establishing at what point the dialogue between strangers or even acquaintances changes in the online environment. For example, in the movie "You Got Mail" the dynamics between the two strangers change when one of the participants (Tom Hanks) writes, "we should meet". This is however a fictional dialogue - one which parallels a major "moral problem" discourse in relation to IRC and the constitution of electronic persona. There are such moments in "real" online IM dialogues (see Internet dating sites [112]).

In Instant Messenger someone steers the conversation into a particular area of discussion, establishing, in CA terms, the "flow" or speaking space for a topic (See Case Study Six). This allows me to look at a simple two-person chatroom before I begin to analyse the multi-voiced chatrooms. Multi-user chatrooms are public and anyone in the chatroom is capable of viewing what others are saying, unless participants go into a private chatroom and only allow one other person to join in. Instant Messenger chatrooms can only be used by the two people in them. This in itself can be expected to change the speech dynamic and behaviours available in this space.

My research data for this Case Study consists of two conversations, one between two people I knew to be IM users, and one between another person and myself. Otherwise the very privacy of this format makes it extremely difficult to observe and study.
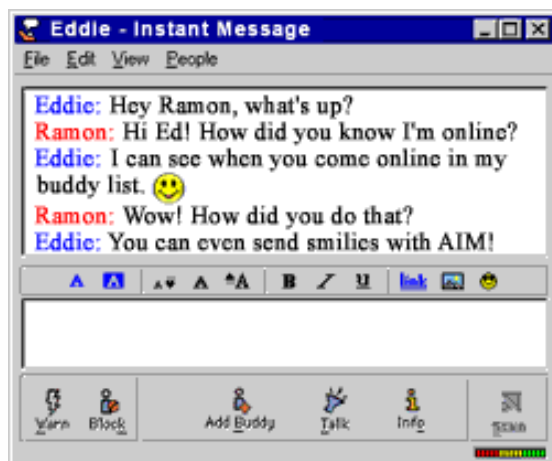
IM Screen

When I "captured" these two chats in 1997, AOL (American Online) Instant Messenger (above) was the only IM available and it was only useable as a text-based turn-taking instrument. The two people "speaking" could observe letter by letter what was being written by both themselves, and the other person on the screen, in real

time. Instant Messenger does not have the chaos of multi-chat entries that most chatrooms have. By 2002 there were several other IMs. Microsoft Messenger is available in 26 languages. Yahoo Instant Messenger, begun in

[113]

March 1998   , has entered the virtual world chatworlds with the release of Yahoo Messenger 5.0   . As such "themed" environments become available, it will be interesting to observe whether the online environment, such as the background images of the chat area, influences the dialogue. Yahoo IM is available on mobile (cell) phones as well as hand-held computers.

[115]

As well as Yahoo, ICQ and American Online, which started its service in May 1997   , there are IMs from

[116]

Lycos, Odigo, Microsoft, begun in July 1999   , Netscape and Paltalk, which have video conferencing facilities as well as IM, voice-mail and PC-Phones.

American online IM

Odigo, Inc., founded in 1998, claims to have a worldwide community of over 8 million users (2002). Their IM screen is shown below.

The IM services are thus already diversifying in themselves, a direct result of ISP competition. But some features remain the same – especially those conditions under which a user of any of these variant services experiences the processes of use. In each case, as well as being engaged in a chat with another person in Instant Messenger, a person may simultaneously be doing other things, such as writing a thesis while having the Internet on. A little icon appears on the screen showing when the person is working online. Unlike text messaging on mobile phones which is currently limited by the use of 26 characters typed in at a time, and the limits of sending, and then waiting for a response, IM users are capable of writing as much as they wish and at speeds close to real-time synchronous conversation. In addition to this, IM users have the ability to engage in texted chat with another user at any time and any place (using a palm computer or a laptop).

CS 2.3 IM Chat Data

The feature I have emphasized in this Case Study is the ability for people to engage in real time conversation with people in different locations far removed from each other. This has always been possible for telephone or telegraphic correspondence but not until the World Wide Web has this been possible with conventional written text. For example in the IM that I use in Case Study Two one person is in California and the other is in Australia, and as the characters are typed on one keyboard they appear on the other person's computer.

In this conversation the two speakers had started out discussing spirituality, but the male (speaking in capital letters) quickly turned it into a sexual theme, with the female then ending the conversation:

> 34. ******: oh my god!...thats what i thought you were going to say.....but i didnt want to go there!

At this stage the female writer (lower case text) could have been revealing a familiarity with social norms (eg male sexual behaviour) or with IRC practices or both. Without other cues: visual, knowledge of the participants and their familiarity with one another, it will be difficult to define the "talk". Yet the female participant suggests that she manages to do just that - because she is familiar with her interlocutor.

For the conversation analyst, not familiar with the co-speakers, the grammar, fonts and abbreviations are all significant. Several of the standard online abbreviations are for instance already used as shorthand for several phrases. How font size is used online is also well illustrated in this chat. The male uses what is conventionally considered "shouting" by writing everything in capitals, as illustrated in example 3. In net-etiquette [117] using the caps key all the time in an online conversation, whether it is e-mail, a user group or in a chatroom, is considered rude and aggressive. However, when a reason is given or understood as to why someone carries on certain behaviour, it may not be considered rude. The person who types in capitals in this Instant Messenger posting types in capitals all the time whether it is in chatrooms, in usergroups or in e-mails.

[118]

He believes he is a master teacher of a religious cult and that the only way he can show his "authority" and "high attainment" by using capitals. It is possible though for an experienced IM user, habituated to the "shouting" code from other CMC encounters, to suppress one interpretation and accede to this rather more idiosyncratic rule in line 10, "LOL" is used as shorthand for "lots of laughs". In chatroom talk LOL is also used for "lots of love" or "laughing out loud", but in this context I am able to interpret it as "lots of laughs", as it follows the word "HE" – itself ambivalent, but here signalled by its repetition as part of the laughter representation, "he he he".

> 10. ######: I PRACTICE THE 4 RULE. I HOPE YOUR NOT INTO THE EQUALITY TRIP BUT I FEEL THE MAN ONE THE WOMAN 4. THAT WORKS GOOD SHE REALLY SMILES A LOT AFTER THAT HE LOL

IM dialogue II

The talk-text is therefore providing cues for the "writerly" or actively interpreting reader/writer. The problems of this "emergent" genre are however constant. Two abbreviations in this IM I am not familiar with. That, and the

way that both abbreviations are used within a few lines of one another, suggests that these two speakers have their own rules of engagement for meaning exchange. This talk-text is not immediately "lisible" for the outsider. The two abbreviations I am referring to are "OBE" in line 11 and "IBE" in line 14 - though in line 15 the writer clarifies IBE by saying that the "I" is for "in". To an outsider such as myself who does not know what the abbreviation represents it would not be possible to know what is being said. Language here is used as an antilanguage where the ones who know what is being said are the participants who at some time must have given a shared meaning to the used words or abbreviations (see Halliday on "antilanguage", 1978).

11. ******: and where does she live....I hope not in Australia.....thats too far even for a good old fashioned OBE

14. ######: WE DO A LOT IBE
15. ######: THE I FOR IN

To some extent the textual "appearance" of these examples of IRC script in IM is accidental. If people are not skilled at typing, they make a lot of errors trying to keep up with IRC conversation. This is especially true in chatrooms where there are several people "speaking" at the same time. Nevertheless, contributors in Instant Messengers do also use text forms in deliberative ways.

As the chat below shows, sequential dialogue, even in an IM space is difficult to maintain. If there is not a turn-taking process in which one person waits for the other before "speaking again" the dialogue is as difficult to follow as in a multi-user chatroom. In the example in Table 4 CS 2:1 below the IM chat on the left, even though between two people, does not show a "listening then responding" regime. Speaker <******:> does not respond to <######: > who has made references "to knowing her in another lifetime". Unlike in off-line person-to-person conversation, topics are rarely pursued. In this instance there is no more discussion after turn number seven on the topic of other life times. In multi-user chatrooms there are similarly few times when topics are continued, but that is often because there are so many people "speaking" at once. In the same number of turns as the Instant Messenger example, the multi-user chatroom shown below shows few instances of continued dialogue,

From Instant Messenger, two person chat.	Afghan Chatroom. http://www.afghanchat.com/chatroom.htm
1. ######: WE WERE TOGETHER IN THE HAREMS OF CHINAS THRONE, THE GOOD OLDL DAYS	1. [MrAnderson] hopefully Zahir Shah will help to bring all AFG tribes - together in peace & establish fair governing body
2. ######: MINE	2. [ZtingRay] Si
3. ******: ah...one of those past life miracles	3. [FRANKY] I CAN RECOGNIZE HIS MORONIC SPEAKING WAYS ANYWHERE
4. ######: COOL LETTERS. I LIKE GRAPHICS AND BIG BLACK LETTERS, COOLNESS	4. [fRANKIE] you are so low you have to have an umbrella to keep the ants - from peeing on you
5. ******: oops....better get a little more humble again	5. [MrAnderson] texasrose: are U in Texas?
6. ######: WE WERE INDIANS IN THE NEW WORLD TOGETHER TOO	6. [afraid] gina, where are youu
7. ******: WOW! far out man!	7. [oliv] HEI FRANK YOU AFRAID MAN

IM dialogue VI compared with Afghan talk

Discontinuity however exists even in the IM space. In Chatrooms, notes Werry, "successive, independent speech acts are simply juxtaposed, and different topics interwoven. The kind of sequencing evident contrasts significantly with that of oral discourse, as well as most forms of written discourse" (Werry, 1996, p. 51). Conversations branch out constantly as participants follow several streams at once and interact with many others at a time. The demands of this multi -processing mean that many threads snap and discontinue. However, in the Instant Messenger genre, with only two speakers, there is still overlapping and checking – focus going backward - especially if the conversation is not strictly in the question and answer genre of talk. In person-to-person conversation the classic CA talk-relation of adjacency pairs: direct response interactions, is one method by which people structure conversation. But due to the overlapping conversation enabled by the "first come first served" packet-switching of Internet software, in chatrooms, this is rarely found. Similar software provisions

impact on IM dialogue. Both people in an IM situation could be writing at the same time, but because of the longer life span of text printed on the screen (when compared to verbal speech) a speaker is able to scroll back up and read what occurred earlier, while they were distracted by their own act of writing. This "recoverability" of text-entries enables a more considered, second-guessing approach, which can be shown to intensify the focus of IM users, shifting their attention from their own assertions to those of their talk-partner.

In IM there are not as many people to contend with as there are in multi-speaker chatrooms, therefore the chatroom users do not constantly have to contend with overlapping conversations. But as shown in the example above sometimes they do. In the second example of an Instant Messenger dialogue, between me and the female in the sequences above, the dialogue is more continuous and there is a classic conversational turn-taking, based on writing, then reading the other person's writing before responding. This is difficult in a multiperson chatroom because of the interruptions of other chatters and even of advertisement ads, which some chatservers put in between turn-takings. Here however the conditions of IM allow me to think more carefully about my responses – and there is textual evidence in the contrast between the performance of my talk-partner here and her previous chats with her other talk partner, that IM users act responsively to the texted-talk-strategies within given exchanges. By using the tools provided by IM, this woman was able to react differently and enact different talk relations during her two captured IM chats.

As I was one of the participants in the chat below I am of course able to give a different and more informed interpretation than for the previous IM example. There are limitations to how people speak, even with others they are already familiar with. One of the areas of online conversation that would be worth study in future is the differences between conversations of already-known participants and unknown chatters. Most chatrooms conversations are between participants unknown to one another. In IM however, the "speakers" are generally known to one another to some degree, as they need to know each other's "handle", "screen name" or username before they can access one another's personal account – and some degree of affinity sensed in the existing online relation must motivate the move to IM. Instant messenger is thus similar to face-to-face talk in that participants already are familiar with each other, even if through only a few correspondences.

One person whom I met in a chatroom and got to know quite well over a short time period on IRC is the person in these two Instant Messenger examples. This person has a history of psychiatric illness, confirmed not only by her, but also several others on my buddy list. (IM has category lists such as Buddy, family, Class-mates). Most of our chats were just bantering and at times quite silly. Our IMs were more entertainment than anything and provided me with a break from the stresses of every day life. However, there were times when this person drifted into

suicidal talk, wanting "to return to her home in the cosmos", her cue that she "wanted to die". Mood and directional changes affect the dialogue even without having tonal or gesture signals. This can be read back within the flow of talk by creating a string of text of lines 1, 7, and 9, or as coded above: 1>7>9. It is line 9, when the person says "on this plane", that the message becomes clear. Even though it is using the same text: "on this plane", by line 9 it has taken on new meaning, following line 7 "I am am (sic) not going to be around too much longer". It is now clear the person is thinking of dying.

The following dialogue has the other party's name deleted. Until this scenario begins the respondent was telling jokes and seemed quite happy. As this stage I have only arranged the text into single exchanges, omitting the full transactional coding, which I have used in other case studies as my transcription method. In those I have shown the order of discourse, [34/\ 33/\ 32/\ 31/\ 29/\ 10], the numbers showing the previous turn-takings which are part

[119]

of the topic or thread   and so build a sense of the inter-weaving of the talk. Instead, here I have added interpretive commentary; to indicate the response processing underway in my own mind as the exchange proceeded. At a later period I intend to use the more objective "coding" on this transcript as well, to test the efficiency of my own "intuitive" conversational responses.

In the conversation below my comments, which are not part of the original transcript, are written in italics. These comments help to clarify sections of text as the conversation went forward.

1.	@@@@@: Terrell......we will probably never meet on this plane
2.	@@@@@: realize that
3.	T Neuage: really we will never meet [*at this point I thought she meant because she lived in California and I lived in Australia – and due to the distance this would never go beyond a cyberfriendship.*]
4.	T Neuage: why not [*I second posted here as there was a long pause of several minutes without a response*] were you scrolling back to pick up that "on this plane" comment?
5.	@@@@@: I dont know
6.	T Neuage: but you believe that?
7.	@@@@@: I am am not going to be around too much longer [*here I first realize she is talking about leaving the world*]
8.	T Neuage: that is not true

9. @@@@@@: on this plane

10. T Neuage: why do you say that

11. @@@@@@: it is so

12. T Neuage: that is silly stuff

13. T Neuage: it is not so

14. T Neuage: for what reason would you leave [*I triple posted here as there were several minutes with no response and I was feeling impatient at the time*]

15. @@@@@@: it ois time soon

16. T Neuage: i am not into control but you can't go

17. T Neuage: it is not time soon

18. @@@@@@: but I will always be with you [*a metaphysical translation being that she believes she will die and her spirit will be with me*]

19. T Neuage: who told you that that you will leave

20. T Neuage: it is not true

21. @@@@@@: I am not sure.....but I am am being taken soon [*here begin the 'I will be taken' beliefs. She claims to be an 'experiencer' - an "alien" abductee. An alien abductee is one who believes they have been kidnapped by a being from another planet or galaxy or realm of existence. There is a support group for victims of alien abductions on the Internet at: http://www.cosmiverse.com/paranormal101102.html*]

22. T Neuage: you need to be around different people

23. T Neuage: by whom [*this refers back to 21*]

24. @@@@@@: it is not people [*this confirms she is not talking about earthlings*]

25. T Neuage: if they take you can they come and get me too

26. @@@@@@: I have had a good life [*proclaiming her death sentence here*]

27. T Neuage: and you will have a better one Here on this planet

28. @@@@@@: I have to go home soon

29. T Neuage: where is your home

30. @@@@@@ : inside my heart

31. @@@@@: because.....this is not my life

32. T Neuage: It is not fair for you to have information that yhou won't share with me

33. T Neuage: I thought we were mates

34. T Neuage: mates share

35. T Neuage: tell me

36. @@@@@: I gave up my life.....so what is left is not up to me

37. T Neuage: what

38. T Neuage: come on you can't believe that

39. @@@@@: I should be dead.....should be....and am not [*proclaiming her death sentence again*]

40. T Neuage: no you should not be dead

41. @@@@@: yes

42. T Neuage: you can not trade or sell your soul

43. T Neuage: that is myth

44. @@@@@: no

45. T Neuage: reality is what you are in right now

46. @@@@@: my daughter was my dear friend and she died 26 years ago from an overdose of heroin

47. T Neuage: what about your daughter now

48. @@@@@: I really better not tell you anymore

49. T Neuage: up to you

50. T Neuage: we can change the subject

51. @@@@@: she is still my friend.....we are not like mother and daughter....not at all

52. T Neuage: what about the daughter you said died

53. T Neuage: mixed me up

54. @@@@@: never mind

55. T Neuage: ok

56. T Neuage: how is your bird [*time to # - change the topic*]

The next day this respondent was back online, seemingly with little memory of the conversation from the day before. Apart from the psychological implications of such conversations, systematic analysis shows that such conversation may seem aimless in structure, but it is in fact a structured conversation in a "casual" format carrying serious social, and maybe psychological, consequences. Yet I had not met this person at the time of this interaction. Nor can I be sure of how our interaction operates within this construction of a social self. There is more involved than casual conversation with someone I would never be in touch with again. Probably I would have left the chat and gone on to another person if I were not in IM, and merely seeking to have a conversation with someone at the time. This is one of the primary differences between online chatting and face-to-face conversation, where the user cannot simply disappear and never be seen again. It is also a key difference between IRC and IM. Here we had each other's e-mail address and even home phone numbers, and we had shared similar experiences decades earlier, of being in the same religious order in the 1960s. My talk-partner here could anticipate in me a capacity to decode her less obvious comments – even if, as shown above, I attempted to deny her vision. It may be that the comparative reversion to formal lexis and even syntax, in contrast with the abbreviated IRC forms used in her other talk-texts above, relates to this earlier – pre-Net – relationship and its talk exchanges. At the same time, the re-focus work that I carried out here during the chat, scrolling to check earlier statements and multi-posting to create dialogic continuity out of silences, was dependent upon the capacities of the software. The exchange displays both elements of face to face dialogic practice, constructed under circumstances of turning-taking breakdown, and online technologisation, permitting forms of conversational "repair" not easily available in either person-to-person or IRC chat. Already, chat genres and practices are demonstrating diversity in relation to both real-life conversation, and within the varying online chat formats.

CS 2.4 Findings

My question and the reason for choosing Computer-Mediated communications as an analysis tool for Case Study Two was to find whether computers change conversation between people, especially when only two people are able to correspond at a time. To some extent I have found that they do. As discussed above and throughout this thesis, computers do not replace but supplement and extend communication - though how that communication actually occurs is dependant on both the sender of the message and the receiver, and the relations between them, enabled by the varying software applications. What is different between the multi-speaker chatrooms, where the CMC influence is extreme and creates heavy pressures on conversational behaviours, and the Instant Messenger services, where dialogue can shift both towards and away from its physical equivalent, is that when

there are only two speakers at a time in a conversation, the speaker's lack of "voice" is more noticeable. The captured data suggest that IM participants "work" far more on managing and compensating the loss of physical cues supporting the conversation, seeking clarifications, offering more gambits, teasing out meanings and nuances. With many "speakers" in a chatroom the absent cues from vocalization (see lurking on the CD at lurking.com) are not as readily missed. Is Instant Messenger, with its one-to-one dialogue, then closer to off-line person-to-person conversation than dialogue in a multivoiced text-based chatroom? Multivoiced text-based chat confuses and complicates talk to the point that not only is dialogue difficult to follow but it is difficult to know who is dialoguing – and maybe at least to some extent, this relative anonymity is becoming part of the point of such talk. One-to-one online discourse is more personal, uninterrupted and closer to "normal" off-line conversation.

One technologically introduced feature of text-based multi-person chat is the random placement of an utterance – a circumstance which decidedly alters the dynamics of chat conventions. This happens when the enter key is

[120]

pressed   following the typing on a keyboard of what one has to "say". The utterance made can fall entirely in a place not expected, due to the rapid movement of text. In a multivoiced text-based chat this can give a very random effect to dialogue and unless a chatter identifies who he or she wishes to communicate with, the line can be out of place. Meanings produced may be quite other than intended, but nonetheless create impact – as will be shown in later Case Studies. IM in comparison appears as more focused, and so enables more depth, and perhaps, as shown above, confessionalism. As with the movie "You got mail", key transitions within the talk-texting – moments when the depth of the relation and the topic shift – are signalled in both annexation of prior relations between the talk-partners; social context, and in activities enabled by the software design – such as scrolling to check earlier contributions, or multi-posting to recreate dialogic processing amidst extended silence.

This raises two further questions. Firstly, since both existing and real-life conventions of talk practice and new regulatory features introduced by CMC technologies can be shown to be impacting on chat behaviours, should these new behaviours be considered to be mere adaptations to limiting circumstances, or more broadly influential changes to the social talk repertoire? Secondly, since the CMC features impacting on and evoking these changes are in themselves products of the same social contexts, do they display certain "pre-dispositions" towards particular types of conversational or communicative exchange?

It is already being suggested that the use of CMC has changed the broader communication landscape in some societies, as is shown below. In a recent study (2000, Nomura Survey - Japan) a survey of Japanese public attitudes toward the Internet and Computers, compared with Korea and the US, showed the following results:

Q. Do computers and other information technology increase human communication?			
	Japan	Korea	US
Yes	43.2%	75.4%	73.8%
No	56.4%	23.6%	25.0%

Each of these countries has a strong base of CMC industries, and a clear pre-disposition towards technology uptake. But there are interesting differences in relation to the ease with which CMC systems could be inserted into communicative exchanges through the respective languages. One of the major problems with Asian languages being used on the Internet is the obstacle of inputting into a word processor in non-Roman scripts. For example, in Japanese the writing system requires two stages of inputting, which slows typing and makes chatroom participation difficult. Users must press the space bar to bring up the desired combinations of Chinese characters, which are then entered in the text by pressing the enter key. This contrasts with English and Korean, both alphabetic languages, in which the typed letters enter the text directly as they are typed on a complete alphabetic keyboard. The Nomura survey shown below reveals that Japan has the lowest level of keyboard literacy of the four nations surveyed:

Typing proficiency – Nomura Survey on keyboard literacy			
	Japan	Korea	US
Fast without looking	6.2%	16.8%	29.8%
Fast but Look	17.5%	14.8%	24.6%
Slow and Look	39.2%	26.2%	31.8%
Barely Use	36.7%	42.2%	11.4%

Typing proficiency January 2001
-http://www.nri.co.jp/english/news/2001/010131.html

While these figures show only very basic and technical aspects of IRC and IM access, they reveal something of the more detailed interactions between technologies and users, operating together to reform and reshape communication practices as we develop online conversational behaviours. Perhaps broadband access, with its break away from texted communication and its introduction of speech, graphics and video will resolve these

text-entry problems for some language groups. Perhaps "texted" talk of the type analysed here in IM transactions will prove an historical anomaly, and simply a convenient moment for the talk analyst, providing useful access to ready-texted transcription. But at this stage it has certainly revealed a complex interrelationship in users' negotiations of the new interface space between CMC technologies and the social interactions that we loosely call "talk".

In the next Case Study I will begin to examine the online-chat-specific elements of communication, such as the use of emoticons, to discover whether meaning is found in a chatroom when more than just text is used.

Case Study Three

CS 3.1 Introduction

In Case Study One, using analysis drawn from Reader-response theory, I explored the dual role of authorship and readership and argued that the writer needed to be the reader of the text in order to contribute meaningful discourse. The author does not have to read in order to write or "speak" in a chatroom, as he or she could just enter a chatroom and enter text into the chatroom, then leave. However, for shared discourse the writer has to read, in order to produce a "response worthy" response. Chatrooms are, to this extent, dialogic. But that definition alone cannot cover the intricacies of chatroom discourse.

In Case Study Two the technology that makes chatroom discourse possible was introduced. Computer-Mediated communication (CMC) involves the study of the process of using computers to exchange information. However, without significance being applied to the characters on the screen during some process of reception, the "communication" of CMC cannot have a purpose. In this case study I combine awareness of both how information is mediated by CMC, and how users (reader-writers) interpret that information. This chapter will look at how meaning is read from keyboard characters and iconic representatives, and especially in the complex semi-graphical textual configurations used in chatrooms, which often cannot be read as traditional text. The current CMC keyboard also now enables the user to upload an image which can be used as a representation of him or herself, or as a visual "cue" or "prop", in the theatrical sense. Analysis of chatroom practice and communicative "production and reception" thus requires a visual as well as verbal-textual analysis.

As I argue throughout my case studies, here the only way to identify communicative intent in the chatroom is through first attempting to identify what the chatter is doing in the room. The only cues that are provided are the utterances and the username. For example a chatter with the username <guest-MoreheadCityNC> is telling

people that he or she has something to do with Morehead, North Carolina. Similarly <IMFLOYD> who was a chatter in the Hurricane Floyd chatroom discussed in Case Study One is saying that he or she identifies with Hurricane Floyd, and <Pizza2man> in the baseball chatroom I discuss in Case Study Seven identifies with baseball player Mike Piazza. Since the baseball player is spelt Piazza, the user here appears to be playing with words, expressing a love of pizza as well as for Piazza, who plays for the New York Mets. Such ambiguity is typical of the wordplay and neologistic creativity of chatroom users, inviting serious analysis of their markedly self-aware language use. Sometimes too the username helps with identifying the intent of the person in the chatroom, in that the conversation of the chatter is often reflective of the username, in a personal or miniaturised version of the "celebrity-identification" used for the entire chatroom for Case Study Three.

Given this tendency towards user-identification with the topics and spaces of chat, what then might we expect from the chat-expressiveness of a group self-selecting into a Britney Spears- focused chatroom? I saved 70 turns from such a chat in March 2000, (see Case Study 3 data on the CD). At the time I knew little about Britney Spears except that she was another pop idol among children. I chose this particular chatroom at random out of a list of thousands on the popular Talkcity chat server, at a period when it was among the top of search engine Google's selections for chatroom servers. Talkcity.com went out of business in early 2002, making it impossible to replicate this series of chats – however the tendencies displayed on this site at this time and shown in this sample, reappear on other similarly focused spaces.

To capture both the self-aware linguistic expressiveness and the multi-layers of identity affiliation processed in the chat in such rooms, I will use semiotics alongside semantics and pragmatics. In a space centred on the image or style culture of a popular, almost iconic figure – and especially of one so successfully appealing to young audiences deeply immersed in adolescent and pre-adolescent self-formation, my focus will be on the ways users take up and rework cues offered by the celebrity image, the site itself, and the talk texts and image-props of other users. I hope here to introduce a socially embedded reading of chatroom communication, examining not just the textual surfaces, but recognizing, where possible, the social origins and outcomes of such otherwise symbolic activity as celebrity-centred chat.

CS 3.1.1 Questions

"Can a celebrity's name as title of a chatroom create a difference in dialogue in chatrooms?"

My first question in researching the dialogue in this chatroom cannot be answered by any form of statistical analysis. People pass in and out of chatrooms, and unless there is a pop-up box with questions to answer – and

some constraint on the honesty or accuracy of replies - there is no way to know who the chatters are, or why they are in a particular chatroom. Even with forms put on a site for people to answer there is no way of knowing whether the answers are accurate, as anyone can put in any information they wish at any time – with single or multiple responses (Danet, 1998; Bromberg, 1996; Turkle, 1996). However, the chatroom in Case Study Three had the name of a celebrity and could be presumed to be limiting the group likely to find the chat topics appealing, so that the possibility was produced for an open or empirical study of whether such a limited group might display special discursive or chat-behavioural characteristics, exclusive to such a self-selected group. I therefore pose the question, "*Can a celebrity's name as title of a chatroom create a difference in dialogue in chatrooms?*"

To some extent this proved to be a naïve question. Before I entered this chatroom and copied the log for the ten-minute 70-turn discourse, I believed the talk would be solely about the person whose name the chatroom bears: a "Britney Spears Chatroom". An extensive and growing literature of fan culture suggests however that this is rarely if ever the case (Jenkins, 1992; Modleski, 1982; Baym, 1993, 1998). The very role of the celebrity in identity formation (Lewis, 1992; Schickel, 1985; Giles, 2000) suggests that much of the talk in fan discussions will be about life and lifestyle for the devotee. Work on use of soap opera texts for instance by Modleski (1982) and Mary Ellen Brown (1994) shows adult audiences creating continuities between the narratives and characters of the serials, and their own and their friends' lives or personalities. Buckingham in the UK (David Buckingham 1987, p. 36) and Seiter (1989) in the US show the same practice among child audiences. Chat in a Britney Spears-identified room is thus more likely to be creating a set of subcultural references, working to delimit the potential group by the desire to discuss not the named idol, but the full range of life experiences and issues relevant to that style-culture-identified social subgroup defined by Britney Spears as a music performer and fashion /lifestyle leader, within a certain age/gender cohort (see Hebdige, 1999; Appadurai, 1996).

Research done on the difference in male (between the ages of 9 and 18) and female behaviour on the Internet found boys were attracted to pictures and games and females to TV, movie, and soap opera sites and chatrooms (see Cobb, 1996). The "National School Boards Foundation" found that girls appeared even more likely than boys to use chatrooms on the Internet: 73 per cent of girls and 70 per cent of boys use chatrooms at least once a week, according to their parents (http://www.nsbf.org/). See also *WHO: Working to halt online abuse*: http://www.haltabuse.org/ for statistics of online habits by gender and age, and http://www.clienthelpdesk.com/statistics_research/ for statistics of online viewing by gender and age).

Girls Use the Internet as Much as Boys

Girls 73% Boys 70%

Percentages of 13- to 17-year-olds who are online

Source: Grunwald Associates
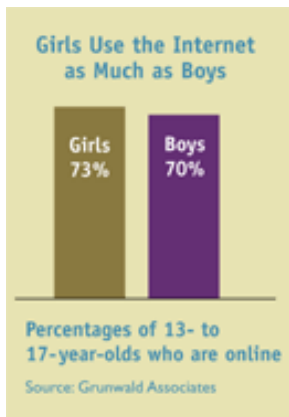
From a survey by The National School Boards Foundation (2002)

Survey results suggest that work done in other media reception studies bears out the view that social activities – such as chat – centred on celebrities or popular media texts is directed less at simple celebration of such identities and texts, than at their insertion into the lives and self-formation of participants. In online inquiry, one way to test this hypothesis is to examine the text-generating habits of chat users for elements of expressive-emotional response: possible markers of a self-aware relation to the meanings being constructed in talk around celebrity figures, and indicative of their meaningfulness in identity construction. How rich is the emotional response to celebrity issues as displayed in the talk around them? How conscious are those talking of their represented orientation to particular issues – and how can this best be read in online chat?

Because of the special repertoire offered to online chatters by the keyboarded symbols called emoticons, the second research question I have posed in relation to "Britney chat" asks: "are emoticons used more frequently in a youth orientated chatroom than in an "adult" chatroom?" Emoticons allow users to emotionally "colour" their texted contributions: to attend to the tone of the talk relation they are constructing with others, or to affiliate to or distance themselves from particular issues, ideas, postings. I have compared the use of emoticons and abbreviations in the seven case studies I have discussed as well with postings from several other chatrooms (see "comparison tables" on the CD) to firstly assess how emoticons add to the signification processing of chat postings, and secondly to assess whether Britney chat, as oriented to younger user groups, displays especially rich techniques for identity formation work – and if so, what these techniques might be, and how might they best be captured and theorized.

CS 3.1.2 Britney Spears

From statistics of her album sales and appearances, pre-adolescents make up the bulk of Britney Spear's fan base

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. There are hundreds of fan clubs on the Internet devoted to Spears, many with sexual notions of youth

[122]

attached   . I have used this chatroom as an opportunity to observe whether there are differences in "talk" in what
I believed to be an adolescent chatroom, from language used in what I would assume to be adult orientated
chatrooms, such as that used in Case Study One, the emergency "storm", or a chat on 3D computer
modelling discussed in Case Study Six.

CS 3.2 Methodology

For this case study I have applied three linguistic analytical tools. Firstly, semiotic analysis or the study of
signs, verbal or visual, (Chandler, 2001; Saussure, 1983; Eco, 1979; 1986; 1995; Kristeva 1980; 1984) is used
to search for recurrent meaning-structures or "significations" within "Britney chat". In this chatroom I will discuss
in particular the chatroom feature of avatars and usernames, as well as emoticons, suggesting that each can be used
as an identity cue. The Britney usage is compared to examples of iconic usernames from two other chatrooms, both
3-D chatrooms, to test for any distinctive features. Emoticons and abbreviations and the "identity" sign-tag of
the chatter are of course features that are important to all chatroom discourse (Crystal, 1985, 1992, 2001; Rivera
2002). I am however particularly interested here in the use of non-word representation, emoticons and
abbreviations, seeking them in particular from a strongly "image-identified" user site, to optimize the chances
of discovering how important visual or design-representational aspects of chatroom practice might be, as
chatroom-specific communicative behaviour. Semiotics is thus used as a method to uncover not just how "talk"
is accomplished in a chatroom, but how far chatroom "talk" generally may be said to include a broader than
usual repertoire of representation.

Secondly, I use pragmatic theory (Ayer, 1968; Peirce, 1966) in an attempt to reveal a socially embedded reading

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of chat "talk". Pragmatics   looks at the "meaning" of an utterance, considered as part of a social system, and
not just as an example of "talk performance" – however rich in its construction. Here I use this to focus on how
the various communicative items in chatrooms; emoticons, abbreviations and misspelled words as well as

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chat utterance sentence structures (CUSS)   , are used within a delimited linguistic or a chat society: to locate
both the specifics of this site, and to suggest that they may be extensible into other, similar, usage-subcultures.
And thirdly I use semantics, (Korzybski, 1958; Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet, 1990, 1995) which investigates

the "meaning" of a linguistic item, considered as part of a syntactic system, in terms of how the item, (in this case even an abbreviation or an emoticon), relates to everything else within its co-location. Through this web or matrix of levels of inquiry, I hope to show that something as seemingly inconsequential as Britney-chat is both richly designed and enacted, embedded within layers of social significance, from which it draws comprehensible formations, in turn contributing new formations to such repertoires, and finally, how it selects and possibly highlights particular meanings and meaning systems to construct core cultural values for the central topic focus (Britney) which are potently relevant to this community of chat-participants.

CS 3.2.2 Transcription

This multi-layered analysis requires a chat transcription different from those used so far in this study. For the Britney Spears chatroom analysis I have divided the "utterances" or chat-turns in ways promoting a clearer view of individual chat "styles" or the specific identity-codings of participants. The data for Case Study Three can be found in appendix 3a on the accompanying CD. Table One presents the types of phrases used, identified within pragmatic or "function" categories (i.e. greetings, answers, etc).

TABLE ONE
A/ = greetings or salutations
B/ = statement- open no one in particular, ever who is in the chatroom
C/ = statement - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker
D/ = answer - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker
E/ = answer - open - to ever who is in the chatroom
F/ = question - open - to anyone - ever who is in the chatroom
G/ = question - to someone specific or previous (earlier) speaker
?/ = undetermined or not classifiable by one of the criteria above

This allows for recognition of the range of talk-functions present, and displays the seriousness of chat which might otherwise be considered trivial. It also permits the analyst to represent the particular orientation towards social significance in chat, taken up by individual chatters.

Table Two denotes the use of abbreviations, emoticon use, and the beginning of threads of conversation. This allows consideration of the "colouring" of individual contributions, and so examination of their orientation to topics as signifying the social or cultural loading of their talk.

TABLE TWO
--- = (NOTE: THIS IS A CONTINUATION OF --- ABOVE)
** = uses abbreviations such as lol
*) = uses emoticons in places of words or identify
#/ = new thread (if a particular thread (direction of talk)

In table three are the user names of the participants, separated to allow for careful examination of their usually multi-layered semantic codings, as significant in identity formation work around the celebrity figure.

TABLE THREE
1. SluGGie-
2. Mickey_P_IsMine
3. JeRz-BaByGurL
4. Paul665
5. guest-Wild-cust
6. Pretty_Jennifer

7.	baby_britney1
8.	IM_2_MUCH_4U
9.	AnGeL_GlRL
10.	MADDY_CICCONE
11.	msbbyblu12
12.	IM_2_MUCH_4U
13.	Luvable_gurl15
14.	Joypeters
15.	TYTAN-guest
16.	buttercup20031
17.	guest-hotgirlz

Table four is the raw data: the chat threads as they occurred in real time, indicative of the degree of chat skill displayed in the actual experience of talk on such sites, while table five lists the utterances used without user name or other coding devices, to examine the emergent "conversation" as if it alone were the significant feature of participation (which this analysis inclines to presume it is not). Table six, shown partly below, contains the 297 words "captured" in this chat sequence – in one paragraph. I have done this to discover whether online chat, CMC software coded as turn-organised, is still meaningful without the speaker-cues provided by its screened representation. In other words, are those user-specific cues that I am suggesting exist in an "identity-work" chat present to sufficient levels for an analyst to uncover, without the turn-organised display convention? Is there any capacity for recognition of user-difference in a chat-sequence such as this, compared to the one that follows with the usernames included?

> lol loL missed ya too jenn.. while I was sleepin lmao ter plz stop Go for it baby b!!! I miss? hmm Scott? Lmao... .?¯ S¯ ?.?°¯ Y¯ °?.?·D·?. lol lol xoxoxox JuStIn well heather he going to end it i just know it No Syd damn it meee no not ter lol hmmm mickey But i think hes gf dont miss him that muc but well see what tomrrow brings

The sixty-seven words above are the same as the ones below, but without the turns being separate they do not tell the same story as the sixteen turns that it took to say this:

TABLE FOUR
1. /\ 1a. <SluGGie-> lol
2. /\ 2a. <Mickey_P_IsMine> LoL
3. /\ 9a. <AnGeL_GlRL> sits n da couch n holds her head.. missed ya too jenn..while I was sleepin lmao
3. /\ 3a. <JeRz-BaByGurL> ter plz stop -OVERLORD walks over to miss <amethyst_desire> and whispers sweet nothings in her ear
4. C/ /\above4a. <Paul665> Go for it baby b!!!
5. /\ 2b. <Mickey_P_IsMine> I miss? hmm Scott? Lmao...
6. /\ 5a. <guest-Wild-Just> .?¯ S¯ ?.?°¯ Y¯ °?.?·D·?.
7. C/ /\06 6a. <Pretty_Jennifer>lol
8. C/ /\06 7a. <baby_britney1> lol
9. C/ /\06 5b. <guest-Wild-Just> xoxoxox
10. /\ 2c. <Mickey_P_IsMine>JuStIn
11. /\ 8a. <IM_2_MUCH_4U> well heather he going to end it i just know it
12. /\ 6b. <Pretty_Jennifer> No Syd damn it meee
13. /\ 3b. <JeRz-BaByGurL> no hes not ter
14. /\ 6c. <Pretty_Jennifer> lol
15. /\ 5c. <guest-Wild-Just> hmmm mickey
16. /\ 2d. <Mickey_P_IsMine> But i think hes got a gf so i dont miss him that muc but well see what tomrrow bringslol

Without indicating the turns as shown above we do not have the reader-response mechanism which cues chatters to continue a communication. We can however, piece together the story of looking for love, whether several

people are speaking or one. But it does not read as the same story.

Table seven presents all of the words in the Britney Spears chatroom sample, separated into order of appearance in the chatroom. This offers the analysis an insight into the word size of "talk" in a chatroom such as this one. There are 3.73 letters per word on average and it shows that the word formation is very simple and could be read or written by someone in primary school. But this does not necessarily class the participants in this particular room in any way that would identify educational level. Chatrooms by their rapid flow of text encourage short, simple wording.

Table eight presents the same words in alphabetic order, as well as the number of occurrences for each word and word type. What this table shows is that "I" is used most often (18 times) with the abbreviation "lol" ("lots of laughs" or "lots of love") the second most used expression of the speakers: evidence I will suggest for the intense levels of identity work under way in this chat, with self-centred and expressive modes dominant. To provide for some continuity of categorization and at least some degree of comparative study between case studies, I have used the same coding as throughout the case studies (see the Methodology section). The name attribution for each speaker, such as, <Luvable_gurl15>, is placed in brackets in the tables, and within the discussion of this case study. The "speech" of each speaker is only in brackets when in the discussion, not in the table.

CS 3.3 Discussion

Using semiotic analysis, the study of signs both verbal and visual, as a way to analyse communication in chatrooms, allows this analysis to show how avatars and ikons can be used to accentuate and intensify the coding in representations of the chat author. A chatter can have a textual username, or a picturographic representation of him or herself that has significance, albeit often only for the time he or she is in a particular chatroom. In the

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figure below   , every time the chatter <Kokuen Lain Unigama> keys in an example of what I call elsewhere a Chatroom Utterance Sentence Structure (CUSS) the following image appears, together with the words, <techno teacher Kokuen's daughter now leading the good life> below the image. This graphic tag takes precedence over any CUSS made by <Unigama>, and must be seen to be colouring the verbal contributions.

Avatar

This person, <Kokuen Lain Unigama> is identifying her or himself as one who can teach others technology and this person has chosen the female gender, as Kokuen's daughter, to chat through. With this ikon others in the chatroom may feel comfortable with asking questions in regards to technology. And saying «now leading the good life» would colour whatever <Kokuen Lain Unigama> says.

The dialogue attached to this posting, which I have transcribed but could not directly save because chatrooms in java script cannot be copied to a word program, is simply about the chatter <Xian-Shin> speaking to another person who wants to telephone his or her mother. <Xian-Shin> answers the other person <Unigama>, with,

This illustrates how an icon dominates what is actually quite trivial and mundane information exchange – actually "phatic" or empty conversation to a viewer not familiar with the characters involved. While the exchange has pragmatic significance to the speakers, it offers little to other chatroom "reader-writers". The ikon however continues to signify, radiating a personalized and socially contextualised set of messages and values, even into inappropriate contexts. Like the linguistic device of "over-lexicalisation": the agglomeration of too many lexical items around an utterance, said by analysts to represent moments of cultural nervousness and tension – a sort of over-compensation – this ever-present "personalization" image and in-group indicator is perhaps deployed to alleviate the user's sense of CMC alienation. As the user posts from her family-oriented security out to the unknown zones of IRC, her identity is over-expressed; her affiliations permanently fixed or "laminated", in Barthes' (1972) term, onto her utterances. It is as if this user were saying "I am this person, with these affiliations – don't you forget it." This use of avatars and ikons is thus qualitatively different from a chatroom that uses only usernames, such as the chatroom logs I used in this case study. While intense and rich in signification, it can

be seen to limit flexibility: to restrict experimentation or fluidity in identity work. It is significant that there were in fact no avatars or ikons used with user names in the Britney Spears chatroom while I was present. In this case study however, the user-name signs, the clearest textual representatives of the self, are instead textual variations of name, such as <IM_2_MUCH_4U>, <Luvable_gurl15>, <SluGGie->, <Mickey_P_IsMine>, <JeRz-BaByGurL>, <Paul665>, <guest-Wild-cust>, and <Pretty_Jennifer>. Britney chatters thus achieve some consistency with the ikon-id, by using enhanced "punning" and linguistic ambivalence in their name-tags, not necessarily to hide their identity, but each to emphasize his or herself at a particular time, and especially within the "sexy-good times" subcultural frame of Britney Spears. Rather than the "strong" self-assertion of the graphic-tag discussed above, unchanging in its signification, the Britney tags are "other" oriented: identity markers arrayed as display, offering selves for social-relational exchange in a – mostly – sexualized frame: "luvable", "pretty", "2 much". The absence of graphics is here compensated by intensive textual wordplay – a mode I suggest that enhances both the feminisation of the site – at least insofar as it endorses research mentioned above which shows the graphic online mode as male oriented, the textual as female – as well as inviting a labile, shifting identity work. Since reader-writers on the site are immediately challenged to solve the riddle in each name tag, and since "real" identity is mostly disguised, but in overt ways, the tags alone display the tendency on the site for identity experimentation and social (sexual?) relational invitations. How then can we work to uncover and describe the meanings within this playfulness? When texted language annexes these semi-graphic modes of missed characters and punning play across capitalization or punctuation codes, can linguistic analysis alone summarise the processes in play?

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CS 3.3.1 Semiotics

The importance of beginning with semiotics or a study of signs in this case study relates to the need for a focus on how users can be shown to be acquiring and passing on meaning within the intertextuality of chatroom "talk", establishing signification in a text-based-chat, through a marked creativity in their use of both keyboarded character sequences, and cut-and-paste graphics assemblies. Chatroom dialogue is, we must remember, neither quite oral nor written. Because of its screened interface: its limitation – in current modes at least – to text and supportive image, at core it is semiotic (Shank, 1993). That is, it shows clear and increasing evidence of breaking away from traditional print-based forms of text composition, to build intensified representational

and signifying techniques, perhaps initially to compensate its keyboarding limitations, but more recently within a growing online community "literacy" of consensual forms and repertoires.

In part this drive to create new and distinctive communicative forms arises from the distinctive circumstances of IRC "threading", as postings arrive haphazardly onto the computer screen's dialogue box. It is neither necessary nor indeed possible to take turns as in oral communication, so that the regulatory features of oral conversation cannot apply. The many voices can be "heard" in parallel, making chat dialogue a multilogue discussion (Høivik, 1995), with each "voice" fighting for attention. To have significance, there needs to be an intensified aspect to the signifier, or the material element of the sign. It must be made not only to stand out on its own terms, but to be distinctive and recognizable within the random threads. For most chatters, the default codes: "Janet3"; "John45", which tag a real world name – most likely their own – to the incidence of appearance of that name in the chatroom – are insufficient as "identifiers". In most chatrooms, given the reduction of the physical "presence" of face-to-face real-life (rl) talk, and its further limitation in the chatroom dialogue box to relatively short text-utterances, there has been a strong compensatory move to creative "signing" through graphic and extra-semantic modes. Still limited at the dialogue-box level at least, to an alphabetic repertoire, supported only by the grammatical and punctuation signs of the qwerty keyboard, this newly evolved form of communication has produced a compound new repertoire comprising the emoticons, acronymic abbreviations, conventions on "expressive" representation – such as capitals for shouting; punning or ambiguous lexical selection, and especially abbreviated "cut'n'mix" forms combining many of the above. All of these are used - often in combination - as personal identifiers. This last multi-form, appropriating elements from multiple sources and imbricating them into a new fusion, is interestingly close to the ideographic mode of Chinese writing, in which one element of a written word addresses its semantic or conceptual load and another its phonetic connections to similar-sounding words (Hegal, 1961; Hu, 1996). The "reader" of Chinese must thus always read on multiple levels for every ideograph, relating it out to both its cultural origins and to its everyday use, to locate its meaning (Rosenthal, 2000). At the same time, the name-terms of chat spaces are also close to the graphically-oriented "tags" of graffiti artists, whose stylized name or initials both teasingly conceal identity, and claim status by their positioning in public places, their over-drawing of other tags, and not least the artistry of their calligraphy (Neuage, 1995). Both cases give some sense of the multi-functioning and multiple cultural engagement of chat-names – and perhaps even of the origins of their IRC use, given both the counter-culture connections of IRC within youth communities generally, and the recent influences of Asian cultures within CMC developments.

Semiotic analysis, by eliminating distinctions between text and image as signifying systems, enables this study

to move beyond a strictly linguistic base, into examination of the graphical and expressive modes used to compensate, and maybe beyond that, to create meaning in new ways, within the new "conversational" spaces of the chatroom – and particularly so in a chatroom of saturating expressiveness within identity work, as is the case with Britney chat. But to fully explore this drive to identity performance and exploration, such that it extends the actual communicative range of the "language" or coding system used, it is first necessary to examine which semiotically signifying communicative functions are actually in use in the Britney Spears chatroom, and to reveal which are dominant and recurrent.

CS 3.3.1.1 Emoticons

Emoticons in chatrooms are similar to manuscripts for theatrical plays, which use bracketed text (Høivik, 1995) to describe actions accompanying dialogue, or to indicate when an actor should enact certain feelings within a speech. In most chatrooms, keyboard letter combinations will produce an emoticon. The grid below shows that when :) is typed on a keyboard, what appears in a chatroom, as well as in a Microsoft Word document, is the graphic ☺. This shows that that these particular emoticons, known as "smileys", are so well established that they are now automatically made when keys are pressed. Some chatrooms even colour in the emoticons, to add expressive coding. Three examples are given below;

Characters typed on keyboard	What appears in Microsoft Word (2000+)	What appears in some chatrooms
:)	J	😊
:(or :-(	L	☹
:| or :-|	K	😐

Emoticons

Just as in person-to-person conversation off-line (p2p-off), different dialects and accents develop in different text-based chatrooms in CyberSpace. For example, emoticons are sometimes replaced by asterixed gestures, such as *s* and *smile* or *g* and *grin* for the traditional :). For many expert typists the conventions of character entry make the typed version quicker than two keystrokes and the unconventional punctuation-sign combination

taken to produce :).

In recognition of the widespread use of graphic-textual combinations, many chatrooms now have emoticons included with their software. For example, The Odigo Messenger, Instant Messenger has graphic ikons to allow participants to show other users how they are feeling. A list of the emoticons that can be sent includes those below:

Of the seven case studies collected for this data corpus I have found the highest incidence of abbreviations (30%) and emoticons (6%) in the Britney Spears chatroom (see appendix for a statistical comparison of the seven chatrooms). The dominance of abbreviation use on this site suggests an especially tight community focus: a consensus not merely of style, pressuring all participants to adapt similar forms, but of familiarity and so frequency of concourse. These are complex, multi-layered linguistic constructs. While they are continuous with those used elsewhere in IRC, and more recently on SMS texting on mobile phones, and while these forms also show influences from the semiotic packing used in advertising logos and slogans (see for instance Williamson, 1978, and Wernick, 1991) their heavy use on the Britney site contains particular elements affiliating individual chat participants to Britney culture. A teenage girl will see hunting boyfriends and beautifying as a norm; it is argued indeed that these are transcribed as their sole purposes in life (Davies, 2001). As these lines below show, the participants in the Britney Spears chatroom are concerned with relationships.

11. <IM_2_MUCH_4U> well heather he going to end it i just know it

16. <Mickey_P_IsMine> But i think hes got a gf so i dont miss him that muc but well see what tomrrow bringslol

26. <MADDY_CICCONE>Sis i want Justin to get here!

29. <Mickey_P_IsMine> wel I duno Mickey lol I juss think hes hottie so i cant really miss him

32. <Luvable_gurl15> i am going to cry if i dont see my baby soon

The assumed age group in this chatroom places this group within the youth market: a demographic focused on identity formation, marked by heavy levels of over-lexicalised self-expressiveness. At the same time, the energetic communicative ethos drives a primary push for shortened messages, as well as for "in-group/out-group" affiliative techniques. Abbreviations and emoticons intensify the group codes at the pace required of a group which sees itself as dynamic, mobile and trend-leading (Wrolstad, 2002; Ocock, 2002). The table below reveals the affiliative urge of such youth groups, attracted to each new generation of communicative technologies, maintaining fashion-status and social cohesiveness in the one focus.

High Interest in Applications of 3G (Among Current Internet Users/Mobile Phone Owners)			
	Western Europe	**Eastern Europe**	**USA**
Total	22%	26%	25%
Under 25	37%	30%	45%
25 to 34	27%	26%	26%
35 to 49	19%	25%	27%
50 and over	9%	24%	10%
("High Interest" based upon a six-point interest scale, where ratings of 5 and 6 indicate high interest.)			

Youth Market per centage of 3G http://www.cellular.co.za/news_2002/060102-3g-market-research.htm

Read purely as signifiers at the level of communicative technique, abbreviations thus carry with them a semiotic loading which endorses membership of such trend-seeking/trend setting youth culture groups. This is, in Barthes' terms (1972), a "second order" signification, to be read not as the specifics of the Britney style-culture claims seen in actual indent tags, above, but as the more generalized "myth" construction which constructs around IRC and SMS an entire culture of newness, group-exclusivity, and urgent self-expressiveness.

Alongside the abbreviation mode, and indeed often compounded into it, is the emoticon – whether

individually keyboarded or software-encoded. Many web analysts have considered the emoticon to be a "symbolic" form of communication (Herring, 2002; Roberts-Young, 1998; Reid, 1991), presumably in recognition of its distinctly graphic or visual form, as opposed to textual-alphabetic codes. But strictly defined, a symbol is a sign that has a non-arbitrary relationship to what it means. Its meaning is established within a particular cultural consensus, even if any logical origins for the connection between the representation and the represented (in semiotic terms, the "signifier" and the "signified"), may be lost in history.

To use an emoticon, however, is to assign a meaning, usually to a feeling, through one or more existing keyboard characters. Emoticons may be "conventional", in the sense of being available and consensually established within a given community of users – up to and including all web users, even across language groups (Churchill and Bly, 2000; North, 1994) – but they can also be "improvised" or created new, by the act of creative recombination or re-application to new circumstances. The keyboard thus becomes a way of adding expressiveness to the words typed into the dialogue box, restoring some elements of the expressiveness of vocalisation, facial expression, body gesture, or even handwriting fluency or emphasis, lost in the standardization of keyboarding and the remoteness and physical distantiation of the chat relation.

Because of the conscious choices from the available repertoire of expressively recombinant keystrokes that the emoticon culture offers, all presentational selections in dialogue box text entry become "significant" in semiotic terms: laden with potential expressive meaning, beyond that of the semantic load of the words themselves. Nor is this semiotic "loading" always an extension or intensification of the semantic intention. Such elements as case selection, word - "fracturing", deliberate mis-spelling, can act alone or in combination with emoticon elements, to create inversions, ironic effects, deliberate ambiguities, and entire sets of witty effects, calculated in their own right to influence their reader(s) – interlocutor(s). In other words, even the presentational elements of chat are pragmatically and semantically "significant" – although it takes a semiotic analysis to unearth the techniques in play: to tease out what is being "signified" by this, or that, selection or creation.

It has for instance long been established in chat communities of all kinds that using capitals for every turn-taking is considered "rude" – the equivalent of shouting (Reid, 1991; Rheingold, 1991, 1994). When an otherwise apparently experienced chatroom participant uses this form of "speech" it is worth seeking an explanation. In the Britney extract below, at turns 50, 53 and 57 <Luvable_gurl15> uses capitals - but there is no immediate indication as to why. She (or he) has only four contributions in this chat sequence: the first in lower case with the following three in capitals.

50. <Luvable_gurl15> HEY PAUL IT IS ME HANNAH

53. <Luvable_gurl15> NAD I WILL.....LMAO

57. <Luvable_gurl15> WAAAAA

<Luvable_gurl15> is the only contributor in this "captured" chat sequence to use capitals. This suggests that <Luvable_gurl15> does not see herself as part of the general discourse format of the chatroom, but has taken it upon herself to claim a stronger presence in this room, than that signified by the conventional smaller letters. Remember that in Case Study Two, examining an Instant Messenger room, one person had used capitals in all of his turn takings. That contributor always uses capitals in all his online writing, whether in a usergroup or in a chatroom or in e-mail, because he professes to be a spiritual guru, and claims it as a sign of spiritual authority to use capitals (perhaps a reflection of the formal grammatical convention of the capitalisation of terms for God; Our Lord, the Saviour, etc). Without similar access to knowledge of the motivations of <Luvable_gurl15> it is difficult to argue a similar case, or to propose that the person uses capitals in this chatroom because of her sense of self-importance. It is however possible to analyse the functions of each contribution, and to reconstruct the communicative intentions of the lexical-semantic as well as semiotic-expressive selections the participant has made. In this example it appears for instance that in turn 50 the use of upper case is equivalent to shouting across a crowded room to get someone's attention. <Luvable_gurl15> says <HEY PAUL IT IS ME HANNAH>. Her naming of her addressee, Paul; her indication of a past relationship which will lead him to recognize her without identification ("it's me"), her addition of her own name ("Hannah") and even her informal and colloquial demand for attention ("hey!") all operate to mark her contribution out as having been made by a special participant. The capitalisation thus, in this case, operates as an intensifier.

In a chatroom everyone is in the same room, operating in a mixed-conversational medium, in which individual contributions – especially from those just joining an existing set of threads - can easily be overlooked. The conversation is no different in this respect from how it would be if the participants were in a physical room together, in which noise levels were high. The graphic equivalent of shouting becomes a necessary strategy – and one underpinned by all of the other elements of the speech behaviour in <Luvable-gurl15>'s contribution.

She subsequently, at line 53, displays a fluent use of chatroom ellipsis: <NAD I WILL.....LMAO> ("laughing my ass off"), building her turns with complex acronyms. At line 57 she creates a paralinguistic expressive utterance: <WAAAAA> in response to not being recognized by her friend. Despite the seeming lapse into juvenile expressions of temperament, this displays her as an experienced, even advanced chatter, asserting her sense

of a superior right to expression and response in a crowded chat space. But it is the dual signification she adopts: the representational load of her words and of her keyboarding, which produces her as this extra-assertive, extra-competent contributor.

This suggests that language within the chatroom is already establishing a set of behaviours and techniques distinctively different from conventional talk, at least in their capacity to add further levels of communicative "signification" through the keyboard's graphic-expressive potential. Can this be adequately explained, within the existing conventions of semiotic theory? It is interesting to attempt to represent the practices of a chatroom modelled on the American philosopher Charles S. Pierce's semiotic triangle, which consists of sign, concept and object as shown below.
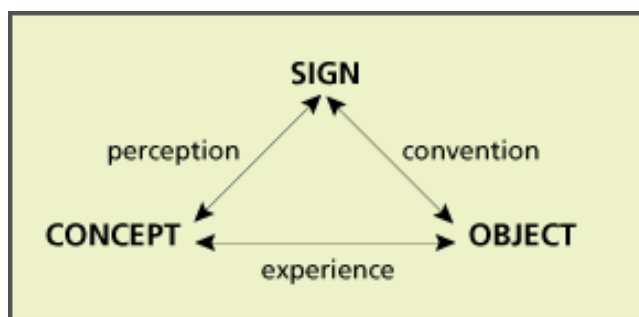
Pierce was attempting to capture a meaning relation between physical or embodied experience, and the symbolic equivalent in language or in conventions of graphic signage, by showing how the material object encountered by the physical senses, and its symbolic coding within thought, are reunited in the use of the SIGN, whether as word or as image. His efforts are salient as we struggle to explain meaning-making practices behind those words or images used on websites, our newest forms of distantiated or alienated communication. But what the chatroom experience has added evolved from a very rapid layering of countless numbers of user contributions and creations and recognitions of "meaningfulness" or "signifiance", (the potential to signify) is the desire to render within this electronic equivalent of everyday interpersonal chat the immediate and creative expressiveness of actual speech.

In a chatroom the sign has duel significance. The emoticon and its associated expressive techniques (for instance abbreviations or avatars) are dually-significant, as they double the semiotic load of the chat, which now carries a semantic and an intentional-expressive load. Even at the simple level of the username or graphic identity symbol, the selections carry multiple messages. Is <Pretty_Jennifer> pretty? Is <AnGeL_GlRL> a girl? Is <Luvable_gurl15> really 15? No matter. They wish to represent themselves as this "other". No surprise then

that the keyboarding of subsequent chat turns is enriched by the use of expressive forms such as the emoticon, which represents a shortcut of expressed intent. Emoticons are useful in chatroom discourse   because of the hurriedness of chat "speech": the sheer text-entry-pace required to maintain a seemingly natural conversational exchange, without losing the complex interplays of spontaneous word projection and response. It

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is much quicker to relay feelings with one or two presses   of the keyboard than it is to explain whether one is sad or happy. The use of username and avatars or ikons as symbols of the chatter provides similar sorts of double signification, hinting to other chatters at the interpretive and relational positions to be taken up in interactions with the speaker.

CS 3.3.1.2 3D virtual chats and ikons

Unexpectedly, there were no avatars used in the Case Study with Britney Spears – a surprising discovery in a chatspace dedicated to a media ikon popular as much for her youthful appearance as for her musical talent (indeed, some would argue, more).   While avatars and graphic representations of self or ikons are primarily used for role-playing sites such as MUDs and MOOs and Habitats, many chatrooms also let the "speakers"

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signify themselves through the use of an avatar. In 3D or virtual chats   , avatars (author as sign/symbol) are added to usernames, to provide the individual signature of the chatter. The screen shot on the following page (see CS 3.3.1.2..3D virtual chats and ikons) shows a virtual chatroom using avatars.

CS 3.3.1.2.3 3D Virtual Chat screen http://www.cybertown.com/

Many newer chatrooms (those designed after 2001) do not use text. Instead the chatter speaks into a microphone to create dialogue, instead of writing text onto the screen. However, even there the author/speaker's identifier coding is an important factor within the ensuing conversation. The selection of the iconic representation of what chat participants "are", sometimes changing at any specific moment, influences the response relation within the conversational exchanges, in the same ways as in the text-talk discussed above. There is a deliberate and purposive link between the avatar and the intended "reading" (or audio reception) of the conversation. If voice is now present, full physical cues are not. Some compensation still appears to be necessary.

A feature of person-to-person off-line (p2p-off) conversational analysis that makes it different from person-to-person online (p2p-on) analysis is that the people who appear in p2p-on conversation are not necessarily the same as their physical originators. Whether it is through the username: <Pretty_Jennifer>, or an avatar, identity is disguised. In the Britney Spears Chatroom users' gender can only be guessed at. Of fifteen users names in the data sample, seven are possibly female, one is possibly male and seven are possibly either:

Possible male	Possible female	Either
Paul665	JeRz-BaByGurL	Mickey_P_IsMine

	Pretty_Jennifer	guest-Wild-cust
	baby_britney1	IM_2_MUCH_4U
	AnGeL_GlRL	msbbyblu12
	MADDY_CICCONE	Joypeters
	Luvable_gurl15	TYTAN-guest
	guest-hotgirlz	buttercup20031

Three-dimensional chat with iconic (avatar) representation characterizes what the chatter identifies with and in turn, wishes or hopes others will see him or her as. An icon or picture of a female warrior, with a username of <lady-warrior>, may belong to an elderly male, but others in the chatroom, and maybe the author of the utterances, may believe that the author is a young woman. How we are affected by these pictures determines how we interpret the utterances and how we respond – but these interpretations are culturally – and subculturally – located. Users predict the reception outcomes of their choices, and work strategically to evoke preferred responses.

For example, below several representative graphics of "the author" in chatrooms show the liberty some chatters take in identifying themselves.

Just as in the Britney chat above, where the possible reference to a popular movie text "coloured" the talk relation, here it is clearly possible to see media identifications used to convey or annex preferred "identity" to garner hoped-for responses.

To communicate such identity claims to others the chatter needs to do little to create a complicated virtual utterance. In the chatroom screen shown below, in the dropdown box on the left the chatter can choose an expression to modify what he or she is saying. Coupled with an emoticon such as a smiley face only a couple of words need be entered into the chat. Once again, the semiotic layer of such communication intensifies the semantic and

pragmatic, allowing it to abbreviate to meet the entry-speed demands of the chat format. Many sites even let the user choose from a list of avatars, speeding up the image-selection process as well – and also incidentally accentuating the already observable tendency to identify through affiliation with widely known and popular media identities. But the self-made avatar gives originality to the user, adding to the sorts of creativity and expressiveness detected above, in compound abbreviations and text-punctuation-emoticon clusters.

The avatar or icon appears before the text whenever the person "speaks" in written text, for example;

...||Xian-Shin||...

Xian-Shin Icon avatar

As a result it pre-colours the posting, both threading the postings for coherent interactive sequencing, and contributing to the responses each participant aims to evoke from others – and often selected and preferred others, to whom a posting may be individually addressed, even in the midst of the multilogue. Recognising this makes it possible to appreciate the split focus chat participants are enacting. Not only are they conveying rich layers of identity presentation in their postings, whether through texted styling or avatar or both, but they are also positioning their postings to respond to and in turn evoke responses from interlocutors. It is at this point that the semiotic focus of analysis shifts, to consider how chat is calculating not just its representations, but its responses. And this demands a move back into linguistic analysis: specifically, into pragmatics.

CS 3.3.2 Pragmatics

Pragmatics looks at what the "speakers" or writers are doing conversationally in a chatroom. At this point, a pragmatic study of chatrooms can show which features of keyboard character-manipulation (emoticons, letters, numbers) are being used to "switch" dialogue by double-loading its semiotic values, to position reception of the semantic load or subject matter the user is dealing with.

Pragmatics is the study of actual language use in specific situations. By looking at the factors that govern our choice

of language in social interaction and the effects of our choices on others (Levinson, 1983; Nofsinger, 1991) we can calculate the speaker's intentions from the utterances they produce. In studying chatroom practice, such consideration of the intended outcomes within reception of utterances must therefore include description and analysis of this double semiotic load: the semi-graphical components of the keyboarding, which similarly "position" addressees to "take up" and respond to utterances in certain preferred ways.

Pragmatics in its more traditional mode looks at the contextual patterns of words in use within a given speech situation, isolating items used for instance to switch dialogue or to identify subject matter. Often in a conversation a speaker will change an aspect of what they had just said (Blackmer and Mitton, 1991; Schegloff, 1979, 1987). This "repairing" of the conversation corrects the talk by qualifying it, elaborating it, or through redirection of the conversation. In the example below the chat flow contains a continuous switching of dialogue, with little topic continuity. What can pragmatics do to help us see the processes at work, and beyond that, any specific "chatroom" practices which distinguish this "dual semiotic" communicative form from other speech behaviours?

Here I have represented the chat turns as they might appear in ordinary talk: that is, without the source attributions which appear on the scrolling chatroom dialogue box. This is of course how the "speaker" enters them – so it is a means of capturing the "response" mode of interactive chat as its intentions are coded in – even if each addressee does have the advantage of receiving the contribution in a name attributed format (along with all of the non-addressees receiving the contribution in the mixed sequence scrolling in the open dialogue box). The removal of the name identifiers does however achieve the function of "remixing" the chat into physical talk-conventional turns, so indicating how far the respondent role (reader rather than writer) is crucial for continuity and reciprocity in this chat mode. Without the named attribution, the talk flows become incomprehensible and unmanageable.

WAAAAA

Ok.. its cool. now your turn =p

gurl 15 hannah??

asl?

not cool jenn...criez

huh

kev are you there

which i duno how im failin science
What?

By consulting the table with the user names included, it becomes possible to see the response interactions – and so to see them as meaningful. These speech exchanges are heavily invested with the types of additional semiotic loading outlined above, because, unpinned from the direct exchange-cues of real life conversation, their semantic load alone conveys too little for us to reconstruct logical response-pairings, and so find the "threads" of conversation. While for instance the single interrogative <what?> could well be a response to the line above – a comment which cannot logically be made to engage any of the prior utterances; that <what> proves to be a response to the comment <not cool jenn…criez>, and thus becomes not a shocked exclamation ("What!") but instead a semi-denial response inviting elaboration of an accusation: ("What are you (unfairly?) accusing me of?")

While pragmatics can help us to reconstruct responses from the positioning work of their original proposition utterances, it can also help us to find if users are switching codes, or shifting the positioning elements of their utterances, according to the interactive and reactive development of their speech relation. Code-switching introduces socio-cultural information in context, which is retrievable through conversational inference (Gumperz 1982; Alvarez-Cáccamo 1990). As can be seen in the conversation below the dialogue is dependant on knowing what the other participants are saying.

57. <Luvable_gurl15> WAAAAA
58. <Pretty_Jennifer>Ok.. its cool. now your turn =p
59. <Paul665>gurl 15 hannah??
60. <Pretty_Jennifer> asl?
61. <AnGeL_GlRL> not cool jenn...criez
62. <Paul665>huh
63. <buttercup20031> kev are you there
64. <Mickey_P_IsMine> which i duno how im failin science
65. <Pretty_Jennifer> What?

The above table includes nine turns from seven different "usernames". Unlike person-to-person talk off-line (p2p-off) where the direction of the conversation can be followed by seeing who is speaking to whom, in person-to-person online dialogue (p2p-on) it is difficult to establish streams of interactivity. The features of p2p chat

online create a new set of rules for interactivity. The degree to which participants spend time "housekeeping" their engagement with a particular respondent is clear from this 9-turn extract, where Paul (lines 59 and 62) tries to establish whether Luvable-gurl 15 (line 57) really is the "Hannah" she claims to be – a surprised questioning achieved with the double question mark and the paralinguistic "huh", rather than in clearly established semantic loadings.

Meanwhile <Pretty Jennifer> at lines 58, 60 and 65 tries to establish contact with an unidentified "newby"; someone of whom she asks the very basic information which operates in chatrooms as "so tell us all about yourself": <asl>, or "age-sex-location please…" Presumably in line 58 she is reassuring this new contributor that she can go ahead: "OK…it's cool", advising her on what to do next: "now your turn…" But to get to this reconstruction of an exchange and so establish its relational and intentional load (helpfulness and reciprocity) and positioning of an expected response, we have had to make a decision about a quite complex "code switch", where <Pretty_Jennifer> has moved into helpful instructional modality (<now your turn…">), and into very basic keyboard acronym coding (<asl>) and away from the presumably less patient forms which have produced <AnGel-GIRL>'s comment at turn 61: <not cool jenn…criez>. Here the reproof, plus the familiar abbreviation of the name, and the representation of her own responsive feeling – along with its youth-culture "z" terminal, builds a complex mix of socio-moral evaluation in the content, and "mitigated" form in the address. This contribution thus says something like "Pretty Jennifer we know each other well enough for me to tell you that what you have just done is unacceptable – but I still like you enough to call you by your pet diminutive name, use youth-in-group terms which cement our shared sub-cultural bonding, and enact a mock-emotional response which I know you will laugh at yet still use as a warning". With 21 keystrokes, including the space bar hits, she has achieved all that. Pragmatic loading must be accompanied by semiotic overload, to carry these degrees of significance.

William James, who wrote on the analysis of the structures of the stream of consciousness accompanying thinking, envisaged pragmatism as "…a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable" (James, 1907). James's notion of streams of consciousness linking thought to thought captures much the same seemingly random and discontinuous flow as chatroom "talk". Chatroom "talk" can appear as random keyboard character entries, often difficult to follow as purposeful conversation. In turns six and nine in this chatsite sampling, <guest-Wild-Just> uses only emoticons or alphabetic symbols to communicate, and in 15 <guest-Wild-Just> adds a single proper noun, <mickey>. It is not clear who <guest-Wild-Just> is speaking to within this short "capture" of conversation. It is as if the reader-listener had walked in on a conversation. What is being said with the emoticons and alphabetic symbols is not universally known, and indeed no one responds to it.

In turn 9 it would be assumed that the x and the o would signify hugs and kisses. Because entry 9 follows <Pretty_Jennifer> and <baby_britney1> it is possible that <guest-Wild-Just> is flirting with them. This is an example of how chat flows are economical because of their capacity to fulfill the relational/reciprocal "positioning" roles covered in pragmatics, by using the signification processes of graphical/alphabetic recombinant "expressiveness".

6. <guest-Wild-Just> .?¯ S¯ ?.?°¯ Y¯ °?.?·D·?.
9. <guest-Wild-Just> xoxoxox
15. <guest-Wild-Just> hmmm mickey

Analytical tools developed in pragmatics have found frequent application in discourse analysis. Much of Pragmatics grew out of Natural Language Philosophy with the work of Wittgenstein's concepts of "meaning as use" and "language games" (Shawver, 1996, Still, 2001). The chatroom as an arena of entertainment and its dependence on interactive conversational exchange genres turns its activity into a sustained and

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dynamically evolving language game   . It is this playfulness and interactive responsiveness which is producing complex and multi-layered significance within what otherwise might appear as little more than a seemingly random bantering.

In a chatroom discussion, finding how meaning is being "read" can only be reconstructed with any degree of certainty through following individual chatters and how they respond to an earlier utterance. Right from the start though there is the problem of the ongoing dialogue and not knowing when it begins or ends. In the example below <IM_2_MUCH_4U> makes his or her first statement at turn number 11 of my chat sample:

11. <IM_2_MUCH_4U> well heather he going to end it i just know it
31. <IM_2_MUCH_4U> s dead=(
45. <IM_2_MUCH_4U> brb going to see if he e-mailed me at yahoo

In the previous ten turns there is no one with the name "Heather", and further more no one else is speaking about a particular person, to provide any positive identification of this "he" in question. When <IM_2_MUCH_4U>'s next two postings, 31 and 45, are read there can be meaning applied. It could be assumed that <IM_2_MUCH_4U> is missing someone, and at turn 45 is saying he or she is checking e-mail to see if there has been any

correspondence. These three lines between turns 11 and 45 seem to indicate that <IM_2_MUCH_4U> is concerned that someone is going to end a relationship with him or her. There is also the possibility, given the presence of this exchange on a media-celebrity site, that the "Heather" alluded to is being used to position the exchange within the subculture of girltalk over boyfriends: an elliptical allusion to the teen flick "Heathers" (1989), coding its address to a confidante so that she can instantly slip into "Heather talk" and so post back <s dead:(> as an appropriately "in character" reply.   Without these references back into (subcultural) context the response relation becomes too hard for at least the outsider to read – and in some cases, even for the insider, as the high levels of interpretive and relational repair talk in these chat exchanges demonstrate.

Pragmatics is the study of linguistic communication; of actual language use in specific situations (Prince, 1981; Levinson, 1983; Clark, 1973) as a cooperative/collaborative process, so that referring backwards and forwards in talk threads "ties" stray meanings back into meaningfulness. Pragmatic accounts of "co-reference", where different names refer to the same individual, are apparent in this case study. Instead of writing out <Mickey_P_Is Mine>, <guest-Wild-Just> addresses the user as <…mickey> just as <Mickey_P_Is Mine> responds to <Pretty_Jennifer>, <Ok Jenn lol>, perhaps not wanting to add the "Pretty" part of the user's name. Once again, pragmatics plus semiotics shows how a particular communicative ethos is under development. Not only do these participants interact, threading backwards and forwards across postings, but they abbreviate tags: they indicate familiarity and group acceptance by shortening the complex tag names – at the same time "outing" the most "real" elements of the name strategies: "Jen", "Mickey", and so on.

The factors that govern our choice of language are important in social interaction and in examining the effects of this choice on others (Levinson, 1983; Nofsinger, 1991). In theory, we can say anything we wish, within our linguistically regulated repertoire. However, in practice, we follow a large number of social rules as well as grammatical rules (many of them just as unconsciously observed) that constrain the way we speak (Crystal, 1987, p. 120-122). In linguistic enquiry, several main areas overlap. Pragmatics and semantics both take into account such notions as the intentions of the speaker, the effects of an utterance on listeners, the implications that follow from expressing something in a certain way, and the knowledge, beliefs, and presuppositions about the world upon which speakers and listeners rely when they interact. Pragmatics also overlaps with stylistics and sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics, as well as discourse analysis (see Case Study Five). Each in its way foregrounds a particular focus, and it is worth examining what each can offer to examination of chatroom communication. A pragmatic analysis can capture a range of seemingly "individual" communicative actions (stylistics), and enable comment on their social applications (sociolinguistics) – including their role in

identity formation and assertion (psycholinguistics) – as well as contributing to the socially and politically engaged analysis of discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Singh, 1996). In this case study, where the roles of the chatters are identified by their names, as shown in table Table 4 CS 3: 1 above, how they perceive themselves often is illustrated through the name. < Luvable_gurl15> wants others in the room to believe this is a fifteen-year-old girl who is luvable. This is her preferred character. Even if she is he, 55-years-old and hates the world, what matters is that at this particular time she identifies as 15, lovable, and a techno-trendy female: not just a girl, but a "gurl". Social conventions make all of "her" statements reasonable: from the adolescent excess of <i am going to cry if i dont see my baby soon> to "her" childlike expression at not seeing the one "she" wants to see in the room: < WAAAAA>. Like the three icon representations shown previously, these texted expressions are cues which reveal real people principally as characters who want others to see them as they are depicted. Once again, the semiotic overload onto the conversational pragmatic carries the main message of the posting.

The distinction between pragmatics and semantics is easier to apply than to explain. One reason for introducing the pragmatics-semantics distinction in this chatroom is to show how seemingly confusing it is when a chatter is thought to be attempting only to convey meaning: to be acting instrumentally, in a transmission mode of communication. Ambiguity, vagueness, non-literalness are not a "fault" of the online speaker, but the style in which communication is carried on. The semantic load of words is not enough, once postings are unthreaded, compressed into the interactive speeds of online IRC posting, and confined to screened text. While Semantics as an analytical practice attempts to provide a complete account of meaning for a language, recursively specifying the truth conditions of the sentences of the language, pragmatics provides an account of how sentences are used in utterances to convey information in context (Kempson, 1988 p. 139). Until the work of pragmatics has captured and assessed how actual examples of online communication "work" in chat, the types of semantic variation already clear from data in this and other studies will not be able to be consolidated into the sorts of systems which the rapidity and creativity of online chat production suggests as already under construction. And further, such a task appears likely, at least from this preliminary sampling, to demand recognition of communicative techniques – such as the semiotic loadings used to intensify online expressivity – as part of the new CMC repertoire.

Semantics deals with the relation of signs to objects which they may or do denote: it accepts that communication operates within a relatively settled, established repertoire. Pragmatics concerns the relation of signs to their interpreters (see C. Morris, 1971, pp. 35, 43; Crystal, 1985; Leech, 1983; Lyons, 1981; Levinson, 1983) – it allows for the sorts of active and interactive communicative relations revealed in the data for this study But

semiotics adds to this "global-local" set of vertical and horizontal meaning-making connections, the capacity to read new techniques – especially the semi-graphical techniques of emoticons and split-lexical character use – which IRC and its related formats have developed to compensate the loss of oral and other physical communicative cues. Britney-speak, with its high demand for expressiveness and a pacey delivery, reveals an especially strong degree of creative semiotic loading – perhaps to be expected in a space dedicated to style culture and adolescent identity-formation. In Peirce's terms, the "object" under signification - Britney – is already also a "concept": itself a semiotically laden entity, carrying values which entice chatters into this space, and not another. That the behaviours, representations, interactions, and texting strategies all prove to be "signed" with these values is thus no surprise. The degree of complexity encountered: the skill in posting, in de-threading complex entry sequences, and in creating new signifying categories, does however indicate communicative repertoires brought to great heights of sophistication - levels which demand new configurations of combined analytical techniques to surface their operations.

 The next case study therefore moves to consideration of how online chat might be understood as instrumentally communicative: less as identity-expressive and playfully creative; more as directed to the enactment of information exchange directed to identified and consensual ends. I explore what a "speech act" is when it is conducted online, in writing: an altogether different coding from that understood inside traditions of "speech act theory". What are the social acts performed when participators engage in online chat? Are there recognizable techniques and systems, carried over from real life speech and analyzable within existing linguistic frames, or, once again, is online chat observably developing new and recombinant modes?

Case Study Four

CS 4.0 Introduction

75) <jijirika> *):) at da room
76) <AquarianBlue>** lol@dingo
77) <safetynet10> ** OMG

:) at da room

Examples of chat in this Case Study are from the "astrochat" chatroom, unless otherwise indicated (see appendix a4). As analysis moves into this highly specialised space, the above three turns are provided to show the difficulty of knowing what any particular chat is about, when only a few turns are revealed. The experience is similar to

a conversation overheard or entered without knowing what the topic is, or without sharing knowledge of the specialist subcultural codes or "registers". However, as shown throughout all of these Case Studies, there can also be several conversations going on at any one time, making it difficult to ascertain the topic(s), or to contextualise the various postings into a continuous and comprehensible exchange.

In the table above for example these are three voices, which may not have any conversational connection at all, as they may each be in response to other chat-streams of talk. Yet once again, even with unconnected streams of chat, users are able to begin some degree of interpretive engagement with a site and its talk, once they know the chatroom title, and can begin to interpret the referents behind the texted-talk. The chatroom used on this case study is titled astrochat, one of thousands available through TalkCity.com. I refer to this chatroom as "user defined", in contrast to a chatroom where the topic is open so that the conversation can weave and wander; from sex to religion to baseball to the price of tea in China. Any chatroom can of course attract people who will discuss any topic; however, my research into hundreds of chatrooms has shown that most chatrooms are used by people who go to them for specific discussion on a defined topic. From the first three turns I captured when entering this room, it was clear that talk in this chatroom would indeed be on astrology:

1)	<gina2b> everyones a know it all!
2)	<dingo42> nicole wahts your sign ??
3)	<AquarianBlue> yeah white told me to meet her tonight

Turn number two from <dingo42> asks <nicole wahts your sign ??>, while the third speaker has the user name <AquarianBlue>. The interpretive cues are in place, and the "newby" can expect to rapidly have them confirmed.

In a "user defined" chatroom a user operates within the subject limits of the chat discussion indicated in the title of the chatroom. Chatrooms entitled "astrochat", "jesuschat", "bondagechat" or "54-year-old-white-adelaide-single-hetero-chat" attract users who are specifically interested in those topics. However, as most chatrooms are

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open for anyone to enter at anytime   , the occupants of a chatroom are not necessarily only those who are interested in the topic of the chatroom title. It is common enough for instance as we have already seen, to encounter "lurkers" who enter rooms without participating in the talk, and who may or may not be interested in the topic. It is also not unknown for users to attempt to derail topic-specific chat – especially in attempts to encounter new cyber-sexual partners (see for instance Hamman, 1998, 1999; Albright, 1995; Gilbert, 2000). But

for the most part, designated topic-specific chatroom participants stay on topic, building their talk-relations – and it can be assumed, their online social relations – around the topic. It then becomes possible to ask: What are the distinctions between those two activities? How far is this "specialist" talk focused around the pursuit of knowledge or information and how far around social relational activity more generally? With both encapsulated under the not altogether appropriate term "chat", what are the talk-text cues and behaviours signalling to possible site entrants that this is for "serious informational talk", and not for "light-weight bantering chit-chat"?

To this extent, the "astrochat" site can be anticipated to offer an intermediate space between the identity-formational zone of Britney-speak participants, with their heavily self-expressive modalities, and the more constrained and formal registers of professional "BBS" styled rooms, where identity is suppressed beneath the demands of expert information exchange. At this stage, what my analysis seeks is the revelation of what is being enacted in these conversations. Inside a specialist chat founded on a field of inquiry halfway between scientific knowledge and psychological or spiritual interpretation, should we anticipate objective information provision, or the sorts of identity work outlined in Case Study Three – the Britney site? Will postings display in their talk texting the creative compounding and semiotic layering of self-expressive chat, or a more formal and direct "plainstyle" syntactic structuring? What, in talk terms, is being enacted here – and what can it tell us of the specifics of online chat practice?

CS 4.0.1 Questions

In speaking any language, through no matter which format, we are performing speech acts, making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on (Searle, 1965). Such "speech acts" however vary in their concentrations and occurrences, as we shift from zone to zone, task to task, social group to social group, within our language culture. Each set of speech contexts develops its specialised sets of techniques: from the questioning repertoires of teachers or doctors – interestingly not at all the same repertoires – to the bald assertions of courtroom witnesses, or the distorted but still comprehensible orders of parade-ground sergeants or short-order chefs, to the heavy enactive burdens of such ritual phrases as "I take thee to be my lawful wedded wife", or "I sentence you to seven years penal servitude". But what might the analytical repertoires of Speech Act Theory reveal about the activities of astrochat? In particular, is such chat formed most distinctively around its ostensible topic: astrology, or around the tendencies encountered elsewhere in online chat behaviours – that is, should we anticipate astrology, or chat?

And can we use Speech Act Theory in old or new ways, to describe what the language in a chatroom is doing?

In the first place, can difference be observed between speech online and speech face-to-face, if the topic matter is the same?

Would an online astrological discussion differ from a face-to-face astrological conversation? And if it does, can Speech Act Theory help us to isolate what those differences might be?

CS 4.0.2 Why I chose this chatroom

I selected an astrology chatroom, partly because I have a background in the field, and can therefore anticipate recognising many of the "typical" speech behaviours of this speech community. At the same time, as a specialised knowledge arising largely outside formally recognised accrediting agencies, such as Universities, a relatively unregulated field such as astrology can be expected to have a broader than usual range of variant or "localised", even informal, usages. My selection therefore anticipated both familiar, and unfamiliar, communicative strategies. But how might the conversation in an astrological chatroom be different from that in a

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real room, full of astrologers, discussing the upcoming Saturn opposite Pluto aspect   ?

I had in fact expected that this chatroom would be more technical and advanced in its discussions of astrology than it was. There are astrological sites where one would need to have studied astrology for many years, not only to

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carry on a conversation, but also to understand what anyone else was saying   . The astrochat site was far

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from advanced   in terms of its astrological expertise, yet still displayed significant differences from talk practices in the other chatrooms under examination. Superficially at least, it appeared that it was indeed the online chat status of the discussion, and not the topic, which was most in ascendance in relation to the specifics of the communicative practices – yet that there was also something worthy of analysis in relation to the influence of the topic selection in the development of those communicative practices. How then, might those practices be described?

Speech Act Theory considers communication as a form of human action: the texture of intention and interactive persuasion and control. To examine that texture in a specific chatroom such as this one, I looked for words, including chat-specific forms such as abbreviations and emoticons, which revealed a capacity to produce interactive responses between chat participants. In the example below for instance, it is clear that <dingo42> is asking for a response from <Nicole528> with his direct question: <nicole wahts your sign??> and <Nicole528> responds equally directly: <im a gemini with tauras moon and scorpio rising>.

Traditional grammar recognises three classes of speech act, distinguishable in many languages, on the basis of their form as statements or declaratives, questions or interrogatives, or commands or imperatives. Asking a question is performing a speech act: one that demands a response, and a response of a particular type. Question responses address the issues of the given question, on its own terms. If they do not, the talk breaks down – either from incapacity, or unwillingness, to respond. But in the astrochat sequences, there is clear and immediate evidence of the capacity of all participants to respond in kind. The following turn-taking sequence shows what any user might have expected to find in a chatroom about astrology, and at a level which suggests that most ordinary, non-expert participants could respond.

2)   <dingo42> nicole wahts your sign ??
11) <Nicole528> im a Gemini
31) <Nicole528> whats your sign dingo?
47) <dingo42> im a libra..much scorpio with it...astrlogist after al;l
60) <Nicole528> im a gemini with tauras moon and scorpio rising

Here, <dingo42> has simply asked what sign <Nicole528> is. The querist does not ask to know any more than that. <Nicole528> replies equally simply with <im a Gemini> - an assertion which is however full of significance on an astrological site. <dingo42>, claiming to be an astrologer, <...astrlogist after al;l>, provides more information, addressing both the respondents' information exchange and the field of knowledge, to show how much he or she knows about the topic of astrology. This identifies him or her in two ways. Firstly <dingo42> knows that astrologers are interested in more than one's sun sign. Secondly, <dingo42> indicates that all participants on the site are likely to know that this particular astrological configuration is common among astrologers themselves: that it is a favourable aspect for astrological talent. In other words, <dingo42>'s has the outcome of deepening the information and the relational intensity, at the same time. By passing two additional pieces of information, the statement builds "in group" rapport with the interlocutors. Yet this is an indirect speech act. There is – as with the semiotic loadings in the previous case study - a sense of too much information being provided, as the participant moves from simple question-answer exchange, into a more multi-levelled and multi-acting contribution. Two questions can be asked here. Firstly, why and when do we give more information than is asked for, when telling about ourselves? And secondly, does the initial speech act, initiated by <dingo42> as the original querist, configured as a simple question and answer exchange, in itself invite this sort of elaboration – or is it the chat zone and its curious mix of identity-distantiation and identity foregrounding, which invites this

more complex move? If for example <dingo42> has given more information in order to have <Nicole528> divulge in turn what her or his signs are, then it is important to examine whether the initial, very basic questioning ritual is just the "astrochat" version of IRC's "a/s/l" cue, or an initiating gambit in all astrological conversation.

CS 4.1 Methodology

CS 4.1.1 Transcription

Once again, the collection protocol used in this chatroom is the same as that in the other case studies. I will however look more closely at the actual word sequences written in this chatroom, to discover how a sometimes seemingly incoherent conversation is able to continue. This is a smaller sampling than in other Case Studies, 16 speakers taking 85 turns, where for instance Case Study One had 48 speakers using 275 turns. This chatroom used more abbreviations and emoticons than Case Study One but fewer than Case Study Three. Because there was no emergency involved as in the first chatroom, the talk is less immediately focused. The speakers seem more playful, constructing more linguistically-focused responses, and paying more attention to their performance as they communicate. They are however less expressive than those in Case Study Three, marking the intermediacy of the topic focus: by no means open conversation, yet not altogether disconnected from self-expressive "identity work" of the Case 3 type.

CS 4.1.2 Speech Act Theory

The method of analysis for this case study is based on Speech-Act Theory, a theory of language use based on J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (second edition, 1975), the major premise of which is that language is as much, if not more, a mode of action as it is a means of conveying information (Henderson, Greig and Brown, Christopher, 1997). Speech Act Theory was developed to explain how we use language to accomplish the goals of speech acts. Many utterances are equivalent to actions. When someone says: "I name this ship" or "I now pronounce you man and wife", the utterance creates a new social or psychological reality (Austin, 1962). Whether this occurs in this chatroom – and how - will be directly examined in this case study.

Speech acts in a chatroom are not exactly in talk mode, as discussed earlier in this study – and yet both forms are clearly interactive real-time communications. The "speech act" when it is conducted as written text has an altogether different coding from the coding of speech acts in person-to-person conversation. Firstly, whether the chat occurs in a chatroom where people are using voice or typing, what are missing are the physical cues

so important in other communications. As my study has been based on text only chatrooms the taking away of

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voice makes it difficult to identify the speaker through tone, gender or age. Using Austin's identifying of speech coding into locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts such as performatives it has however still been possible to look at a particular chatroom to try and discover how meaning is exchanged using only a few characters on the screen. Locutionary acts for instance, which define the intentions of speakers while speaking, are dominant in the early exchanges in the astrochat site, discussed above. But, as we have also seen already, these relatively basic statement structures move quite quickly into more complex forms – and it is this transformation, which demands some attention.

CS 4.2 Discussion

My focus in this chatroom is thus initially on the "speech-act", at its simplest terms. Even at this most reduced of levels, it is important to test whether the contributions made produce an "unhappy" response or a "happy" response - to use the terms of Austin (1962) and Searle (1965, 1969). *Speech Acts* involve uttering identifiable words that are perceived as coherent to members of a given speech community (Gudykunst and Kim 1997 p. 153). But, from the start, we have difficulty with this concept in the chatroom setting. For example, is there a speech act in the example below?

<AquarianBlue>
12) /\9 hehe
29) /\26 sniff sniff
34) /\32 hmmmmmmm
42) /\40 ** wb jiji
76) /\61 ** lol@dingo

Here, in speech terms, the communication appears reduced to the paralinguistic, including sniffs, murmurs, and laugh markers. But in chat terms, there is also complex abbreviation work; some of it conventional – such as "lol"; some compounding convention and originality – lol@dingo - and some seemingly entirely original. The exchanges thus work at a level beneath speech act activity – perhaps as holding devices to register attention without any active contribution, rather in the manner of linguistic "continuers" such as "yeah" or "aha". But at the same time, given their appropriation of chat conventions, they also make clearly interpretable speech

act contributions, stating, albeit in abbreviated form, such responses as "you make me laugh"; "you make me weep" – or perhaps "cry with laughter"; "I am bemused by what's going on", and "I am laughing out loud at Dingo". They are declaratives, with the added expressive load and affiliative-relational codes typical of online chat.

At first sight then the status of chatroom talk in general seems obvious and unproblematic. Surely the chatroom is a speech act community. There are speech exchanges and even continuous conversations. Yet this is a most unusual conversational milieu, which has never before appeared in any society. Chatrooms can after all produce a never-ending conversation. They are quantitatively different. There are thousands of chatrooms available on the Internet with no set hours of operation. Moderated chatrooms may have a set time, and people can meet an authority on a topic or a famous person and talk to them, but in other chatrooms one could spend days without leaving, and carry on continuous conversation. Even though people come and go, and potentially the

<div align="center">[135]</div>

same person could be in a chatroom with several usernames   chatting as different identities, there is continuous interactive dialogue, just as there would be in a real-life setting where everyone knows one another. But at the same time they also appear to be qualitatively different. Their talk texting seems to fulfil and yet not fulfil the definitions for speech acts: to be both inside and outside its registers. So is this perhaps a new set of speech act forms? And how far is it the situation in which this speech occurs, which is driving such changes?

CS 4.2.1 Speech situations as speech events

The choice of the term "speech event" to describe text-based chatroom exchanges may be seen to endorse the view that such exchanges are a form of speech, i.e. a conversation. A number of researchers have examined this question (Shank, 1993; Veselinova & Dry, 1995; Maynor, 1994) and the general consensus is that of Shank (1993):

> Is Net communication like conversation? Quite a bit. Messages on the Net tend to be informal, to be phrased in conversational form, and can engender a great deal of direct and dyadic interchange. Is Net communication like writing? Absolutely. Messages are written instead of spoken.

"Speech situations" (chatroom situations) are composed of "speech events" (chatroom events) (Hymes, 1974) and these activities have rules governing the use of speech within particular circumstances - e.g. getting-to-know-you conversations - (Gudykunst and Kim 1997 p. 328). Often though, the whole chat, or the entire chatroom event, is little more than a "getting-to-know-you" conversation. I have found from my research on many chat sites that most statements are of the greeting type:

32) <Night-Goddess_> anyone cool in here?

At this level at least, Speech Act Theory helps us to understand the preponderance of this sort of entry on "open" chat sites, where general conversational rules must be deployed in the absence of clear topic-focus guidelines. But to understand Speech Act Theory more thoroughly and what it offers for chatroom analysis, we must first look more closely at the vocabulary of speech act theorists.

Speech Act Theory as with most schools of thought has its own sets of terms. There is a specialist language to explain the language of speech acts. Most of these terms and ideas originated with Austin (1962), with Searle (1969, 1975) later developing Austin's insights.

John Austin's original classification of speech acts separates acts which are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary, including acts which are informative, performative, expressive, directive, commissive, declarative, and representative, each seeking to operate within those "felicity conditions" which will produce an appropriate speech act in response. Such utterances can in the first instance be analysed using the basic threefold distinction: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

CS 4.2.1.1 Locutionary

A locutionary act is simply the speech act which has taken place, regardless of its intentional or enactive role. In a text-based chatroom locutions are the typed symbols that signify talk, including even for example the paralinguistic elements noted above, such as <hehe> <sniff sniff>. While we may also – as above – attribute more complex intentional and enactive loads to these entries, at this level they are simply registered as speech acts.

| 14) <Nicole528> 5-28<--- hehe |
| 29) <AquarianBlue> sniff sniff |

CS 4.2.1.2 Illocutionary

An illocutionary act is a complete speech act, made in an utterance which typically consists of the delivery of some propositional content within the utterance, and connected to it a particular illocutionary force, whereby the speaker asserts, demands, vows, names, promises, apologizes, congratulates or suggests. Illocutionary acts refer to real actions which will eventuate from the messages performed by the utterance, where saying equals doing. At the illocutionary level the chatter in effect provides interpretation of the sentences as they enact the speech. For example, <Night-Goddess_> utters <bye> in line 59. There is not only this word typed into the chatroom,

but <Night-Goddess_> actually leaves the room.

An illocutionary act also therefore has an effect on the hearer. Austin calls this effect the perlocutionary act.

CS 4.2.1.3 Perlocutionary

The perlocutionary act is the effect of an utterance. "This means that every utterance can be analysed as the realization of the speaker's intent to achieve a particular purpose" (Eggins & Slade 1997, p. 40). Perlocutionary acts include persuading, intimidating and incriminating. Perlocutionary and illocutionary speech acts are both found in this chatroom. Yet sometimes the medium used is so reduced that the speech act may not be immediately obvious.

1) <gina2b> everyones a know it all!
25) <gina2b> coocoocoocoo
56) <gina2b> /\47 coolfool

Perlocutionary and illocutionary chat acts

A perlocutionary act is present here, despite the extreme reduction of the formatting. <gina2b> begins the session – or at least the section which I recorded - with a statement intended to indicate her evaluation of others in the chatroom, by responding to an earlier utterance. (Its actual content is unknown as the previous utterance has not been a "captured" statement). There was it appears a response from others and a discussion concerning who was "cool" in this chatroom, which led <gina2b> into making one final summarising statement in my recorded session: "coolfool", in turn 56.

Here, none of <gina2b>'s statements can easily be given clear attribution as this or as that speech act. While both posting 25 and 56 can be regarded as perlocutionary acts, because they assert, or at least suggest, an evaluative summary of another participant and their behaviour, both the reduced form – again, almost paralinguistic – and the wordplay: the assonance and compounding of "coolfool" and the onomatapoeic pigeon-cooing of "coocoocoocoo", add so much to the impact of a simple act of assertion, as to shift its significance as a speech act. As a perlocutionary act is a speech act that produces an effect, intended or not, achieved in an addressee by a speaker's utterance, <gina2b>'s utterance must be interpreted as an insult – and yet one designed to impress others in the chat group, and to elicit supportive agreement alongside the stringent criticism.

The complexity of the speech situation here however raises the question of whether, in Speech Act Theory terms, chat spaces provide "felicity conditions" for the deployment of such perlocutionary ventures.

A speech act is felicitous when it is uttered by the appropriate speaker, directed toward the appropriate hearer,

and uttered at the appropriate time and place. If one or more of the above are not satisfied, the act is infelicitous.

A speech act thus has to be appropriate in both immediate context, and within social conventions more generally. Here <gina2b>'s contributions are clearly felicitous within the closed context of the chat forum, as she enacts the quick-response but heavily meaning-laden summary forms of chat communication, to indicate to a set of preferred participants, her views of the behaviour of another. As appears typical of chat participants, especially in expert or semi-expert groups, who share sufficient social capital to assume common values, <gina2b> is confident that her postings will enjoy felicity conditions – so much so, that she can code them in subtle, indirect ways, where the "appropriate hearers" can enjoy the wit, and be relied upon to interpret the correct message for themselves.

CS 4.2.1.4 Performatives

According to John Austin (1962), there is quite often more going on than the actual definitions or semantic loadings of words that we share in person-to-person conversation. Austin used the terms "performatives" and "constative" acts to describe some of these activities, and both categories have much to offer analysis of chatroom speech acts.

Verbs in Virtual Communities such as chatrooms often have a specially allocated perfomative function. In virtual environments, verbs such as "open", "close", "lift", "move", are specialised performatives, in that they they perform actions to open another screen on the computer (see Cicognani, 1996, 1997, 2000). For example in a chatroom that has private rooms one can click on the "open" button and the screen will change to where only the person selected to speak with is present.

In a chatroom, performatives thus include words, emoticons, acronyms and abbreviations; elements that can "do" instead of merely "describing". For a speech act to perform and be successful, two qualities must be present. Firstly, the speaker and addressee must share a common language. If a chat participant instructs another to "move", it must be understood that this is used within the conventions of chat space, and not those of the physical realm. Even at this most basic of levels, it is thus obvious that chat has its own set of felicity conditions, which experienced participants will deploy as the preferred usage, at least while in the chat space. This however, I suggest, cues chat users to extend specialised usages and in turn anticipate them in other users, so that the sorts of multi-loaded wordplay we saw in <gina2b>'s postings, or in the more general use of emoticons or abbreviations, become common and readily comprehensible.   Chatroom users must then come to allocate the same meanings for abbreviations and emoticons. Only then can participants work to create within these known repertoires – as <gina2b> does, with her "coocoocoocoo" play on the term "cool".

Secondly, within these new codings, the speaker must work to make an utterance understandable. A creative posting – one which uses new or original abbreviations or wordplay forms – must still be sufficiently within the felicity conditions of the chat coterie to be received and to activate its intended meaning(s). And it is, I suggest, a function of the specialist topic within focused chatrooms to guarantee this. <gina2b>'s postings work in this space, because here she has an interlocutory group sufficiently consensual in its values, to be able to discriminate and exclude. And part of that consensus is established not in established semantic loading, but in performance – as it is with her message of judgement. One participant is being summarily dismissed not just by being described as "foolish because attempting to appear cool", but as a "coolfool" – a speech act which is presented for the subculturally defined pleasure of the "ingroup" interlocutors, as much as to enact the dismissal of the miscreant who has occasioned the judgement.

A performative utterance includes its own successful performance. Saying it, and saying it this way, makes it so. This constitutes the conditions that a performative must meet if it is to be appropriate or successful. According to Austin, the performative "I pronounce you man and wife" will be effective in marrying people only under the conditions that the person uttering it is qualified to solemnize marriages that it forms part of a marriage ceremony that the couple have agreed to marry, and so on. A performative is an utterance in which a speaker does something by the act of speaking, and is acknowledged as having the power to do so. In online chat communities such stable relations and status hierarchies are both less clearly demarked, and more fluid. Here, <gina2b> claims power, with the reductive and dismissive formulation of her words: it is the aesthetics of her posting which guarantee her status and capacity to judge. In chat space, this is a crucial marker. Since real social or cultural status is unknown, the postings alone must indicate how "qualified" individual chatters are. And it is in the verbal techniques they are able to deploy that their status is displayed.

There are constant instances of postings which at first sight appear to be simple performative statements, but which also display this dual sense of "chat activating" verbs, and of the doubled "chat cultural" loading. Performative verbs are used to perform the acts they name. In the sentence "I promise not to lie", the verb "promise" is performative, because it carries out the action it describes. Such verbs are in other words self-referential, in that they describe their own actions and execute them at the same time. When < tazzytaz1o1> in line 64 says <is Outta here! > he or she is leaving - and in saying so both describes the content of the promise (to leave) and makes it so. Yet once again, the form in which this is done doubles what the term signifies. Not only does this enact in chat technology terms the activation of "enter" and "exit", but it does so with a colloquial and youth-cultural coding: "outa here!" not just as an escape, but with the implication of "better action elsewhere: your loss…"

In typically reduced form, the posting carries both a (dual) performative and an evaluative load.

Are there then other speech act types which can help explain this multi-loading tendency in chat postings – and especially in those within culturally consensual or topic-focused spaces? One possibility is the use of the constative act. A constative utterance is used to describe a state of affairs. It has the property of being true or false. Constatives can be concurring, insisting, affirming, disputing, claiming, identifying, conjecturing, informing, predicting, disagreeing, alleging, ranking, announcing, answering, stating, attributing, classifying, confirming, denying, disclosing, reporting or stipulating. The performance utterance, by contrast, can never be either true or false: it has its own special job; it is used to perform an action. What a performative says, it also does.

It is surely significant that, within the astrochat site, constatives outnumber performatives – and that even in the more relational acts of affirming, disputing, disclosing, and so on, utterances are "mitigated"; coloured by consensual codings, typical of although not exclusive to chatrooms, which endorse consensus and act to confirm membership of a specialist speech community. Constatives move closer to this central chat agenda, since their purpose cannot be checked by simply looking at the actual utterance, on its own terms. Context, not activational power in the semantic loading, creates constative utterances as meaningful. There need to be other words, (or abbreviations or emoticons) to mark the reception conditions of the utterance. One needs for instance in chat to know what particular abbreviations and emoticons represent. For example, <AquarianBlue> on the astrochat site states <wb jiji>. If one entered this conversation at this point one would have no idea, without seeing previous utterances, what this means or refers to. However, knowing only the previous two turns, it is clear that <jijirika> has returned to the room, and the abbreviation "wb jiji" can be interpreted as <AquarianBlue> saying "welcome back to jijirika". To this extent at least the speech act is responsive to context: it reacts, rather than enacts – and this degree of inter-relational sensitivity appears crucial within chatsite talk. Add to it the familiarity implied in the use of the intensified diminutive ("jiji", not "jijirika"), the warmth of welcome even after temporary absence, and the deployment of abbreviation, anticipating a chat-form expertise from the group, and <AquarianBlue>'s posting is working more to affirm, claim, classify, and confirm the affective and relational elements of a communicative exchange, than to produce actions. Chat talk, distantiated from physicality in its relational space, appears to refocus away from actions and into transactions.

When action-dependant statements do occur in "astrochat", they are often marked by reference to activities "off-site", in the real or physical world. Two types of performatives, contractual (I will) and declaratory (I do), help illustrate the point.

In the example below <AquarianBlue> is reporting that he/she has already planned to meet "white" in this chatroom. The character "white" does not appear in the chatroom selections for this data corpus, however only fifteen minutes of the conversation were collected. There is no contractual statement present, since <white> does not appear to negotiate the agreement with <AquarianBlue>. Instead, <AquarianBlue> works constatively, to report the arranged meeting to others:

3) <AquarianBlue> yeah white told me to meet her tonight

Contractual

In fact there is an entire chat thread about this person. Two others, <judythejedi> and <IroquoisPrncess>, are also looking forward to meeting "white", not only in this chatroom, but physically. Here the speech acts not only move closer to those of real world chat: constatives, binding the group through references to planned, agreed, negotiated, promised ACTIONS – the sorts of things which can only happen in real life – but the utterances ease away from the sorts of "chat styling" we are coming to see as a principal online mode. Here there are few abbreviations, no emoticons, and little wordplay of any sort. The playful "colouring" which loads onto language when its activating component becomes limited is here far less necessary as a community binding technique. Real communing is planned, looked forward to, and talked about. There is a referent act under discussion, which focuses the talk and demands far less creative or affective compensatory texting.

In part this "over-loading" of chat utterances with relational or constative work responds then to the conditions of online chat technologies. For a performative utterance to be successful several conditions are necessary – and these are often either absent, or rendered difficult, in chatrooms.

In the first instance the words, including emoticons or abbreviations, need to be appropriate to the circumstances. But in a chatroom there can be much confusion in locating appropriate responses. The thread that the response is part of needs to be identified, most often under pressure from competing and interrupting postings. Secondly, the response must be appropriate and intelligible, not only as it is entered, but also as it arrives in the chat sequence. For example,

84) <Nicole528> yea

Successful performative

does not provide a successful response in any way unless it is referring to turn 82,

82) <dingo42> just VERY passionated

Response to?

Only two turns prior to the "yea", this assertion invites a response, in particular with its capitalised intensifier – and <Nicole528>'s ready agreement provides consent – even more powerfully, because <Nicole528> and <dingo42> have been carrying on an interchangeable thread. However, <Nicole528> could be answering other speakers. Her utterance is too broadly applicable to link with certainty to <dingo42>'s opinion.

As in real life conversation, where someone just acknowledges an utterance or offers a continuer by saying "OK", or "yea" when someone announces they are present, or asks a generalized question, the affirmative as response has many possible uses.

> 65) <tazdevil144> so hows every one to day

One might expect that <tazdevil144> who has just entered the chatroom is going to receive a response from others as one would if entering any group of people. We would expect a response such as "we are fine" or "I am a bit sad today" or some such returned speech, but in this chat there was not any response to <tazdevil144>'s question. This not answering a question or responding to what one has said is not unusual in chatroom dialogue. What then is the speech act role of such questions?

Greetings in a chatroom are one of the most often used speech acts. Most often someone will announce his or her arrival in a room by making some form of greeting. Although in turn 64 <tazdevil144> says <so hows every one to day>, as this is his or her first utterance it is less a question than a marker of the beginning of their interaction with the others in the room. In some chatrooms when a person logs on a message will appear with that person's log on name. For example, the India chatroom has an auto-welcome and farewell cue:

> ***jagat (202.141.24) India/ Welcome!!!
>
> ***rahul (202.9.172) has left location India
>
> ***Preet assi vi vadiya ncg
>
> *** neuage (198.175.242) India / Welcome!!!

Log on message

In the astrochat chatroom this does not occur. <tazdevil144>'s utterance <so hows every one to day> is thus a generalised welcome greeting, undirected to any particular participant, and as yet not engaged into any conversational thread. In chat, we must therefore read through the lens of the communicative technology –

here enabling us to see that what in speech act terms is a question, in chat terms is the equivalent of an impersonal and technically generated welcome cue. That <tazdevil 144> produces his greeting in standard speech form, and not in the wordplay colourings of the astrochat group, may contribute to his slow acceptance into the speech community – another feature which invites critical scruntiny of just how far chat utterances depart from those of real life communication.

Speech Act Theory, depending on whose definition is being followed, refers to greetings as "expressives" (Searle, 1965, 1969), "behabitives" (Austin, 1962) and "acknowledgments" (Bach and Harnish, 1979). Yet in chat speech, we have already seen these linguistic elements adapted and coloured into new codings, through abbreviations, emoticons, and various other forms of intensive wordplay. Greetings like <taz devil 144>'s, with its generalised address and its real-life word choices, indicates to an expert and consensual group such as the astrochatters that this incomer may not be able to operate within the behaviours and codes of their communicative group. Unless he or she can move quickly into chat-mode forms, entry into the threads will be slow.

CS 4.2.2 Searle

[136]

Philosopher John Searle   classified speech acts into five categories: Commissives, Expressives, Declarations, Directives and Representatives.

CS 4.2.2.1 Commissives

Commissives involve agreeing, guaranteeing, inviting, offering, promising, swearing and volunteering. Once again, given the distancing of chat space from the capacity to directly enact through language, commissives are rare.

With commissives, speakers commit themselves to a future course of action, as <judythejedi> does below:

> 26) <judythejedi> /\24 she'll stop in west palm , then i'll take her to Miami for a seminar

> 4) <Seoni> ** brb littletaker beak lol

Commissives

Here the action is very clearly promised for the real world, in named places. In chat space those few actions which can be undertaken – most often still relating to real world activity – are frequently coded into

conventional abbreviations, so that when <Seoni> leave the site for a moment, presumably to undertake some real life demand, she signals with "brb" - "I'll be right back".

This tendency to reduction of performative utterances adds to the rebalancing that is going on inside chat, from performatives to expressives. Since real life enactability intrudes on chat, it is among the reduced elements of the talk.

CS 4.2.2.2 Expressives

The expressive function of language is to tell others our attitudes, feelings, and emotions, including the speech activities of apologizing, welcoming, or sympathizing. Expressives are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker feels. They express psychological states and can be statements of pleasure, pain, like, dislike, joy, or sorrow, such as saying "I'm so happy!" or "It depressed me".

Even in these more relational elements of language online chat tends to use reductive and coded forms. In these two examples we have "sniff sniff" as in the sounds of one crying to express how <AquarianBlue> is feeling about a situation, while <Seoni> expresses anger about a personal matter. In turn 81 <Seoni> lets others know how he or she feels about the electric company. Here, where the real world referents might mean that we anticipate the full-form texting we have seen elsewhere, since <Seoni> is actually more intent on expressive utterance for her chat colleagues than on activating talk to redress her problems in the real world, the chat is rich in abbreviations and codes. <Seoni> uses abbreviations to emphasize the hurriedness of the situation. <brb> - be right back – is used twice in this utterance, while in <cll> the vowel "a" is left out, and the electric company is shortened to <elc>. Only when <Seoni> reaches the level of graphic curse ("they can kiss my white ass") does she move fully into complete formal language, asserting rejection of an assumed responsibility (paying a bill) by transforming the "payment" it into an obscene action, with herself as the recipient.

29) <AquarianBlue> /\26 sniff sniff
81) <Seoni> **is confused brb gotta cll the elc company i dont owe them they can kiss my white ass brb

Expressives

While the conventions of the curse mean that it could operate in the rather more figurative and non-literal talk of the chat space, here its intention to express anger intensifies its physicality, and so makes it appropriate to the real world intrusion. How then is rejection of this sort handled inside a chatroom?

CS 4.2.2.3 Declarations

Searle uses Austin's term "declaratives" to describe speech acts intended to change one's world. The speaker of an utterance brings about a new external situation by use of a declarative, eg. christening, resigning, marrying. Declaratives – indeed all performatives - are more useful in MUDs and virtual games, where a verb such as "open" performs an action of opening another space or room (Cicognani, 1996). In chatrooms there are several performative commands, such as, "Whisper". By using the keystrokes /w a participant turns on the whisper command. Whispering allows one to say something privately to another individual chatter. Other chatters will see the whispering, but they cannot hear what is being said. The "Ignore" mode, using the keystrokes /I, turns on the ignore function. You may "boot" people out of the chatroom with the "Boot" command. This parameter is however configurable by the room owner and may not be allowed in all chatrooms. Some chatrooms have a "booting level" which corresponds to the number of different people who have to move to "boot" someone before they are knocked out of the room for a certain period of time. These functions may have different related keystrokes in different chatrooms and not all chatrooms have these functions. More importantly though, does this "technologisation" of the declarative's hyper-performative function – a mode something akin to Startrek's famous line: "Make it so!" – influence the broader use of declaratives in chatroom talk?

In this case study there is various forms of performatives used as enacting markers when users are coming and leaving the chatroom:

48) <Seoni> **brb littletaker beak lol
59) <Night-Goddess_>bye
64) < tazzytaz1o1> is Outta here!

Performatives

40) <jijirika>is back
62) <jijirika>climbs back up the tree
72) <jijirika> toodles taz
75) <jijirika> *) :) at da room
80) <jijirika> as she quietly drinks her water

In these captured turns <jijirika> uses only the available commands. Her postings are thus a curious form of commentary on her actions: a teasing notation of her use of inserted activators. More than any other single element of chat practice, this indicates the shift between real life and chat speech. In chat, declarations seldom change an external or non-linguistic situation. Chatrooms are virtual spaces, and unless there is a real person-to-person resultant contact following the chatroom exchange, declarations are not a classification which can be used. The limitations on action equate to limitations on speech acts.

CS 4.2.2.4 Directives

Directives are speech acts that include advising, admonishing, asking, begging, dismissing, excusing, forbidding, instructing, ordering, permitting, requesting, requiring, suggesting, urging and warning.

With directives, the speaker wants the listener to do something. But since this "something" can be verbal rather than physical, directives are possible speech acts in chat spaces. This is in fact one of the most common speech acts in a chatroom. Below, the chatter <dingo42> wants the listener, Nicole, to state her sign.

2) <dingo42> nicole wahts your sign ??

The invitation is typical of chat utterances, in that it attends to the conditions of multilogue, naming the required respondent, as it opens space for reciprocal exchange. It is an indirect directive, inviting rather than commanding response – and as such once again helps to build the reciprocity and communal ethos of such expert chatspaces as astrochat.

What happens then once this communal consensus is in place? Does a chatroom reach complete agreement on its rules of communicability? Is it clearly expressing its social values, and is that one of its peak goals, given the diminished capacity for performative or enacting talk?

CS 4.2.2.5 Representatives

Representatives are speech acts which convey belief about the truth of a proposition, as for instance in asserting, or hypothesizing (Crystal, 1992, p121). They are speech acts which state what the speaker believes to be the case or not; for example, "The earth is flat".

In using a representative, a speaker makes words fit his or her world (or at least, his or her world of belief). Such representatives occur relatively often in chat spaces.

35) <judythejedi> /\32 everyone is cool here

73) <safetynet10> EVERYONE WANTS THE TRUTH BUT NO ONE GETS IT

Representatives and truth statements

<judythejedi> responds to earlier thread contributions, discussing the behaviours of a participant over-keen to appear "cool". She is in effect mitigating the impacts of that participant's claims to a superior "coolness", by representing a consoling belief in the shared "cool" of her community. Because her contribution is doubly contextualised: acting within both the conversational thread and the community of chatters, she is able to "represent" safely and without demur. Her speech act is – at least tacitly – accepted, and needs no reply. But <safetynet10>, with no one previously having made any comments about truth, has decided to make a representative utterance to the chatroom concerning "truth". This is a big claim – perhaps reflected in its capitalization. There may indeed be truth in the proposition that "EVERYONE WANTS THE TRUTH BUT NO ONE GETS IT", but not only is there no proof for the truth of a statement which refers to "everyone", but no one responds to this statement in the next twelve turns (all that is recorded for the data corpus). Here tacit agreement of the type acceded to <judythejedi>'s posting seems less likely. Perhaps participants need time to digest the referents: a universal (off site) "everyone" or a direct accusation directed at participants on this site ("you are all concealing the truth from one another, even while seeking it for yourselves"). In either case, the posting is not pursued – an indication of the need for contextualised posting, especially when assuming the task of representative statements.

Reading the conversational contexts is however a complex and multi-levelled task – and one which, as we have seen, defies the skills of some participants. Even with those chatroom users immersed in the abbreviated forms which enable fast texting, the chat technology often limits attribution, and so reply. For instance, when <tazdevil144> produces this isolated ripost:

83) <tazdevil144> ** lol

lol as answer

<tazdevil144>'s utterance could have been in response to many other utterances in the chatroom, including any of the three previous contributions:

80) <jijirika> as she quietly drinks her water

<Seoni> **is confused brb gotta cll the elc company i dont owe them 157 they can kiss my white ass brb

82) <dingo42> just VERY passionated

In a prior turn at 78 <tazdevil144> had invited a participant to take up a particular speech act:

<tazdevil144> in turn 78) <tazdevil144> do be so rude

To a general reader none of the following turns in 80, 81 and 82 seem to fulfill this request, however, to <tazdevil144> one of the answers does enough to give the response (lol).

One difference between chatrooms and person-to-person conversation is thus the relative indeterminacy of chatroom exchanges. Because no observable actions result, an "unlinking" occurs within the speech act sequencing. Overall, this produces a refocus on and intensification of those elements of speech which construct consensus and community. Even those speech events which do relate to activation – for instance those planning meetings or activities outside the chatroom and in the real world – focus around qualities rather than activities; values rather than actions.

13) <judythejedi> /\6 i can't wait to meet her in person

17) <AquarianBlue> /\13 your meeting her judy? when?

While this is planning talk directed towards the act of meeting socially in the physical world – talk with outcomes – it still forms around emotional states such as the pleasures of anticipation.

 When <AquarianBlue> in turn /\6 evaluates a non-present participant, his comment at first sight seems inappropriate to the physicality of the posting which preceded it:

6) <AquarianBlue> /\5 shes a sweetheart

5) <judythejedi> she almost had me peeing my pants i was laughing so hard

Here though <judythejedi>'s description is mitigated by "almost". With one addition she shifts focus from the physicality of her own response, to the figurative and expressive. She "almost" peed her pants, and so intensifies the humour and the trust of her relation with both <AquarianBlue> and the unnamed and non-present site participant. At the same time, she shifts the talk firmly back into the chat tendency of relational community-building. There was "almost", but not in fact, any action here.

How far is this produced by the technologising of online chat; the rapidly developing tendencies to the establishment of "consensual" or "communal" talk strategies, compensating the non-physicality of the communicative experience with saturating expressivity and relational techniques?

The features that I have highlighted in this chatroom are features of all chatrooms. The first is the disruption of the dialogue, caused by the technologisation of the "threading" onto the chat participant's screen. There are several ways in which this occurs. Firstly, there are the threads which break away from initial dialogue exchange to begin another one. Unlike a printed story which has a single or at least a dominant message, a chatroom has many messages, and even many threads from the same author. A new thread can be from a person already in dialogue with others, but who wants to begin discussing something else, or it can be from a new arrival in the room. Continuing with the chat above, turn-taking 33 shows an example of a new thread from someone who has not yet produced an utterance in this room, which cuts into two quite separate dialogues:

| 31) <judythejedi> i don't think so..she's bringing amtrack down maybe |
| 32) <Nicole528> whats your sign dingo? |
| 33) <Night-Goddess_> anyone cool in here? |

Following <Night-Goddess_>'s opening utterance [anyone cool in here?] a new thread develops:

33)	A/	/\32	5i.	<judythejedi> hi night
34)	D/	/\32	3h.	<AquarianBlue> hmmmmmmm
35)	D/	/\32	5j.	<judythejedi>everyone is cool here
36)	D/	/\32	6h.	<Nicole528> is cool lol
37)	A/	/\35	11a.	<poopaloo> 10ty judy
38)	D/	/\32	6i.	<Nicole528> is cold too
39)	?		12a.	* sara4u I LOVE YOU TO MUCH.......ACARD
40)	B/		13a.	<jijirika>is back
41)	D/	/\32	15a.	<tazdevil144> cool

For this series of speech acts to be completed within the performative mode there needs to be an understanding of what is actually being said by <Night-Goddess_>. <Nicole528> for instance plays across the ambiguity in the

term "cool", reading it as both "trendy" and climatically "cold". <AquarianBlue> and <judythejedi> and even <poopaloo> however consider how to respond to the issue of trendiness, <poopaloo> scoring <judythejedi> a "10" for asserting group cohesion around the proposition that some might be more "cool" than others – while <tazdevil144> endorses the solidarity among the group, and its resistance to hierarchical evaluations, by commenting that it is equally "cool" that <jijirika> has announced a return to the room. Overall then, we can see in this thread extremely high levels of affiliative or "group" talk, resistant to suggestions that some might be more worthwhile ("cool") as chat participants than others: "everyone is cool here". And yet, whatever the work undertaken to reinforce group cohesion and repair solidarity, there is a disruption to the original narrative about a person travelling to Florida on an Amtrak train. Here the chat enacts its own focus: "maintains cool", by shifting into witty and consensual ripostes across this new topic.

CS 4.2.3 Speech Act Disruptions (SADs)

Besides complex crossovers in threads in a chatroom discussion there are other disruptions that are particular to chat. On many chatsites there are advertisements from the chatroom provider. After every so many lines of text, which differs from server to server, there will be an ad to purchase something available from the server. This disrupts the conversational flow. However, after observing this in hundreds of chatrooms I have never seen anyone refer to the advertisement. Instead, participants continue what they were discussing or begin a new topic or thread of conversation. Disruptions then are frequently an ignored speech act – whether auto-cued as advertising, or posted by new or new-thread-initiating chat participants. In other words, no matter the intention of a thread-initiating speech act, it may or may not activate its purpose – and indeed, such activation seems especially difficult within the expressive-consensual talk of chatrooms. In these spaces it seems that the unlinking, or at least the over-extended distantiation, between the utterance and what it might enact, works to de-emphasise and weaken the traditional performative, instead refocusing on the consensual-expressive.

CS 4.3 Conclusion

Using Speech Act Theory as a means to identify how chat participants communicate and find meaning in a chatroom suffers from the marked indeterminacy of the "response" mode in online chat technologisation. Speech acts are difficult to code, and Speech Act Theory difficult to use as a conversational analysis method in chatrooms. It is equally difficult too to know how much of the intentional load might be carried by para-linguistic elements such as emoticons or abbreviations, elements which can only be semi-coded into this system of analysis, thus even

further distantiating the enactment potential of utterances.

The question to be answered in this chatroom at the beginning of this case study was, in Speech Act terms,

"Are 'felicity conditions' being met in this chatroom?"

Before the question can be answered, it is necessary to raise other matters. What is a successful speech act in a chatroom? And do the special codings: the abbreviated forms and expressive techniques particular to online chat, add to or detract from successful speech acts? Only then can the sorts of performative repertoires evolving in chat be assessed. And once again, a complex and variable set of communicative behaviours appears to be under way online.

Some final examples of particularly "chat represented" speech acts might help resolve these issues.

Remember that in the chat sequence outlined above, <AquarianBlue> offered a paralinguistic continuer when directly questioned, along with others, over the degress of "coolness" in the room.

> 34) <AquarianBlue> /\32 hmmmmmmmm

It is not easy to determine the intention of this utterance. Austin and Searle claim that the speech act is the basic unit of meaning and force, or the most basic linguistic entity, with both a constative and a performative dimension. They both accept that there are illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts, and that these can combine. Here then, "hmmmmmm" can be interpreted to offer a vision of <AquarianBlue> pondering on either <NightGodess>'s question, "anyone cool in here", or <judythejedi>'s revelation that (someone) is taking the Amtrak train. And since these are somewhat different propositions, the act performed by "hmmmmm" becomes as indeterminate as the very suspension it induces within <AquarianBlue>'s contributions.

In other words, the technologisations of online chat interfere with what Lanow has called "wreadings" – writerly interpretations – of the utterances, and defuse their certain attribution as speech acts. There are many such instances in this data corpus. When <safetynet10> comments on truth:

> 73) <safetynet10> EVERYONE WANTS THE TRUTH BUT NO ONE GETS IT

We at first assume that <safetynet10> is shouting at the others – perhaps accusing them of suppressing their real opinions. However, other utterances of <safetynet10> (appendix 2 table 15) reveal that all their text is in capitals, meaning that <safetynet10> either has the capital key locked on, or wishes to claim status over other participants. Once again, it is difficult to determine exactly what is either intended, or produced.

Even misspelt words can provide "wreaderly" meaning online, although usually the most likely meaning is that the writer is typing quickly or is not overly concerned with spelling conventions. However, what it does show is that the writer has decided that the addressee is comfortable with having to interpret what is being said. In other words the speaker is more intent on presenting text than grammar, and is consensually open to (mis)interpretation.

Unless a person is being directly addressed, meaning is often unknowable in a chatroom.

21) <dingo42> ok nicole its in the air

With this posting, even careful contextual analysis leaves the meaning unresolvable to an outsider – and maybe to insiders. Sometimes we can anticipate a seemingly obvious response:

17) <AquarianBlue> your meeting her judy? when?

But in each case, describing what is going on in a text-based chatroom using Speech Act Theory has limited use, and often produces indeterminate outcomes, working more to illustrate the differences between online and off-line talk, than to resolve the role of each posting. What appears to be needed is a system which can read "speech acts plus" the "uses" of a posting-statement, plus its performative and expressive loadings, and the particular contextual forms evident within the posting and its surrounding talk-texts. Accordingly, in the next case study I use Discourse Analysis to analysis "language beyond the utterance", or within linguistic studies, "beyond the sentence".

Case Study Five

CS 5.0 Introduction

In this case study I proceed to examine a general or non-topic-specific chatroom. A general chatroom is not listed under any specific category and topics of discussion or chat have no prescribed direction or purpose, unless the participants decide, seemingly at random, to follow a topic thread together.

[137]

I took the dialogue I am primarily concerned with in this case study from a Talkcity chat one afternoon. It consists of some 89-turns and has eleven "speakers". My purpose in using this particular chat was to examine a chatroom with a short turn-taking series, to discover if, even in a passing and apparently casual conversation, there was enough time to establish a communicative community amongst the chatters present: to sense the

operations of either a site-specific discourse under formation, or a generalised "chat" discourse, controlling all chat. The whole chat I saved lasted only twelve minutes. If this chat were recorded over a twenty-four hour period, there would have been approximately 10,500 turns; and if there had been a continuation at this rate, 75,000 turns per week. Across such an intense volume of talk, something of social and cultural significance must surely be operating, or at least under construction. This case study sets out to locate at least some elements and features of what that might be.

Talkcity has thousands of chatrooms, and together with the tens of thousands of other chatrooms online, several million lines of e-talk are being exchanged between people at any given moment; few of them known to anyone else in the chatroom. It is only when a major event happens that an individual chatroom takes on added significance. The New York City Chatroom whose chat log I have used for analysis often had no one in it. Only at certain times do certain chatrooms become intensely active, when for example, there is a major event to discuss. But what occurs at other times? How do chat threads establish themselves? How do individuals persuade others into pursuing certain topics? And what is actually happening when, as appears often to be the case, no particular topic gains enough attention to structure a sustained discussion?

CS 5.0.1 Question

Is there a discourse purpose in non-purpose centred chatrooms?

The research questions which guide the exploration of this case study centre on intent: "Does a chatter have a discursive purpose when he or she enters a chatroom?" I ask this question because of a peculiar utterance that is found throughout this chatroom by one speaker, <B_witched_2002-guest>, who repeatedly utters the single comment: <0HI> (see http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/a5.html). Since this comment seems to be proffered regardless of the context, I became interested in what might be motivating it - and in how chat "wreaders" might be interpreting it. Is it just an endlessly entered offer to chat: "Oh, hi!" If so, why does it fail to evoke a response? How might a successful entry to conversation be achieved in an unthemed and topic-free space? And if, as we have seen in analysis of previous themed chatroom conversations, much of the communicative activity is directed towards coding utterances within either general or topic-culture specific styles and cues, can that be achieved in an "open" chat space? Whose utterances succeed in this space, and what characterises them?

This chapter sets out to examine how online conversation is structured when no pre-established markers or pre-existing chat-relationships appear present.

CS 5.1 Methods

CS 5.1.1 Transcriptions

In the transcription in this case study, I have highlighted each speaker by a different colour as a means by which to quickly identify the different speakers, for example,

tab_002

Leesa39

. jenniferv

Ashamo416

"Welcome to Talk City *** February 17, 2000

This additional coding works to compensate the relative "crowding" in the chat threads, where many participants are operating, most often without a single topic focus. As with any chatroom dialogue my data sample is an example of "jumping into talk". What precedes this exchange has not been "captured". Therefore, this is a random snippet of talk from a random chatroom. This particular "frozen" moment in time is from room #50 (picked at random) on the Talkcity (http: www.talkcity.com) channel taken on February 17, 2000.

Many of the larger chat servers now are set up so that they are impossible to copy and save. Even Talkcity, from which I took this chat, is now impossible to save, as it is in an "applet window" (see glossary). The primary difficulty then for the researcher is in future attempts to gather data for comparative analysis. Replication of this research is already impossible, as the chat logs from Takcity.com are no longer available. However, since I am not engaging in statistical research, looking at, for example, the number of times a particular person or category of user visits a chatroom (see further research topics in the conclusion of this thesis) replication is not important for establishing validity. Here I am focusing on analysis of the actual linguistic strategies deployed by users at a particular moment in time: work which is already receding from easy research accessibility, and which in part at least seeks to establish how chat-specific communicative techniques have become established in just such spaces as these. While at a micro level my work is empirical and descriptive, at another level it is about the historical development of social and cultural pressures operating on and through the new CMC technologies. While the numbers of people engaging in such unstructured or "casual" talk as online chat continue to increase, our capacity to understand how that talk works – and thus why it is so popular – actually declines. We are very

rapidly losing the necessary access and archival capacities which such research requires. And at the same time, the potential to uncover significant recurrent patterns of language-in-use is denied. For this reason, I consider it important to examine these seemingly "random" talk-sessions while they are still available, using a broad analysis method, which will at the same time allow me to examine whether there are socially "active" outcomes within the talk of non-topic-specific chatrooms: the least directed of the samples I have collected. Discourse analysis – and especially the "Critical Discourse Analysis" developed by sociolinguists working in a Foucauldian context (see especially Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995) – enables such analysis.

CS 5.1.2 Discourse Analysis

[138]

I am using discourse analysis   in this fifth case study, as it combines oral and written language analysis in an interdisciplinary approach, which can show how language is structured and used in a chatroom context. Discourse Analysis incorporates many fields of research such as linguistics, cultural studies, rhetoric, and literary studies (Propp, 1968; Greimas, 1990). Theorists who write on Discourse Analysis come from various disciplines, such as sociolinguistics, conversational analysis (which I discuss in Case Study Six) as well as from within the two theories already discussed in the previous case studies, "Reading Theory" and "Speech Act Theory".

In its simplest form, Discourse Analysis is the analysis of language beyond the utterance, or within linguistic studies "beyond the sentence". Not all discourse analysts look at the individual utterance, but instead consider the larger discourse context in order to understand how it affects the meaning of the sentence. Charles Fillmore (1976) points out for instance that two sentences taken together as a single discourse unit can have meanings different from each one taken separately (Tannen, 1989). In a rapidly scrolling textual-chatroom taking lines seemingly out of context often leaves an utterance uninterpretable, or opens it to what in context is revealed as a misinterpretation. Even an individual who is in the midst of writing may push the enter key before finishing writing what they had to say, or they may push "enter" as an afterthought, cutting their texts into incomplete and unresolvable discourse entries. For example in the previous case study, <AquarianBlue> enters <sniff sniff> in turn number 29. That on its own has no reference, until we look at the line prior to it. In line number 28 <AquarianBlue> says, <she wont be in orlando?> giving us an indication that he or she is upset and disappointed. By considering the larger discourse we discover that the seemingly random utterance "sniffsniff" is indeed a significant contribution to an ongoing topic. It is discursively active.

Discourse Analysis maintains the unity of language as both structure and event, operating within pre-

established language systems as it processes actual topics and speech situations. It handles both knowledge and action; activates both a system and a process, and exists both as communicative potential and as actual communication (see Firth, 1957, 1964; Halliday, 1978; Pike, 1983). This dual operation allows us to "read back" one level from another: to see the system behind the conversation; the knowledge deducible from the communicative activities. Discourse Analysis, while seen as a subdiscipline of linguistics, having grown out of both philosophy and the descriptive study of language, deals in broader cultural issues, and allows for analysis of deep patterns of communicative practice, which engage social organisational and cultural preferential modes of thinking and acting. While, as Fairclough acknowledges, it has a relatively underdeveloped methodological repertoire in its own right, it is able to harness techniques drawn from other linguistic-analytical methods - some of which I have already highlighted in this study, including Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics. With Discourse Analysis - and especially Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis with its direct program or social engagement, this study can extend its focus to the outcomes of chatroom conversation, and their possible influence on sociality, cultural consensus, and the insertion of CMC into everyday living.

With online talk-texted chat, discourse analysis allows the rigorous investigation of the structuring powers of

language beyond the keyed in words, abbreviations and emoticons used to exchange messages with meaning [139]. It sees through the language selections, to their social and even cultural contexts. The term "discourse" thus contrasts with a more "linguistic" analysis, which sections the language selections into their constituent parts and categories, including the study of the smaller elements of language, such as sounds (phonetics and phonology); of parts of words (morphology) or the order of words in sentences (syntax). All of this fine-detailed linguistic inquiry is directed not to what a given deployment of language might achieve, or why it arises as it does – but to seeing the regulatory systems behind language itself, controlling its sense-making systems (Tannen, 1989; Stubbs, 1998 [140]). Discourse analysis on the other hand involves the study of larger chunks of language, such as several turn takings, taken together, as they flow into a meaningful "discussion". Even in this seemingly "topic-free" chatroom I will examine the grouped utterances of participants as just such meaning making activity, seeking not to discover how an utterance "works" in its own right, but how it works as an act of communication: why it is admitted into social relational action, and how it can be seen to be formed by, and in turn to inform, consequent utterances from others.

There are many theorists from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds who have researched discourse (see Van

Dijk's four-volume collection of the range of theories and practices available within Discourse Analysis, 1986; as well as Comber, Cook and Kamler, 1998, and Lee and Poynton, 2000, for those commonly used in Australian research). In many cases even central terms used in Discourse Analytical studies are disputed – including the term "discourse" itself. "Discourse", "dialogue" and "utterances" may seem interchangeable, or they may have entirely different referents. However, "discourses" in this case study, will be seen as the sum total of the utterances (the individual words in a turn taking) and the dialogue (the interchange between speakers): a meaningful construction directed beyond the mere activity of language exchange, and into the social and cultural worlds of the participants.

There are many kinds of "specialist" discourse used in the many social roles undertaken in everyday talk; author, listener, eavesdropper, interpreter, political rhetorician, calligrapher, mediator, teacher and poet. Each can be examined, and the special features which declare its specific purposes and applications can be defined. We distinguish readily within daily talk behaviours the special discursive features of such communicative activities as spoken and written jokes, stories, ABC wire news items, South Park dialogue, riddles, IRC chat, and heart-to-heart and face-to-face conversation in MUDs and chatrooms. Discourse theory allows us to uncover and understand how those communicative activities work; why they select the language behaviours they do, and how these "position" those communicative activities within certain social or cultural locations, status categories, or social groups. "Critical" Discourse Analysis especially focuses on the social consequences of particular discourses, and primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk-text in a given social and political context (see especially Tannen, 1989; Schiffrin, 1997).

What however signals the "given social and political context" of a topic-undirected chatroom? How do participants make decisions which enable them to operate in this relatively uncued space for encountering strangers? One interesting issue which signals an extreme degree of such problems is the case of "cut utterances".

In chat, because practitioners may press the "enter" key at any moment - intentionally or otherwise - and especially because some participants do so habitually, to maintain their "place" in a thread, chat sequences occur in odd and discordant patterns. The relational element is often difficult to attribute, and can produce some surprising juxtapositions. Discourse Relation Theory can provide a formal description of the possible relationships between events in a text, and so allow an analysis of cut utterances. Cut utterances are frequent in chat-talk, for several reasons. Chatroom utterances are determined by the particular discourse situation, which includes the rapidly moving text and the hurriedness of the communicational act. A "speaker" could have mistakenly hit the enter key, or may want to emphasize a point, or just to take up space. In the example

below <soldier_boyedo835> makes three immediately consecutive utterances to describe his or her present state:

85) <soldier_boyedo835> good tab

86) <soldier_boyedo835> thanks

87) <soldier_boyedo835> I'm grrrrrrrrrrreat

The relation between the same speaker entering three utterances and what evokes the three-part response,

79) <tab_002> good soldier how bouts you?

is further related to an earlier cut text,

76) <soldier_boyedo835>how the hell is everyone tonight?

<tab_002> answers even though the question was not necessarily or exclusively directed to him or her.

This "voluntary" relational interchange shows the consensual cultural coding of speech utterances in chat, that occurs either because the participants already know one another from previous times in this chatroom, or because everyone feels so comfortable in a public chatroom that, even unknown to each other, everyone is a "friend". <tab_002> is thus able to shorten <soldier_boyedo835>'s name to just "soldier", showing social familiarity. This is much like when someone, even unknown to the other person, will shorten a person's name to the familiar diminutive form: Robert to Bob or Terrell to Terry.

Asher & Lascarrides (1995) have isolated nine discourse relations or categories: narration, elaboration, continuation, explanation, background, result, contrast, evidence and commentary; all of which can be useful in isolating how discourse in a chatroom makes sense, or does not make sense, to other participants, as "co-speakers" interpret and "identify" different relational strategies within the online flows of chat. In the above examples the relationships are shown as elaboration, continuation and explanation. Despite the problems of cut utterances and complex threading sequences the chat participants are able to work significance into their continuing talk, selecting particular discourse relations which build consensual relations into even broken and discontinuous sequences. Within this formation, both the intimate abbreviations of tag names, and the

informality and colloquialism of the lexical selections ("how bouts you?") work as reinforcement. There is

evidence therefore that even in this undirected chatroom, there is a preference for discourse forms which

support communication itself: which work to set up and maintain speech relations, rather than to "speak something".

CS 5.2 Findings

CS 5.2.1 Discourse and Frames

In discourse analysis, framing is an important aspect for the performance of both task-oriented talk and that

supporting interaction (Cassell, 1999). "Small talk" is one form of talk framing, especially important when

meeting someone anew. Within a sales environment for instance it is considered important for the sales person to

build rapport with the buyer before entering the actual sales topic. When meeting with any new person, "small

talk", such as commenting on the weather or on a feature of the person, such as an article of clothing, is used

to establish a communicative relation, before more important topics are launched. Such initial framing in a chatroom

is most often the greeting frame, which includes the "hellos" and "anyone want to chat?" forms. A farewell frame

is similarly activated once a person is seen to be signalling an intention of leaving.

1) <tab_002> HI nice to see you too Jennv :)))))))
3) <jenniferv> SCUD
4) <Ashamo416> hi
26) <jenniferv> buh bye scud ;)

In the examples above in turn 3) <jenniferv> simply says <SCUD>, yet this is activating a greeting frame, as

it introduces the speaker <jenniferv> to <SCUD> and <SCUD> responds seven turns later.

10) <scud4> hiya jenn hugz and kotc S"S"

The importance of these ritualistic exchanges - marked by their constant recurrence, and by the creativity of the use

of emoticons, demonstrates once again the relational or "communicative" focus in chat practices. These work to

bind chat participants into collaborative relations: talk forms which are reinforced not only in the lexical selections - and enhancements - but in the close attention to building and maintaining comprehensibility across the chat exchanges.

Discourse Analysis uses the category of "reframing", or checking and correcting initial understandings - and the practice can illuminate several recurrent practices in chatroom talk. "Reframing" in DA terms is the act of going back and re-interpreting the meaning of the first utterance of a dialogue between speakers to bring meaning to a subsequent utterance, asking "What activity are speakers engaged in when they say this?" (Tannen, 1998), and uncovering a direct orientation towards review of earlier utterances. This activity is common when we hear or read something that at first does not make sense to us. We go back and re-read or listen again. In chatroom talk, chat participants, as in natural speech, will ask whether something is in fact referring to this or to that subject. For example, in Case Study One in turn 104 <SWMPTHNG> asks <YOU AINT TALKING ABOUT MEX ROOFERS ARE YOU?>.

Chatrooms however do not lend themselves easily to reframing. If a participant misses an utterance or misinterprets one, they will usually move on and talk about something else. I have never in fact seen anyone in a chatroom attempt to reframe formally in this way – to say something like: "but you said in line 666 that you were from the moon, now you're from Mars?" or in any way citing or quoting directly what had been said earlier - even though the scrolling function does permit this. Presumably the ongoing flow of talk makes the time taken to scroll back and review too difficult to undertake. Yet chat participants do use reframing strategies online, to check, to reinforce, and to move forward and develop existing or already offered utterance sequences: in effect, to build a space for themselves within a topic thread. This is, of course, especially important in open or non-topic specific chatrooms, and invites a more careful consideration of the concept of discourse framing.

Frame analysis is a type of discourse analysis that asks, "What activity are speakers engaged in when they say this?" "What do they think they are *doing* by talking in this way at this time?" Erving Goffman introduces the idea of framing in his work, *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* (1974), and introduces categories of "natural frames" and "social frames", to distinguish between different levels of activity. Goffman uses the idea of frames to describe and analyse interaction in face-to-face communication. Goffman writes that:

> anytime human beings experience anything, we "frame" the experience in frame categories of the natural frame, which one does "automatically". Those frames are not easily changed or shifted" (p. 46).

These framing devices are what makes the way the person constructs his or her reality seem "natural" to them - and to reciprocating others. To this extent, Goffman's "frames" are discourses: selective language patterns which work

to control and constrain not only symbolic activities: thinking, knowing, communicating, representing, but actions as well, as they are in turn selected from within the predominant discursive patternings, and used to justify and motivate "appropriate" behaviours. Online, framing has been used as a metaphor by Bays (2000) to explain how presence is negotiated in virtual communities. Chat groups will for instance, as we have seen, greet new comers in the room, or work together to organise against someone in the room. Since these "actions" can be carried out only at the level of language, and since the social relations which work to include and exclude individuals are also established only within (texted) talk, "natural frames", or in DA terms selective discursive formations, must be in place. But how are these frames established, or carried over from the most probably variant social locations from which individual chat participants enter the chat space?

One answer, drawn from Goffman's work, is the heavy use of "social framing". In this Case Study, as we have already seen. Chatters greet one another and ask how they are:

41) <MtnBiker99> Hello everyone

This is a social framing, letting the others know that <MtnBiker99> is "present" in this community, and sees the others as worthy of greeting.

Social frames result from our past experiences, resultant predispositions, and worldviews. Because the rituals and behaviours which are established in our speech repertoires thus reflect our social and cultural values, they can be used, as shown above, to code consensus - or its converse - into speech relations. The otherwise unmeaningful greeting exchanges of chat thus become crucial.

Once this is recognised, some interesting questions can be raised about speech behaviours in this chatroom. Can a single person control the frame of the speech experience, once a close social frame has been built - as is so often the case? If so, how does this happen in a chatroom, as opposed to real-life conversation? If one person does gain control of a discourse thread or topic, what is the response of others in the chatroom?

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I attempted to examine discourse coherence between the chatters in this topic-free room. Discourse coherency is difficult to define in real life and even more difficult to define in a chatroom. By coherency we generally mean, does the discourse flow? Is there a central logic or sense? Without such a sense, can we respond? For example, with greetings, a primary activity in most chatrooms, we look for adjacent pairs: comment and response. One

says "hi", another responds. This discourse relation is known to us: pre-established as a "social frame". Below we find several people recognizing this discourse relation: saying "hi" to <scud4> as he enters the chat space.

CS5.2.1.1 scud4>

<scud4>

3) 3a. <jenniferv> SCUD
12) /\10 2c. <Leesa39> heyyyyyy scud
18) /\15 1b. <tab_002> hiya scud

<scud4>, I would speculate, based on the greetings above, has already made an utterance in the period before I began capturing the conversation, though from the beginning of my "capture" of this dialogue, he or she does not have a recorded entry until turn 10;

10) /\3 <scud4> hiya jenn hugz and kotc S"S"

<scud4> has replied to one of the three who greeted him or her with [hugz and kotc S"S] or what I would translate as being "hugs and kisses". It is not revealed exactly what "kotc" represents, but it could be "Kisses On The Cheek", to reframe the greeting into a more passionate expression. It could also be someone's initials or another combination of words: "Keepers of the culture", "king of the cage" or "knights of the court". Abbreviations can be a language known only to those who are part of the group. We are however able to understand this discourse without fully recognising the utterance itself, since it is a conventional speech act: a greeting. However, if we examine the social frame, we can see how it is that respondents know which responses can be logically made. Not only does each respondent in this case make the conventional assessment that <scud4> is operating within the discourse relation of the greeting, but each is able to respond in a variant way, which indicates in itself a particular and even personalized socio-cultural relation: <jenniferv> with the capitalized enthusiasm and delight of recognition: <"SCUD">; <Leesa39> with the street-wise gestural emphasis of <heyyyyyy scud>, and <tab002> with the rather more restrained and conventional <hiya>. And <scud>'s own subsequent response to <jenniferv> endorses the view that we – and the online participants – can and do

read "difference" into each of these greetings, since <scud>'s delivery of not only an intensive emotionalism, but an expert online control of abbreviated formulae: <hugz and kotc S"S"> – indicates an ongoing relation with fellow chatters, plus the capacity to distinguish among them discursively, and respond in kind.

To a person entering a chatroom who joins an already established chat, the frame may appear to be closed. And

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yet what appears on any reader's screen is the totality of what is said.   In most chatrooms there appears not to be a lot of "in depth" correspondence between chatters when viewed from "outside" the chatroom. Someone outside the usual participant group in a chatroom, if indeed there were usual participants, would not necessarily be aware of the dynamics of the speakers' interactions.

> 54) <tab_002>so how you been jenn?

Yet while chat exchanges may be brief, they are obviously still significant. It appears in this exchange above that <tab_002> knows <jenniferv> well enough to shorten the name to jenn - or at least claims the equivalent of that status, in online acquaintance.

Even in a very brief contribution, emotion can be displayed. In example three below, <scud4> uses no emoticons or abbreviations, just a command. This is one time where leaving out the emoticon can heighten the annoyance. If there had been a smiley face, :) or ♩ following the utterance, <bwitched stop scrollin in here>, we would assume that <scud4>, who earlier was saying <hugz and kotc S "S"> was fine with what was occurring - or was at least giving advice, without being particularly upset. Emoticons and abbreviated forms can be used to "mitigate" utterances - and often are, in chat communication. Here the fact that <scud4> has not only made two attempts to leave this room, discussed below, but that he or she has had little to say in this room, suggests that a "social" discourse frame settled around   <scud4> in the greeting rituals has not achieved total group cohesion in this instance.

> 47) C/ /\46 6e. <scud4> bwitched stop scrollin in here

Where are the framing devices here? This utterance by <scud4> makes sense in the context of the 89 turns "captured" in this chatroom, when we realize that <B_witched_2002-guest> has entered the same utterance 37 times with no variation. It seems that <B_witched_2002-guest> is doing nothing more than cutting and pasting the same letters over and over.

> 5) <B_witched_2002guest> 0HI

The others in this chatroom are left to their own interpretation of this utterance. Is <B_witched_2002-guest> attempting to annoy everyone? Is < B_witched_2002-guest> in fact even a person or merely a bot, planted in the room to say the same thing repeatedly?

It is difficult to follow <scud4> for more discourses markers in these few turns as he or she has only two other utterance during this time;

> 10) /\3 <scud4> hiya jenn hugz and kotc S"S"
>
> 29) <scud4> thanx leesa "S"

These are both within the greeting and social etiquette frame. In a chatroom the same linguistic conventions are applied as in face-to-face talk – although they are arguably more significant, since without them other contribution seems socially unlicensed. While physical presence can be registered with a nod or a glance, chat entry must be marked by an arrival ritual, configured, at least in these early "social frames" of chat, around the discourse relation of greetings. Not "knowing" whether any of these chatters know one another is not a limitation in this analysis. We are even able to read the distinguishing discursive markers of degrees of familiarity, and even different forms of affiliation, from the form of each utterance. The concern with discourse is thus with what is happening "beyond" the utterance: with elements still "contained" within the language, and yet directed towards elements other than language – such as social relations, degrees of familiarity, levels of friendship, social cohesion – possibly even gender category maintenance, in which "hugz and kotc S'SS'" is appropriate between "scud" and "jennferv", when it might not be between someone called "scud" and someone called "rambo". What is being accomplished here is recognition of the existence of other, earlier, chat events, which are being used by participants to complete the dialogue coherency.

When we go beyond the utterance in a chatroom in this way, we can begin to see that there are, as in real life, other, non-speech acts that can become parts of speech acts. In this data sample there are many such examples. In many chatrooms one can even click on a hotkey on the screen that will send an image, sound or generic pre-

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written text   , to help within the conversation. In a discourse analysis of a chatroom these too become important. They are another dimension beyond the abbreviation, mark, emoticon and mis-spelt words, which define the discourse. They are part of the speaker's repertoire of communicative tools, and are often deployed in especially interesting ways. For example, <scud4> has two other entries in this chat event,

> 21)   <scud4> <----on his way to the main room
> 36)   <scud4> <----is now door testing

There are no utterances here as Scud4 activates an auto-text by leaving the room, but there is intent of discourse. In real life when one ends an utterance, one of the actions can be to leave the room. Here <scud4> has clicked on a link to another room, the main room. He or she does not in fact leave the room, but in turn 36 is still showing intent by clicking a link to a door to another room. Yet still he or she does not leave, instead making an utterance further down in turn 47. By turn 85 at the end of the dialogue I have captured, <scud4> still has not left. However, in a chatroom others see who is present. There is recognition of <scud4> from the dialogue that was going on before I entered the chatroom and it is apparent that <scud4> had previously been engaged in conversation with one or more of the people present, as seen in the two examples above. So <scud4>, while not taking an active part in the dialogue remains an active presence – in fact, is able by asserting his near-non-presence, to make significant contributions to the chat.

Discourse analysis studies just such aspects of a "complete" text (both written and spoken), giving attention to textual form, structure and organization at all levels; phonological, grammatical, and lexical elements of language structuring, as well as to higher levels of textual organization in terms of exchange systems, structures of argumentation, and generic structures – each of which is then seen to signify as broader social, political and institutional practices (Fairclough, 1982, 1989, 1995). Its analysis then extends out to its social and cultural context – and yet all of this is contained within a meaningful utterance that one responds to, in a turn-taking sequence, in the chatroom convention of abbreviated but multiply-loaded short postings.

CS 5.2.2 Language system

As I go beyond the structure of the words in the chatroom and look more at the context within which the individual utterances occur, it becomes necessary to examine a few of the many theories regarding

language development. These theories have emerged from social and cultural disciplines such as linguistics, philosophy and psychology, each of which influences the specific focus and so outcomes of a particular language acquisition theory. But in order to examine how chat might be evolving as a new discursive form, within a certain set of social relations, and having implications for broader cultural activity, it is important to examine current views on how language development occurs: both in the sense of how an individual enters a language system and acquires its repertoire of features, and in relation to how a given language system can change its favoured repertoires over time. Put simply: how do chatroom speakers learn the codes? How do they "read" the codes of a particular space, and so come to use them? And how is it that the sorts of chatroom-specific "utterances" and special codings have developed so rapidly?

Discourse analysis allows us to examine examples of socially-embedded language, working over a recorded text, within a given language system. What should happen then is that we should find generic conventions and expectations within the chatrooms we are examining here. Thus we approach the study expecting participants to understand and use certain conventions of dialogue. As I have shown in previous case studies in this thesis, there is clearly a body of accepted linguistic, lexical, syntactic and semantic resources used in chatrooms. These conventions are conveyed even in the special semiosis of the abbreviations and the emoticons, as well as in the acceptance of poor grammar and misspelt words used so often.

We accept these conventions of hurried utterances because the chatroom dialogue passes by so quickly. For example, I was able to copy and paste a chat in a chatroom (http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/afgan.htm) that in less than five minutes had more than two hundred and fifty turn-takings. So in acting within these pressured limits, how have chatroom speakers selected the techniques we now see?

Language acquisition occurs gradually through interaction with people and the environment. Whether it is a new language, the first utterances of childhood, or learning how to communicate in a chatroom, the process is the same. There is a trial-and-error learning progression involved. To have meaning in exchange understandable there has to have been prior experience at communicating. For example, in this exchange we have turn-taking that would not have been learnt in traditional education, or in any way, except through these participants having spoken to each other previously, in a chatroom:

3) 3a. <jenniferv> SCUD

10) /\3 6a. <scud4> hiya jenn hugz and kotc S"S"

12) /\10 2c. <Leesa39> heyyyyyy scud

14) /\10 3c. <jenniferv> heheh scud	
15) /\12 6b. <scud4> leesa ltns hugz and kotc S"S"	
18) /\15 1b. <tab_002> hiya scud	
23) /\15 2d. <Leesa39> same to ya scud	
29) /\23 6c. <scud4> thanx leesa "S"	

What can we make of <scud4>'s popularity in these exchanges? <Leesa39>, <tab_002>, and <jenniferv> each seem familiar enough with <scud4> to carry on what would be considered a conversation. The concept of an anti-language is a useful way of understanding the social basis of the form of this exchange.   Michael Halliday has written extensively on the topic of anti-language, referring to it as slang developed by members of "anti-societies" such as criminals and prisoners. My Honours degree from Deakin University ("Graffiti as Text" 1995) focused on anti-language as the language of gangs, adolescents and hip-hop/graffiti crews. In my thesis I researched the development of language that graffiti crews used to communicate with one another. Mary

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Bucholtz's essay: "Word Up: Social Meanings of Slang in California Youth Culture"   similarly investigates identity formation within linguistic anthropology and her research is useful in this study of the chatroom, as it emphasizes how code comes to be applied to what is considered a community. Those who cannot speak the code, or understand it, cannot participate in the discourse, as without meaning, discourse does not proceed.

CS 5.2.2.1 Anti-language

There are many differences between online and natural conversation and person-to-person spoken conversation. In natural conversation there are discourse markers or conversation markers. Words such as "oh" and "well" can be called discourse markers or conversation markers. Likewise, some words and constructions are likely to occur only in spoken English. Words like "thingamajig", "dohickey" and "whatchamecallit", and phrases like "bla bla bla" or "yada yada yada" are unlikely in written text - unless it is reflecting spoken forms deliberately.
 Natural conversation can also have simpler constructions and fillers, such as "um", "uh" and "er".

Nixon: "But they were told to uh"

Haldeman: "uh and refused uh"

Nixon: [Expletive deleted.]

--Excerpt from the Nixon Tape Transcripts (Lardner 1997)

In a chatroom the user can use symbols and abbreviations or just a series of letters as discourse markers in the conversation.

2) <Leesa39> ooooo my sweetie jake is angry

Here <Leesa39> uses a series of letters <ooooo> to express reaction, just as one may in a person-to-person conversation, to emphasize his or her sense of sympathy - or perhaps mock-sympathy..

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) advance the concept of the "community of practice" as a useful alternative to the "speech community", the traditional unit of sociolinguistic and linguistic-anthropological analysis (see Raith, 1987 and Romaine, 1982b). According to this method the speech community proposes language, in one aspect or another, as the basis of community definition. The community-of-practice model however considers language as one among many social practices in which community members engage, with different community members participating to different degrees. This is another interpretation of Halliday and the antilanguage theorists – and it allows in the sorts of consideration of language as operating within inequitable power distributions, common to critical discourse analysis (CDA).

In a chatroom the speech community, in order to construct itself first as a speech community, and then as a specifically "chatting" or online community of practice, must have an understanding of what is being said, written, uttered or read - all four blending together as one "speech event". To display at the same time a chat-specific repertoire of discursive markers: social framings, and beyond them, the "natural framings" of full discourse orders of belief and practice - appears however to require more than simple transfer of natural utterance forms into texted-talk. As we have seen, code-intensifiers, by their constant presence, seem to indicate their necessity in establishing, and maintaining, both social and natural discourse frames.

Yet another "Community of practice" element in chatrooms that is different from person-to-person or natural conversation is thus the way abbreviations and emoticons are used. There are no "utterance" equivalents to emoticons in person-to-person or natural conversation. While at one level these can thought be of as compensating the loss of physical speech cues for expression, gesture, relational elements such as eye contact or body orientation, and auditory markers such as volume, intonation or accent, in chat practice they are directly linked into utterances, appearing in the same registers, and generated from the same keyboard pool of symbols, and appearing on the same screen boxes as the texted "utterance". As we have seen, there is thus a further compensation in chat practice, as consensus is established in both general and specific chat groups as to

how, and when, and to what purposes these elements of utterances can be applied. Yet there also appears to be a belief that these forms are directly translatable across language groups. Some chatrooms are for instance using machine translation which provides on-the-fly translation into several languages - everything users in the chatroom say is instantly translated into the appropriate language for the other people in the chatroom. MultiCity.com has chat interfaces that can be translated into 17 different languages as the person is "speaking". Though translation software translates words that are in a dictionary base, they cannot translate abbreviations and misspelled words that are understood by others in a chatroom. Yet in Internet speak the same use of emoticons demonstrates a belief in a commonality between chatroom practices in all languages. The examples below show for instance a Japanese language site that uses ikons with the English words ("welcome" and "post") - while the next extracts show emoticons applied into other examples of non-English emoticon usage.

En attendant je fais du gros boudin�byour pas dire d'autres choses moins polies😵👿😵

French emoticons

<ÇÞæáå> ããßä ÈäÊ ãä ÇáÞØíÝ Êßáãáäí ÇÐÇ ãäãßä ¿¿ (^_^)

Arab emoticon

Does such trans-language application of keystroke symbols imply the development of an ideographic system - akin for instance to Chinese notation, where the phonic element of a word may vary completely, without disturbance of the semantic load? Or is even that claim a misapprehension, missing the cultural immersion of all meaning making? Are "visual" codings such as emoticons language specific - and even anti-language specific – and to be compared with abbreviations and colloquialisms?

What we do already know is that for chatters to graphically express emotions and simulate speech-phonology

(through phonetic spelling) provides the potential for gesturally and linguistically created social cohesion to exist. Chatrooms thus present at first entry a "community of practice" operating as a Hallidayan "anti-language". Anti-language, without immediately appearing political, is what a particular, usually non-dominant culture, creates as a communicative system to distinguish it from mainstream behaviours, and to bind its users into a sub-culture (Halliday, 1978). The most characteristic antilanguage of chatrooms is in the use of acronyms. Chatters keep key-strokes to an absolute minimum. Usually, an acronym will be used to replace a common real-life phrase such as "be right back" (BRB) or "by the way" (BTW). Chatters capitalise on the ability of others in the chatroom to predict much of an everyday conversation from the context, or decode it from the initial letters of the words.

There are certainly observable elements of behaviour which are extending the limits of linguistic convention well beyond comprehension from within a mainstream "community of practice". This single-phrase chatter discussed above - and ejected from the chatroom community - offers what may be an appropriate utterance within the confines of an anti-language of chat practice, but one which bears little semantic loading for a mainstream speech community. What is the intent of the discourse? What communicative purpose is being served?

CS 5.2.2.2 <B_witched_2002-guest> 0HI

> <B_witched_2002-guest> 0HI

In interpreting this single utterance [0HI] by <B_witched_2002-guest> one needs to suspend any notion about the meaning of words. Why is this [OHI] repeated 37 times in 89 turns by <B_witched_2002-guest> when no response is offered? And does the lack of response make this a nonsensical speech gambit from B_witched, or is it meaningful but unacceptable/uninteresting to other participants?

1. tab_002	9
2. Leesa39	12
3. jenniferv	8
4. Ashamo416	1
5. B_witched_2002-guest ['OHI']	37
6. scud4	5
7. MtnBiker99	3

8. SiReNz_A	1
9. Hooligan3	1
10. soldier_boyedo835	7
11. MCXRAY	5

If <B_witched> was hoping for a specific response it is difficult to know if it occurred. There are only three responses. The first captured instance of [OHI] is turn 5: followed by turns 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32-35, 37, 38, 40, 43, 44 and turn 46 before anyone in the room comments. Then we have <skud4>'s response in turn 47 (see example 3, above) instructing someone (B_witched?) to "quit scrolling".
However, undeterred, <B_witched> continues the same [OHI] for turns 50, 52, 55, 56, 58-60, 62-65, 67 and turn 68. <Leesa39> finally responds, "B_witched we see ya". There is one more [OHI] from <B_witched> in turn 69 before <tab_002>says in turn 70, <hi bwitch>. Then there are no more interactions between <B_witched> and the others in the room. What appears to have happened is that until this moment, the other seven chatters have not had any positive, "conversational" interest in <B_witched>. If, as is likely, <B-witched> has used a scroll key and an abbreviated greeting ("Oh – hi") to force entry to the chat, then their attempt at entering this "chatter" discourse has failed. If, however, <B_witched> was attempting to disrupt the conversation of others or to irritate them, then <B_witched> had some, but very limited success. Again <B_witched>'s efforts could be considered to have failed. Other participants, however, have had greater success in communicating. <Jenniferv> for instance manages to enter the conversation with a similarly reduced formula using the abbreviation "rofl" (rolling on the floor laughing):

   CS 5.2.2.3 <jenniferv> ** rofl

Chatroom dialogue centres on the assumption that someone else within the room is able to interpret the words – or the codes of the "anti-language". However, chatrooms of this type at least, do not appear to provide an opportunity to elaborate the context of all one has to say in a holistic manner. There is seldom even a coherent chain of speak-events. For example, in the following, <jenniferv>, whom we have noted as a successful entrant to this community of practice, has made eight entrances or utterances in a space of seventy-eight-turns (turns 3 – 81). Below are the eight turns. If <jenniferv> had a point to make about anything other than contact with the other chatters then I have missed it.

3) 3a. <jenniferv> SCUD

6) 3b. <jenniferv> *) nice to see you to tab ;)

14) /\10 3c. <jenniferv> heheh scud

26) /\213d. <jenniferv> *) buh bye scud ;)

39) 3e. <jenniferv> ** LOL

57) /\54 3f. <jenniferv> good tab and you?

73) 3g. <jenniferv> ** rofl

81) 2j. <jenniferv> hiya ray

As can be seen there is no elaborative content in the sum-total of <jenniferv>'s conversation, beyond the relational and the greeting functions. Even if we take the previous turns, the ones we assume <jenniferv> is responding to, will it make <jenniferv>'s conversation into a more sustained and coherent contribution?

3) 3a. <jenniferv> SCUD

1) 1a. <tab_002> *) HI nice to see you too Jenny ♩))))))

6) 3b. <jenniferv> *) nice to see you to tab ;)

10) /\3 6a. <scud4>hiya jenn hugz and kotc"S"S"

14) /\10 3c. <jenniferv> heheh scud

26) /\21 3d. <jenniferv> *) buh bye scud ;)

39) 3e. <jenniferv> LOL

54) /\39 1d. <tab_002> so how you been jenn?

57) /\54 3f. <jenniferv> good tab and you?

It is not even clear who the below 'rofl' is addressed to.

73) 3g. <jenniferv> rofl

Nor is it clear who the utterance below is addressed to, as no one in the chatroom had the name "ray". Of course Jennferv may know better than we do here…

81) 2j. <jenniferv> hiya ray

With dialogue such as the above we are often left to ponder what exactly is going on with communication in a chatroom. As has been shown in the previous chatroom dialogues and is obvious in any other chatroom presented in this study, there seldom is a clear conversational "topic" when exchanging turns in a chatroom, beyond the relational "management" utterances. For an act of speaking (locution) in a face-to-face conversation to be valid as a locution, an utterance must be at least to some degree grammatical, and draw on a recognisable lexicon. In this reading, a given locution must have meaning independently of the context in which it is used. Using the utterance in context then amounts to lending it a particular force (illocution). However, what do we make of <B_witched_2002-guest>'s "0HI" utterance in this chatroom? Is there a recognisable lexical element involved? This "OHI" occurs 37 times in the 89 turn-takings recorded, so comprises 42 % of the utterances involved. We surely do not have lexical cohesion in this case – and yet a great deal of expressive energy is directed into producing and placing this repeated utterance.

> Continuity may be established in a text by the choice of words. This may take the form of word repetition; or the choice of a word that is related in some way to a previous one (Halliday, 1994, p. 310).

The difficulty with this particular form of repetition is that it appears to be - as indicated by <scud>'s irritated comment - produced not as "socially framed" relational talk, but as an auto-function within the technologisation

of chat. Its impact then appears to defy rather than to consolidate the community of practice - even at the level of antilanguage. While many statements are ambiguous in isolation but clear in context - or at least amenable to logical analysis – "Ohi" appears to have little acceptable application in this context - even though <jenniferv> does ultimately accept and respond to it as a greeting cue.

CS 5.3 Conclusion

My purpose in using this particular chat was to examine a chatroom with a markedly short turn-taking series, to discover if even in a rapidly passing conversation, there was enough time to establish a communication community amongst the chatters present.

I asked in particular, "Does a chatter have a communicative intent when he or she enters a chatroom?" It seems that, no matter how reduced or "closed" the discourse; there is indeed a community of practice operating. The seemingly empty exchanges of greetings and the rituals of recognition are here deployed in much the same ways as those identified for any speech community – and may arguably be extended into "communities of practice", in which a sociality of who is "in" and who is not is central to the functioning of the group.

Internet textual chats are one of many genres in communication, which help one express, clarify, see and think about the world. I have chosen the chatroom in Talkcity which is not associated with any "topic interest" group [145] or community in order to examine what I would call passing chat or by analogy, bus-stop-chat. What this study has shown is that online chat communities do take on social agendas as much as they would in person-to-person meetings. Communities of practice can be communities marked by acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours registered at the level of the "doubled speech" of chat, with its semiotic loadings of meaning and familiarity. In Case Study One it was apparent that there was an easy familiarity established among the speakers, enabling them for instance to discuss Mexican roofers in the midst of a discussion of a national emergency. In Case Study Seven the baseball chatroom has a clearly established community of practice where the participants are comfortable with their talk. In this case study the participants have not even developed an in-depth discussion centred on a particular topic, but there are the same practices of social and even natural discourse framing.

Why then do chat participants enter and use online communities? Early research (see Turkle, 1995; Rheingold, 1991; Reid, 1991; Hamman, 1996) suggested that cyberspace communities would be "other" to their off-line, real-life parallels: that they could and did avoid issues of inequitable power relations, allowing those who were

suppressed or minority "voices" in physical communities to achieve a new freedom of expression and to realise ideals of active democratic participation and citizenship. Certainly, by examining discourse in a range of chatrooms we have been able to establish that in online chat one may affect not only their own world-views, but also those

[146]

of others. This is accomplished through exchange in an environment that is widely considered to be "safe" by users – "safe" in the sense of providing a "values free" space for communication. Yet in every instance to date, we have found much the same instances of communicative consensus and control occurring - indeed, in most instances we have found enhanced and intensified relational or "social framing" activities in play. So are chatrooms in fact the "free" spaces we have been led to believe?

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The freedom of expression in a chatroom is increasingly being questioned on legal , social, philosophical

[148]

and political grounds . Research has yet to establish exactly what online communication is and how it does or does not relate to its off-line equivalents - or indeed to which off-line equivalents it would be compared.

[149]

4:50 p.m. Feb. 27, 2001 PST .

A federal court ruling last week could make it much more difficult for companies to successfully sue chatroom posters for expressing their opinions.

A Los Angeles judge dismissed a lawsuit last Friday that sought to collect damages from "John Does" who criticized the company anonymously on Internet message boards. Privacy advocates say the decision sets an important precedent in the fight to protect anonymous speech online.

The ruling on the case -- Global Telemedia International vs. Does -- found that the chatroom banter posted by the defendants were statements of opinion, not fact. Electronic privacy experts say that distinction sets an important legal precedent.

There are a growing number of business and private Internet sites that display the anti-censorship campaign logo:

"The ruling is significant," said David Sobel, an attorney for the Electronic Privacy and Information Center (http://www.epic.org/), who has been deeply involved in the battle to protect anonymous speech online. "It is a judicial recognition of the fact that the vast majority of material posted to message boards constitutes opinion, and is thus protected under libel law."

Most material posted to chatsites differs greatly from the considered and deliberate comments of such formats as message board communication, in its relative restriction to social-relational talk - however, rulings such as these do appear to recognise online talk and texting as linked to pre-existent talk forms, and as therefore operating within known modes - here for instance open to legal interpretation. As legal problems demand examinations of what Net chat "is", in order to decide upon its acceptability as "private" or "public" communication, inquiry into actual online practices will become more rigorous. It will use richer and more extensive samples than those possible here, to investigate how online chat practices annexe and alter existing off-line talk behaviours – and which discursive formations they most resemble and duplicate. Regardless of outcomes, they seem very likely to discover that early claims for online communication as marked by "freedoms" not apparent in off-line talk are less than accurate: that online chat may be evolving new repertoires, but that all of these are built upon existing, off-line linguistic and especially social-relational discourse practices.

It is in recognition of these added loads of social-relational "work" that this study now moves to focus on even finer details of how chat operates online. In the next case study I use Conversational Analysis to focus right in onto the details of communicative exchanges; to assess whether chat displays new forms or practices of relational communicative activity, and where such a communicative form might be leading us.

Case Study Six

CS 6.0 Introduction

Dialogue can be studied through its grammar (as I do in Case Study Seven) as well as through examining its preferred discursive patterns (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p.178), as I have shown in Case Study Five. Grammar provides the "nodes" of speech; in the case of dialogue, the constituent "mood" structures of conversational clauses. With physical, live-interacting conversation, linguistic investigation techniques particularly as used in ethnomethodology provides a system for analysing the assertion of rights and privileges stemming from the inequitable social roles in culture (see Bourdieu, 1989). Words very much define the speaker, and provide both him/her and the co-locuters with a settled repertoire of what can and can't be said, and how it can and can't be cast. And this, in turn, establishes and regulates elements which we read back as social power or status. However, in electronic "talk" it is especially clear that words do not so immediately define social roles. First, they must construct a continuum of speech practice, which can evolve into a conversation, as participants begin to "read" the cues for social positioning. This processing will, over a course of many turn-taking sequences,

define enough about a speaker to allow others to have some awareness of their places within social structures: elements such as their social or cultural beliefs, and sometimes nationality, culture and standing. I have explored this notion of trying to "know" more about a speaker from the words they use in individual case studies, suggesting that the relative lack of socio-cultural cues in chat is being compensated by the semiotic loading of abbreviation and emoticon-graphic codings. In this section I want to examine what can be learned from how the "turn-taking" rules are operated within an online conversation. Do the same regulatory systems apply as those found in live conversation, or are there once again restrictions, and compensations?

Within conversation turn-taking is central. Without turn-taking, the chatroom is static. But does the system of turn-taking within chat follow that of non-electronic conversation, which in this thesis I refer to as "natural conversation", or do the constraints of the chat space act upon this, as upon other areas of this particular communicative practice? In the case studies thus far it has been shown that electronic conversation is dependent on the vehicle for the speech – the computer. Conversational analysis or sequential analysis to date has involved noting "natural" conversation and understanding such conversations as regulated, to provide an orderly sequence of entrance spaces for participating members. A chatroom too is thoroughly bound by orderliness, with its protocols, rules and structure. It is only within this order that sequential conversation can be carried on.

Electronic communication has received much analytical research. In my literature review in the section on online literature most of the material reviewed brings a sociological or psychological perspective to electronic chat. Meaning development in chatrooms can be shown to be dependent upon conceptualisation, as well as upon social formation (see Tannen, 1984, 1998, 1995; Turkle, 1995, 1996). What I have done in this case however is to go beyond the "why" we communicate, into "how" we exchange utterances. In this case I am using the most systematic and "fined tuned" of the linguistic investigation techniques, Conversational Analysis, within the Sacks tradition. Conversational analysis focuses on the sequential organization of talk, and the overlaps in various places in the transcript, focusing in particular on how participants contest and maintain "powerful" speaking positions, which enable them to lead and steer conversations (ten Have, 1999).

CS 6.0.1 Sacks

Conversational analysis (CA) is an outcome of an ethnomethodological tradition of social inquiry. Ethnomethodology is a sociological perspective, founded by the American sociologist Harold Garfinkel in the early 1960s, to explain and understand meaning systems and procedures between people and how they make sense

of their social world. CA was developed collaboratively by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson to study

ordinary conversation to discover if organizational details could be formally described. The idea is that

conversations are orderly, not only for observing analysts, but in the first place for participating members (Schegloff

& Sacks, 1973, p. 290; Sacks, 1992). The field of CA is primarily concerned with finding the organization of

social action located in discursive practices in everyday interaction. The first analysis came from detailed inspection

of tape recordings and transcriptions made from such recordings.

> I started to work with tape-recorded conversations. Such materials had a single virtue, that I could replay them. . . . I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to disagree with me (Sacks, 1974, p. 715).

Due to most tape recordings being accomplished with the knowing of the participants they may not be as free

as natural conversation would be without the presence of a recording device. Chatrooms provide

an enthnomethodological object in which the researcher is able to lurk without the participants knowing.

> The researcher is on exactly the same epistemological grounds as the room's other members. The researcher is looking at the screen, just as the others. All parties have exactly the same information, and all receive it simultaneously. If the researcher were to be able to record the chatroom from the physical perspectives of all the room's other members, he or she would gather no data that could not be gathered by recording some other computer screen somewhere else in the world. In this way the study of chatrooms avoids the epistemological difficulties that may arise in studying FTF interactions (Parrish, 2000).

CS 6.0.2 Case Study chatroom

This case study is of a site dedicated to discussion of Web 3D graphics. It is a highly developed and supervised

site, with its own help files, as well as clearly defined rules and assistance and a "Quick reference guide". The

headline for the chatroom states:

> "Come and chat about Web3D and VRML and all things 3D, every Wednesday at 9:30PM Eastern, (Eastern is UTC-5) which
>
> [150]
>
> is 2:30 UTC time (Thursday)"   .

Because this is a topic specific site, on the development and/or use of computer graphics, the purpose of the

moderator in this chatroom is more one of leadership, than of keeping users from either going into other topics

[151]

or abusing others   . To this extent, the site is inviting a use closer to that of the listserv, or of the older

BBS services, in which professionals with a given interest met regularly for the purposes of common-interest

debate and information exchange. The booking of a common "meeting" time on this site suggests serious

purpose, rather than the more spontaneous development of conversation with strangers, expected in a non-topic-defined chatroom. For this reason, I anticipate a more overt and analysable display of "regulated" conversational exchange.

CS 6.0.3 Questions

A question that I explore throughout this thesis is "Are non-moderated chatrooms closer to casual conversation than moderated chatrooms, where there may be a perception of censorship, and attempts to steer the talk?"

My second question asks whether having fewer participants in a chatroom makes for a better and easier to follow discourse. Unlike the other chatrooms that I have used so far which had more users present, Chat 3D had only eight participators (see CS 6 data on the CD). The chat logged for this study is available online [152] and permission to use this chat was obtained by the chatroom owner on November 13, 2001 [153] .

My first question is also concerned with whether a moderated chatroom provides a setting for "natural" chatting. At this time there are not any bots (Internet robots simulating Artificial Intelligence) that are able to reproduce the flow of "natural language" (see Barr, Cohen, and Feigenbaum, 1989). Natural language involves the processing of written text or spoken language, using lexical, syntactic, and semantic knowledge of that language, as well as any required information about phonology or scripts, as well as enough additional experience to handle the further ambiguities that arise in communicative acts. The theories that are used to discuss the different case studies in this thesis are steps in the process of natural language understanding. To have a natural chat in a chatroom one might for instance expect to be required to produce "conversation", such as that in person-to-person conversation, that would include turn-taking, sentence structures, waiting for the completion of a sentence before responding to a previous speaker, and a continuation of the topic. In this case study there is evidence of many of these features, such as for instance a continuity of topic. As this is a moderated chatroom, someone in fact keeps the speakers on the topic. Yet in Case Study One the participators kept the chatroom on the topic of the storm, as they also do in Case Study Seven, when the topic is about baseball. How then can communication in a moderated chatroom be seen to differ from that in spaces generally considered less regulated? Is it perhaps possible to see all chat as "moderated" – at least in the sense of conforming at some level to the requirements of natural conversational order?

My assumption before analysing this room had been that moderation equals censorship. Knowing someone will

correct or change or even suppress what we wish to say could alter the forms used in chatting. After visiting many moderated chatrooms at Talkcity.com and at Microsoft's chat server I realised for instance that few people are concerned with conventional spelling or grammar, even in a moderated chatroom (see the afghan chatroom example below). "Moderation" therefore does not appear to alter levels of formality, at least in so far as this relates to text conventions of "correct" usage. There is, however, quite clear concern about content, and whether it fits the room's topic or themes.

In an unexpected way, content proves important to maintaining turn-taking in a moderated chatroom, as will be shown in the discussion below. Unmoderated chatrooms, as we have seen, can spontaneously generate forms of moderation, if people in the chatroom attack or attempt to control others. In unmoderated chatsites the area of grammar and spelling is, curiously, one area where a participant can make an attack on another chatter – and yet I have not found an example of anyone in a moderated chatroom being concerned with spelling or grammar. I discuss grammar more formally in Case Study Seven.

51) <Pauline> hello there....
52) < web3dADM> hey pauline!
53) <Pauline> hiya sandy ! how are things going ?
54) <Leonard> blaxxun and Shout have browsers based on their proposals, but no ones proposals were adopted in totality
55) <Leonard> Hi Pauline
56) <Pauline> hi leonard !
57) <brian> what do u refer to when u say x3d then?
58) <brian> network lagged today!!
59) <Leonard> Think of X3D as redoing the infrastructure of VRML. It is not a change
60) <Leonard> in functionality, but a change in the language.
61) <brian> i thought it was a subset of vrml?
62) <web3dADM> x3d is VRML with an XML syntax
63) <Leonard> Of course, Core X3D is MUCH smaller than VRML - about ½ the nodes
64) <brian> to allow small client downloads

In this case study when a new person arrives there is the usual chatroom greeting, and shortly thereafter the other participators, along with a new user, such as for instance <Pauline>, continue their conversation – in this case, on

65) <pauline> are there any add-ons compare vrml with x3d ??	web 3D animation. <Pauline>

joins in at turn 51 and is immediately greeted by <web3dADM>, whom <Pauline> apparently knows, as <Pauline> says <hiya sandy> in response to the moderator of the chatroom, <web3dADM>. <Leonard> also greets <Pauline> and after one line of greeting there is once again the continuation of the topic, with <Pauline> in line 65 going straight to topic, saying <are there any add-ons compare vrml with x3d ??>.

This sequence, with its strong topic focus, is similar to the baseball chat in Case Study Seven, where there are 13 greetings with the other "captured" 142 lines being on the topic of baseball. After the greeting there is the immediate continuation of the baseball topic. It is also interesting to note that the baseball chat shown below, the majority of the greetings were from the speaker <NMMprod>. <NMMprod> has taken on the role of greeting people as they enter the chatroom. As this was not a moderated chatroom it is not the "official" role of <NMMprod> to greet people. Voluntary operation within such a role – and the acceptance of that act from others – seems to indicate the refocus by most chat participants from the saturating greeting rituals and social framing work of open or non-topic directed chatrooms, to the topic focus of specialist rooms and moderated expert communities.

36.	/	/\		<NMMprod>	2e.	hellotrix
37.	/	/\		<CathyTrix-guest>	6c.	hiya
47.	/	/\		<MLB-LADY>	3f.	h cathy
50.	/	/\		<NMMprod>	2g.	hey trix
75.	/	/\		<NMMprod>	2k.	hellotrix
82.	/	/\		<<NMMprod>	2m.	Hi Molly!
90.	/	/\		<Chris_Pooh>	10b.	Hey Mike
115. /	/\			<Chris_Pooh>	10c.	Howdy MLB
119. /	/\			<Chris_Pooh>	10d.	Cathy? you new here
125.	/	/\		<MLB-LADY>	3j.	howdy pizza man
127.	/	/\		<MLB-LADY>	3k.	hi chris
141. /	/\			<KnobbyChic-11>	11a.	Chris!!!!!
147.	/	/\		<Neeca-Neeca>	13a.	hey Chris!

In the chat3D chatroom the moderator <web3dADM> continues greetings and small-talk until turn 10, even indicating an off-line or at least out-of-room engagement with the work of the chat community:

10) <web3dADM> just got the Cult3D folks to agree to show up on March 3

The remainder of the chat is concerned almost exclusively with the topic of discussion: three-dimensional software. Yet by beginning with small talk and greetings this chatroom is shown to be based in casual conversational ordering techniques, even though it is about a specific topic. The administrator, <web3dADM> even states this policy of casualness to <Justin>:

4) <Justin> my first visit here; what's normal?

8) <web3dADM> NORMAL ;-) I try not to be normal ;-) nothing formal justin unless there is a guest

In the non-topic specific chatroom in Case Study Five there was no prior focus of conversation. There the participants concentrated on greetings and relational talk: elements which <web3daDM> emphasizes here, with his emoticons at least, as he cues Justin for entry to the group. But even in this mode, his posting is marked by relatively formal grammar and complete sentence structure – as well as by what amounts to metatetxtual reference, as <web3> reacts to <justin>'s expectations of "normal" behaviours, and queries the term with caps emphasis and emoticon mitigators. This move "beyond" formal language and into chat techniques is significant, given the shift it enacts in the discursive frame, from topic-orientation and expert discussion, to the "social framing" of the establishment of group "norms" in a chat space.

Other examples of such metatextual, self-aware comment on language use within chat tend to occur only at what CDA theorist and practitioner Fairclough (1989) calls moments of "crisis" – instances when the talk relation is strained or broken. In the example below (see http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/afgan.htm) there actually are personal attacks enacted through issues of spelling. The unmoderated users here comment on each other's spelling, using it as so often occurs in unmoderated chat, as part of the establishment of the "ground rules" for the chat: the constant readjustment of relational talk which dominates non-topic-specific talk, and bleeds over into topic-specific but unmoderated sites at moments of "crisis" in a given talk relation.

[ZtingRay] what a dumb ass

[fRANKIE] excuse me i meant to say butch bitch

[ZtingRay] cant spell

[ZtingRay] butch

[fRANKIE] asshole ztingray (who can't spell himself

Here an abusive exchange focuses around the capacity to wordplay across terms, simply through orthographic shifts – or even by implying that they should occur – as in the critique of <ztingray> with a "z" instead of an "s". With little else available for building critique, the textual elements alone are made to serve. Even on the "expert discussion" site, where a consensual community is already in place around a topic, there are occasional moments of rupture and repair around spelling:

1) <Leonard> Sort night for me tonight... Gotta take my oldest to scouts

2) <web3dADM> sort night? ahhhh

6) <Leonard> Sort == new term for Short

Two very different types of chatrooms, saved side-by-side at http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/bondage.htm show that topics or themes may be as important as the actual conversation in a chatroom, in controlling the forms of talk. Not merely the topic, but the formality of exchanges varies between these two spaces:

<Tape>: true,but would like to see what the nipples look like under latex

<MrMikl>: as long as dag is tied to a spoke?

<Cupid's Sister>	Dolly.....Nowhere that's just how I am.....I prayed hard to God for my father to recover....but God took him and now my father is in heaven
<Ann>	I'm singing that same tune Cupid's Sister. Still we have the love of Christ

Each of these exchanges achieves a marked consensual flow, but there is in the second a greater concern for grammatical exactness – including for instance the capitalisation convention for God and Christ – while in the first a much freer form of sentence structure is present. Coates (1998) has shown in many studies that such a distinction between formal and non-formal language use in natural conversation rests on an interesting intersection between class and gender – and here there is at least some suggestion that gender may be in play, with <Dolly> and <Ann> and <Cupid's Sister> preserving the conversational niceties, as Coates suggests. But in earlier analyses we have seen (at least ostensibly) female participants using the abbreviation/emoticon formulae of chat which breech formal speech rules – see for instance <Jenniferv> in Case Study Five, above. I do not wish to embark here upon a gender based study of chat, which might, if Coates is correct, either enable expert analysts to detect gender in chat even when online gender disguise is in play, or perhaps even indicate that all participants already do such detection work, remaining alert to the subtleties of a gender regulated talk, learned from natural conversation. Instead, I am interested in whether the sorts of "ungrammatical" behaviours common in non-topic-specific chat, where the focus is on relational talk, are actually instead new forms of grammatical regulatory behaviour: the sorts of "anti-language" which I argued in Case Study Five could be used for establishing and maintaining a specific "in-group" culture, against the broader mainstream behaviours of "intruders".

CS 6.1 Methodology

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I use a conversation analysis (CA) approach in this chatroom as CA investigates the machinery and the structure of social action in language. The primary concern of conversation analysis is sequential organization, or the ways in which speakers organize their talk turn-by-turn (Neuliep, 1996). Conversation Analysis (CA) grew out

[155]

of the research tradition of ethnomethodology . Ethnomethodology refers to understanding the meaning systems and procedures people use in everyday transactions – in whatever cultural field they find themselves.

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Where Functionalists , Symbolic Interactionists (see Blumer, 1969), and Marxists understand the social world as orderly instead of chaotic and haphazard, ethnomethodologists assume that social order is illusory (much as it appears at first glance in chatrooms). The task in everyday life, as "we do what we do", is thus to forge a means of ordering a particular task, to achieve common understandings among consensual groups – even if temporary – which enable us to carry out daily life processes. Applied to language-in-use by ethnomethodologist Harvey Sacks, this totally empirical and descriptive approach requires minute examination of the exchanges of talk, seeking the emergence of regularly recurring and reciprocal patterns of practice, which then act as structuring rules

for talk. The CA or Conversation Analysis which Sacks and his fellow investigators produced (see for instance the work of Sacks, in collaborations with Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974) has outlined a number of ruling structures around which talk exchanges are constructed, and which can be used to assess how conversations are formed, as well as who among a group of talkers performs which roles, and why.

CA thus becomes a way of researching chatrooms as just such a (temporary) consensual group. This may lead to an understanding of the way in which words are produced and meaning is ascribed in these new spaces for talk. There is the sense in the literature to date that social interaction based on the turn-taking conversation in a chatroom is a hit and miss affair - even chaotic (see for example, Reid, 1993 and Vronay, Smith and Drucker, 2001). CA assists in the making sense of these otherwise seemingly random or perverse acts of speech acts.

Conversational analysis looks at who is "leading" in the conversation. Finding who is leading may appear impossible in an unmoderated text-based chatroom where turn-taking appears random and where, unless the chatroom has a specific time frame - for example the chatroom is open only for one-hour a day - there is a never ending conversation. Who is leading can change at any given time while the chatroom is open. CA however is able to "read" the relational ploys of speakers at any moment of a conversation, extending over any number of "turns", from two to infinity – and is expert at detecting those moments when the conversational lead does indeed shift between participants.

CA has studied the social organization of conversational turn-taking in the past by a detailed inspection of transcriptions made from audio tape recordings. With the advent of computers to log text-based chat conversations researchers are able to inspect huge amounts of data.

Chatrooms are thus a useful source for CA study of casual conversation. There is even already in place the notion that online communication is nothing more than casual conversation (Murphy and Collins, 1997, 1999) and open to what is termed sequential analysis. Criteria for Sequential Analysis includes that conversational data must be directly observable - which in chatrooms it is - and can be saved for future research. Next, all principles and rules of how conversation is structured in terms of exchanges-in-sequence must be developed inductively, based on observable data. An analysis of any particular conversational event when replicated by others should look essentially the same.

Because of the technologisation of chat, chatroom turn-taking at this point in time always looks the same; there is a username followed by the utterances. Some chatrooms have additions to this provision, such as the ability by participants to change the font or colour of the chat text or to include a sound, but ultimately all postings all have

an auto-sequential nature – they do not appear side by side on the computer screen, but are followed one after another, line by line. Once the enter button is pressed there is no taking back what was said. If the chat can be saved, either by saving the screen shot of the chat, or by copying and pasting or reading the chat logs, the dialogue can be "captured" for future reference. What the technologisation does do however in CA terms is to prevent any analysis of the sorts of simultaneous talk occurring in such configurations as "overtalking", or interruption. Because the "enter" button sends statements which log according to the speeds of modems and the packet-switching used in online transfer, CMC technology and not the reciprocal talk relations of chatters sets some of the turn-taking rules. Enough features remain evident however for CA to operate on chat data.

Conversational analysis is one of three central themes that are the focus of ethnomethodology, the other two being "mundane reasoning" or the structuring of logical order within everyday thinking, and "membership categorization", or the ways we regulate social order through techniques of inclusion and exclusion. Sociologists typically examine talk or conversation as a resource to learn something of people's attitudes, the ways people's lives are structured, and how people differ from each other in their values and assumptions. The ethnomethodologist, on the other hand, treats chat as a topic to learn how members of a community (in this case the online chat community) use properties of talk (e.g.: its sequential properties) in order to do things with words, such as to have an interaction in a chatroom. CA research for this case study helps investigate the structure of social action in online language, to reveal how meaning is negotiated – and this is especially appropriate to a topic-focused chatroom, intent on professional knowledge exchange.

Conversational analysis first seeks to make an analysis of the data by studying the overall structure of interaction and sequence organization within casual conversation. Secondly, CA investigates the dominant sequential patterns of speech, systematically analysing talk-texts to discover which properties govern the way in which a conversation proceeds. The approach emphasizes the need for empirical, inductive work, and in this it is sometimes contrasted with "discourse analysis", which has often been more concerned with formal methods of analysis, such as the nature of the rules governing the structure of texts (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p.56). My "capturing" of "natural conversation" within chatrooms is through the saving of conversations into a word document, by-passing the need for transcription – although the many debates within CA on the interpretive colourings introduced by the selection of a transcription protocol (see Agar, 1983; Berelson, 1952; Moerman, 1988) are mimicked even in my cut-and-paste technique, by the varying ways the extracts used in subsequent analysis can be represented (see Chapter 3, methodology).

CS 6.2 Discussion

My purpose in this case study then is to describe in detail the conversational relation displayed in topic-specific chat by isolating and measuring its primary components. Conversation processing is rich in a variety of small behavioural elements, which are readily recognised and recorded. These elements combine and recombine in certain well-ordered rhythms of action and expression. In the live, two-person confrontation there results a more or less integrated web of communication, which is the foundation of all social relations (Guy & Allen, 1974, p. 48-51). Chatrooms use many of these small behavioural elements, even evolving as we have seen new techniques such as emoticons, abbreviations and pre-recorded sounds provided by the chatroom, including whistles, horns, or laughter. The full web of online communicative exchange however remains unmapped at this time. Analysts are not yet even agreed on which elements should be mapped for analysis.

What is important in conventional, live-talk enacted CA is firstly the degree to which talk breaks into "turns" – sometimes reciprocally agreed, sometimes hotly contested among participants. Within chatroom conversation however, fragmented conversation is the norm. Rarely are full sentences made, or contiguous and related sentences exchanged, although it is arguable that complete thoughts are being formed and understood. But within chatroom dialogue breaks in the utterance exchange pattern are especially clearly established, because the ENTER key is pushed on the keyboard, even if a participant is actually only part way through the utterance. For example, below, poster Gordon carries his comments through several contributions:

197)   <Gordon> the funny thing is
198)   <brian> sgi visual workstatio demos by sam chen are great
199)   <web3dADM> yeah the new SGI NT boxes come with a great VRML intro
200)   <Gordon> that when I try to view those SGI vrml, or any VRML with .gz extension to it
201)   <web3dADM> yeah
202) <Gordon> Winzip take over

Because of the enter key there is a primary difference between person-to-person conversation or natural talk and its online equivalent. It is as if one interrupts oneself. It can happen quite accidentally when someone is typing,

and hits the enter key, dividing their own conversation as <Gordon> does above. At the same time, many chat participants habitually break their postings in this way, as if, in CA terms, claiming "the floor" for their ideas, by keeping interlocutors waiting for a completed thought.

During the event-pause the person who is "speaking" is likely to be writing the continuation of his or her own text, while others are inserting their utterances into the chat. When we look at a larger selection, such as the six turns above, we can see that there was a complete thought by Gordon, who is expressing a frustration with the computer code in his or her program. Furthermore, these breaks in speech in the chatroom do in themselves function as an element in the verbal stream, similar to those Allen and Guy (1974) mention in their discussion of person-to-person talk. This introduces a "mechanics" of speech as a signifying act which includes a wide variety of meaningful techniques - in contrast to the behaviourists' view that language and thought are identical. Here even activities enabled by the CMC vehicle through which communication occurs can be rendered significant communicative acts. To behaviourists, there is no "non-verbal thought": all thought is seen as determined only by the language used (Watson 1930, Sapir 1929 and Whorf, 1940, 1956). But CA – and now CA within the new conversational forms of the chatroom – is able to locate "meaningful" communicative acts in such calculated actions as pressing or not pressing the "enter" button; interrupting or not; "shouting" in caps or not; "texting" chat talk in abbreviations or emoticons, or in carefully regulated formal grammar and spell-checked entries. These ways of communicating are therefore forms of "language", even if not qualitatively the same as language in person-to-person conversation. Since these online activities contribute to the ways participants position their postings for interlocutors, they can at least to some extent have their impact calculated through the existing rules of CA – a language investigative tool which examines how talk is performed, to establish what it is actually saying. So to what extent might established CA rules from natural conversation help in analysis of online chat – and is online chat evolving new rules and techniques of its own?

CS 6.2.1 Adjacency Pairs and Turn-taking

Conversation analysis recognizes the existence of turn-taking procedures, and especially the impact of what are called adjacency pairs, or direct interactive responses, within conversations. In chatrooms however, one turn can be presented amongst multiple utterances, with intervening but totally unrelated statements. The conversation does not stop to wait for one person to finish a turn that he or she did not conclude in one utterance. So does online chat inherently breach CA rules – and will some sets of CA description need to be reworked for IRC research?

Adjacency pairs while a useful structure for both conversational formation and its analysis; describe one method

by which people structure conversation. When one asks a question, one expects an answer. And the structure, and its attendant expectation, does in fact occur online. In turn 47 below <brian> says <still confused about x3d> and <web3dADM> sympathizes, <so are most people brian> - yet ten-turns later <brian> is still without a comment on his or her confusion: <what do u refer to when u say x3d then?>. Only then does the topic shift to discussing x3d directly - for the next thirty-five turns.

47) <brian> still confused about x3d
48) <web3dADM> so are most people brian
49) <brian> r u talking about blaxxun and shout3d implimentations or   something else
50) <Leonard> They are still debating some wrapping issues
pauline joined.............
51) <pauline> hello there....
52) <web3dADM> hey pauline!
53) <pauline> hiya sandy ! how are things going ?
54) <Leonard> blaxxun and Shout have browsers based on their proposals, but no ones proposals were adopted in totality
55) <Leonard> Hi Pauline
56) <pauline>hi leonard !
57) <brian> what do u refer to when u say x3d then?

The turns above were interrupted by a new person entering the chatroom and others giving greetings. Interruption by people entering or leaving the conversation, or shifting focus to speak with someone else is not the only splitting of conversations to occur in a chat-flow.

Due to the accidental hitting of the entry key an utterance can be split even before it is completed:

40) <Leonard> I will be offereing it online through Digital University sometime this
41) <brian> can't make it
42) <Leonard>spring

Speakers can thus actually create adjacency pairs within their own turn-takings. In the following turns <Leonard> posts two different utterances in a row, one a question and the next a statement. Both turns are taken before anyone responds. <web3dADM> answers the first question, even though not personally addressed, and then responds to <Leonard>'s statement.

21) <Leonard> Anyone used Xeena?

22) <Leonard> 3D just arrived today

23) <web3dADM> no it's on my list

24) <web3dADM> ahhh great Len

In CA terms, chat participants must learn to re-thread turns, eliminating some postings, without coding them as intended interruptions, and instead working towards reconstruction of consecutive threads. But how has this technique been acquired – and are there experiences inside natural or face to face conversation which pre-dispose us to towards interpretation of online non-sequential threads?

Two different and conflicting linguistic theories concern the relationship between language and thought: "mould theories" and "cloak theories". Mould theories represent language as "a mould in terms of which thought categories are cast" (Bruner et al., 1956, p.11). An example of mould theory is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Cloak theories represent the view that "language is a cloak conforming to the customary categories

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of thought of its speakers" (ibid.)   .

In sum, this debate asks, is language bigger than and outside of its social use, or does social use in itself form and reform language?

The American linguist Benjamin Whorf believed that speech is culture bound. He points out that words used are uniquely determined by specific cultures, so that it is impossible to fully equate the thought processes of two persons from different cultures, even though they appear to be saying the same thing (Whorf 1956, 221). Extending on the work of Edward Sapir (1929), Whorf developed the "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis". This hypothesis combines two principles. The first is linguistic determinism, which states that language determines the way we think. The second is linguistic relativity, which states that the distinctions encoded in one language are not found in any other language (Whorf 1956). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that:

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there. On the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our mind (Whorf, 1952, p.5).

Language thus becomes a "determining"; or at least a structuring, set of regulatory practices. As such, its systems must be observable in action, in order for it to operate consensually within given culture. Elements of the system

can be deduced from any given speech exchange (including in the case of my study, those of CMC "talk"). Many such elements have been analysed. For instance, "sequence probability" (Allen & Guy, p. 79) refers to the likelihood that any given verbal act will not be followed by just any other verbal act. An assertion for instance usually follows another assertion and not a question (Allen & Guy, p. 189).

When discussing language determination we need however to ask whether and how an individual's analysis of their world links to their particular acquisition of their language's vocabulary and structuring systems, and whether people in different cultures analyse the world in different ways, linked to differences in the vocabulary and structuring systems of their language. The answers to such questions have important consequences for investigation of chatroom talk, where new formations appear to have evolved, or are still in the process of evolving. Is there already evidence that such new configurations of language might be impacting on world-view – or at least on social-relational and concept-formational activities, which would reflect the emergence of new world views? If a finely-honed, detailed analytical technique such as CA is able to find complex patterns of social-relational formation inside natural conversation, and – with modifications – different patterns in use in online chat; might we not be looking at communicative behaviours with at least some capacity to reflect new patterns of social interaction – and perhaps even new meanings?

In chatroom conversation the chat "voices" have to be separated by participant speakers in order to follow the sequencing and turn taking. A difficulty arises when a speaker responds across the board, to different speakers, instead of staying with one particular voice. We always know who is speaking in a chatroom because the username prefixes the talk. However, we do not always know to whom the speaker is responding, unless they use the usernames in their postings, or there is a clear theme being responded to. Below it is clear for instance that <Justin> is commenting to <web3dADM> without any name being used. In this case it is especially clear because the response is in the very next line.

| 10) <web3dADM> just got the Cult3D folks to agree to show up on March 3 |
| 11) <Justin> what's cult3d |

Dialogue about Cult3D continues until turn 21 between only three participants, <brian>, <web3dADM> and <Justin>, until <Leonard> introduces a new topic - however the overall topic is still about computer animation.

| 21) <Leonard> Anyone used Xeena? |

Though in the following it is not clear who is being referred to, it would be assumed the speaker is addressing the whole room; the online convention being that greetings are universally addressed, demanding response if not from everyone, then at least from a representative sample of those present:

51) <Pauline> hello there....

Despite the potential for disruption from Leonard and Pauline, the conversation is able to continue. The regulatory systems are placed under increased pressure to keep the participants and their postings on topic. After returned greetings by two of the five, <web3dADM> in turn 52 and <Leonard> in turn 55, the conversation continues with the animation topic:

59) <Leonard> Think of X3D as redoing the infrastructure of VRML. It is not a change

In such spaces it is typical that only a few of the chatters will respond to someone new in the group. This is unlike person-to-person conversation, where a new person entering a room will usually be acknowledged by all of the others in the same space – dependent on the size of the group. It seems then that the greeting function, shown in earlier chat analyses as a dominant practice in non-topic-specific spaces, can recede in importance, until it is only a ritual mode, which can adequately be handled by only a few participants in any one instance. Certainly this shift between not only natural conversation and online chat, but non-topic led chat and topic-focused types, indicates that chatrooms have already established quite different repertoires of practice for different contexts.

This study seeks however to establish whether such pressures as interruption and the necessity to re-thread simply increase participants' competence in speech exchange relations, or actually alter the regulatory systems. The evidence suggests that the language system is in fact altered as speakers contrive ways for their "talk" to proceed in a chatroom. There have not been any studies to date which examine whether chat behaviour, were it to extend beyond the relatively brief technological "shelf-life" I have suggested it is likely to enjoy, could permanently alter face-to-face talk – although there is conjectural discussion in the media in relation to chat and SMS format and its arrival inside the language repertoire in school classrooms. Online conversation however has many generic features that cannot be replicated in person-to-person conversation. When within individual chatrooms, language systems change from word usage to emoticons or abbreviations, as soon as one user begins, others often follow. This capacity to play creatively across the keyboard repertoire appears especially attractive to online chat participants. Here a group rapidly picks up the challenge to express

opinions through numeral characters alone – and they spin the joke through several transformations:

98.	<NMMprod>	if you like the yanks press 3
99.	<dhch96>	1111111111
100.	<BLUERHINO11>	got it
101.	<dhch96>	1111111
102.	<smith-eric>	5555555
103.	<dhch96>	11111111
104.	<dhch96>	111111
105.	<CathyTrix-guest>	2I hate the Yankees
106.	<smith-eric>	don't have a 3
107.	<Pizza2man>	12456789

The sophistication and speed of this reciprocity is marked, but the tendency to reply in kind is common.
Chat participants frequently reply using the same coded forms as the speaker before:

165) <Pauline> lol, hopefullly is a family site, sandy ! ;-)
166) < web3dADM> lol think so!

And in Case Study 3,

1. <SluGGie-> lol
2. <Mickey_P_IsMine> LoL

In face-to-face communication there are many layers of signals to decipher before meaning can be ascribed, including gestures, facial expressions, body posture, intonation, inflexion, colloquialism, and so on.   In electronic "talk" we have eliminated all but the actual typed symbols in providing added signification. Within a chatroom conversation it is therefore impossible to construct nuances of talk in precisely the same ways as those developed in person-to-person conversation. Developed layers of meaning need more than one utterance, or else an established communicative community – or the safe expectation that one will exist – in order that a participant can colour their posting in the chat-codes which have evolved to carry these additional meanings. But in the final analysis, what is this additional loading about? How necessary is it to the act of communication? Is it central, or optional? Are those chat participants who perform creatively inside the repertoires, "better communicators" – more influential in their chat groups? Are they, in CA terms, "powerful" conversationalists?

Conversational analysis focuses on actual communicative performance as it is realized in the social context. Language overall for CA theory however ultimately provides and acts as the communicative means behind a social goal, holding human social systems and cultures together (e.g., Sacks 1992). Does this lift the seeming inconsequence of non-topic chat into something meaningful and socially important? Are the many seemingly trivial exchanges of online chat actually the very aspects upon which an online CA should be focused?

CS 6.2.2 Moderated/Unmoderated

Before addressing such key questions, it is important to consider the issue of power specifically within the chatroom milieu, and its special communicative technologisation. Here, power is most obviously invested in one particular role, and it is crucial to examine this role, and how it operates, before proceeding.

Chatrooms can be moderated or unmoderated. The case studies I have looked at so far have been unmoderated, so that people can come and go and say what they please at anytime. But there are also two types of moderated chatrooms. The first is the one I discuss here, where a moderator maintains the topic discussion, either by making those not appropriately contributing leave the chatroom, or by bringing the discussion back to the original topic. The other moderated chatroom is for an expert or a known person, such as an actor or sports person, to answer questions. This I refer to as edited-moderated chatroom – although in Australian use this is more often referred to as a "web forum"; see for instance many examples at ABC.net.au, used to allow audiences to discuss news and documentary content with expert guests and journalists, following radio or TV broadcasts. In these chatrooms the user sends their message to a moderator, who selects and posts messages for the person the chat is based around to answer.

In any type of moderated chatroom there is thus some practice of relatively direct censorship acting over postings – so is "casual" chat actually possible in an area which is moderated? One way to check this is to compare its interactions with those of unmoderated chat.

Most unmoderated chatrooms are open to the public. Usually no one is in charge, and what transpires between the participants is built around the "conversational" turn-taking that I am investigating. Some chatrooms, however, may have someone who overlooks the interaction, or a method to silence someone who may be a threat to the community sense of the chatroom. For example, some chatrooms have warnings:

> "If you witness any obscene or rude behaviour, please e-mail me at…" Or a notification is posted on the chatroom site stating that any of the following will not be tolerated: "Abusive language; Disrespect of others; Causing a disturbance; Purposely annoying others".

A moderated chatroom can have different levels of moderation. At its most extreme in controlling content is the chatroom where participants write in their "talk" and a designated person reviews what they say and either allows it to become visible for the other chatters or deletes it so no one else can see it. This makes a chatroom very topic specific, and helps to keep the interchange between speakers on one subject, or to keep out unwanted material, such as sexual or political information, which is not suitable for the general public, and a distraction to

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an expert or topic-specific group. It is also a method used by chatrooms which have a "guest speaker" who currently has a high profile.

The formality introduced by such restrictions and the sense of being under surveillance not only maintain topic, but also tend to produce a more conventional formality in language and presentation: even a certain "literariness" to postings, which often arrive as extended paragraphs, with levels of grammatical and lexical correctness which suggest a visit to the spell checker en route. More interesting is the topic-specific site with less formal moderation, where, as in the case I am examining here, the moderator sets up the time and date and stands back for contributions – or jumps in him/herself to the debate, relating to content rather than to regulatory concerns. Here I am more easily able to compare the "expert chat" which I can anticipate will still be content lead, with the more "relational" chat of non-topic-specific sites, and so examine what it is which is producing different language forms in the talk of the two types of site.

CS 6.2.3 Bound by orderliness

The problem of measurement anchored in a complex phenomenon is that it can contain thousands of discreet elements within a short time span. Allen and Guy have identified some twenty types of basic elements in the action matrix of "live" two-person conversation. Many of these elements however are not available to current chatroom speech, as they rely on physical cues for interpretation. In addition, social relations which can impose limits on conversation are not useful in chatroom analysis. In face-to-face conversation for instance participants must be concerned about the impressions which they make on the others (Goffman, 1959, p.33). Prior to electronic communication conversation has been considered a "reciprocal and rhythmic interchange of verbal emissions" (Allen & Guy, 1974, p. 11). It is enacted down regulated and recurrent pathways, its variations built around and used to maintain social relational patterns of importance in social living. However with synchronous online interaction conversation can no longer be considered a merely verbal phenomenon, and all definitions need to be re-evaluated for their coverage of online practice. The performance in electronic talk of

such regulatory features as Goffmann's recognition of the need to preserve face is marked for instance by the emergence of the practice of "flaming", or intense escalations of abusive exchange (Lea, O'Shea, Fung and Spears, 1992; Mabry, 2000; Turkle, 1996). Numerous early studies of online communication have noted this tendency towards aggression and rapidly escalating abuse sequences – perhaps one of the motivators producing the careful attention to social relational formulae in consensual communicative sites, observed in Case Studies above.

CS 6.2.4 Flaming

Not every chatroom has flaming, just as every conversation does not have insults as part of the dialogue. Flaming is another communicative tool, and needs to be analysed less as a problem, than as a communicative relation, whose use should indicate something about the talk relations at a particular moment and in a particular conversational context. Most chatrooms in fact have rules disallowing flaming within the room, yet abuse can still reach peaks of intensity usually possible only in selective communities – such as men's locker rooms or other hyper-masculine locations (see for instance Kuiper, 1998). In this case it may be just <fRANKIE> who is intent on applying his online expressive creativity into an abuse mode:

113. <fRANKIE> you are so low you have to have an umbrella to keep the ants
81. <fRANKIE> because you and texas asshole rose eat fried donkey dicks- (excuse me... pig dicks) on rye bread.... together

In the seeming chaos of nonlinear communication there are protocols and netiquette controls – especially important in spaces without a chatroom moderator. The more usual open-topic rooms are largely self-regulated environments, so that abuse, entering the mixed thread conditions of relatively loosely interconnected turn-taking, can cause serious disruption. Aside from the social rules to adhere to the same standards of behavior online that one follows in real life, and so to maintain the sorts of speech behaviours displayed in the context one enters – as we have seen above - there are unwritten online rules relating to respecting other people's time and bandwidth, as well as their privacy. Most important though is being in the right chatroom with the right utterances at the right time. If a room is unmoderated others in the room may insist that an offending party change their talk or else change their room. In the present case study I have saved 500 turn takings and every turn is on the topic of 3D animation, unless it is a greeting to a person coming into or leaving the chatroom. And yet no one censored this talk. Even when there is disagreement as below (for the full text see moderated_unmoderated.doc on the CD), it is usually the theme or topic of the chatroom which provides a sense of orderliness.

> [fRANKIE] fuck you texas rose. you need to be sent back to afghanistan, where they make your type behave
>
> [ZtingRay] If those bastard terrorists would stay in their own damn country... .that would be great

Even when someone has a different tone it is still about the same topic,

> [AmericanExpress.] WHAT AFGHANISTAN NEEDS IS A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT - ELECTED BY ALL THE PEOPLE.
>
> [ZtingRay] GOD BLESS THE USA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

In the following series of turn-takings the moments when the participants self-regulate are noted, as well as moments of leading; moments of contesting, and moments of adding to the discussion.

Participator	What is happening in this conversation
111) <brian> so did len say x3d not finalised yet?	adding to the discussion
112) <web3dADM> x3d is not finalized yet...yes true i think the final spec is due by siggraph time this summer but a lot should happen at the web3d conference too	adding to the discussion
113) <brian>is a lot of business done there?	adding to the discussion
114) <web3dADM> yeah quite a bit i suppose....most of the working groups meet	adding to the discussion
115) <brian> there's not a lot of info about the BUSINESS of web3d	adding to the discussion
116) <web3dADM> ahhh you mean money business?	adding to the discussion
117) <brian> maybe someone should write a regular column i'm interested in what makes some of these companies tick!	Leading – introducing new information for the topic
118) <brian> eg. blaxxun, shout etc	This is a continuation of 117 but due to the enter button being hit it shows as another turn
119) <pauline> am back...	Formal greeting
120) <web3dADM> hi there	greeting
121) <pauline> hi again. ;-)	greeting

122) <web3dADM> well I'm writing lots ;-)	Response to 118, expressing disappointment at not having work recognized, but with emoticon as mitigator
123) <brian> yeh, you're the info hub!	Acknowledges that work does exist
124) <web3dADM> seriously...get the new "3D Magazine" issue on web3d	Leading – introducing new information for the topic
125) <brian> ok we'll probably get it here in oz in a few months! :(	adding to the discussion; also mirroring emoticon expressives: amounts to an apology
126) <web3dADM> ecommerce is certainly a good app... should help	adding to the discussion
127) <web3dADM> it may be up on there web site soon www.3dgate.com	adding to the discussion
128) <brian> thanks	adding to the discussion
129) <pauline> are there a lot of e-commerce sites doing vrml or 3d ??	Leading – introducing new information for the topic
130) <web3dADM> definitly growing	adding to the discussion
131) <brian> seems to have taken of (relatively) over the last 6 onths	adding to the discussion
132) <web3dADM> ahhhh! www.3dgate.com has the new issue!	adding to the discussion – also indicates moderator has checked a website while online: leading group as well as conversation

The topic of the chatroom is not breached, except for a few greetings. There is only one incidence of self-regulation, in turn 123 – and this is a particularly mild reversal, acknowledging both error in assuming that no work yet existed on an issue, when the interlocutor had in fact produced such work – and at the same time reading and responding to the mitigator attached to the rebuff, in the form of an emoticon.

In Case Study One, a largely consensual discussion of the urgent topic of Hurricane Floyd, there is only one attempt at regulation, in turn 125 when <Zardiw> reacts to <SWMPTHNG> saying <smptthing................go back to your SWAMP> in reaction to <SWMPTHNG>'s turn: <i SAW A BUS LOAD HEADING ACROSS THE GEORGIA STATE LINE THIS MORNING>, in line 117. In that chatroom this directive technique works, with <SWMPTHNG> making just one last comment on Mexican roofers: <WHAT AABOUT THE

CONTRACTORS WHO HIRE THEM?? THEY OUGHT TO BE TRIED FOR TREASON DURING A NATIONAL EMERGENCY LIKE THIS> in turn 133. The next turn from <SWMPTHNG> is back to discussing where Hurricane Floyd is, <WHERE IS THE BLASTED DEVIL AT RIGHT NOW> - surrendering his political comments to the topic at hand. Notice though that once again, even when the reproof from <Zardiw> is quite direct, it still takes time to pun on <SWMPTHNG>'s name. As with the moderator's emoticon attachment above, this formulation of rebuttal inside the special registers of chat appears to provide recognition that, even in the moment of critique, an errant group member is still included within the communicative community.

CS 6.3 Conclusion

Conversation analysis holds that talk is an orderly affair. It is "organized by use of machinery deployed in and adapted to local contingencies of interaction across an immense variety of social settings and participants" (Zimmerman & Boden, 1991, p. 8). Conversation Analysis is an especially useful analytical tool for understanding busy chatrooms where actual dialogue is buried beneath the "noise" of IRC technology; systems that show for instance everyone that signs onto the chat server. Has this convention then become "bracketed out" of CA transactions by most online participants? In the IRC chat below there are only two actual utterances in thirty-six turns; the remainder showing merely someone joining or leaving, or an action such as kicking a user out of the room:

1.   *** asim has joined #beginner
2.   *** A-SirD-Bot has left #beginner
3.   *** A-SirD-Bot has joined #beginner
4.   *** nybbler905 sets mode: +b *!*@200-184-112-212.intelignet.com.br
5.   *** nybbler905 sets mode: +b *!*@203.135.47.1
6.   *** we2 was kicked by ^BeginBot^ (banned from channel)
7.   *** asim was kicked by ^BeginBot^ (banned from channel)
8.   *** young-male has joined #beginner
9.   *** BARNITYA has joined #Beginner
10.*** CRONOS405 has quit IRC (Ping timeout)
11.<primz1> dont know much about it
12.*** Guest39262 has joined #beginner
13.*** DjNItin has quit IRC (Ping timeout)

14.*** nybbler905 sets mode: -b *!*@203.135.47.1

15.*** AlertMe has left #Beginner

16.*** sweety49 has joined #beginner

17.*** `Peer_Away` sets mode: -b *!*@202.151.228.95

18.*** ET is now known as Guest10473

19.*** kitty-mews sets mode: -b *!*joaoa@*.intelignet.com.br

20.*** nybbler905 sets mode: -b *!*@200-184-112-212.intelignet.com.br

21.*** erin22 has joined #Beginner

22.*** jooe has joined #Beginner

23.*** Neo has joined #beginner

24.*** nybbler905 sets mode: +b *!*@ppp06-iligan.mozcom.com

25.*** Guest39262 was kicked by nybbler905 (Clone Removal of *!*@ppp06-iligan. mozcom.com)

26.*** Neo was kicked by nybbler905 (Clone Removal of *!*@ppp06-iligan.mozcom. com)

27.*** ci-be-rawit has quit IRC (Ping timeout)

28.*** adam has joined #Beginner

29.*** jooe has left #Beginner

30.*** jabin has quit IRC (Quit:)

31.*** sand`and`scents is now known as depths

32.*** dbztoolkit has joined #Beginner

33.*** guitarguy18 has joined #beginner

34.*** Guest49543 has joined #beginner

35.*** Elaijah has joined #Beginner

36.<dbztoolkit> whats going on in here

An IRC chatroom on http://www.irc.org/

Curiously, had the two actual dialogue postings been reversed in order, they could be read as interactants – in effect, as question and answer. But with the intrusion of so many technical entries, this space appears too chaotic to interpret – and certainly as it stands it displays no evidence for CA transactionality. According to

conversation analysis, turn-taking is integral to the formation of any interpersonal exchange – and here, turns cannot effectively be established. In *The Business of Talk: Organizations in Action*, Deidre Boden (1994, p. 66) compiles a list of the "essential features of turn-taking":

- one speaker speaks at a time
- number and order of speakers vary freely
- turn size varies
- turns are not allocated in advance but also vary
- turn transition is frequent and quick

There are few gaps and few overlaps in turn transition in such a listing. Boden's definitions do hold good for online chat, although in the IRC chat above the actual "speakers" need to be separated from the noise of the participants coming and going.

Other than in the act of lurking, participants in chatrooms demonstrate their knowledge of the chatsite they are visiting in order to be accepted or rejected by others in the chatroom – both as regards topic focus, and in relation to how to "format" their postings or utterances to the styles used by others on the board. The signalling of one's status as an insider or not is important in establishing communicative membership – and in cases where a participant resists or attempts to overturn prevailing norms, they will be censured, ignored, and even ejected. In this chatroom on computer animation it is clear for instance that <web3dADM> is the leader or moderator, not only because of the abbreviation for administrator (ADM) behind the web3d part of the username, but because of the number of leader entries posted; the expertise displayed in answering questions; the familiar greetings to arriving participants, and especially the interaction with those seeking information on the chatroom itself:

4) <Justin> my first visit here; what's normal?

8) <web3dADM> NORMAL ;-) I try not to be normal ;-) nothing formal justin unless there is a guest

<web3dADM> is also known by a first name, "sandy", showing the community that develops in a chatroom:

52) <web3dADM> hey pauline!

> 53) <Pauline> hiya sandy ! how are things going ?

Not just the topic expertise, but the sense of communal engagement, focuses this chat. Turn-taking is not only strongly reciprocal in such circumstances, but is strongly adjacent in its construction and patterning – showing how far classic tropes of CA can be demonstrated on IRC sites. What is of more interest however is any occasion upon which the regulatory norms are breached: where either CMC technologisation or IRC conversational practices move away from patterns established in live conversation. To capture such moments is to move beyond CA description, and to examine other influences organizing the processing of words. In the next and last case study I discuss the grammar of chatroom talk, focusing on word order, and asking whether there are already differences showing up in online utterance structures – differences relating to how chat is composed, which can reflect back on how it might be reciprocated.

Case Study Seven

CS 7.0 Introduction

This is the last of my case studies of text-based chatrooms. A discussion of the grammar of online text-based chat seems especially suited to the talk-texting behaviours of sports fans: a group heavily immersed in a pre-established expertise and strongly demarked specialist lexis. Link the sorts of linguistic adaptations already made within the language of sports culture, and especially of dominant sports forms such as baseball within the US, to those appearing in internet chat, and baseball chatrooms appear a likely source of linguistic re-formation down to the level of the grammatical.

It is of course obvious from the most casual scan of online chat that chatroom participation does not demand use of formal grammar – or even grammatical practices used in the often relaxed and idiomatic levels of everyday conversation. Standard spelling in particular, because of the rapid rate of scrolling text, seems to be an unimportant aspect of online communication. Abbreviations on the other hand do become important – part of the "anti-language" established for an "in-group" of expert and rapid key-boarding online communicators. It is much quicker to write BTW than to write "by the way". The abbreviation also however functions as a way of signalling chatroom-use experience. So is the same true of some of other new regulatory features of grammatical practice online? Are the common patterns of grammatical adaptation under formation? Are

these predictable, variable across sites, part of individual online creativity, or markers of online social-relational consensus? Which features can be observed, and why might these, rather than other options, be in play?

There are many ways in which chatroom talk could be considered simply as an informal, efficient use of language. Will we for instance stop using prepositions altogether, after extensive chatroom experience? If we learn that these small markers of relations can be inferred by users, will we bother to learn to use them at all? Yet at another level it is possible to see not a "relaxation" of grammatical rules, but the establishment of a new set. This chapter will examine chatroom practices, to see whether particular usages are becoming sufficiently widespread and recurrent to constitute a new "online grammar".

In selecting chat on the topic of the sport of baseball, I am following up on Case Study Three's chatroom analysis, focused on "Britney Spears" Chat. That site displayed few utterances on the topic of the person on whom the chatroom was based. My findings there showed such high levels of inter-social or relational talk (greetings and group-behavioural "maintenance" work), that I was able to suggest that the topic worked more to select a delimited social category of participants: a "style tribe" of taste – and probably of age and gender – than to afford the opportunity for topic-based discussion.

In the other topic specific case studies, "Storm", Case Study One, and Case Study Six on "3D animation", there was more dialogue in the chatrooms on the topic headings for the chatrooms, with evidence for group-maintenance behaviours being used to militate against excessive off-topic postings. But to date I have not considered whether particular repertoires of grammatical usage emerge to mark performance within given chatrooms.   In this case study, "Baseball Chat", which combines an expert population with informal and colloquial speech behaviours, I will apply several linguistic models for examining the grammatical functions most often evident – and ask whether these are general across all sites examined so far, or whether some forms and behaviours are specific to this site.

Researchers and linguistic historians, who study various aspects of online language, communication, cognition, socio-culture, psychology and other facets of cognitive and communicative behaviour, may find the discussion of grammar and structure a useful modelling forum for researching online communication. If certain behaviours are coalescing around IRC, the formats in which they are configured must in and of themselves be relevant to the analysis. Indeed, recent re-theorisation within conversation analysis in particular and socio linguistics more generally, suggests that it is the preferred techniques in which cultural dispositions are being expressed which constructs identity (see especially Holmes, 2000, and Bergvall and Bing, 1996). Rather than

language "expressing" pre- established identities, it becomes a stage upon which selves are enacted; a surface on which identity is inscribed. Within such a theorization, the sorts of language selections dominant in a given context are indicative of more than communicative intent. In particular, the site and the cultural positioning of a speech context are likely to be impacting on both individual decisions to access such a site, and on subsequent behaviours within the site. A baseball chatroom thus becomes an important site: one likely to display gendered and classed language selections, yet within the casual or "conversationalised" range, while mixing expertise and sociability. Baseball, as a widely popular male-dominated spectator sport, centres a great deal of general male social communicative activity – and thus becomes an ideal forum for the examination of

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distinctive communicative patterns in online use   .

CS 7.0.1 Why this chatroom?

I chose baseball as a topic-specific chatroom to balance the probable gender-balance of the Britney Spears site, and to provide for a broader social range of users than in the specialist 3d animation room. Sports spectatorship is a broad-based social activity, which improves the chances of locating not a class or educationally-based grammatical usage, but one arising within the chat practices; established across a more socially-inclusive group. Baseball in the US has a very broad spectatorship. I have myself had a long interest in baseball. One of my sons was signed as a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2001 and has played for Australia in the Baseball World Cup in Taipei (September 2002). Therefore I can also claim some expertise on the subject of baseball, which helps my analysis of the often specialized language content of the discussion.

4.	/\--	<BLUERHINO11>	1a.	sox beat the tribe
5.	/\4?	<NMMprod>	2a.	Nop
6.	/\4	<MLB-LADY>	3a.	no clev fan but like wright

In the above three turn-takings, which are the first three turns I captured in this chatroom, it is clear that the ongoing topic is baseball. The first speaker, <BLUERHINO11> says <sox beat the tribe>. The user name could be in part a name of the professional Major League baseball team in Toronto, the Blue Jays or it could have another meaning. The utterance <sox beat the tribe> refers to the baseball team, Boston Red Sox and "the tribe" is another name for the Cleveland Indians. Both teams are in the same league, the American League, and are rivals. The next speaker, <NMMprod> does not have a username that is easily reduced to a baseball term and as it

is only the second turn captured in this dialogue it is not possible to know whether <Nop> is a form of "no" in response to the early statement of <sox beat the tribe> or some earlier utterance. The next user is easier to identify as a baseball fan, with the name <MLB-LADY>, MLB being the initials for Major League Baseball and "her" response to turn 4 (/\4) is that she does not like the Cleveland Indians (the tribe) but she does like the pitcher (Jaret) Wright. These turns are written in typically abbreviated chatroom talk and the participators demonstrate their knowledge of both baseball and chatroom talk in this room. What they do not demonstrate however at this stage is any depth of expertise in the game – beyond knowing results and the names of major players – all information which can be gained from general media news coverage. Is this then in fact an expert group, as with the animators in the previous Case Study, or is this instead a loose-affiliation topic-focus group, seeking sociality above information exchange? One way to examine this proposition is to test the grammatical selections and preferences of this group.

CS 7.0.2 Questions

Which functions of grammar dominate in baseball chatroom language? To ask that question is to seek out the participants' roles within their online activities: to examine their desires and motivations in online chat. What is it they want to do? Why are they "here", and how do they want the site's communications to function? In this case study I will examine theories of grammar, and seek out techniques of analysis which will help us to look at the recurrent grammatical patterning of the language used in this case study.

CS 7.0.3 Transcriptions

For the sake of continuity and familiarity the transcription method is the same as used in previous chatrooms. However, in order to discover how conversation flows within the chatroom between particular speakers, I have arranged two different sequencing orders within the transcripts. In the first and most familiar instance I have put each user's utterance into chronological "posting" sequence, as it arrives on participants' screens. But I also re-arrange these, to show the more conventionally threaded interactional utterances between the participants, as if in one-on-one relations. I aim to test how far grammatical adaptations relate to reciprocal communicative work: does one grammatical selection evoke response in kind?

Also, I suggest in this case that removing usernames from postings may not make much difference to the conversation. In a text-based chatroom where people may not know each other, each entrance to "speech" is separated by the presentational software - so that a reader knows the beginning and end of an utterance. For example:

62.	<Nickatnite13>	How will Finley do for the Indians this year?
63.	<NMMprod>	hellolady
64.	<dhch96>	reds and red sox
65.	<smith-eric>	he'll do ok
66.	<Pizza2man>	fifteen wins...hell of a lot more than gooden

With the usernames not inserted the conversation, apart from the <hellolady> utterance, is as readable as it is with the usernames present – and shows both immediate and delayed responses far more easily.

| 62. How will Finley do for the Indians this year? |
| 63. hellolady |
| 64. reds and red sox |
| 65. he'll do ok |
| 66. fifteen wins...hell of a lot more than gooden |

While usernames as we have seen elsewhere are a major element of online greetings once past that with a conversation developed or developing, it is the subject matter and the verbal forms of postings that become important. Therefore I am suggesting that the user names are NOT the sole or even the major codes chatters use to achieve de-threading. The primary cues for that exercise can exist elsewhere. To this degree at least, the grammatical patternings of the language are significant, since it is these which help users determine response modes from new threads.

CS 7.1 Theories

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language (Fromkin, 1998). Trying to find an umbrella for all the theories available in linguistic dialogue is difficult. There are overlaps and even overlaps of overlaps. Often there seem to be very few differences between Speech Act Theory, Discourse Analysis, Conversational Analysis and many other linguistic mazes. Dixon addresses this problem, using the term "Basic Linguistic Theory" in his writings:

The term Basic Linguistic Theory has recently come into use for the fundamental theoretical concepts that underlie all work

in language description and change... (Dixon, 1997, p. 128).

Others use this term in a similar way. For example, "Basic Linguistic Theory refers to the theoretical framework that is most widely employed in language description, particularly grammatical descriptions of entire languages" (Dryer, 1995). Therefore, for a language describer, Basic Linguistic Theory can be used to describe all of the "structuring" features which regulate communicative utterances, and make them consensually meaningful. In this case study I will examine chat using such "Basic Linguistic" grammatical descriptions, its terms and concepts applying across many theoretical frames.

From the outset it is clear that without regulated grammar there would be no communication. This may not be the formal grammar of educated written communication. Yet while any given grammar-in-use may be closer to the relative informality of everyday conversational speech, it is always going to be different from that as well, dependant upon its context, its user group, and its topic focus. Chatroom grammar therefore is likely to be a form that incorporates many traditional forms of grammar formation, since it must be accessible to a broad – indeed in theory at least, entirely open – public of potential users. How then might such a traditional grammar be described, while at the same time open to indications of different, specifically online, practices? Will established descriptive terms and concepts suffice, or does online grammar define itself in new ways?

Several of the discourse theories and linguistic schools of thought focus on the exploration of grammar in conversation and the construction of meaning, including the Prague School of Linguistics (see Vachek, 1966; Jakobson, 1980), Paris School Semiotics (see Parret, 1989; Perron and Collins, 1988), Tagmemic Discourse Theory (see Edwards, 1979; Pike 1983) and Systemic Linguistics and Optimality Theory (see Archangeli and Langendoen, 1997). There are many Grammar Theories: Categorial Grammar (Wood, 1993; Morrill, 1994), Word Grammar (Hudson, 1995), Dependency Grammar (Bauer, 1979; Fraser, 1994), Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995), Relational Grammar (Blake, 1990), Montague Grammar (Partee, 1980), Transformational Grammar (Roberts, 1992; Chomsky, 1957), Cognitive Grammar (Huttar, 1996), Generalized-Phrase Structure Grammar (Gazdar, Klein, Pullum, and Sag, 1985), Lexical_Functional Grammar (Bresnan, 2001), and yet as of December 2001 there were no publications regarding an Online Grammar, which might use parts of some of these other grammar theories.

Grammar is at core the system of structural rules that describe how words combine with each other to form sentences. On the Internet in chatrooms speakers of English already have an instinctive knowledge of its grammar and it is this knowledge that enables us to distinguish a well-formed English sentence from one which is clearly ill-formed – even in the grammatically-variable realms of natural person-to-person conversation. For example,

native speakers of English would know that the following sentence is well formed and "grammatical":

"I am not a Cleveland fan but I like their pitcher Wright."

Native speakers can produce and understand a sentence like this without ever thinking consciously about its grammar. Conversely, in either a face-to-face or letter writing communication, no native English speaker would say <no clev fan but like wright>.

6.	<MLB-LADY>	no clev fan but like wright

But in a chatroom not only would saying "I am not a Cleveland fan but I like their pitcher Wright", look out of place in the steady stream of quick chat, but there would not be the time to write it. Hence the version: <no clev fan but like wright> - a grammatical elision which fits the technologisation of online communication. Immersed in the stream of other such postings pre-existing this one, it signals the chatter's capacity to perform speech acts suited to this online context. We can then begin to deduce the grammatical demands on chat participants: demands for abbreviation of noun forms ("clev" no Cleveland"); suppression of pronouns ("I" is removed twice); simplification of negation ("no" not "not"); removal of particles and possessives ("a" and "of") – all in all a selection for the most active components of language: nouns – especially proper nouns – and verbs.

The main dimension of the linguistic systems to be explored below involves the distinction between linguistic resources (which describe the potential for forming well-formed utterances within a given language

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system's repertoires) and linguistic processes (which describe how the resources can be used)   . For example, Saussurean structuralists observe that, syntactically, "Terrell" and "Narda" are the same, as are "cat" and "rat". It is not the meaning of a word that provides one with a total meaning, but only the way it relates to other words. All of these examples are nouns, and can be used as nouns. The first two are proper nouns and can be used differently from the others – in that, for instance, while all can stand as noun subjects or objects in relation to sentence formation and their relation to verbs, only the first two may stand without definite or indefinite articles – since only the first two can convey identity outside a general category. The "rules" outlined here pay no heed whatsoever to the meaning of these words – only to how they may, or may not, be placed in relation to other words. One is thus able to define a word grammatically, only in a relation to the roles it plays with other words.

To further complicate things, in chat turn taking, we often have to go beyond the turn to know what a word

"means", even in the limited grammatical sense of establishing what role it is playing in the stream of communication. In the example below,

> 17. / /\ 16 <dhch96> 5 b. big baby

<big baby> is not a description unless we put it into context. Who is a big baby? What is a big baby? Are we speaking of a woman just giving birth to a large baby, or a big baby elephant, or someone who complains a lot? The two words *big* and *baby* can have opposite meanings, just as in "small" and "tall". We need the earlier utterances in the chatroom to clarify what this means: which roles these terms are playing. So from the outset chat conversation relies on two layers of context: the words to which each word relates within an utterance, and those to which it relates in other preceding utterances. While grammar can be seen to be regulated from within the systems of its home language, with some modifications in varying speech communities, online chat appears to have an extremely specialized speech community of usage, and a regulatory system built around four different levels of communicative selection:

- The possibilities of English as a communication system
- The conventions of selection used in standard spoken conversation; talk, not text
- The specialized vocabulary and usage of "topic indicated" speech communities
- The special online needs of "de-threading" interpretation and its related cues.

With the rapidly evolving modes of communication electronically, from SMS messages to Palm Computers and the computer text-based chats of the late 1990s and early 21st century, with which this study is concerned, the grammatical structures of a new language-use system appear to be evolving. This new language already has established new rules based on graphic-expressive symbols (emoticons), heavy use of consensual systems of abbreviation, and admits significant levels of creative wordplay and neologism, as well as such partial cues and "gestalt" forms as misspelt words and reduced sentence structures.

Already however such a selection contains paradoxes. Abbreviations for instance are peculiar to the chatter's native language, and even to their sub-cultural specialist groups -as are most examples of creative wordplay - but emoticons are becoming language-universal, deployed in many online language communities which work with the necessary keyboard elements. To witness this is to recognize the technological intervention acting upon chat: software systems contributing new communicative elements, which are taken up variously in different language and user groups. Are these then linguistic or extra-linguistic elements? And can existing linguistic theories describe the regulatory processes under development with such elements?

CS 7.1.1 Prague School

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A central aspect of the Prague School of Linguistics' approach is the belief that linguistic theory should go beyond the mere description of linguistic structure to explain the functions fulfilled by linguistic forms - and this is important to the study of chatroom conversation.

The Formalists who were the members of the Prague School concerned themselves with a writer's technical prowess and craft skill. Before Communist disapproval ended this movement in 1930 there was a growing trend to take account of the sociological dimensions important in the writings of the "Bakhtin School", which combined formalist and Marxist traditions into an analytical technique that offers insight into the ways that language, as formally regulated by such structuring systems as phonology, grammar and vocabulary formation, can be linked to language in use: the systems as deployed by groups in distinctive social settings. Where de Saussure had been able to posit a binary coding system driving elements of language construction from phonology ("cat" not "rat"; "cap" not "cat") to grammatical rules ("I runned"? No, "I ran") or vocabulary selection ("regal"? "royal"? "kingly"?) Bakhtin (1981) in his principle of dialogism was able to show that all communicative forms – spoken or written – were inherently intertextual (see Kristeva, 1984 and 1987), constantly working in and out of "already uttered" communications, to make new utterances, the meaning of which belonged to both "sender" and "receiver" of the utterance.

The simultaneous coexistence of competing discourses or systems of usage provided a dialogue between "voices" that anticipated then answered one another. Even when, as shown below, the speaker carries a monologue, the speech is built over pre-established texts, and re-enacts in varying ways their techniques. Bakhtin referred to this multitude of voices as a heteroglossia: different voices speaking together to form a complexly layered dialogue. In a chatroom every voice is then already a mosaic of voices, picking up and reapplying the textual and communicative forms of earlier postings and earlier chat experiences, in order to maximize comprehensibility. Yet, at the same time, inside the scrolling lines of chat's technologisation, a different form of heteroglossia is compiled, with many simultaneous voices competing with one another to be heard and answered.

In turn 84 of this baseball chatroom for instance, <smith-eric> states: <cinni has already changed rules for jr. > (Cincinnati Reds' outfielder Ken Griffey Jr.). There is no earlier indication of a thread discussing this player, or references which can help decipher which "rules" are being discussed. The only other response to this utterance is in the next turn, where <Pizza2man> says <he'll hit sixty in cincy...maybe sixty five>. This is referring to how

many home-runs Ken Griffey Jr. may hit. In 1997 and 1998 he hit 57 home runs for Seattle which puts him on target to hit 60 plus home-runs in a year. Babe Ruth's record was 61 home runs in a year. There is no other discussion of Ken Griffey Jr. until <smith-eric> in turn 95 continues with his or her own discussion, saying, <jr. will sell the tickets!!!!!!>. <Pizza2man> replies <already has!>. In this sequence of turns there is a multitude of voices, yet with one voice seemingly operating alone – at least until <Pizza2man> cooperates. Much the same can be said however for the other exchanges and turns within this extract. What emerges is a set of different conversational relations, each ongoing in its own monologue or dialogue, yet technologised by the chatroom software into a merged entity or multilogue.

84.	<smith-eric>	cinni has already changed rules for jr.
85.	<Pizza2man>	he'll hit sixty in cincy...maybe sixty five
86.	<BLUERHINO11>	u
87.	<dhch96>	boston
88.	<Pizza2man>	with casey and vaughn around him...he'll see a ton of good piches to hit mwillie1 !
90.	<Chris_Pooh>	Hey Mike
91.	<BLUERHINO11>	asl dhch96
92.	<mwillie1>	hey chris
93.	<BLUERHINO11>	wuts th nic mean
94.	<dhch96>	24 m bos
95.	<smith-eric>	jr. will sell the tickets!!!!!!
96.	<dhch96>	me and wifes name and ann.
97.	<Pizza2man>	already has!

Only by reconnecting grammatical connections here can we discover which turns relate to others. Turn 86 with its single character entry can be seen to be a question, once turn 87 "answers", with the location cue, "boston". But this only becomes clear as a correct reading, once we arrive at turn 91, where <BLUERHINO11> as querist cues <dhch96> to continue disclosure as to identity, with the chat-form convention "asl" – "state your age, your sex, your location". The reply at turn 94 complies: <dhch96> is 24 years old, male, and lives, as we learned above, in Boston. A second question: "wuts th nic mean", receives the reply: "me and wifes name and ann." – presumably indicating a couple called – for example "David Hogan," married to "Carol Hogan", in 1996 – their "ann." or "anniversary". Grammatically, we have clear question-answer exchanges – yet until these are

reconstructed, the actual referents of each term used remain obscure.

Both intertextuality and dialogism are therefore central to chatroom conversation – yet even at the most basic of linguistic levels, Prague School thinking can be used to uncover new and inventive elements of linguistic change in play. Bakhtin's term dialogism here reveals a double interplay within communication: language building itself within pre-existing regulatory systems, learned from earlier communicative experiences, and another logic of two or more communicative relations progressing at the same time.

Because the phonic elements of language are absent in print text, "voicings" cannot cue us as to who speaks which utterance. We re-learn a cue technique as readers, discovering for instance how to unravel even unattributed dialogues, relating comments to possible speakers. We become expert at using context to distinguish between those elements distinctive in meaning, but similar in phonetic composition. To some extent within text spelling conventions cue us to decisions which might be harder in spoken language: for instance, dispelling any problem between "cue" and "queue". But in chatroom conventions, where abbreviation rules, both of these are likely to be rendered as "Q". Perversely, even at the level of phonology which might seem almost irrelevant in texted chat, we are confronted by the need to actively interpret which phonic elements refer to which semantic elements, by referring not to the aural binaries which regulate language at the phonological level, but to the much broader social and cultural context which we call discourse.

> 148. / /\ <Pizza2man> still has a 4 era

Read aloud, especially at random; for example when a person just arrives in the chatroom setting and sees a phrase such as, <still has a 4 era>, this posting is most likely to be construed as "four era". Then the question could be asked, "what is a four era?" An era could be a time period, such as in the Internet era. It could mean many things. Google Search Engine gives a result of 13,300,000 entries for the letters "era" (for example, Equal Rights Amendment, Electronics Representatives Association, European Regions Airline). This would mean that "era" in this utterance could potentially have any of thirteen million referents. But in this utterance there is a shared knowledge of meaning: a specialist discourse. In baseball slang, "era" is the Earned Run Average, and is important for a pitcher, as he or she wants to keep the era at a low number, usually fewer than three. A pitcher with a "four era" is allowing four runs per nine-inning game, which is not considered good. Once the referent is in place, not only does the ambiguous element become meaningful, but its communicative load may be immense – as in this case. The feature of post 148 which suggests this reading however is the grammatical construction. The suppression of the subject ("he") is so common in chatroom usage as to signal through its absence – and if

the implied "he" is signified in this way as agent of the verb, and as doubled by the term "still", then we are cued to locate a possible subject within a pre-existing prior utterance, to which this will act as a reply. Scroll far enough back, and we will find a requisite "he" – one who we can expect to have been praised, since the logic here is that he carries a handicap (the era of 4) which may disqualify him as a successful player – signalled by the insertion of "still": an argumentative indicator suggesting something which must yet be taken into account.

The capacity for interpreting and responding to this reduced and recoded online grammar is clearly present. It includes for instance grammatical roles for emoticons, which act as we have so often seen above, as intensifiers or mitigators – effectively, in terms of traditional grammar, as adverbs, heightening or softening the intended speech acts of chat participants.   When a chatroom user sees :) or "I say this smilingly", there is no phonological referent. Even when the emoticon suggests weeping, or an abbreviation phrase refers to a physical response (for instance, "LOL", or "laughing out loud"), there is no evidence that the action or emoting actually occur. What we come to then, as this thesis argues often, is that what is said in a chatroom is translatable by those who know the online "chat acts" of that room: who are thus conversant in its additional grammatical features, constituting a new expressive range. This grammar has already evolved to a stage where it is strongly rendered in communicative elements which are outside the repertoires of live-enacted, face-to-face, "natural conversation", and yet which also defy the formal grammatical conventions and narrative techniques of texted prose genres.

Does this imply a "chat universal" repertoire however, or are there grammatical conventions which are chatroom or at least chat-topic specific? It is difficult to tease out such possible specialist repertoires from their natural conversational and even popular media texted equivalents. In some special chat communities for instance vocabulary alone appears to signal the discursive frame. Anyone unfamiliar with baseball for instance may have difficulty understanding the sequence of utterances in this baseball chatroom.

31. <CathyTrix-guest> anyone have predictions for who will take the west?
32. <BLUERHINO11> yans, sox, orioles, jays, rays.......indians....mariners rangers   a's, angels.........final   standings

<CathyTrix-guest> is referring to the Western Division of the American league, or so <BLUERHINO11> must believe, or he or she would not have responded with the team names. <BLUERHINO11> shows not only a knowledge of the requisite baseball teams, but has enough time in between turns (either he or she is a very fast

typist or there is a long enough pause in between turns to provide the utterance) to list not only several teams in the Western Division <indians....mariners rangers   a's, angels.........> [The Seattle Mariners, Texas Rangers, Oakland Athletics and the Anaheim Angels] but also the Eastern Division Teams <yans, sox, orioles, jays, rays.......
>. [The New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, Baltimore Orioles, Toronto Blue Jays, Tampa Bay Devil Rays].
There is only one error in this list and that is the "indians...." [Cleveland Indians] who are in a different division (American League Central Division). But the second feature of this response lies in the compression of its structure: its complete elision of any personal verb-subject structuring: "I think that…", or "My list would be…" - in favour of a direct listing. This plunge into the instrumental is often held as the preserve of high-masculine speech behaviours, as opposed to relational female speech work – or at least to the claims masculinity has traditionally exerted over the occupancy of public spaces and discussions (see for instance, Holmes, 1998). But the apparently simple "listing" of nominatives also carries two other grammatical markers: firstly, the reduction to colloquial abbreviations – especially in the case of the Anaheim Angels – and secondly the use of suspension points (…….) to segment the entries into their regional League categories. There, even the possible error of attribution with the inclusion of the Cleveland Indians in a Western league listing is semi-negated by the suspension of that team within two sets of extended dots.

Here then at least three forms of grammatical work are under way. Firstly, <Bluerhino11> annexes the colloquial nominatives, which emerge from sports chat inside natural conversation in real world settings, to list a predicted set of winners. By adding to this claim on familiar expertise the sorts of abbreviation behaviours which act in everyday speech, and especially in everyday male speech, a breezy disregard for formality and a set of "in group" conventions for indicating consensual usage, <Bluerhino11> enacts a powerful speech format which endorses a right to express opinion, and to be listened to. But at the same time this utterance slides its grammatical features across into the very similar grammatical formulae of online chat. There too abbreviation acts to license and even privilege authority and the right to utter, as we have so often seen in earlier case studies. And finally, <Bluerhino11> uses keyboard functions exclusive to online chat – in this case, the points of suspension – to segment the categories listed, and so reinforce the expertise and knowledge of the regional League structure which underlies the posting. There is then in this one posting an indication that online grammatical codes are both co-extensive with, and differentiated from, specialist codings in natural conversation – and especially so in topic-specific zones, such as baseball chat.

 It could be argued then that the style of utterance in a chatroom is a form of dialect.

        …speakers of one dialect may be set off from speakers of a different dialect by the use of certain pronunciations, words,

and grammatical forms (Roger W. Shuy, 1998, p. 292).

In a spoken dialect, phonological cues are especially important in identifying what someone means. "Accent", read back as preferred pronunciation of some phonetic elements, is absent from texted chatroom talk. So are those conventional arrangements of intonation, pitch and pace, which we learn to relate to regional or classed or gendered communication preferences. But the selection of some lexical items and grammatical constructions, especially when recurrently used, and the texted indication of certain phonic behaviours and grammatical elisions ("gonna", "gotta", "ain't") are all continuous with dialectical forms. Since the use of certain words or grammatical forms in speech marks a person's membership within the communicative forms of that dialect, it should be anticipated that chatrooms are also segregated according to the "accent" of their text. In this baseball chatroom, having a shared subcultural knowledge (the beginning of the baseball season) is important for a successful chat speech event to be accomplished. But so is knowing what the shared language is, and being able to perform within that discursive order.

126. / /\ <dhch96> 5w. sox are gonna get radke

Sox would be understood by others in the chatroom to be the Boston Red Sox baseball team, while Brad Radke, at the time of this chat, was a second base player for the Minnesota Twins. Within this specialist discursive frame then, the selection of "gonna get" becomes "accented" by elements of the class, masculinity and contestational aggression associated with talk about competitive sports. Once again, interpretations must be established from within context – this time, the "local" context of surrounding postings in this thread. Two interpretations of what <dhch96> means could be firstly, "Radke will be recruited into the Red Sox team" – which would give the utterance a tone of positive affirmation – or "the Red Sox players will completely outplay Radke and leave him looking foolish" – which colours the comment altogether differently. In either case, even in the absence of direct intoning of the words, "accent" is present.

If we assumed that what is meant is that Radke would be recruited into the Red Sox team history would have proved us wrong. Radke did not go to the Boston team.

> MINNEAPOLIS (Ticker) -- Brad Radke made his first start since becoming the richest player in Minnesota Twins" history but
> [162]
> on this night, Boston Red Sox rookie Paxton Crawford was a better bargain. *USA Sports Today,* Jul 06, 2000, Online   .

Already it is becoming apparent that the apparently simplest of chat utterances requires multiple layers of linguistic analysis to tease out its complete communicative activity. No one linguistic school of theory

can accommodate all of the necessary interpretive elements.

To extend the sorts of basic grammar analysis used above to examine the complex relations between online and natural talk forms, it is necessary to look at how the total structure of an online dialogue can be described and interpreted. The theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) is concerned with the distribution of information as determined by all meaningful elements, from intonation (or online, emoticons and abbreviations) to context.

CS 7.1.2 Functional Sentence Perspective

[163]

Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) was developed in the early 1960s by J. Firbas   and others in the tradition of the pre-war Prague School as a means of analysis of utterances in terms of their information content. With FSP, the semantic contribution of each major element in a sentence is rated with respect to the dynamic role it plays in communication, such as in interaction with the prior utterances in a chatroom. It refers to analysis of utterances (or texts) in terms of the information they contain, the role of each utterance part being evaluated for its semantic contribution to the whole. The notion of communicative dynamism has been developed as an attempt to rate these different levels of contribution within a structure, particularly with reference to the concepts of theme and rheme.

Theme and rheme are the parts of an utterance alluding in the first instance to already given information, communication which is considered the lowest level of communicative dynamism (or CD), and in the second instance to new information. These latter elements have the highest degree of communicative dynamism, and form the rheme. Parts which have an intermediate degree are sometimes said to form a transition between theme and rheme.

CS 7.1.2.1 Rheme and Theme

The term "Theme" is used to refer to the elements of an utterance which serve as the point of departure of the message. The remainder of the message, the part in which the Theme is developed, is the Rheme (Halliday, 1994, p. 37).

Rheme is the part of a sentence, which adds most to the advancing process of communication; it has the highest degree of communicative dynamism as it expresses the largest amount of extra meaning, in addition to what has already been communicated. Below, consider the posting: <How will Finley do for the Indians this year?>

adding <for the Indians this year?> provides extra meaning in this chatroom. Given the fact that in a chatroom the common approach to dialogue is to disburse only a few words at a time, adding a complex Rheme to an utterance is unusual. Within FSP therefore, we are able to see that chat communication may often carry comparatively low levels of dynamism: more theme than rheme.

Theme carries the lowest degree of communicative dynamism. The theme is the part of any sentence which adds least to the advancing process of communication. It expresses relatively little (or no) extra meaning, in addition to what has already been communicated. When <Nickatnite13> asks <How will Finley do for the Indians this year? > and in reply, <smith-eric> says <he'll do ok>, his contribution remains focused on theme. His own rheme element is minimal - "ok" – and he fails to pick up anything offered by Nickatnite's rheme extension: "for the Indians this year". Replies which could have developed discussion on the Indians, or on this season's play, or on the Indian's record this year as opposed to previous years, all fail. The minimalism of chat appears to favour theme over rheme.

| 23<Nickatnite13> How will Finley do for the Indians this year? |
| 26. <smith-eric>. he'll do ok |

What this suggests is that there may be dynamism inhibitors inside the technologisation of online chat – including for instance both the requirement for brevity arising in the technical limitations on space and pace of entry, and the socio-cultural demand for adjustment of speech act styling into the semiotic modes of abbreviations and emoticons as expressives and relational markers. These both enforce significant amounts of "theme" over "rheme", building large amounts of conservatism into the chat text, and requiring all participants to attend to the stylistic demands of a given chat location before uttering. In terms of the reader response theories which began these case studies, chat then becomes a markedly "readerly" communicative form. How then might we describe the grammatical demands of this act of reading a chatsite and its transactions? Is there a linguistic theory and method of inquiry which can help us to examine the processing activities as they unfold?

CS 7.1.2.2 Meaning-Text Theory (MTT)

Meaning-Text Theory (MTT), first developed by Zholkovskij & Mel'chuk (1965), operates on the principle that language consists of a mapping from the content or meaning (semantics) of an utterance to its form or text. In a chatroom, MTT is useful for detecting how a chatter is able to map content quickly enough to respond – and for assessing differences in the mapping repertoire, as chat develops its own distinctive communicative forms.

The baseball chatroom for this Case Study offers extreme challenges to MTT analysis.   How can chatters

know, without reading and remembering turns taken earlier, what the semantics reveal?

In turns 99 – 111 every utterance, with six chatters involved, is linked to what was said before turn 99.

98.	/	/\	<NMMprod>	2n.	if you like the yanks press 3
99.	/	/\	<dhch96>	5p.	1111111111
100.	/	/\	<BLUERHINO11>	1l.	got it
101.	/	/\	<dhch96>	5q.	1111111
102.	/	/\	<smith-eric>	8j.	5555555
103.	/	/\	<dhch96>	5r.	11111111
104.	/	/\	<dhch96>	5s.	111111
105.	/	/\	<CathyTrix-guest>	6g.	2I hate the Yankees
106.	/	/\	<smith-eric>	8k.	don't have a 3
107.	/	/\	<Pizza2man>	7o.	12456789
108.	/	/\	<CathyTrix-guest>	6h.	2blech
109.	/	/\	<NMMprod>	2o.	hahahahahaha
110.	/	/\	<dhch96>	5t.	yankees s-ck
111.	/	/\	<BLUERHINO11>	1m.	im removing that # now

A person who enters at turn 99 has no clue what the dialogue is about. For the content of this dialogue to be mapped one needs more than the immediate content. Even to follow the speech events which ensue means a quick reading of the participants' expertise with their keyboards: the knowledge for instance that # is the keyshift for 3. The degree to which the postings switch from direct contribution to the "like or hate the Yankees" challenge to competitive play within the repertoires of chatroom keyboard codings – and recognition of clever contributions – indicates yet again the predominant focus on the formalities of chat communicative activity itself. Even in topic-selected chatrooms participants appear to raise their participation levels highest at such moments of play across the chat repertoire. Here "rheme" is achieved by creative use of a limited keyboard – all in response to a single "themic" element. Attention is thus focused on patrolling the "chat community" as expert at two levels: that of the chat topic, but also in regard to chat skill. This is a double focus, as signalled in post 100, where <BLUERHINO11> indicates that the joke-code has been broken. But by post 102 chatters have begun playing within the new repertoire – including the cleverness of posts 107 and 111, which act within the repertoire of keyboard entry, to deny the act of homage to the Yankees. All chatters – even those working only at the

simple repetitive insistence of <dhch96> - display immediate capacity to read the degree to which <NMMprod> has coded semantic load inside online chat format. Across this dialogue-stream responses interact, not only referring back to the themic cue of <NMMprod>'s original challenge, but to individual "rhemes" as they add to the repertoire. When <smith-eric> at post 106 denies his capacity to praise the Yankees ("don't have a 3" – a good joke for its obvious untruth -) <Pizza2man> picks up the omission technique, and intensifies the wit by omitting the 3 in his listing – evoking <dhch96>'s subsequent suppression of alphabetic markers at post 110. In other words, participants prove able to map semantic and formal loads both back to the initiating moment, and from moment to moment – and all at the pace of chat posting, and within its preferred repertoires. So does such an exchange, seemingly enjoyed by all as a peak moment of online communications, indicate the emergence of a new, reduced and double-coded, online grammar? Which other elements of traditional or formal texted or spoken grammar are absent, or transformed, in online usage? And is this a steady, replicable, and universal online re-processing, or do individual online chat communities – and even individual chatters – enact an online grammar differentially?

CS 7.1.2.3 The loss of formal or traditional text Grammar

Once chatters learn the language, it appears that they then can speak like a native, displaying a sometimes formidable command of online codes. But they can never become in effect an online native speaker (ONS). Speech behaviours are established first off-line, and are then modified for online use – most notably by the current technology which at least demands that texted formats intervene in the "chat" processing. Yet the logic of this developmental trajectory suggests that online chat, mediated through writing, would have become more formal than natural speech – not, as we have seen, markedly less so.

Online chat is already in its short history notable for its flouting of at least some of the rules for formal written-text grammar. Most immediately obvious is perhaps the loss of rigorous capitalization rules:

> [Not capitalizing "I"] is fairly typical and seems to be a direct result of the immediacy of the computer mediated communications environment. This...is probably due to a sense of urgency that is not usually present in a writing mode coupled with a medium that takes much longer to compose a message in. Capitalization is something he just does not want to bother with - it takes too much time and destroys the flow of his "speech". The same is true of spelling errors and other typographical blunders. The written word on the net is built for speed, not for show. If, in the opinion of the writer, the meaning is more or less clear there is no social need to go back and correct such blunders (Giese, 1998).

<div align="center">[164]</div>

To many people grammar refers only to the basis for "proper" communication   . Presentation of our language to others signals many things: for example, our command of language, our social position, our educational level

and much about ourselves. "Improper" grammar is thus often associated socially with laziness, low self-esteem or being a "foreigner". However, the focus in Internet chat is on constructing effective or meaningful messages quickly. Traditional rules of grammar are replaced with a new set of emerging grammar protocols – and the meaning of "grammar" for analysis of this shift must move to that of formal linguistics, where grammar is examined first as a system of regulation of word order, established consensually within given languages, and again within their social sub-sections, to optimize communication. In other words, to make the sorts of "inclusive or exclusive" social regulatory decisions based on grammatical "correctness" which dominate the popular understanding of the term "grammar", we must first be able to undertake the purely "descriptive" work of the formal linguist, in identifying which elements in a given language or "dialect" are considered standard or variant.

In today's online environment we can rarely form a definite social opinion about another person based on their ability to write online. For example, my physician types painfully slowly, with one finger at a time; however, she has been through university and medical school. Meeting her in a chatroom may at this level be the same as corresponding with a child. She has told me that she has never used a chatroom because her typing skills were too poor. If she was communicating in a chatroom with many speakers and the text was scrolling by at a rapid rate her utterances would quickly be lost in the shuffle. However, if instead of being careful and typing slowly to be accurate with grammar and spelling, she typed quickly and disregarded the forms of speech she was using, others in the chatroom might not take her professional qualifications seriously. In a chatroom then we assume authority not from externally recognized credentials, but from the internally obvious cues of high levels of chat "literacy" – the capacity to process and enter texted-talk rapidly, and with creativity, inside the keyboarding repertoires of online grammar. When <BLUERHINO11> is able to list the baseball teams above, properly segmented in the quick notation of chat, keeping the colloquial nominatives, and reducing grammatical sequences to the bare minimum, we treat him or her with respect, for both the baseball expertise and the chat literacy displayed. Traditional grammatical exactness as required in high-social status speech and formal written texts has been replaced by systems of reductive syntax and compensatory keyboarded creativity, built from within the very limits placed on CMC by its technologisation. So is there yet in existence a linguistic theory and associated analytical method with terms to describe this reduction-compensation online grammar?

CS 7.1.2.3.1 Systemic-Functional Linguistics – the functions of online chat

The function of language is central (what it does, and how it does it) within the field of Systemic-Functional

[165]

Linguistics   (SFL). In place of the more structural approaches, such as the Prague School mentioned

above, which place the elements of language and their combinations as central, SFL begins with social context, and looks at how language both acts upon, and is constrained by the social context.

The social context in a chatroom is the chatroom milieu itself. The social context of an online community is a self created and constantly changing group. Without a moderator as discussed in Case Study Five, the group goes from one topic to another with no set direction. As was shown above, "Tangent Topic Thread" (TTT) usually lasts only a few turn-takings before another topic-thread is started and the group joins that. Even within topic-selected chatrooms, as we saw above, the talk often turns to the relational or to the skills of chat entry. Chat is "theme" directed, rather than dynamically skewed to "rheme" construction. SFL can help us to finally assess the "sociality" of chat, by locating the major social "functions" to which it is oriented.

The social function of communication, as theorized within SFL, can range from entertainment, to learning, to communicating news and information. "The value of a theory", Halliday wrote, "lies in the use that can be made of it, and I have always considered a theory of language to be essentially consumer oriented" (1985a, p. 7). A theory of online linguistics, the social "what-is-said", as with any communication, will always have changing values and redeveloped theories. Grammar is thus by definition flexible rather than unchanging, and with such a fluid communicative form as that found in chatrooms, grammar both embodies and discourages traditional rules.

Central to SFL is the concept of "stratification". Linguistic function is divided for the purposes of analysis into its social context, its semantic loading, its deployment of a lexico-grammatical selection, and its phonological-graphological choices. In chat terms this relates to the specifics of a given chat community, the topic focus – or relative lack of one, the terms and structures used from posting to posting to build threads, and the online chat codings recurrently itemized above: abbreviations, emoticons, creative use of the keyboarding repertoire.

CS 7.1.2.3.2 Stratification grammar

Stratification grammar views language as a system of related layers (strata) of structure. Stratification grammar [166]

has two meanings:

1. the act or process of stratifying or the state of being stratified or

2. a stratified formation.

The first of these allows us to assess the formational processing carried on in chat.

Stratification firstly allows language to be examined for its relation to context, introducing consideration of what is called Tenor and Mode.

CS 7.1.2.3.2.1 Context

Context concerns the Field across which the talk plays ("what is going on?"), while Tenor considers the social roles and relationships between the participants ("who are these people?"), and Mode reviews the ways in which the talk is conveyed, considering aspects of the channel of communication, such as whether it is monologic or dialogic, spoken or written, +/- visual-contact, and so on (Halliday, 1985).

CS 7.1.2.3.2.1.1 Field

In "Online on Time: The Language of Internet Relay Chat", Juliet Mar (2001) includes within "Field" the entire context of an online conversation: the activity, the topic, and language choice. In her view "what is going on?" is answered not by the topic advertised for instance in a Talk service listing, such as those for Talkcity, but instead by what an arriving participant witnesses as they log on and enter a given chatroom. Her system would therefore produce an understanding of chat "field" as experienced in the following strata:

1. The "Field" as topic title:

```
*** Welcome to Talk City *** baseball talk
```

2. The "Field" as activity:

```
sox beat the tribe
no clev fan but like wright
 I sure hope wright gets out of his funk this year
 hes a headcase
```

3. The "Field" as language choice:

```
fifteen wins...hell of a lot more than gooden
With the run support I say 20
won't be coked up like gooden either
```

2anyone have predictions for who will take the west?
sox, orioles, jays, rays mariners, rangers, a's, angels...   final standings

Having indicated the field across which talk is proceeding, has the chat "wreader" entering a site exhausted the possible information being offered? Within SFL, tenor is also considered, an element concerned with processing and indicating the social relationships among the participants, including their relative power or status.

CS 7.1.2.3.2.1.2 Tenor

Usernames alone can be seen to work to form the social roles between chatters. These are the first-encountered signals as to a participant's intended relation to others in the chatroom. But usernames alone are no guarantee that what is promised will be and can be delivered – for "tenor" is established in a broad range of chat activities:

> Tenor is concerned with the social relationships among the participants. Power (or status), contact, and affective involvement are three important dimensions of Tenor. Power is the operator (an individual that monitors, guides, and polices the room), an individual that seems to be an "expert" on the topic at the time, or one that has a more aggressive style in the conversation. Contact comes in various forms, both intimate and frequent. This contact can lead to affective involvement. Since contact is usually not outside the chat environment, affective involvement is usually low (Juliet Mar, 2001).

It is the usernames that first work to establish the social relationship between chatters:

BLUERHINO11
NMMprod
MLB-LADY
MollyChristine
dhch96
CathyTrix-gues
Pizza2man
smith-eric
Nickatnite13
Chris_Pooh
KnobbyChic-11
mwillie1
Neeca-Neeca

Except for the user <MLB-LADY> (Major League Baseball) none of these users can be identified by their name as anything to do with baseball. In fact, other than the probable pizza lover <Pizza2man> and the Nickolodeon cable TV fan <Nickatnite>, these names create not only no baseball-expertise claims, but no cultural referents in the field of popular leisure pastimes (with the possible exception of recreational sex!). However, the fact that there are no socially unacceptable names; nothing that would stand out as confrontational, as one would find in a sex chatsite, indicates some degree of intentional neutrality. In sexchat users are quite clearly identified in relation to how they want to be regarded by others:

| :)Skipped school |
| Ali Kat (asian fem) |
| Black Love [M]uscle |
| Drew(wifes at school) |
| FuckBuddy(m)Pa HardOne47 Hike my Skirt (f) |
| I(M)pressive Proportions |
| Lisa-PornAddict Nice Old Guy down the street |
| Older is Better (M) |
| Prison Guard |
| Slut Trainer |
| Toronto Guy |
| cousin lover (F) |
| justforfun(m) |
| paolo soccer boy |

In this case the tenor for ensuing exchanges is set by the names alone, in effect operating as invitations to the establishment of specialist threads within a general discussion. Compare the relatively neutral and non-

informative baseball chat names, where initiating postings must be produced to evoke discussion threads:

98. <NMMprod> if you like the yanks press 3

In this case <NMMprod> began a thread that continued for another fifty-two turns, while <SWMPTHNG>'s comment in Case Study 1 began a thread that continued for fifty-five turns – albeit many of the responses evoked proving antagonistic and combative:

75. <SWMPTHNG> THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF MEXICAN ROOFERS IN N CAROLINA NEXT WEEK

Within chat spaces tenor thus appears, as Julie Mars suggests, a combined and flexible element, constructed not only from a combination of communicative features, but varying between chatroom types. The same could perhaps be true of other SFL categories.

CS 7.1.2.3.2.1.3 Mode

Mode in SFL terms refers to the special circumstances marking a particular communications channel – in the case of chat the symbolic (emoticons and other typed representations) and rhetorical techniques distinctively present, and the role which language plays in the situation (Halliday and Hasan, 1985, p.12). The mode is formed by the type of electronic communication fostered within the varying Internet modes already established, such as e-mail, discussion groups or chatrooms. Mode in chatrooms can be further broken down into that found in text–based chatrooms, visual chatrooms (with web camera) and multimedia chatrooms. These chat–modes in turn include Instant Messenger (IM) forms with two participants or larger chatrooms with many participants. And each has already-established particular speech relations (tenor).

Using the text–based modes of chatting mutes the visual and aural ranges of physical activities that off-line users use to communicate. A large part of the power of new technologies to accommodate these intersecting and overlapping layers of reality lies in their power to simultaneously expand and constrain interactants' mutual monitoring possibilities, giving the participants greater control over developing how the situation is enacted (Sannicolas, 1997). Because there are no physical objects, spaces or barriers participants are often thought to negotiate physical alignments and levels of involvement at will. The mode then becomes the framework that is chosen by chatters seeking to interact within certain forms of relation. Perversely, a large chatroom with dozens of participants and the chat moving at a rapid rate provides an arena of the highest safety for a chatter to be

non–committed in a discussion. The aura of invisibility is heightened and it is easier to be a lurker hiding amongst many voices than it would be in a chatroom of only a few speakers. The least safe arena to be in and not participate would be in an Instant Messenger chatroom, where the one-on-one mode invites a social relation of intimacy, demanding active participation and an expectation of disclosure.

A chatter entering the baseball chatroom centring this case study confronts a medium-activity chat flow, with multiple threads already established, a topic clearly designated, and chat-expert formulae on display. The tenor and mode thus align, cueing the new entrant to the functions of this chat, and to the systems within which it operates. While not necessarily knowing exactly who "jr." is in the following extract, the Baseball Chatroom entrant is unlikely to assume a general discussion about someone selling tickets to the baseball game, perhaps even a young person, as the letters jr. often denote "junior". But in this case the person referred to is Ken Griffey jr., the baseball player discussed above. And that he will sell tickets based on his popularity, as people will want to come and see him play, is a given of baseball lore.

95.	<smith-eric>	jr. will sell the tickets!!!!!!

Even in the absence of experience of preceding threads, a new chat entrant is likely to review their previous out-of-chat experience of baseball players and the tag "jr", to establish the referent. Topic, acting to establish field, stands in for the missing data – and so the chat still functions.

CS 7.2 Findings

CS 7.2.1 Altered language

Each of the linguistic approaches to grammar surveyed during analysis of this baseball chatroom has proven able to contribute to our understanding of how chat functions, specifically at the level of its structuring. Yet none can totally answer the question asked at the start of this case study; *what is the function of grammar in chatroom language*?

Instead, what we have discovered is the insight offered by SFL: that grammar, rather than establishing an unchanging repertoire of structuring rules for composition of chat utterances, is a flexible and shifting system – or set of sub-systems, each established in and providing the basis for a specific communicative space. Language forms in any chatroom, as we have seen, are constantly altered - both deliberately, in the search for creative expression, and by mistake, arising in the pressures of the CMC technologisation. Mis-spellings and changes to

language witnessed on the Internet may not be altogether deliberate. Typing can lead to accidental changes in spelling and punctuation. On the other hand the grammar of chatrooms, when enacted intentionally, can display a highly sophisticated form of new texted-talk processing that is semantically innovative and daring.

Below, <CathyTrix-guest> in turn 108 of the baseball chat site says <2blech>, an utterance which has no conventional linguistic place inside any grammar. Is this a noun? A verb? If a verb, is it a command? A request? An insult? What is implied by its combination of numerals and alphabetic characters? Within the "new grammar" of IRC, specifically within this chatroom, and in particular within the response patterns of this thread, the utterance is keyed within   an appropriate grammar. The "2" refers to an earlier request for chatters to press the "3" key if they liked the New York Yankees. <CathyTrix-guest> emphases his or her dislike of the Yankees by pressing a lower key to "3" and confirming her representation of disdain with a "blech". This is not a recognized semantic element, but has the same letters as "belch", and is a fairly conventional onomatopoeic or phonetic vomiting representation. In this turn there is therefore deliberative linguistic response – even while the riposte perverts the intention or request of the original posting.

In turn 77 <MLB-LADY> asks "dd any see the atanta score"? with two spelling errors. Assuming the correct wording is, "did any see the Atlanta score"? I would suggest that the first missed spelling is a deliberate alteration to save time in typing, while the second is a simple typing error. The removing of vowels in text-based chat is common, for example: <msg> for message, <ppl> for people and <plz> for please. But in neither case is the meaning lost because of the suppression. At the level of both chat convention and simple error, the reconstructive capacity of online "wreaders" is able to prevail. Online grammar is sufficiently flexible to admit change at many levels, without loss of comprehensibility.

108.	<CathyTrix-guest>	2blech
77.	<MLB-LADY>	nmm whats new? dd any see the atanta score they played u. of georgia
126. /	<dhch96>	sox are gonna get radke
127.	<MLB-LADY>	hi chris
128.	<BLUERHINO11>	i hope so d

As well as leaving out letters, single digits are conventionally used in place of whole words: u – you, 4 – for, r –are, c – see, 2 – to; and in 128 below <BLUERHINO11> refers to <dhch96>by using the single initial letter "d". Within SFL this allows us to see not only a flexible and indeed constantly developing grammatical repertoire actually

under construction and re-application, but because of the stratified processing, we can also recognize that such moves as <BLUERHINO>'s use of the single letter "d" construct a particular social relation, as well as a new grammatical coding for his interlocutor. Here "d" is admitted to the colloquial "nicknaming" techniques of diminutives, which indicate familiarity, informality and friendship.

In chatrooms, grammar is thus a developing protocol. Common practice of grammar may be applied differently in chatrooms – and in different chatrooms, and sometimes even differently within a given chatroom. In everyday social interactions, we use grammar to judge people in terms of social status and education. In chatrooms the rules have changed. A person may be judged by how efficiently he or she types, by their expertise in deliberately misspelling words by leaving out vowels to indicate the pace of their utterances and their familiarity with chat modes, as I have demonstrated. Unlike in face-to face formal or professional conversation, or high-status text genres, one does not seek to impress others in chatrooms by the "correct" use of spelling and grammar. What is "correct" in chat spaces has already clearly moved on, to suit its own communicative conditions, and to permit variability into the increasing range of online modes.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Findings of Case Studies 1 - 7

In the first instance my task within each research frame was to examine what each particular methodology could capture and describe within the talk-text as data. Only then could I begin to detect directions within these accumulating sets of features, and so to hypothesise that on-line chat had recurrent or characteristic behaviours and selective techniques, which, while varying across the types of chat sites examined, tended towards the establishment of recognizable "on-line chat" linguistic strategies. By summarizing the most explicit findings in each study, I can now move to compare the seven studies, adding where appropriate observations from

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five supplementary chatroom studies , to show features common to all text-based chat, and generalisable as the "core" discursive modes of Internet chat.

Despite their often incommensurable focus, the range of the theoretical methods used for analysis revealed particular communication features common to all chatrooms. Most of these features are not part of person-to-person off-line talk, and many appear unique to text-based electronic dialogue - although there is evidence that some of these behaviours occur in related CMC-delivery formats, such as SMS.

Returning to the five assumptions, drawn from the CMC literature and from personal experience of IRC, posed at the beginning of the methodology section (), it is now possible to test the Case Study findings against these, and so to construct a series of propositions on the nature of on-line chat:

- That language used in chat rooms is more deliberate and calculated than the predominantly "informal" styles might suggest.
- That conversation within Chatrooms demands a highly sensitized "reading" of texted-talk gambits from participants.
- That "chat" does not differ from natural conversation in certain key aspects, but does so in others.
- That observational study of chatroom conversation can capture adaptations to conversational behaviours.
- That such work gives a better understanding of how, and why, chatrooms are an important area in which to extend current conversational research theory.

Each case study had three components useful in bringing about such conclusions for chatroom analysis.

Firstly, the linguistic theory and its associated methodology identified key aspects relating to how each text-based set of chat data "worked".

Secondly, each case study identified features of conversation that were unique to both text-based chatrooms, and to the varying types and functions of such spaces.

Thirdly each case study allowed for the analysis of recurring or "typical" chatroom behaviours, demonstrating elements of communicative activity specific to the theory driving that particular case study. In other words, both general and specialised features were pursued in each case study.

 The primary discoveries in each case study together provided a map of IRC, in both general and specific terms, across a broad spectrum of exemplar behaviours, at least during the sample period, and most likely beyond.

5.1.1 Case Study 1

Case Study One based its analysis on Reader-response theory to show that in on-line chat, both the

revealed as an active reading environment where the "reader is left with everything to do…" (Sartre, 1949, p. 176). In order to engage in conversation the "speaker-writer" first needs to be a "listener-reader". Yet, as with all Reader-Response research, chat-texts captured for this study illustrated ongoing tensions for users, in relation to the issue of "closure", or certainty in interpretation. What is left open in chatrooms – more so than in person-to-person conversation - is what later Reader-Response commentators called "preferred readings": techniques whereby texts are arranged to position readers to receive and interpret them in certain ways which optimize selected understandings and suppress others. Such texts may construct within themselves "an inscribed reader", or such a figure and its attendant roles may emerge in "interpretative communities" (Chandler, 2001). But are such positionings found in the "texted" talk of IRC and its user-groups?

Using Reader-Response theory to examine chat in a community of users checking progress of an extreme weather-alert emergency, I found that there are two moments of "reading" that a chat participant carries out in seeking to understand meaning within a chatroom, even before beginning to read the actual utterances of the other chatters. In person-to-person conversation early "readings" of an interlocutor, taken even before we listen to what he or she says, involve viewing the person, their appearance, their posture, body language and the environment (see Richmond and McCroskey, 1995; Ong, 1993; Goffman, 1981). Similar work is clearly undertaken in on-line chat.

In chatrooms, firstly, the title of the chatroom is read. Case Study One showed that chatters carried on conversations reflective of the chatroom title, Hurricane Floyd. In other Case Studies with clearly designated topic-related titles I found the same reading techniques used. Speakers tended to converse about the topic established by the chatroom title. In chatrooms the reader's response fits the chatroom milieu. A new utterance may begin a new thread, but there too the response is dependent on the reading. For example in Case Study One turn 107, <SWMPTHNG> inquires <YOU AINT TALKING ABOUT MEX ROOFERS ARE YOU?> in assumed response to turn 99 <EMT-Calvin>: <folks need to be careful for con artest after the storm>. This reading is however still on the same topic of the storm as a thread alongside, which talks about the storm itself – it merely illustrates a different "reading" of the topic. There are indeed very few threads during this conversation that are not directly on Hurricane Floyd. The chart below shows that 254 of the utterances in this chatroom are directly on the storm, while 14 turns are about whether Mexican roofers will become involved with rebuilding after the storm seven; are interpersonal (for example, <your last name wouldn't be Graham would it>); and a small number "drift" from the storm topic onto comments not immediately about the storm, although arguably bearing on the participant's semi-panicked reaction to it, as well as to their performance within the chat exchange:

<VIAGRA AND PRUNE JUICE....DON'T KNOW IF I'M COMING OR GOING.....>, or <ankash> stating <I gotta go get some Xanax.>. Such lines are not uncommon during even focused and topic-specific chat, and reveal from their "theming" to both topic and interchange relations, the varied "reading" work of participants.

Thread	Example	Number of turns in thread
Storm thread	Turn4 <TIFFTIFF18> DO U MOW IF ITS GONNA HIE JERSEY AT ALL	254
Mexican thread	Turn77 <SWMPTHNG> THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF MEXICAN ROOFERS IN N CAROLINA NEXT WEEK	14
Personal thread	Turn189 <guest-Beau> Calvin, your last name wouldn't be Graham would it	7
Chocolate thread	Turn15 <mahmoo> brb.......gotta go get me some chocolate	6
Other	Turn215 <guest-Capt> VIAGRA AND PRUNE JUICE....DON'T KNOW IF I'M COMING OR GOING.....	6

Reader-response theory takes us further however than just the recognition that topic controls most of the dominant conversational thread-construction. Here, I found that the "writerly-writer" or actively constructing text-talker who initiates a conversational thread, and the "writerly-reader" who responds, are able to move the chat into new avenues, not simply responding in topic-compliant ways to developing conversations, but demonstrating especially "open" and "active" strategies of initiating text and responding to it. The talk remains topic centred, yet works to focus and refocus threads around certain aspects or themes of a topic. This is not just information provision, but creative exchange build around information sharing.

Chat entrants anticipate certain content and behaviours, focused around the chatroom title – but also display tendencies towards adapting rapidly as topic focus shifts and new threads develop, and even a capacity to shift off topic, especially into personalized referential chat. One of the features of reader-response theory as I am using it in chatrooms is thus that it shows how a reader brings certain assumptions to a text, based on the interpretive strategies he/she has brought to a particular community, from other social-cultural contexts (see Gass, Neu, and Joyce, 1995; Blum-Kulka, Kasper, Gabriele, 1989; Rheingold, 1994; Turkle, 1995). The racial tone in Case Study One, displayed toward Mexican roofers, is an example of this. Reader-Response analysis thus reveals inside chat the sort of active, meaning-generating participants considered central in postmodern consumer culture

(Lury, 1996; Castells, 1997, 2000). Even where the topic-shifts and socio-cultural attitudes may be directed to conservative or reactionary positions, the claims on reflexive use of communicative technologies and transformational interventions on communicative texts demonstrate Castells' hypothesis, that the new communicative technologies are necessary to the "project identity" strategies of the postmodern condition. IRC becomes not a trivial pastime, but a key location for social and cultural formation.

How important is the particular chatroom context for the reader-writer interpretive relation?

It is the title of the chatroom that I suggest lures a participant to a particular chatroom. In Case Study One it was the topic of Hurricane Floyd. In Case Study Seven it is baseball and in Case Study Three the title of the chatroom indicates that chat will focus around the pop idol Britney Spears – although in this case, as the analysis suggests, talk focused more into a Britney Spears form of style culture than into direct discussion of the ostensible topic. It appears then that despite the title as indicator, the chatter has to deal with multiple frames of interpretation, assessing the motivations and attitudes of others in the room. When in turn 105 of Case Study One <SWMPTHNG> asks <YOU AINT TALKING ABOUT MEX ROOFERS ARE YOU?> the question indicates a moment of direct consensus - checking. <SWMPTHNG> picks up a hint in an earlier posting that there may be an opportunity to redevelop a current thread, and intervenes to "take the floor" in CA terms, in a powerful bid to redirect conversation. Here "context" is both shifting – from hurricane alert information, to discussion of ethnic tension – and not shifting, since <SWMPTHNG> in making this move is assuming that he or she is already culturally contextualised: conversing with a group of like-minded non-Hispanic Americans, who will share his or her views on "Mex roofers". The "ain't", with its appeal to a colloquial repertoire, helps establish that cultural context, and indicates not only a chat entry which has "read" a cultural framing in earlier postings, but which re-inserts its interpretation of that framing, hoping to evoke response in kind.

The chatroom as context appears then to pre-position its users to expect and enact certain behaviours, values and topics. But since this appears to be only partially established through the title and topic selections, chatters also display complex techniques for both signalling and reading back rather less directly expressed aspects of the social and cultural framings brought to the chat. Context is generated in both chat space and real space – and these may or may not align. To this extent it becomes necessary to assess the contribution of the technologisation of chat to its cultural contextual framings, and to take up the findings of Case Study 2.

5.1.2 Case Study 2

Case Study Two examines on-line chat as a form of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), with all the

special features and characteristics this implies. Computers do not replace but supplement communication. Despite the many obvious influences of the technologisation of on-line talk, communication remains dependant on both the sender of the message and the receiver. Even bots: those elements of on-line practice pre-generated as software and used to automate some on-line messaging functions, are scripted inside the communicative conventions of their language community – and sometimes even of their specialised chatspace.

The many tools available for CMC research conventionally divide the research objects into either asynchronous CMC (e-mails; mailbases; network groups; annotatable webpages; databases and discussion boards) or synchronous CMC (chatrooms and computer-conferencing) – although future studies might well address this division from the perspectives established in studies such as this. While the "liveness" of synchronous chat enables application of such analytical methods as CA, the use of script in "chat" still places interesting limits around the act of communication, and links even the immediacy of IRC to the more stable and enduring CMC forms. Since Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is used in business, non-profit organizations, education, and entertainment as well as for personal use, better understandings of how each format works as a communicative act, and of how each suits its wide range of uses, might assist in future selections and development of the various formats, for specialist use. However, as this study has suggested, CMC at this stage still lacks established and specific methodologies to analyse chatroom talk. While this thesis has used several conversational analytical theories, such as Speech Act Theory and Conversational Analysis, as a lens to examine the data in CMC, it has also uncovered in a preliminary way many limitations for analysis, as techniques developed for real-world talk are transferred into electronic forms of communication. Until CMC research moves beyond its current emphasis on pragmatic and developmental studies of user applications, and begins to examine instead the practices of those users in observational, descriptive and analytical ways, "how to" introductions to CMC formats will remain largely at the level of technical glossaries. The most common use of CMC research currently is surveying students and instructors (see Romiszowsk, 1996; Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, & Turoff, 1995; Mason, 1992; Rice, 1990) and tracking e-business supported work coordination (Bowers and Churcher, 1988). CMC is however beginning to be used as a method, as well as a tool, for researching on-line conversation (see Cicognani, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000; Parrish, 2000; Rheingold, 1993, 1994, 2000; Vallis, 1999, 2001; Turkle, 1982, 1984, 1995, 1996) – but such studies to date work within broad sociological or social-psychological modes.

To some extent the impacts of CMC on Internet chat are obvious to every user.

Synchronous CMC has its own particular set of difficulties, as I have shown in Case Study Two. Multiple threads of discussion become difficult to follow. Slow Internet connection can mean that the speed of reading and

responding cannot be maintained. This results in discussion losing its focus and side discussions (threads) developing. Sometimes participants may simply be slow typists. The result is that what is written is often a response to something written many turns earlier.

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Three terms, "gap", "lapse" and "pause" are used to refer to silences in CA   . In chatrooms however, there will never be silences in the proper sense of the word, let alone with the specificity and distinguishability of CA analysis.   If there are silences in real time, the text will simply scroll together to cover these spaces. The CMC technologisation masks what is, in CA terms, significant rupture in "talk". Because of the threaded nature of the arrival of chat postings, chat users learn to bridge and to braid: to cross between postings, to reconstruct postings into reciprocal turns. As yet, there is no means of assessing how extended, or how complex, such bridgings and braidings might become – or of registering or measuring their impact on subsequent "replies". By "breaking open" the technologisation of online turns as I do in many case studies, it becomes possible to examine the space between a person's turn, and the next time the same person has a turn. I have called the distance between the two turns a "lag" or the distance between speech events of a speaker in a chat situation; a pause between one utterance and another. The unviability of such "lags", together with the changed perspectives showing up in consequent entries, shows that there is a strong "writerly" form of "reading" in between such frames (see CS 1.2). In face-to-face conversation a conversational lapse or pause can be equated to a listening phase of conversation (see Sacks, 1992). In chat rooms this is a reading phase; interpretive, reconstructive, and wholly significant in the chat process. Without consideration of the lag times, as well as of the intervening utterances, it is impossible to see how much interpretive work is occurring. In de-threaded sequence postings seem incommensurable. Several unconnected themes can develop – and only by consideration of both the time taken in achieving these changed frames, and in shifting focus as new threads intersect and gain attention, can we make sense of the whole contribution. A CA methodology therefore, with its primary focus on relatively immediate conversational responses, even within multilogue circumstances, will need adaptation when dealing with IRC conditions.

It is also important to locate techniques which will allow analysis of the differences in communicative responses between various Internet communication devices. In discussion groups and e-mails people observably take more time and care with what they write, and are therefore not as immediate in their communication as in Instant Messenger (IM) or chatroom conversations. Users of discussion groups and e-mail may use a spell/ grammar check, and plan more consciously before posting their text. There is for instance a more textual format

with discussion groups. But while Instant Messenger and chatrooms appear at first sight to be less disciplined and more varied, with the relative spontaneity of casual interchange ignoring many more formal communicative conventions, analysis has shown complex patterns of interpretive and pre-dispositional structuring under way. Messages from the Hurricane Floyd Messages Board, for instance appear more developed textually than the storm-related chatroom utterances – but is this an absolute, or a relative judgement? While IRC postings are far less grammatically formal, they remain as communicatively active and complex.

It is of course possible to postulate that, in the absence of directly reciprocating co-locutors, postings must address an unknown and general audience, in their quest for the specific addressee – and thus the more formalized and "public" mode of expression. In an Instant Messenger chatroom, the contrary is true. Interlocutors – most often established acquaintances, or at least those who are able to establish cultural commonality within the immediate communicative context – form responsive exchanges through their readings of informal, yet nevertheless complex and sophisticated talk-texting repertoires.

I approached this case study with two questions related to Computer-mediated communication: "Do computers change conversation" and "Are Instant Messenger chatrooms closer to off-line-person-to-person conversation than dialogue in a multivoiced chatroom?" It has certainly become obvious that computers do change conversation, and especially in relation to the suppression of paralinguistic cues, direct address carried by gaze or gesture, tonal emphasis … all of those techniques used in "live" communication to manage the conversational relation. While we have found many emerging CMC techniques being used to replace these physical features, and noted the extraordinary creativity and pace of application in many cases, the informality of the new repertoire: its constitution within practice and its lack of a tailored analytical method, mean that CMC has not yet delivered all of its secrets. Nor can we anticipate that users will cease their creative transformations of the mixed-mode of "texted-talk" into these and other new communicative forms. Already it has become obvious that while CMC has produced and still produces new talk techniques, there is no monolithic regulatory influence being exerted. Practices differ – between chat spaces, between chat participants – even at different moments within a particular chat sequence, as talk-topics shift emphasis, and behaviours adapt. CMC itself has already spun into many different formats, and the talk-texting and speech relations within each have also differentiated. Some patterns appear to cross between CMC technologising practices in different formats. For instance, as with the chat in Case Study One where multithreads branch out from the primary topic of the storm, multiple chat-focus threads are also present in Instant Messenger conversations analysed.

Yet in Instant Messenger or any two-person-only chatroom there is more opportunity for an organized and familiar turn-taking within communication, and therefore a more immediately meaningful exchange, than in a multi-person chatroom. So how then might the multi-person communicative repertoires of IRC be examined, to assess how participants "manage" the complexities of their flows of talk? Which tools can be used to assess techniques in use by IRC users, to overcome problems posed by CMC technologisation?

5.1.3 Case Study 3

In Case Study Three, using semiotic and pragmatic analysis as my tools of investigation of on-line chat, I particularly wanted to uncover not just how "talk" is accomplished in a chatroom, but how far chatroom "talk" generally may be said to include a broader than usual repertoire of representation, working to "manage" talk relation problems as outlined above, and to compensate the loss of off-line conversational cues. Mihai Nadin (1977) claims that the computer is in itself a semiotic machine, as it is at core a machine that can be programmed to manipulate symbols. Using computers themselves as semiotic generators has an aesthetic appeal to users, because semiotic codes change over time and provide new meanings to old ideas. This seems interestingly close to the sorts of marked creativity the IRC and IM users in particular display in the case studies for this research – although the continuity of these creative "solutions" will communicational problems on-line, with strategies and talk/texting techniques evolved in off-line conversation and reading-writing practices, reduces the implied suggestions that it is the CMC technologisation, and not human communicative ingenuity, which drives these changes. While users take up and work with some of the special codes and even coding styles CMC systems provide, both the machines and the users develop inside a broader social and cultural context, and source their various communicative pre-dispositions there.

In this case study I focused on the most obvious of the CMC elements of creativity, exploring how the use of non-word representation: emoticons and abbreviations, as well as the "identity" sign-tags or the usernames of the chatters, influenced the turn-takings of the chat-talk (see Crystal 2001; Rivera 2002).

I chose a chatroom named after a celebrity to firstly discover whether usernames, their "identity" sign-tags, would be reflective of the title of the chatroom. In this case study on "Britney Spears Chat" one chatter did indeed identify as a Britney fan: <baby_britney1>. This identification with the chat-title is consistent with what I have found in the other chatrooms in this thesis, such as in Case Study One, Hurricane Floyd, where there was the username <IMFLOYD>. In Case Study Four on astrology participants used the names "astrochat", <AquarianBlue>, <TheGods> and <Night-Goddess_>; in Case Study Six, "web 3d animation" there

were <web3dADM> and < Web3DCEO)> and in Case Study Seven, "baseball chat" <MLB-LADY> (major league baseball). Therefore it is evident that usernames can be directly associated with the name-directed topic of the chatroom. When the dialogue is read from the postings of these specific users it is clear that each chatter is indeed interested in the topic of the chatroom:

<AquarianBlue> in Case Study Four;

> 10). <AquarianBlue> Nicole 528 is gemini

<web3dADM> in Case Study Six;

> 10) <web3dADM> just got the Cult3D folks to agree to show up on March 3

<MLBLADY> in Case Study Seven;

> 6. <MLBLADY>   no clev fan but like wright

But in each of these chatrooms there are also participants, as we saw in each study, identifying against or outside the title-topic convention; contributing postings off-topic; playing with textual form rather than following content threads – even resisting efforts to bring them back on topic. And both within and off topic, we have seen intense moments of creative communicative play, frequently directed more towards the maintenance of communicative relations than to focused engagement with talk topics.

Case Study Two, let us note, centred on inquiry into whether the "playfulness" of on-line chat is a CMC specific impulse. In face-to-face conversation it is clear that people also use an array of semiotic communicative cues: intonation, physical gestures, facial expressions - but with CMC communication semiotic play is restricted to lines of text on a screen as an expressive marker (Stone, 1995a, p.93) as well as such "characterising" elements as semantically-layered usernames, expressive emoticons or colour selections, and added sound. Semiotic analysis thus enables this study to move beyond a purely linguistic base into examination of the graphical and expressive modes used to compensate, and maybe beyond that, to create meaning in new ways, within the new "conversational" spaces of the chatroom - and particularly so in a chatroom of saturating expressiveness within identity work, as is the case with Britney chat.

In Case Study Three to fully explore this drive to identity performance and exploration, to find out how users extend the actual communicative range of the "language" or coding system used, it was first necessary to examine which communicative functions were actually in use in the Britney Spears chatroom, and to reveal which

are dominant and recurrent.

Firstly, it was obvious in this chatroom that chatters employed usernames as signs to give others clues about their identity – or at least about their "preferred identity", or particular identification with a Britney community. In person-to-person conversation the clues that are given as aspects of identity are personal – indeed, physical. On-line, these are replaced by the sorts of identity markers which demark off-line social or cultural status: one's employment or educational level for instance.

Here, in keeping with the Britney world, user tags are about image and "claiming", or the image that one wishes to have represent one's status within the particular social context of the Britney chat group. Each asserts either a relational claim, or one's desirability as a relational being: <Mickey_P_IsMine>, <JeRz-BaByGurL>, <Pretty_Jennifer>, <baby_britney1>, <IM_2_MUCH_4U>, <AnGeL_GlRL>, <Luvable_gurl15>, <buttercup20031> and <guest-hotgirlz>. These usernames suggest that the chatters, if not actually young girls, are at least identified with a popular teen culture of physicality and cuteness. In real-life <Luvable_gurl15> could be a 58 year old male, but if so he is entirely conversant with the codes and values of the Britney culture – even down to the assertiveness of the orthography: the post-feminist/netchick "gurl" replacing the conventional – and less powerful – "girl".

Secondly, the title of the chatroom identifies the chatters as interested in the celebrity icon, Britney Spears. The chatroom title alone can provide information on the identity of a participant; for example, in a chatroom such as "Iraq4u". An adolescent chatroom such as this one is likely to focus discussion on aspects of personal self, as users construct identity around the image and stylized behaviours represented in their idol. A comparison table with a computer software discussion chat shows this to be true in the Britney Spears room. And yet there are distinguishing features beyond the level of topic as well. Abbreviations were used more extensively; suggesting that adolescent play over identity is also enacted within talk-texting strategies.

Emoticons too serve a purpose beyond just the saving of time. They are also a marker of informality, and so an "antilanguage", in Halliday's sense, indicating a special subcultural group identity, and used to show who is familiar or "up-to-date" with the latest language being used. Of the seven case studies, I have found the highest incidence of abbreviations (30%) and emoticons (6%) in the Britney Spears chatroom (see http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/tables.htm for a
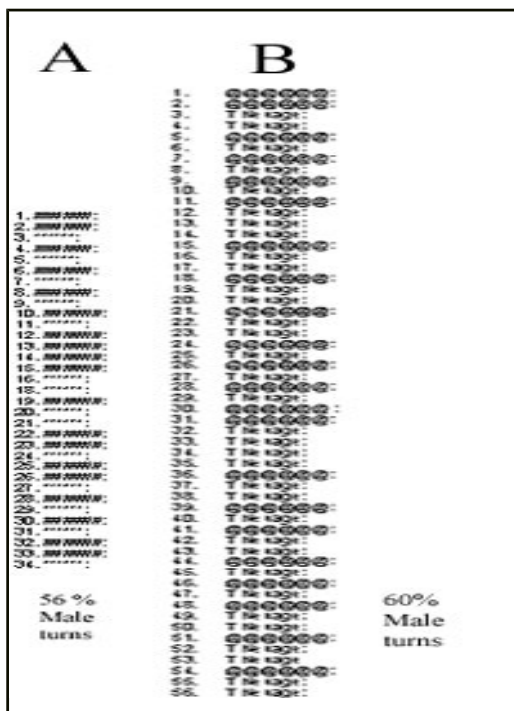
statistical comparison of the seven chatrooms). In fact the abbreviation for laughing-out-loud "lol" was used fifteen times. In this chatroom frequency counts of specific language forms are indeed revelatory. There were 294 words used within the collected data corpus, with the personal pronoun "I" used the most frequently, (18 times) and "lol" used the next most frequently (15 times). In one sequence "lol" is used nine times in 20 turns, which is more frequent than in any other chatroom examined in this study. Another form of laughing-out-loud "LMAO" (Laughing my ass off) was used five times.

Firstly then, chatroom semiotics show the specialist communicative skill-level of the participator and whether he or she is in the right communicative arena to continue to be an accepted part of the chat community. Yet identity work of this kind in the Britney Spears chatroom is limited to the user name and the textual input of the chatter. By contrast, in face-to-face conversation, forms of identification are much more extensive and include cues which can reveal personal identity, national identity, occupational identity, corporate identity, gender identity and even religious identity (see Berger, 1998). So the talk-texting and linguistic creativity of these young chatters must achieve high levels of sophistication in order to convey all of the information needed to assert a "Britney" self, and yet remain a distinctive and desirable co-locutor in the "flattened" yet still competitive space of the chatroom. One dimension of chat which seems to become suppressed in these conditions is that of extended reciprocal conversation – those longer threads of debate, information exchange or narrative, which appear in some other chat spaces and cultures. Here, while such narratives of experience for example do exist, they are constantly interrupted by the "social recognition" postings of greetings and farewells, and reactive-expressive turns, working less to cement sociality than to maintain affective role within the chat relation.

Having established such high degrees of symbolic or creative-linguistic play, it becomes important with this chat culture to examine more carefully how this specific talk-texting repertoire works. Pragmatics as a lens of conversational analysis in chatrooms (Ayer, 1968; Pierce, 1980) can reveal a socially embedded reading of chat "talk". Pragmatics helps to focus on how the various communicative items in chatrooms; emoticons, abbreviations and misspelled words as well as chat utterance sentence structures (CUSS) are used within an on-line linguistic society. Pragmatics in chatrooms starts from the observation that people use on-line language

to accomplish certain kinds of acts, broadly known as speech acts (Speech Act Theory is discussed in Case Study Four). Studies by Simeon J. Yates (1996) have shown that the language used in interactive speech in chatrooms more closely resembles spoken than written language, especially in the interpersonal respect (including use of personal pronouns). As I have shown, in Britney Spears chat, Table 8 - http://www.geocities. com/picture_poems/thesis/table8.htm (also on the CD) "I" has been used 18 times in the chat, the most used word in the whole chat.

Writing (or text-talking) back to a previous utterance in a synchronous conversational situation in chatrooms leads to a pragmatic re-contextualization of the use of the sorts of double-loaded semiotic expression discussed in Case Study Three. It is how the signs are read which provides meaning, and entices, or provokes, other participants to either continue building an utterance into a thread, or begin a new thread – including responses to its graphic or creative-abbreviation load. In Case Study Three there are several utterances that do not become threads, as they evoke no comment on them. For example neither of the following utterances have a response.

> 23. <baby_britney1> do any guys wanna chat?

> 27.<SluGGie> need to fix my hair..

Despite the direct question/invitation in posting 23, and the focus on a Britney-culture preoccupation with physical appearance in posting 27, neither turn is answered. The sorts of creative play with chat-semiotic loadings which we have seen above appear more likely to evoke reciprocal posting, when otherwise powerful conversational and communicative strategies such as direct invitation or topic and contextual focus, do not. Even those postings which access and reproduce the contextual "antilanguage" or specialist codes, with the conventional attitudinal and behavioural signifiers in place, do not always succeed in chat. In these next two turns <Mickey_P_IsMine> similarly receives no response - but responds to him or her self in turn 64.

> 56. <Mickey_P_IsMine> Ahh i got a retest tomrrow mi failin math lol..and i think science
> 64. <Mickey_P_IsMine> which i duno how im failin science

The casual texting, including colloquialism ("dunno"), spelling lapses "tomrrow ", and "mi" for "im" = "I'M") – even the "lol" abbreviation – code into the established styles of group talk – yet seemingly without sufficient creativity to gain notice. While responding to abbreviations and emoticons and colloquial forms and specialized lexical terms shows a commonality of understanding amongst those who are chatting, this appears not enough in itself to command a reply.   Commonality is clearly indicated when <Paul665> in turn 44 asks <Jen> to give details on his or her self, and it is evident that to evoke a response <Paul665> must assume that Jen knows the abbreviation "asl".

44. <Paul665> Ok Jenn asl

 <Pretty_Jennifer> responds:

51. <Pretty_Jennifer> 15/f/fl u?

But while we can clearly see that here the codes are exchanged in perfect reciprocity, what we cannot do is calculate with certainty why this exchange succeeds, while others fail. The gambit is not as directive as in <baby_britney1>'s direct question in posting 23, so that we are left with an interesting possibility that the direct question works less effectively in this chat context than the coded-abbreviated "asl" convention: perhaps a signal of <Paul665>'s chat-credentials and comparative "cool" – while <baby-britney1> may be showing too much real-world social desperation and push. But it is impossible to be certain. Maybe chatters were attending to other surrounding threads as posting 23 arrived. It is at such points that textual analysis, no matter how multi-layered, begins to fail, and only ethnographic or observational work can succeed.

5.1.4 Case Study 4

Since Case Study Three therefore raises the question of whether the conversation in each chatroom varies in its focus in relation to talk techniques, and not just in topic focus, this study moves to consider which talk forms are evident in chat, and whether variability in given chat spaces can be detected – and perhaps even predicted, from the "chat community" present. Case Study Four used Speech Act Theory to identify dominant types of speech activity in a single chat space. While IRC chat makes application of Speech Act Theory difficult, because of the indeterminacy of the "response", it is still possible to categorise postings within the speech act repertoire, and, where threaded exchanges are evident, to evaluate the success or "felicity conditions" of an utterance. It remains difficult to assess how much of the intentional load of a chat utterance is carried by para-linguistic

elements such as emoticons or abbreviations, codings shown as of immense communicative significance in previous case studies. Given the frequency of use and rapid assimilation of these elements into on-line communication in various media, it is important to attempt at least a preliminary investigation of their "speech act" role.

Direct Speech Acts

In chat there are clear examples of direct speech acts being deployed, and in quite conventional ways:

Speech Act	Sentence Type	Function	Examples
Assertion	Declarative.	conveys information; is true or false	(Case Study Four) 11) <Nicole528> im a Gemini (Case Study One) 10) <guest-MoreheadCityNC> NO she's near 10th & Gville Blvd (Case Study One) 77) <SWMPTHNG> THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF MEXICAN ROOFERS IN N CAROLINA NEXT WEEK
Question	Interrogative	elicits information	(Case Study Four) 2) dingo42 nicole wahts your sign ?? (Case Study Four) 17) <AquarianBlue> your meeting her judy? when? (Case Study Four) 32) <Night-Goddess_> anyone cool in here? (Case Study - 911) 182) Brazilian report: some one know any new about the manhattan situation ???

Orders and Requests	Imperative	causes others to behave in certain ways	(Case Study Five) 47) <scud4> bwitched stop scrollin in here (Case Study One) 123) <Zardiw> smptthing................go back to your SWAMP

Direct speech acts that use performative verbs to accomplish their ends expand the three basic types shown: statements, requests and commands (as shown below).

Statements

Case Study One	37. <EMT Calvin> well folks im signing off here

Questions

Case Study Six	49. <Brian> r u talking about blaxxun and shout3d implimentations or something else

Orders and Requests

See the CD "911.doc"	296. <MissMaca> Brazillian Report: Iknow it was a building % &#%head. Give up on the %&#%ing nuke's ok!!!>.

Indirect Speech Acts

Indirect forms in chat are dominated by a generalized activation formation, which masquerades as a question addressed to the entire chat community:

Case Study One	74. <guestTom> does anyone know where floyd isnow>.

Case Study One	125. <guest kodiak> does anyone know why UNCC has not closed>.
Case Study One	162. <guestEZGuest367> Anyone know if I should worry about daughter in west NC?>.

The form has even evolved its own abbreviation:

Appendix "911" 370.	<England> n e one know of other active new york chat rooms?>.

The first four postings are clearly in the form of questions, but equally clearly are not inquiries about issues the chatter can anticipate will be answered by an expert "knower". Thus the speech act is in itself indirect, as we can see by examining possible answers. Most of the time, the answer "yes, I do" to any of these four questions would be an uncooperative response. The normal answers we would expect in real life talk would be "Yes, the Weather Channel tells us that Hurricane Floyd is passing over North Carolina now"; <UNCC is closed because of the storm>; <if your daughter is in the eye of the storm you should be worried>; <another active New York chatroom is at http://www.superglobe.com/chat/ >. Because of the anonymity of the chat situation, each response depends upon what could be called a "validation" format: the use of an indirect statement or reported speech from another context: "The weather channel tells us that…" A simple "yes" answer that responded to the literal meaning would usually be taken for an uncooperative answer in actual social life. For example "Yes, I do", would be heard as "Yes, I do, but I'm not necessarily going to tell you where the storm is, why UNCC is closed or the location of other active chatrooms in NY". So the five examples above function as indirect questions, more accurately coded as "I want you to tell me where the storm is now", "I would like to know whether UCC is closed yet", or "Please tell me of some other New York chatrooms so that I can move to them" and the chatroom participants are clearly able to interpret this function, and respond appropriately. In other words, despite the added indirection of chat speech act formation, chat continues. But this means that very complex speech act relations are concealed beneath the quick-form exchanges of IRC – across a range of chat communities. Indirect speech acts appear to be in heavy use.

The key question for this Case Study and this chatroom

"What is a successful speech act in a chatroom?" thus appears to require consideration of the more than usual loadings of indirect speech acts inside a non-physical and multilogue talk community.

Austin and Searle claim that the speech act is the basic unit of meaning and force, or the most basic linguistic entity, with both a constative and a performative dimension. They both accept that there are illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts, using Speech Act Theory as their theoretical foundation and analysing the data by message length, distribution, message links, and interaction. Speech Act Theory is based on the notion that what people say is consistent with what they do (Howell-Richardson; Mellar, 1996). Such a definition indicates that we should examine those zones in which chat "unravels" some of the regulatory functions hypothesized in speech act theory. Distribution roles, or those aspects of speech working to direct talk relations and to control its performative dimensions, are problematic within the generalized speech relations of chat: one explanation of the sorts of indirect strategies outlined above – and maybe of the retreat into saturating expressives and relational work.

In part this indeterminacy which bedevils speech act analysis in chat rests in the technologisation and "de-threading" of the format. Speech Act Theory cannot categorise all utterances in a chatroom, with certainty – and it may be that the confusion and chaos that new users so frequently report of the chat experience relates to this indeterminacy, in relation to off-line talk. Yet at the same time regular chat users do manage their talk successfully.

Speech Act Theory can be used to examine features common to all chatrooms. In particular it can help establish interconnections within the threads of conversation. Unlike face-to-face conversation, where a person appears to respond to the most recent statement in a conversation, in a chatroom the utterance can be a continuation of someone else's utterance - or it can be on a new topic, with the hope that someone else may join in. The example below shows three unrelated utterances, but all are either continuations of a thread or the initiation of a new thread:

30) <judythejedi> i don't think so..she's bringing amtrack down maybe

31) <Nicole528> whats your sign dingo?

32) <Night-Goddess_> anyone cool in here?

Because of the technologisation of chat there are no markers to segregate or "direct" this conversational traffic. Chat participants must then de-code the speech acts, and re-connect threads into logically sequential strands. Since posting 30 relates to an earlier posting, only those participants already threaded into that particular chat will respond – unless of course a new chatter asks directly "You don't think what? She who? Amtrak down to where? Why only 'maybe'"? Since such a response would be an interruption of an implied co-locutor relation, it is unlikely to occur. Posting 31 creates a similar "directedness", signing it with the user name "dingo" – the sole participant invited to reply. So it is no surprise that of these three consecutive postings, it is 32, the generalized and indirect question/invitation form, which succeeds. Following <Night-Goddess_>'s utterance <anyone cool in here?> a thread develops that plays across the issue of whether anyone is "cool" in this room – and incidentally provides a possible answer to the role of posting 34 from <AquarianBlue>.

32) <Night-Goddess_> anyone cool in here?
33)<judythejedi> hi night
34)/\32 <AquarianBlue> hmmmmmmmm
35)/\32 <judythejedi>everyone is cool here
36)/\32 <Nicole528> is cool lol
37)<poopaloo> 10ty judy
38)/\32 <Nicole528> is cold too
39)<sara4u> I LOVE YOU TO MUCH.......ACARD
40)<jijirika>is back
41) <tazdevil144> cool

For this speech act to be completed there needs to be an understanding of what <Night-Goddess_> means by "being cool". The speech community within the room chooses in interesting ways to respond by playing across the semantics of the term "cool" – yet in doing so, indicates an understanding of the indirectness of her speech act strategy. As <Nicole528> and <poopaloo> evaluate and reward the claim from <judythejedi> that all the chatters in this space are cool, and <tazdevil> extends the game by using the term to express pleasure that <jijirika> has rejoined the chat, each understands not only the "surface" codes, or display techniques which sign "cool" chat expertise: "lol", and "10 ty", but also the indirection of <Night-Goddess>'s speech act. This is not a directed question. As its "anyone" address formula shows, it is an invitation to talk. But specifically, in its address

to not only a chat community, but to a known and familiar group (note <judythejedi>'s diminutive tag-name response: "night") it creates a speech act which is less a general question than an assertion of communality. In effect, it says something like: "Hello to all my old friends: I'm ready to be as active in chat as usual" – and those chat friends react entirely appropriately. Responses demonstrate "cool", in chat terms, with a mix of community affirmation:

<judythejedi> everyone is cool here>

appreciation of the communality:

<Nicole528> is cool lol>

and the sort of metatextual play across chat conventions which establishes the cachet of cool on-line:

<Nicole528> is cold too>

No surprise then that the thread is continued for several more turns before a new thread is begun. The original utterance serves not to elicit specific answers, but to evoke the sorts of talk which on-line chat promotes, and which is distinctive to its form: reflexive, linguistically aware, communally directed, generalized and inclusive/exclusive, fast-paced, and multi-threaded:

49) \32 10c. <Night-Goddess_> I is not cool
50) \49 5l. <judythejedi> yup
51) \49 6j. <Nicole528> really
52) \4910d. <Night-Goddess_> I is awsome
53) \496k. <Nicole528> yes your cool
54) \465m. <judythejedi> lol..i know prncess
55) \476l. <Nicole528> cool dingo
56) \521c. <gina2b> coolfool

Is there then sufficient evidence to assert that in its Speech Acts, on-line chat is predominantly relational – working more on its communal elements through generalization of its modalities, than on its

performative or illocutionary acts? To test this requires assessment of chat in a strongly topic-directed chatroom – one in which we might anticipate task and topic oriented talk. Case Study 5 takes up the analysis of chat in an Astrology chatroom, in which many chatters appear to already know one another – therefore appearing less reliant on self-assertion or community formation.

5.1.5 Case Study 5

If there is a preponderance of relational talk-texting in chat rooms, by examining a chatroom with a predominance of markedly short turn-taking sequences and a clear and consistently central foucs on topic, it may be possible to discover whether even in the rapidly scrolling conversation of on-line chat, there is enough time and appropriate "speech act" work establishing a communication community amongst the chatters present.

Talk in text-based chat is as fleeting as its off-line equivalent. Text disappears as it scrolls by. The participant gets one opportunity to read the text, after which time it cannot be retrieved – at least not without time out for back-scrolling – during which period postings continue to amass. This capacity I have called "fleeting text". On-line fleeting text affects discursive connectiveness. There is a counter-intuitive distinction here between talk and text. Conventional spoken language is also dynamic, fleeting, and irreversible communication, but printed language breaks the strictures of time and leads to permanence. The two together in an on-line environment contain elements of both – what has been said can be "revisited", as long as the chatroom is showing previous turn takings. My data cannot show evidence that users do check back to re-establish threads, but the co-presence of postings onscreen, even while fleeting and constantly mobile, does encourage longer consideration than in talk.

Thread-framing is in itself a major phenomenon in chatrooms. A posting appears to "begin" and "end" because it arrives on the receivers' screens inside an individual text-box. These framed pieces of conversation are of course not necessarily sequential. Threads twist around, stop and start, and several may arrive at one time, in a seemingly chaotic fashion. What then is the relationship between the seeming coherence of a single chat utterance, and its equally contained surrounding utterances?

We have already seen that the apparent commensurability of utterances, each framed in the same spatial convention, is an illusion. Immediately consecutive utterances are often unrelated, or at least out of sequence – and many remain so. Further, because this form of visual framing is the only contribution to the communicative regulation of texted-talk by its technologisation, users themselves must work instead at the level of language alone – including of course both verbal and visual elements – to construct meaningful communication.

At the linguistic level the "threading" which constructs meaningful conversational exchanges across and between

these individual and flattening visual frames also must read back possibilities for response. It is this form of "framing" which gives a starting and finishing point to a thread, and turns it from an artificial sequence of random utterances to a meaningful conversation. Since there are no visual codings contributed by the CMC technologisation to mark a new or ending thread, that decision too must be made by the chat participants; read back from the speech act possibilities. Curiously, in many cases the originator of a thread is also the last "voice" seen in that particular thread. In the example below, <Night-Goddess_> begins a new thread by asking whether there is <anyone cool in here?>. The topic is also ended by <Night-Goddess_> 20 turns later, with the comment: <I is awesome>.

32) <Night-Goddess_> anyone cool in here?
49) <Night-Goddess_> I is not cool
52) <Night-Goddess_> I is awsome

Because this topic had centred so clearly upon the word "cool", this transformation – "cool" becomes "awesome" – ends the potential for wordplay, and so terminates the frame. But to sense this termination chat participants must be able to "read" and respond beyond the level of conversational turn-taking exchange – the CA level. By reading speech act intent in utterances, and seeing <Night-Goddess> "switch off" the topic cue at this point, collocutors can indeed note a frame termination – and they move on accordingly.

The initial framing of a thread can thus determine – or at least work towards determining – its success and duration. But in the case above, as already noted there is a particularly consensual group in communication. This community of astrology followers appears to be regular collocutors on-line, and know one another's behaviours. How far then is this, the cooperative communication of a friendship group, as opposed to a specific communicative behaviour of on-line communities generally; a feature of "chat", rather than of this one example of "astrochat"?

One way to examine this is to check for deliberate interventions: "policing" of chat posts. If there is hostility shown in a chatroom, or as shown in Case Study One, an attitude such as racism, (in this case towards Mexican roofers) will other speakers contribute to the thread in like manner, supportively, as in the astrochat sequence? Here there is clear evidence that such threads can be very deliberately de-railed, and comments such as <SWMPTHNG>'s stopped by others. A different speaker can and will end a thread, indicating a multi-chatter frame (see Tannen, 1998; Bays, 2000). Since to do so they must however also "read" the frame – understand the

intent of the utterance – the termination/transformation intervention still acts as evidence for the power of talk-text framing. So clear is the framing intent (or re-framing intent) of some postings to some collocutors, that they move to end a posting – or at least, to re-direct it. And indeed, without such framing a thread could continue indefinitely. Framing is what completes the thought in chatroom discourse but it is also what enables groups to maintain focus. How then does each participant enact these interventions and responses within a given frame? What additional problems for analysis of chat exchange does its online practice present?

5.1.6 Case Study 6

Using conversation analysis (CA) in chatrooms helped me discover how communication on-line regulates its exchanges. While the "capturing" of data is different in chatrooms from that used to research face-to-face conversation there are similarities in the analysis process. Traditionally, CA researchers audio record a session and discuss from a printed readout "what happened" in the conversational exchanges. In the example

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below from such a taped session   the time between turns and the pauses in the conversation are noted – not an element that can be considered in on-line chat, or at least not in those chatrooms which do not mark the time of arrival of each utterance – and even then, given the packet-switching technology, this does not reflect the times of entry for a given posting. Some aspects conventionally of communicative import in CA are therefore not available for analysis in chat. In CA for instance most work is done with two or three people speaking. In the example below two people are having a phone conversation. This one-on-one speech relation, or its close approximation within a small group, has contributed many of the techniques and features of CA method.

To an extent, the features identified by CA in small-group or dyadic talk relations can also describe chatroom interactions. Conversational analysis of chatroom talk shows for instance examples of adjacency pairs and turn-taking conventions common in CA-analyses of natural talk. But both the capacity for multilogue and the technologisation of the talk, through text and through CMC, create new complexities inside the talk relations. One primary difference, as this case study and others have shown, is the interjection of conversation before a thought is complete, due to the tendency to use the enter button "mid utterance". A second disctinctive difference arises with the often lengthy periods between utterances, filled with other streams of talk. Offline

"natural" conversation offers talk techniques not possible in online chat. In examples A and B below we see clear indications of turn-taking, and the development of a conversation. In A however there are interruptions (for example in turn 45), impossible in chatroom turn-taking.

A CA transcription from tape recording	B Web 3D Chat on CD at 6a.doc

Utterances are mostly complete turns in chatrooms, with the only breakage in a particular utterance being made by the user at the time of the utterance – for only if they press the enter button does the utterance become broken. In the chatroom turns 21-24 below (column B) *<Leonard>* makes two utterances that are different thoughts, but because they are entered sequentially without anyone making an utterance between the two thoughts *<web3dADM>* is left to answer them both, as different thoughts, sequentially after *<Leonard>'s* entrances.

21) *<Leonard>* Anyone used Xeena?
22) *<Leonard>* 3D just arrived today
23) *<web3dADM>*   no it's on my list
24) *<web3dADM>*   ahhh great Len

In a face-to-face conversation one would assume that *<web3dADM>* would respond to *<Leonard>*'s question, <Anyone used Xeena?> with the utterance <no it's on my list> and then to *<Leonard>'s* <3D just arrived today> with <ahhh great Len>, ordering the conversation differently:

21) *<Leonard>* Anyone used Xeena?
23) *<web3dADM>* no it's on my list
22) *<Leonard>* 3D just arrived today
24) *<web3dADM>*   ahhh great Len

If in fact utterances 21 and 22 had been offered in sequence in a natural conversation, it is also likely that <web3dADM> would reverse the response sequence, offering his expressive and evaluative response before his explanation – in effect replying to 22 before 21:

21) *<Leonard>* Anyone used Xeena?
22) *<Leonard>* 3D just arrived today
24) *<web3dADM>*   ahhh great Len
23) *<web3dADM>*   [no] it's on my list [too]

Online however, *<web3dADM>* could have been typing in <no it's on my list> at the same time as *<Leonard>* was typing in <3D just arrived today> - or even before, since we do not know the relative distances travelled

CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS OF CHATROOM TALK by Terrell Neuage A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PHD University of South Australia

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through the system, or the traffic-flow conditions encountered by the packet-switching .

According to conversation analysis, turn-taking is integral to the formation of any interpersonal exchange. Online however, the conventions of turns are very much modified. Chat participants appear conversant and comfortable with the new regulatory demands. Unless lurking, the participants in chatrooms demonstrate their knowledge of the particular chat conventions of the chat-site they are visiting in order to be accepted or rejected by others in the chatroom.

The signalling of one's status as an insider is for instance especially important in establishing dominance. In the chatroom I used for this case study with its expert topic of computer animation, it is clear that <web3dADM> is the leader or moderator, not only because of the abbreviation for administrator (ADM) behind the <web3d> part of the username, but because <web3dADM> provides answers to questions people ask in the chatroom regarding the chatroom itself. The status of this participant is thus marked in various ways, but key among them is this specificity of interrelational role – a feature marked by particular forms of turn-taking as identified in CA, but also by thje chat-specific conditions of a combined general and individualised set of response-relations.

The underpinnings of CA, sequential organization, turn-taking and repair, and how they can depict interactional competence, are therefore useful in reading chatroom talk. However, the circumstances of chatroom technologisation demand adaptations to CA protocols, to enable analysis of conversational relations occurring in de-threaded sequences. Unlike face-to-face conversation the sequential organization of a given chat exchange needs to be separated from what else is being enacted in the chatroom. The isolating of pairs in the chat is difficult if there are many people chatting and the text is scrolling at a rapid rate. In finding adjacent pairs in Case Study One for instance the conversation had to be re-threaded. What is revealed below is that there is a turn-taking strategy present between <lookout4110> and <Werblessed>, but each utterance has several turns in between.

Turn	Between Utterances	Speaker	utterance
60.		<lookout4110>	Who is in Wilm. right now?
64.	4	<Werblessed>	Im 50 Miles west of Wilm.
73.	9/13	<lookout4110>	How ya holding up Werblessed?

83.	10/19	<Werblessed>	So far just strong wind gusts and lots of rain.. Over 8 inches so far..
89.	6/16	<lookout4110>	Have the winds been strong?
98.	9/15	<Werblessed>	Gusts up to 60-65 so far its starting to pick up a bit.. Only gonna get stronger Between now and midnite

The first number in the "between utterances" column is the number of turns since the previous utterance was addressed, and the second number is the number of turns since the last utterance by the same speaker. The complexity of the posting relation is apparent. After these three sets of turn-takings <lookout4110> and <Werblessed> no longer interact directly. <lookout4110> contributes more utterances, concluding at turn 164, and <Werblessed>'s final utterance in this segment is at turn 180. In other words, given the multiple threads available for response in on-line chat, threads form and reform, as participants shift focus. But the degree to which such shifts are driven by the complexities of the multilogue is hard to evaluate – another feature which CA is unable to address, and which may require a more ethnographic inquiry to assess.

CA is however able to help the online chat analyst consider some aspects of conversational breakdown – for instance, repair, a standard part of normal conversation. Natural conversation is rich in examples of breakdown – a feature which CA analysts often find disruptive to other programs of their analysis:

> When we consider spontaneous speech (particularly conversation) any clear and obvious division into intonational-groups is not so apparent because of the broken nature of much spontaneous speech, including as it does hesitation, repetitions, false starts, incomplete sentences, and sentences involving a grammatical caesura in their middle (Cruttenden, 1986, pg. 36).

In chatrooms, where utterances are mostly posted complete, this experience of breakdown at first sight seems less of a problem. But chat-repairs do come about, due to two primary causes. The first is introduced when a word is typed incorrectly – for instance, when <IroquoisPrncess> says <hey Judy did a get my car in the link thingy>. While "car" is a proper word, it is wrongly entered when "card" is intended and confuses the meaning, since interlocutor <judythejedi> does not associate the word "car" with the utterance-topic, leaving <IroquoisPrncess> to correct the error. Here the error is text and CMC related: clearly a typing error, and a feature which in natural conversation would be corrected immediately. In speech it would be enacted as a mispronunciation, or a mishearing – its conncetion probably cued by a quizzical glance or facial frown. Here the interlocutor, <judythe jedi>, directly addresses the need for repair. In texted talk, there is no other cue for repair.The second repair error however is less techno-conversational, than CMC technological. Owing to pressing

the enter key early, dividing his utterance, <Leonard> leaves a curious suspension in his exchange with <brian>. Has <brian> pre-empted a reply in advance of all the information, because he senses that the utterance object introduced by "this" must be "spring"? Does <Leonard> enter "spring" while <brian> is entering his own utterance, or because he thinks if <brian> has all the information he may change his response? Because we have no information available on the timing of the utterances we are unable to analyse the interaction further – an interesting example of chat's technologisation defying CA principles on repair.

From Case Study Four	From Case Study Six
57) <IroquoisPrncess> hey Judy did a get my car inthe link thingy	40) <Leonard> I will be offereing it on-line through Digital University sometime this
63) <judythejedi> car in the link?	41) <brian> can't make it
66) <IroquoisPrncess> card	42) <Leonard> spring

Are there then instances of chat which require more than the sorts of extended CA repertoires discussed here, for examination of the full range of utterance behaviours and conversational techniques? Are the chat participants examined above displaying both interesting instances of the language-use pressures of chat, and conscious attempts to redress these? Are there other techniques of talk or text analysis which can help both identify and explain some of these communicative behaviours? One issue raised in CA work on chat is the need for a more finely-focused examination of word-selection and word-ordering in utterances – and especially in such self-conscious moments as those occurring around instances of repair. In a final pass over the chat-room communicative experience, this study used current approaches to grammatical analysis, to assess how far chat already displays ways to use and/or depart from standard text or talk grammar conventions.

5.1.7 Case Study 7

This case study examined baseball chat, a talk-community likely to use high degrees of informality in grammatical formations, to assess whether the functioning of grammar in chatroom communication could be shown to be the same as, or different to, that evident in text or talk. Do common grammatical conventions – such as word order, sentence structure, question formation, hold up in on-line chat? Do baseball-chatters on-line use the

same specialist formations as their off-line brethren? Are there any new constructions evident?

Language in a chatroom certainly proved to be altered by its users, both deliberately and by mistake. Formal sentence structure conventions become less evident, as abbreviation and graphic elements arise to meet the speed-entry demands of the chat technology and its new communicative ethos. Compound forms arise, with the informality of spoken language, but enacted in the sorts of textual play and creativity otherwise seen in communicative genres such as poetry, or advertising. The grammar of chatrooms, if it is done intentionally, is developing a highly sophisticated form of prose that is semantically and semiotically innovative and daring.

Below, <CathyTrix-guest> in turn 108 creates the utterance <2blech>. Such combinations of numerals and letters have no place or "utterability" in spoken conversation – yet in this chatroom, at this moment, inside this thread, the utterance communicates. The "2" refers to an earlier request for chatters to press the "3" key if they like the New York Yankees baseball team. <CathyTrix-guest> emphases his or her dislike of the Yankees by pressing a different key from the "3" suggested, confirming it with the comment: "blech" - not conventionally a meaningful word, but one used colloquially as an onomatopoeic representation of the act of vomiting. The turn thus communicates something like "I don't like the Yankees, they make me sick, I would only score them at a rate of 2". The economy, the creativity and the expressiveness of the utterance overturn the conventions of a more formal sentence construction, without losing communicative power. But at the same time, they demonstrate a linguistic and grammatical formatting not available or possible in speaking about baseball.

98.	<NMMprod>	2n.	if you like the yanks press 3
99.	<dhch96>	5p.	1111111111
100.	<BLUERHINO11>	1l.	got it
101.	<dhch96>	5q.	1111111
102.	<smith-eric>	8j.	5555555
103.	<dhch96>	5r.	11111111
104.	<dhch96>	5s.	111111
105.	<CathyTrix-guest>	6g.	2I hate the Yankees
106.	<smith-eric>	8k.	don't have a 3
107.	<Pizza2man>	7o.	12456789
108.	<CathyTrix-guest>	6h.	2blech
109.	<NMMprod>	2o.	hahahahahaha

110.	<dhch96>	5t.	yankees s-ck
111.	<BLUERHINO11>	1m.	im removing that # now
112.	<NMMprod>	2p.	you wish

Similar concision in chat utterances operates as both efficiency forced by the required typing speeds, and a stylistic marker of on-line competency. In turn 77 of this chat <MLB-LADY> enters a question: "dd any see the atanta score". A formally grammatical rendering would produce the form: "d*i*d any*one* see the *Atlanta* score?" While the third spelling error: atanta for Atlanta, is likely to be a simple typing error, the suppression of the vowel from "did" and the lack of capitalisation for the proper noun "Atlanta" are both conventions of on-line use.

Similar effects are achieved by the use of single letters or numerals in place of whole words: u – you, 4 – for, r –are, c – see, 2 – to. In posting 128 of Case Study Seven <BLUERHINO11> refers to <dhch96>by using the letter "d" – an abbreviation of a user-tag which works as both familiarity ("may I call you "d", <dhch96>?) and as on-line efficiency.

In chatrooms, grammar is thus a developing protocol, reacting to both the demands of the rapid scrolling of the conversational threads, and to the creative demands of establishing on-line communicative competence. Common grammatical and orthographic principles are applied differently in chatrooms. In society generally, we use grammar to judge people in terms of social status, regional origins, and educational level. In chatrooms the rules have to some extent already changed. A person may be judged by how efficiently he or she types, and by the familiarity they are able to display with on-line chat conventions, such as abbreviations, graphics integration, and the capacity to respond to creative utterances in kind – to continue the stylistic directions of a thread, as well as its content or semantic load – and that may well mean "reading" and writing back the sorts of grammatical adjustments outlined in Case Study Seven. There does indeed appear to be evidence that on-line chat is activating new elements in the communicative repertoire.

5.2 Unique features of chatrooms

Overall, the case study sites have then been able to display not only communicative complexity inside the chat utterances, but complexity resolving into specific on-line chat techniques. Electronic chat is no longer only one small communication exercise among many, sharing most of the communicative styles of natural conversation or equivalent text forms (such as for instance the memo), but an important and distinctive form of communication, establishing its own regulatory systems and practices. Internet text-based chat is already changing as

[171]

a technology, with the increasing use of webcams, multimedia and 3D Graphics-based chat communities   and the ability to use voice instead of only text. New applications of text-based chat are appearing with the availability

[172]

of wearable computers   , including miniature PCs, personal digital assistants (PDAs), cellular

[173]   [174]

phone watches, cognitive-radios   , and electronic performance support systems (EPSS)   . Such devices will enable people to access information via networks anytime, even while out walking. But as this occurs, it will in turn force adaptations to the sorts of on-line communicative practices revealed in this study, and others. From the discussion of the seven primary chatrooms in the case studies and several secondary chatrooms I have found that there are common, "core" elements, present on all web-based chat sites, as well as specialist elements on specialist sites – and further, that these elements are not limited to a special lexis, as might be expected in such relatively new communication contexts, but extend to the full range of communicative behaviours.

This study has shown too that chatrooms place particular limitations on communication, producing unique communicative strategies which not only mark them as communicative locations and cultures, but are consciously deployed by users to demonstrate competence and status within on-line community. In summary, moving from Case Study to Case Study, the following communicative features already mark on-line chat:

Author as reader, reader as author (Case Study 1)

On-line, as talk text generates, the "reader" and the "author" can be the same person at the same time. The listening and response phases of face-to-face conversation are less separable on-line, where the formulation of a reply is dependent upon a high-demand interpretation or "reading" of prior postings – including their formatting, recognition of which is required for reciprocal expression, which lifts a participant's status within the chatroom. Without this capacity to process postings at speed, and to reply creatively and in like mode, chat participants become less successful in on-line communication. To be a powerful on-line "author" is also to be a competent on-line "reader".

Chatroom titles as communicative-community controls (Case Study 1)

The title of a given chatroom often fails to indicate what is actually discussed. On-line communities, like casual conversationalists in the off-line world, very often redirect their communicative focus – and sometimes permanently, with consensual groups setting up regular meetings in spaces no longer very relevant to

their topics. This "drift" in topic direction demonstrates once again the focus produced within on-line chat on communicative technique, with chat very often more directed towards features of its own communicative repertoires than to pre-determined topics.

Multiple-Authorship in different chatrooms (Case Study 2)

It is difficult in face-to-face conversation to carry on two or more conversations at the same time, but in chat communication it is possible to open two or more screens on one's monitor, in order to chat in several chatrooms at the same time. This can be expanded to having conversations in different locations at the same time, for example speaking with someone in Australia at midnight there and someone in New York in the early afternoon, New York time. And within a given chatroom, it is also possible to maintain multiple conversational threads, responding to different topic-focused chat relations as the relevant postings appear. On-line, communicative "authorship" thus distantiates from the actual "author", in quite formal communicative ways – well in advance of any conjecture as to identity experimentation or concealment. Chat is markedly "presentified", in Lefebvre's terms: that is, attending always to the response happening NOW, as well as displaying a strong interest in and skill with presentational aspects of communication – but without arriving at Derrida's postulation of "presence" in speech: that authorizing validation of communication which is conventionally thought of as originating in the physical being of a speaker. This suggests that the curious and much-remarked physical absence of chatters from the relations they establish is over-compensated through such practices as multiple simultaneous engagement in chatrooms and chat strands, and in the excessively conscious attention to chat utterance forms.

Avatars (Case Study 3)

Avatars are graphic or textual representatives of the speaker, based on how the chatter identifies him or herself. The avatar could be an animal, cartoon, celebrity or any object. An avatar is the chatter at the time of textual engagement. Again, its created character both distantiates and characterizes a chat participant, acting to position them in the larger chat community in a preferred way. The persona thus also becomes a part of the communicative intent, adding to the complexity of chat techniques.

Emoticons (Case Study 3)

Using a series of keyed characters to indicate an emotion, such as pleasure [:-) 𝅘] or sadness [:-(𝅙] chatters are able to communicate beyond the "word", giving faster communication. Some emoticons are becoming universal

– even carrying the same meaning in different languages. The first and most used emoticon is the smiley [175]

. Emoticons re-deploy the keyboard repertoire, adding expression to a communicative form denied the expressive techniques of gesture, facial expression or vocalization. Once again however they have already established themselves as a layer of communicative competence, used not only to add nuance (acting for instance as mitigators or intensifiers) but to demonstrate creativity and "wit" in interchanges.

Threads and Discontinuity (Case Study 4)

Because conversational threads disconnect in on-line chat, as the posting sequences react to the technologisation of the IRC software and not to interpersonal turn-relations, all chat participants must both accept and learn to negotiate discontinuities in their postings and those of others. The ability to focus on topic and to build even multilogue discussion under these circumstances has already established itself across many types of chatroom – so much so that common elements of practice are already evident from chatroom to chatroom. Often even very extended sequences of intervening text do not appear to deter thread focus, while chatters are also able to respond to sequences which "de-thread" as postings arrive in inappropriate order; i.e. sequences dictated more by typing speeds or transport efficiency than by the logic of the topic development. This particular form of "repair" work appears to pose few problems for chatters.

Discontinuity, i.e. popup ads or ads amongst the turn-takings (Case Study 4)

One form of stop in the flow of conversation in chatrooms is caused by advertisements that are auto-inserted at regular places amongst turn-takings. Different chatrooms will have varying spaces for their ads, some having an ad appear every five turns, others displaying ads that appear to randomly pop-up in the midst of the chat. These interruptions also appear to be no problem to chat participants, who remain focused on their threads. It appears that intervening postings of this kind are dealt with not as chat, but as otherwise-framed text, which does not "interrupt" the texts of talk.

Chatroom graffiti (Case Study 5)

The messages conveyed through the work of graffiti artists are often highly political and deliberately aggressive, positioned in public spaces most likely to attract notice and force response. Some on-line participants go from chatroom to chatroom, leaving messages but not participating in chatroom conversation: I refer to this

as chatroom graffiti. Perhaps because their postings appear to chatters as utterance rather than as "otherwise-framed" text, these postings are more likely to evoke negative response – especially if repeated.

Fleeting text (Case Study 5)

Chat, despite its textual base, is still a synchronous communication form, yet lacks the permanency of asynchronous texted message systems. Thus, despite its texted format, it shares more features with talk than with prose – among them the tendency to "patrol" or work positively and negatively to maintain the specific features of the communicative forms and relations present in a given chatroom. This drive to include and exclude utterance forms, utterances and utterers is evident in different degrees and different ways in different spaces and chat modes, but does mark a communal sense of control over chat, and a regulation of what is and is not acceptable or preferred behaviour.

Lurking (Case Study 6)

Lurking is one behaviour which may not be welcomed in chatrooms. Some chatrooms do not show inactive chatters in the room and therefore the lurker is even more hidden from view. A lurker is able to read and observe behaviour in a chatroom without making any contribution – but since chat is by definition a participatory activity, lurking defies all aspects of the communicative act, with even the "reading" which we might anticipate as being carried out by a lurker being inactive by virtue of its failure to connect with the "w/reading" of texted chat which is signaled in properly configured response postings. Since chat status is judged by the relevance and creativity and format-matching of one's postings, lurking is so low status as to attract derision and censure – or at the very least, nervousness.

Collaborated-Selves (Case Study 6)

MUDs and MOOs are collaborative, networked environments where the MOO and MUD consists of a number of connected rooms. Chatters create a "combined self", partly fictionalized but partly built on his or her own chat capacities and skills, in order to create a space or story or thread in the chatroom. It is the MUD and MOO experience which signals most clearly the continuity-separation aspect of chat identity on-line, where the skills required to chat with authority and efficacy – elements continuous with our off-line expectations of a "present" or authorizing self from which "expression" can flow – can be shown to be fictionally deployed, in the service of an on-line character role. This insight drives a further wedge between identity and chat-skills: that is, it establishes the distance that exists on-line between whatever roles and statuses a chat participant may be accorded in real life, and those established through their skills at on-line chat. It is here that the special chat codings enter

the scene, providing a repertoire of possibility across which chat experts can play, to establish their on-line credibility.

Spelling, Abbreviations and Grammatical errors as on-line "norms" (Case Study 7).

Abbreviations and grammatical errors are not only accepted but also dominant in on-line chat, for two primary reasons. Firstly the speed of "speech" in a chatroom does not provide time for writing out what can be abbreviated, leading to forms such as "btw" for "by the way". Once this is established as commonplace however, it becomes a marker of expertise. High-statused chatters – those whose postings gain attention – display creative innovation and application of such compounds, abbreviations and grammatico-orthographical reformations. Moments of reciprocation between chatters all displaying command of these new conventions become peak moments of on-line chat, showing the degree to which chat conventions themselves are a major element of on-line community identity, and have become central to chat as a communicative form.

Long gaps between asking and answering in turn-takings, with other turn-takings in between – equivalent to the listening phase in a conversation (Case Study Two)

If chat-community is established in the formal conventions of chat "style", "w/readers" or entrants to a chat space who seek to participate must work to establish the repertoires in play; the level of skills required to intervene, and the likely acceptability of their own postings, in terms not just of ideas and opinions – semantic issues – but of their capacity to reciprocate in kind at the formal level. But other elements of chat skill are also demanded. The length of gap between turns, and the ability to locate and follow discontinuous threads, also place a premium on chatroom experience. For many new chat users this threading complexity is baffling. Its difficulty is often dependent on, firstly, how many people there are in the chatroom, and secondly the number of turn-takings offered and taken up – by one or by many participants. For example, in the "911" chat I have referred to in this study, there were as many as 45 turns in a minute – sometimes two entries for the same second – which leaves little time to construct those turns. Below there are seventeen turns in one minute.

| | 14:59:49 | Pete: Let kill all Palestinian terrorist´s greetings from Finland ps:morjens Will kuis panee |
| | 14:59:54 | 1Bone!!: HELLLOOOOOOOOOOOOOO |

14:59:56	oscar: that's not shute will!!!!

15:00:00	MissMaca: hikacked planes, and flew 3 planes into the pentagon.
15:00:02	mike: I think so, miss maca.
15:00:04	sascha: hallo from germany
15:00:08	Hello: How many building are still up in NY
15:00:08	1Bone!!: Whats up in NY???????????
15:00:12	damaged: no then we get a world wore 2
15:00:16	dolly: our news says five planes now
15:00:22	1Bone!!: I'm from germany too!
15:00:23	novyk: who's the author of this ... ??? Anyone know there ???
15:00:25	sascha: 3
15:00:30	Will: Pete: Siinähän se

Of these eleven chatters who "spoke", only three had more than one turn in that minute. <1Bone!!:> had four utterances in this minute:

14:59:54	1Bone!!: HELLLOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

15:00:08	1Bone!!: Whats up in NY???????????
15:00:22	1Bone!!: I'm from germany too!
15:00:48	1Bone!!: %&#% 3. Worldwar?!?!

The degree to which this chatter also manages to engage other postings, all within this very tight time frame, suggests on-line experience – as does the heavy use of keyboard expressives and "stuttered" repetitions as intensifiers. <1Bone!!> is able to drive multiple conversations right across the crowded chatroom, to follow up on postings, but also to present a coherent and even passionate political engagement – even permitting a distraction: "I'm from Germany too!" as he/she notes Sascha's posting. This occupancy of close to 25% of this set of postings renders this chatter a dominant force at this moment.

Chat technologisation and turn-taking disruption: anticipating discourse

As in face-to-face chat there are sometimes instances when an unexpected utterance occurs. With the de-ordering that can occur within the delayed response of entry and posting, curious effects can arise. In the thread above, <!Bone!!> has an utterance arrive on the site only one second after <sascha>, at line 44 introduces the phrase and so the concept: "world war". Without

	15:00:47	sascha: the 3rd world wore
	15:00:48	1Bone!!: %&#% 3. Worldwar?!?!
	15:00:49	oscar: hello 1 bone, where are you from?

the time=entry evidence, <1Bone!!>'s posting looks like a response-turn: reaction either to the suggestion of war, or perhaps to the misspelling: "world wore". But the single second of elapsed time makes this impossible. <1Bone!!>'s other turns arrive at about 10-15 second intervals – about the time it takes to read, respond, enter and have a posting arrive. What we have is not a response turn – a dialogue – but two independent chatters arriving at the same conclusion at the same moment.

	15:00:47	sascha: the 3rd world wore
	15:00:48	1Bone!!: %&#% 3. Worldwar?!?!

Repeated utterances with little or no content e.g. "hello", "anyone want to chat" (see Case Study One).

In chat terms these are phatic communicative entries: ritual exchanges, signaling presence in an otherwise un-indicatable context. Greetings have become very quickly established as a formal necessity in chatrooms, and a round of greetings is considered a requirement for entry into existing chat threads, or the launching of new ones – anything less is interruption. Unacknowledged greetings thus become signs that a chat group is unwilling to admit more members: a hint to either await a suitable thread to enter, or to go away. Repeated greetings from the same individual thus read as intrusive – or perhaps as desperate. Unless such a potential chat participant can move to establish the requisite codes of credibility through the "display" features of their postings, they are less and less likely to receive response and be admitted to chat exchange.

Short conversational utterances

In almost all cases, talk in chatrooms is limited to short phrases. Rarely will there be more than several words written at a time by a "speaker". Counting the words of hundreds of entries in my seven chatrooms (see table below) I found an average of 5.82 units per turn; including words, abbreviations, and emoticons. Within that sampling 25 percent of words consisted of only two letters, and 20 percent consisted of three letter words. Using CMC or the computer as the tool for an electronic content analysis, introduced in Case Study Two, I found that eighty-three percent of words used in chatroom conversations consisted of five letters or less.

1)   Purpose chatroom (Hurricane Floyd) Avg. 7.17/per turn

2)   Instant Messenger (two-person conversation) 11.32/per turn

3)   Celebrity chat Avg. 4.2per turn

4)   Astrology – purpose chat Avg. 3.5//per turn

5)   No topic chat - Avg. 3.2/per turn

6)   Topic (3D animation) chat Avg. 4.4/per turn

7)   Topic – baseball chat - Avg. 6.7 /per turn

The above table shows that users of multi-voiced chatrooms, whether they are working with a stated topic or not, produce fewer utterances than users in a chatroom with only two people speaking, as in an Instant Messenger environment. The Instant Messenger chat that I "captured" had 11.32 words per turn compared to other chatrooms that averaged 3.2; 3.5; 4.2; 4.4; 6.7 and 7.17 words per turn.

This implies that more is said when only two people are in a chatroom. With several voices seemingly all speaking, it is difficult, unless one is a very fast typist, to respond before someone else does. The "reading" time on a busy board, allied to the waiting time to have your own turns attended to with a directed response, cuts back on the ratio of postings from each participant.

On-line chat and intimacy: public conversation and personal expressiveness.

Many of the findings of the uniqueness of chatrooms can be seen in the table below which highlights differences between asynchronous on-line communication (chatrooms) and synchronous electronic formats (e-mail, discussion groups).

Synchronous	Asynchronous
time-bound conversation – or real-time communication	on-going conversation – not necessarily the same day
must arrange a specified time to participate to meet	can communicate any time
can interact only with those presently on-line	can interact with people not presently on-line

fast and free-flowing conversation may be hard to follow (much chat is very informal and relaxed)	slow paced conversation allows more time for understanding and formulating thoughts (more opportunity for formal, thoughtful discussion)
multiple conversations occurring simultaneously may be difficult to follow	conversations are usually arranged by topics
one-to-one (IM) allows for individual conversation; IRC is "public" chat	private conversation on a one-to-one basis in e-mail, but not on noticeboards
messages are fleeting; can't be referred to later except if saved; scrolling back to capture past comments means missing ongoing talk	messages are permanent for later reference

Chatrooms display many of the features of off-line "friendship" gatherings and their talk-formats, including the necessity to display "notable" qualities in the talk performance, to be noticed within the group; to meet the norms of the particular group in order to be an acceptable group member; to know the codes, preferred topics, and specialized locations of chat types, and to be prepared to "meet" and talk regularly, to keep these skills honed and updated. On-line chat appears to demand much the same commitment to sociality as its off-line equivalent.

Chat-types have however already differentiated within the IRC community generally, and can be further defined by

[176]

the following chat-behavioural categories   :

1. **Initiating messages which successfully stimulate a new discussion**.
Chatters begin discussional threads with the anticipation that others will continue. Continuity stops if no one responds.

2. **Initiating messages which fail to stimulate further discussion**,
If no one responds, a chatter may attempt to re-introduce the thread, but if no one responds then the thread dies, unless someone else reintroduces it.

3. **Continuing messages which cause further discussion**.
Responding successfully requires the sorts of w/readerly sensitivity to issues and form which enables chatters to create utterances suited to the group norms – or if possible, extending them further, in the right ways. Responses which simply approve or confirm are acceptable; for instance indicating approval in chat-abbreviation form: "lol" or "ȷ" – but the most responded to are those postings which move a thread forward, whilst also displaying chat-form expertise and creativity.

4. **Continuing messages which create branching threads**.
A thread can have several thread nodes branching from the root branch, which will then have an overall topic but

with sub-discussions. For example in Case Study One there is the main thread of Hurricane Floyd with several branching threads that are still about the storm but a different aspect of it – such as the discussion about Mexican roofers or a thread about sizes of buildings.

As my research dealt with the formal aspects of on-line chat, it did not attempt to explore how the users felt about their time on-line. Studies have been done that show that a majority of chatters "felt like they could jump right in and chat", or that "chat discussions are too superficial", or that "chat went too fast because he or she could not keep up with the conversation", or that "14 out of 15 felt a moderator was needed" [177]. My own research has not identified what people think, but is still able to show that users can indeed "jump right in and chat" – but that most in fact consider the prior postings before doing so. To "write" is to "read" first.

Are these then the major features of on-line chat across all domains, all languages, and into the future? Certainly the technologisation of this form of talk appears to have spread across language groups and cultural behaviours.

Chatrooms currently provide one of the most universal forms of communicating. By late 2002 there were 4206

[178]

Internet cafes in 140 countries   and wherever there is an internet café there is the opportunity to chat on-line. In the Middle East for instance there are many chatrooms available and most have translating software for the language of the chatters to be translated into the user's native language. On the chat-server, http://www.chatinternational.com the following chatrooms were currently available (as of December 2002):

Afghanistan (5)	Iran (9)	Lebanon (7)
Armenia (5)	Iraq (5)	Pakistan (15)
Azerbaijan (5)	Israel (9)	Syria (7)
Bahrain (4)	Jordan (4)	Turkey (9)

The universality of chat-styles can be demonstrated by examining a chatroom on the Iraq-Net domain, which has similarities to the chatrooms in all of my case studies. Since this is a JavaScript chatroom the log could not be captured as text, but is "snapshotted" direct from its webpage.

(Iraq-Net chatroom on the day the US invaded Iraq – March 2003)

The formatting of chat entries is immediately recognizable, even when in Arabic script, as is the convention of name-tagging – right-to-left, even in a left-to-right texting language such as Arabic. The list of users on-line to the right indicates the fusion of cultural representations available: Anglo or Arabic names in Roman script (<basil> or <Haedar>); Arabic coded into Roman script with accent markers – not reproducible in the Word Processing package I am using for this discussion: see tags 5 and 7 in the list. At the same time, within these selections, participants are able to code their tags for expressive effect – not only in the overt US aggression of a "GI Joe" on such a site, but possibly also in the interesting number of "Alexanders" who appear to be registered to this site. Already it is possible, even in such limited sampling and in the presence of a dual cultural context, to see chatters playing to position their contributions in the sorts of ways introduced in discussions above.

Even where chat participants enter from different language and cultural contexts, IRC conventions

are observable.
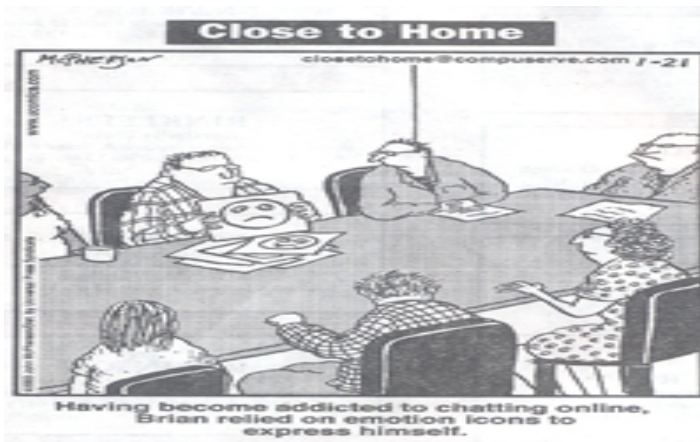
Lebanon-based chatroom

On this Lebanon-based chatroom, which has an instant translator, the speaker is not demonstrating good command of English. But common abbreviations are used that would be found in any English-speaking chatroom, such as <how r u> - and the emoticon < :) > is used in standard form. Even in the dual-language situation, where threads cross in scripts as well as in topics, chatters build response relations in familiar ways:

Soso's careful attempt to suggest that Moz "serch after help" for his violence finally devolves into reciprocal personal abuse: "they have to blow u from the world".

This study has shown that on-line chat communities do take on social agendas as much as they would in person-to-person meetings. Communities of practice can be communities marked by acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours registered at the level of the doubled speech of chat, with its semiotic loadings of meaning and familiarity. In Case Study One it was apparent that there was an ease among the speakers in discussing Mexican roofers in the midst of a discussion of a national emergency. In Case Study Seven the baseball chatroom has a community of practice where the participants are comfortable with their specialised sports talk. Here the participants have not developed an in-depth discussion or a site-specific set of codes - but there are the same

practices of greetings, abbreviations and quickly accelerating shifts from mitigation to abuse, as seen across all case studies. Topic and situation it seems, do not prevail against the standard features of on-line chat behaviour.

5.3 Research Questions and answers

Having revealed them both a tendency towards community-specific chat behaviours and at least the foundations for "chat universals", it is time to revisit the research questions which orginally drove this project. How have they contriubted to, or contrained the findings? The five initial focus areas for this study were as follows:

1. Is meaning communicated in chatrooms?
2. How is turn-taking negotiated within chatrooms?
3. Are issues of cultural sensitivity as relevant as in face-to-face talk?
4. How is electronic chat reflective of current social discourses?
5. Will chat become a universally understood language?

Added to these mixed and incommensurable questions were an equally multi-level listing of my then-current assumptions on online communication:

1. That people create a different textual self for the chatroom environment that they are in
2. That conversation within chatrooms will change how we come to know others
3. That 'chat' does not differ from natural conversation
4. That observational studies of chatroom conversation can capture some of the adaptations of conversational behaviours
5. That this work gives us a better understanding of how and why chatrooms are an important area in which to create a new conversational research theory

Having completed the seven differently-focused case studies designed to investigate these issues, it is now possible to see the quite distinctive directions these questions raise and the concomitant ways in which equally distinctive "clusters" of research focus have proven to have arise. The studies move from the fine focus of what can now be seen as technological and methodological questions (turn-taking; meaning-making; observational study) to a comparative emphasis cultural sensitivity in chat and in real-life talk; chat as reflective of real-life discourses; chat in comparison to natural conversation to the "postulatory" emphasis of much broader questions (chat as a useful area for new conversational research theory; chat as a new universal language). My own preliminary thinking indicated a three part study program, moving from existing linguistic-based observational and analytical methods, to an empirical evidence-founded description of actual online "talk" practice, and so to a deeper and richer set of hypotheses relating to online "chat" practices and behaviours. The study has thus begun the first stage of a methodological design for the study of chat – and perhaps of its future technologisations.

The ODAM or Online Discourse Analysis Method proposed at the outset has evolved across the seven constitutive Case Studies:

- CS1 Reader-response

Meaning-making depends on interpretation
Interpretation depends on Habitus and e-Habitus

So the study moves to

- CS2 Technologisation

CMCs contribute new connective problems (gaps/pauses) and selections (bridgings/ braidings).
IM is relatively familiar (like conversation):
IRC is complex

So the study moves to

- CS3 Pragmatics/Semiotics

How talk is managed and represented online

Pragmatics   Semiotics
Regulatory online cues/codes   Graphic play
command more response   Creative play dominant

So the study moves to

- CS 4 Speech Act Theory:

Which talk forms occur in IRC?
Very indirect forms common, to keep relations OPEN.
Is IRC primarily relational?

So the study moves to

- CS 5 Discourse Analysis:

Does the "relational" work online construct a communication community?

Consensual semiotic play   Speech-Acts as initiation/termination
                                                                      of "threads"

So the study moves to

- CS 6 Conversational Analysis:

How online communication regulates exchanges. Turn-taking and repair evident, but more complex than in real life conversation

So the study moves to

- CS 7 <u>Grammar</u>:

How do word selection and order contribute to chat?

Technologisation, creative play, force new "grammars".

Concision   online competency   familiarity in online community
                                                            relational work

Building inwards from the broad user-perspectives of Reader Response, examining chat postings as actively received and interpreted "wreaderly" communication, the ODAM has cut four deep and "rich descriptive" wedges from a multi-dimensional, multi-leveled set of chat actions. Beginning simply as an empirically driven aim: to cut into actual instances of chat practice using any existing research methods which could examine how online talk "works", the study can now be seen to offer in the first instance, a set of interlocking research tools, any or all of which can be picked up, critiqued and re-applied, to be improved upon in future studies, by future researchers.

A second "wedge" or cut from the research findings however establishes that a key direction in linguistic research methodologies: the drive towards establishing the "regulatory" or rules-and-systems elements behind language use, is indeed given a different spin within online talk. Here it proves possible, again and again, from method to method – across the seven case studies "speech communities", to reveal tightly regulated, recurrent and systematic talk practices, variant from those observable offline, even where there are equivalent interest or topic groups. Wedge 2 indicates those already established online practices which constitute the difference, and even expertise of online chat. They are what suggests that it may well be on its way to constituting its own "speech community/ies".

But it is wedge 3: those descriptive features which reveal a markedly "open" or "creative" set of communicative behaviours online, which reveal <u>how</u> chat is being constituted. Here the evidence of

complexity, semiotic and graphic play, consistent relational focus and creative expertise introduces the dynamic energy of online communication, favouring members and strategies and expertise which reveal skill and creativity and fast-paced interpretive responsiveness. Wedge 3 practices lead us on to the discourse-under-formation of Wedge 4: a discourse demanding continual enactment of familiarity, consensual strategies, relational work, and what CA would call "category maintenance" – of an exclusively "communal" kind.

Online chat, regardless of topic or the specifics of a participant group, appears directed to community itself. Not quite un-agentic as it dis-connects from action, it becomes meta-agentic: more about how to operate than about "what to do". It is thus, contrary to most contemporary public and media accounts, richer in value than in projects. It is a discourse largely about itself.

5.4 Summary

After analysis of seven different locations for and modes of Internet chat, this study can be used to suggest that in the chatrooms captured and analysed for the period 1995 to 2001 there is evidence for a new genre of interactive, conversational writing, or "talk-texting". While awaiting (and perhaps assisting in) the evolution of new methods of analysis for this hybrid communicative form and technologically transitional format, this study has tested a broad range of existing text and speech based analytical techniques, to uncover what we can know of how Internet chat forms currently operate. This genre – or set of genres - must then be regarded as historical and time bound, because the technology of delivery is in itself already changing; for example to include images and sound, so that communication within chatrooms is no longer simply text-based.

Nor is this transience within the format the sole aspect marking the ephemerality of chat. Chatters themselves know that their text may be lost forever; and yet ideas, offerings in creative prose, experiments with personal and social identity, debates and discussions and inquiries and statements are being written, posted and lost from moment to moment: communicative effort that in other more conventional writing genres would be saved, reflectively reassessed and elaborated on. On chatsites text is speech – with all of the misdirection, rapidity of onward flow, focus on the inter-relational, and lack of attention to permanence experienced in speech communities. It is surely significant that at the very moment that this attempt to capture and catalogue at least some of the behaviours of this communicative genre was being prepared for the processes of printing and binding, a major service for the activity of chat was, without warning, curtailed. In September 2003 Microsoft announced the closure of its IRC services.

While IRC services of various types remain available to users, and it seems likely, given the use of chat in

various functions from education to industrial design and conferencing, that the genres will in some form prevail, a central moment of chat as a social activity is passing. This document may then, as it has so often suggested, be already on its way to being an historical study. It is important therefore to note that, despite the wide variations in chat purpose and performance found in the seven case studies used here, chat has in its short life evolved a solid central repertoire of communicative techniques. Each case study revealed some unique talk-texting features, but the primary outcome of each of the case studies proved that there were more common features in chat spaces and styles than differences.

There is a new genre of "text-based conversation" text – that found in chatroom postings. The chief characteristics of this genre include recognising how users create a distinctive, but site and talk-category regulated, "textual self" for each chatroom environment they enter. Conversation within chatrooms, without all the cues of previous forms of conversation, changes how we come to know and interact with others, so that new cues based on written conversation become as important as the physical ones which we rely on now. Observational study of chatroom conversation can capture some of the adaptations of standard conversational behaviours to the demands of on-line chat. Observation, description and analysis of chat, using existing analytical methodologies from both text and speech traditions, lets us take a first step towards recognition and analysis of new, hybrid, communicative forms. But it is already possible to uncover a consistency and replicability in findings across chat types and sites, which suggests that chatroom conversation has certain features which make it different from off-line, person-to-person conversation, including the following standard features:

1.   That the author or "speaker" role can be complex, requiring a rapid mixing of the reader and writer roles, as well as the capacity for multiple simultaneous engagement in a number of conversational threads – even using multiple log-on identities.

2.   That chatrooms use an on-line-specific adapted language which incorporates semi-graphic elements such as emoticons, a specialist "anti-language" of abbreviations, an expressive range of self-selected "tailored" settings involving font colours and styles, and the deployment of pre-formed phrases and ikons as representative of the author.

There is, above all else, an intensified emphasis in chat practice, on the fleeting nature of this texted conversation, since the Internet is itself an unstable, and even experimental, place. This set of studies of contemporary on-line chat behaviours has produced above all else, a foregrounding of the complex, interactive nature of on-line conversation, it demands upfront attention to inter-relational aspects of the talk-texting

exchange, signalled in the complex braiding structure of the conversational threads and the inherent discontinuity of talk-exchanges introduced by the technology of the posting software. It is, in itself, a braided study, at the level of description, theorisation, case selection, methodology, and even of presentational design.

And that is, in the final analysis, the nature of the research object: Internet chat. It is likely to illustrate a tendency to conitnaul change – and one issuing ongoing challenges to researchers.

5.5 Future Research

Electronic communication is becoming an established form of communication. However, there are many areas within electronic and online communication which remain unexamined, yet which are undeniably generating new forms of communicative behaviour – and which have potential to feed back into further developments of the Computer Mediated Communication technologies and applications available to today's and perhaps tomorrow's communicators.

Among these experientially new social forms of communication evident in online chat, are some curiously invisible forms of communicative practice, qualitatively new and outside the scope of even the broad range of communicative methods of data-capture and analysis used in this study. Research into silence in a chatroom, referred to as lurking (see 2.2.1.3 in this thesis) has not been fully explored. In person-to-person communication, silence does have readable meaning. A participant's silence in "natural" conversation is observable to both other participants and to analysts. It literally "speaks", as a conscious act of non-participation. In electronic communication without visual cues, we cannot fully know the purpose of a person's silence – and in the rapid stream of other conversational postings and responses, may not even notice it. What then is the social or relational impact of online silence? And beyond this more "absolute" silence, what of the uses of lag-times in active participation? Is there for instance an acceptable time lag between chats entries? If a participant is a slow typist, or considers a response for a length of time – or conducts multi-stranded exchanges and so is slower to each response, does this alter the communicative relation? How long can a response gap stretch, before it becomes too difficult to re-connect? In Instant Messenger chats there is a notice that appears that reads the "respondent is writing a reply," but in multivoiced chatrooms it is impossible to know whether a person is slow in responses, otherwise occupied, or is actively "lurking" for a reason.

The impact of participation in casual electronic chat on privacy is another area of research that is still under formulation. While this research shows that chat has tendencies towards the establishment of casual and even intimate social relations, the literature suggests that many participants consider this non-proximate and

non-physical social relation to be a secure space in which to interact with a broader than usual range of others, and to test out various ideas, behaviours, and even personae.. Attitudes to online security have however altered after aspects of the 9/11 events were connected to the capacities of the Internet to offer ease of international communication to terrorist groups. Subsequent security measures taken in the US to detect terrorist activity online may mean that chatters become more careful with their "talk". In a Harris Poll conducted in April 2002 [179] the following findings indicate that the US public, which had actively favoured monitoring of Internet communications by their government, is turning back towards an unregulated system:

- Law enforcement monitoring of Internet discussions in chat rooms and other forums: favored by 55%, down from 63%; and
- Expanded government monitoring of cell phones and email, to intercept communications: now favored by only 44% and opposed by 51%.

Will chatrooms remain an open sphere of communication, or have they lost their "innocence" as a place of play and experimentation?

Research into similarities between chatroom and mobile phone messaging (and image exchange) would seem to be an inviting field of study, with Internet based and phone based codes (especially of abbreviations for instance) appearing to converge. Are they in fact the same? And if differences exist, what might explain them? Study into how mobile phone text-messaging is used to convey meaning in place of a voice message on mobile phones would help to show whether messaging conveyance is as effective with the abbreviations and emoticons used in phone text as speaking. It would also provide some interesting guidance on the possible communicative impact of moving to voice-activation on the Internet – and on some of the ways to interlink aural and text systems. Text-messaging is as short as chatroom text, but is more accessible – a rapid disseminator of the short-form texted message into new communities of users. SMS was launched commercially for the first time in 1995 [180] and by 2002 there were one billion SMS per day exchanged globally (December 2002) . It may prove that my predictions in this study that IRC will be a short-lived technology, may in part be wrong – if SMS and mobile telephony become heir to the form.

Finally, this research raises questions in relation to the "global" or universal use of electronic and online translation software, offering instantaneous contact between speakers of different languages. With electronic chat becoming global, whether online or on a mobile phone, the

need to exchange rapid messages across language barriers becomes more pressing. But how accurate are the translation devices that are used for online communication? Online translators are available from services such as

 http://www.worldlingo.com who offer "WorldLingo Chat," giving one the ability to chat instantly in ten languages; or Alta Vista's Babel at http://world.altavista.com/ while at http://www.freetranslation.com/ there is Instant Multilingual Messaging for American On Line Instant Messenger and SMS Translators that gives translations from one's mobile phone. But how accurate are the translated messages? More importantly, how can one use abbreviations in this environment and still be understood? The examples of the two phones above are full-sentence-translated - but what happens with typically shortened chat writing? Imagine the message: **Will U wed me @ Gretna tomorrow pls darling?** Translated into Dutch on Alta Vista's Babel it comes back as **Zal U wed me @ morgen pls darling Gretna?** Would the receiver get the message correct? The translator at WorldLingo.com translates it differently: **U wed me @ zal morgen pls darling Gretna** whilst freetranslation.com interprets it as **Wiedde wens U mij @ Gretna morgen pls lieveling?** All three translations are different, with different meanings. If something as short and simple – yet as socially crucial! - as this message is translated incorrectly, what is needed to exchange meaning in international electronic devices? Can translation between languages also accommodate an online code of abbreviations which is informal and non-standardised – and to date, unrecorded?

Further research into online discursive communication will undoubtedly be driven by rapidly changing technologies as it becomes more intensified, more complex, more globalised, subtler and far more widespread.

But no matter the design outcomes, or the decisions taken technologically, or the platforms chosen for communicative exchange, we can be sure that users themselves, across an ever increasing range of language forms, will respond to these new "chat" formats in ways just as lively and variable; just as practically directed to communication, yet displaying just as much experimentation and pleasure, as the Internet chat participants captured here.

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Appendices ON CD

These files and the one folder are on the accompanying CD. For example, **logs.doc**: is the raw data of all seven case studies

1a.doc: Additional tables for Case Study 1

2a.doc: Additional tables for Case Study 2

3a.doc: Additional tables for Case Study 3

table7_8.htm: Additional tables for Case Study 3

> **table8.htm**: the words for Case Study 3 in alphabetic order as well as number of occurrences for each word and word type.

4a.doc: Additional tables for Case Study 4

5a.doc: Additional tables for Case Study 5

6a.doc: Additional tables for Case Study 6

7a.doc: Additional tables for Case Study 7

911_Chat.doc: Raw data of chat during the September 11 crisis in New York

911_compare.doc: Raw data

Afghanistan_chat.doc: Raw data

All.doc: Thesis in its entirety

All.htm: Thesis in its entirety with hyperlinks

America under attack.com: Raw data

bondage.doc: Raw data

Christian_Bondage_chat.doc: Raw data

christianchat.doc: Raw data

CNN_com - Community - Discussion.doc 911: Raw data

emoticons.doc: A large list of emoticons collected over five years

emoticons2.doc: A large list of emoticons collected over five years

hurricane Floyd message board.doc: data from message board

lifeline_amid_tragedy.doc: Article *Net offers lifeline amid tragedy*

lurking.com: All responses to a question posed in a discussion group on lurking.

logs.doc: raw data of all seven case studies

moderated_unmoderated.doc: Comparison of a Moderated chatroom (below) and an un-moderated chat (right frame).

online_articles.doc: the description of each article in the "VC" folder

postscript.doc: These are notes in progress on September 11 tragedy (911) and not an official part of the PhD thesis.

proposal.doc: The original thesis proposal submitted to the University of South Australia in 1998.

Tables from Case Studies.doc: Table 01 Case Study + Theory + word count, Table 2 Code of utterances, Table 3 Per cent instances, Table 4 Greets/Statements/Answers/Questions %.

unmoderated.doc: Chat: Terror From the Sky

VC: (folder) Online articles on chatrooms – articles that have been saved in their entirety.

xena.doc: Example of chatroom rules, **"**Below are the rules for the cartoon site of xena WARRIOR PRINCESS**"**

youth_slang.doc: Social Meanings of Slang in California Youth Culture

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[1]

     (See for instance studies in online behaviours: Turkle: 1982, 1984, 1995, 1996; Rheingold: 1993, 1994, 1995, 2000; Reid: 1993, 1996; Poster: 1990, 1995, 1999, 2001 and Landow: 1987, 1992, 1994, 1997. In discourse practices see Kristeva: 1980, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1989 and in the field of socio-linguistics, Halliday: 1978, 1985a, 1994).

[2]

     There are many texts on how language evolved. (See "The rise and fall of languages", by Dixon, 1977). He traces the theoretical issues of language from a comparative and historical linguistics view. For example, Dixon traces language prototypes over the 100,000 years humans are believed to have used language to communicate. What is interesting from the perspective of this study is how languages currently spoken and understood are changing with the globalisation of communication. The more people "chat" on the Internet from different cultures, the more homogenised language may become. I will look at this issue in several case studies where I will compare chatrooms from different languages to discover whether the same abbreviations and emoticons are used or whether

different languages use their own abbreviations. For example, I will investigate whether abbreviations such as, BW, "by-the-way", which is one of the more commonly used abbreviations in Internet chat, as well as in SMS messages on mobile and palm-computers, is the same in other languages.

[3] Language and Mind: Current Thoughts on Ancient Problems (Part 1) Noam Chomsky. http://www.utexas.edu/courses/lin380l/nc-pap1.htm viewed 25/10/2001

[4] See http://homestead.deja.com/user.robin_pfeifer/claytablets.html viewed 21/11/2001

[5] See http://home.swipnet.se/~w-63448/mespro.htm. viewed 21/11/2001

[6] See http://www.halfmoon.org/writing.html viewed 21/11/2001

[7] "Rise Of The Human Race, The Civilizations Of The Ancient Near East"

http://www.emayzine.com/lectures/sumeria.htm viewed 21/11/2001

[8]

     Everything that we do as a consumer leaves an electronic footprint whether it is shopping or using electronic equipment. Whatever we do on a computer (and/or network, Internet, e-mail, instant messages) leaves an electronic footprint.

[9]
     For a history of The Internet from its source see
http://public.web.cern.ch/Public/ACHIEVEMENTS/web.html
[10]

     Newsgroups and list serves enable a group of network users interested in a common topic to exchange message. Central servers handle the forwarding of mail to all subscribers to the list or conference. Participants need to know only a mailing list address, not the addresses of all participants. This model has been extended to create electronic journals.

[11]

     See http://www.netcafeguide.com/

[12]

     See http://www.provide.net/~bfield/polaris/topnoframe/top0151.htm viewed 8-21-2000

[13] ArabChat can be accessed at http://chat.arabchat.org/english/ as of 9-2001.

[14]

     Original IRC history memo is at http://www.mirc.co.uk/help/jarkko.txt Viewed August 10, 2000.

[15] For a history line of IRC see http://www.efnet.net/?page=history viewed September 23, 2000.

[16]

     (see http://www3.usal.es/~nonverbal/researchers.htm which lists 135 current researchers doing academic work on

online communication.).

[17]

(http://www.nua.ie/surveys/),

[18]

(http://www.pewInternet.org/).

[19]

See http://www.growingupdigital.com/ See also Internet Demographics and eCommerce Statistics http://www.commerce.net/research/stats/stats.html for Internet traffic usage statistics.

[20]

See: "Sociological Research Online" http://www.socresonline.org.uk/; "Online Research's Time Has Come" http://www.bitpipe.com/; "Curtin University of Technology Internet Studies" http://smi.curtin.edu.au/NetStudies/projects.html.

[21] Research Methodology Online, Issue six, has valuable information on doing online research http://www.cybersociology.com/

[22] The free webpage provider, Geocities, provides individual chatrooms for its members to put on their homepage

[23]

We marched on Washington DC to stop the Viet Nam War, to stop segregation, to give women more rights. I marched for so many things I forgot what we were marching for at times.

[24]

See http://www3.usal.es/~nonverbal/researchers.htm which lists 135 current researchers doing academic work on online communication. Most of these researchers are presenting online work in the areas of psychology and sociology which are providing an ongoing source of literature on Internet activity. There are many university Internet research projects such as the University of London's "Gender and the Internet" project, University of Washington's Center for Internet Studies; The Internet Studies Center at the University of Minnesota. For example there are psychologists exploring options with using Internet chatrooms as well as many universities using chatrooms for distance learning (including the University of South Australia, sponsor of this thesis) and for classroom experiments (see Sociology and the Internet at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey).

[25]

See Daniel Chandler's list of "Active Interpretation Reader-Oriented Theory and Studies" at http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Sections/interp02.html (viewed July 20, 2001).

[26]

See also "Plot Creation, Linearity & the Importance of Playing the Game" viewed online March 17, 2001 at http://members.cox.net/vincentrhodes/moo/analysis/linearity.html

[27]

See file:///E:/WINDOWS/Desktop/www.worldlingo.com/resources/language_statistics.html

[28] Computational linguistics is the scientific study of language from a computational perspective. Computational linguists are interested in providing computational models of various kinds of linguistic phenomena.

[29]

Anna Cicognani's "A Linguistic Characterisation of Design in Text-Based Virtual Worlds" focuses more on the design in a text-based virtual environment and its sense of interactions between users and the virtual environment, "and that these interactions for design can be approached using a linguistic perspective". I have saved this to my university server online for a reference point as it may no longer be on the Internet. Therefore, though the reference material is not available in hardcopy it is available as long as the University of South Australia preserves my web site and it is also on the CD which accompanies this thesis. On the World Wide Web I have saved it on the CD it is in the appendix: Online essays: vc/30-design.

[30]

Sherry Turkle, Professor of the Sociology of Science at the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has published widely on topics of Online Interactions. Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet, is one of her major works. In 2000 she was named one of Time Magazine's Innovators of the Internet. Her Internet site links to many of her published articles. http://web.mit.edu/sturkle/www/. Turkle's current research is on Cyberpets and Children (http://web.mit.edu/sturkle/www/vpet.html). Her most current published work is "Cyborg Babies and Cy-Dough-Plasm: Ideas about Self and Life in the Culture of Simulation In Cyborg Babies: From Techno-Sex to Techno-Tots". Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit (eds.). New York: Routledge, 1998.

[31]

David Caraballo has one of the most comprehensive explanations of IRC chat on the Internet at http://www.irchelp.org/irchelp/new2irc.html.

[32]

Cyberrdewd was one of the earlier researchers into online behaviour. His site http://members.aol.com/Cybersoc/is2cyberdude.html begins with the academic and professional qualities most researchers bring to their Internet research during the early years of the World Wide Web and says: "My qualifications in this area are based on five months experience as an "Internet junkie", this being the amount of time I have had my new computer and hence been on the Internet   ;-) I focus specifically on IRC community on AustNet becuse this is the network I regularly access. The essay concludes with a few imaginative speculations regarding the future of digital communities."

[33]

Robin Hamman covers topics such as online communities, Internet access, and cybersex with his Cybersoc e-zine, which is a valuable online resource for social scientists interested in the study of the Internet, cyberspace, Computer-mediated communication, and online. http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/home.html, issue 6, is on "methodology of online research".

[34]

Paul ten Have, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam, writes and researches on the concepts of ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, medical interaction, technology and research practices. He currently heads an online discussion group on ETHNOMETHODOLOGY and

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS "languse". http://www.pscw.uva.nl/emca/paul.htm

[35]

Dr. Karen L. Murphy and Mauri P. Collins are two of the many researchers and academics who have written in the e-zine, *First Monday*, a peer-reviewed journal on the Internet, solely devoted to the Internet. Since its start in May 1996, *First Monday* has published 336 papers in 68 issues; these papers written by 399 different authors. To view hundreds of published articles on everything and everything to do with the Internet go to their website at: http://www.firstmonday.dk/index.html.

[36]

The aberMUDs are a type of MUD that has been in existence for a quite long time. They precede most of the different types of MUDs that exist now, and are still quite popular on the Internet. AberMUDs got their name by being created at the University of Aberystwyth in the United Kingdoms. At the moment the most popular aberMUD server is a one process version of the aber4 server and is called dirt3. http://www.ludd.luth.se/mud/aber/northern_lights.html

[37]

Languse Internet Discussion List http://www.sprog.auc.dk/~firth/languse.html

[38]

Paul ten Have is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam. His work in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis is useful for a study on chatroom "talk". Ten Have has a large collection of sites on his web site "Information on ETHNOMETHODOLOGY and CONVERSATION ANALYSIS".

[39]

Valentina Noblia [University of Buenos Aires] see
 http://www.flatusvocis.com/Datos/programas/p83.htm%20active%20as%20of%204-2002.

[40]

Rhyll Vallis submitted her PhD thesis "Sense and Sensibility in Chatrooms" in August under the supervision of Carolyn Baker and Calvin Smith at the University of Queensland. Her Internet site is http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/aiem/vallis.html

[41]

Hillary Bays [Paris] Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris completed her PhD on Conversational Analysis in 2001.

[42]

Sean Rintel [State University of New York] See http://www.albany.edu/~er8430/ online as of 2-2002

[43]

Gene Lerner is Associate Professor of Sociology at UC Santa Barbara in the area of grammar and interaction. See http://www.summer.ucsb.edu/lsa2001/courses/lerner_bio.htm online as of February 2002.

[44]

Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication is at http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/ University of Southern California and http://jcmc.huji.ac.il/ the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I last accessed this journal online Wednesday, June 12, 2002

[45]

The Electronic Journal of Communication is a mega site of articles on every aspect of online researchonline since 1993 and active as of Wednesday, 12 June 2002 at http://www.cios.org/www/ejcmain.htm

[46]

Computer-MediatedCo mmunication Magazine (ISSN 1076-027X) is online at http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/ as of Wednesday, June 12, 2002.

[47]

See for example, "Synchronous Computer-mediated communication Resource Site Papers": http://www.fed.qut.edu.au/tesol/cmc/papers.html

[48]

See especially the paper, "How Cultural Differences Affect the Use of Information and Communication Technology in Dutch-American Mergers" by Frits D. J. Grotenhuis in Volume 12 issue 2 of the CIOS journal at cios.org.

[49]

E-mail as an important part of online CMC is not the privilege of the original dominant creator of the technology. Messaging Online reports that for the first time ever, there are more e-mail accounts outside the US than within it. The total number of electronic mailboxes in the world at the end 2000 was 891.1 million, up sixty-seven per cent from 1999. Over 451 million of the total for 2000 were outside the US. See http://www.messagingonline.com/

[50]

This is available on the "Linguist List" http://linguistlist.org/

[51]

Chat Gains Ground As A Service Channel, March 2002 http://www.forrester.com/go?docid=14660

[52]

Beyond the psychological, linguistic and sociological effects of MUDS are those who have developed the software for the environments to use textual based communications, such as Alex Stewart who designed the software for "The Cup-O MUD Client". The Cup-O MUD client is a fully functional client for Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVEs, aka MUDs, MU*s, MOOs, etc), and other line-based text communication systems, written in the Java programming language.

[53]

On the frontpage to Achaea it is advertised as, "In Achaea you will experience dreams of the Divine; a grandeur beyond mortal ken that will astonish and delight at every turn". It is a coherent world with a detailed history and mythology.

"*Join one of the influential Guilds and become a telepathic monk or a wily Serpent Lord. Become a member of the Church and fight the battle of the righteous to drive the Occultists, lovers of Chaos, from the land. Join us, and your fate and fame shall be an echo and a light unto Eternity.*"

[54]

Books on MUDs are rapidly growing in quantity. Four books which have been useful in this research to give me background into MUDs are:

1. Kolstrup (2000) Virtual Interaction: Interaction in Virtual Inhabited 3d Worlds by Text this answers basic research questions about the logistics of interaction in virtual inhabited 3D worlds, examining the core activities of interface interaction. This book takes the reader from general theories all the way into specific design methodologies and suggestions for management in the multimedia industry.

2. Steven R. Holtzman (1995) Digital Mantras: The Languages of Abstract and Virtual Worlds. A commentary on the integration of computers into the creative process. Holtzman draws examples from ancient languages, the philosophy of a Buddhist monk, Ferdinand de Saussure, and the grammar of Noam Chomsky, to illustrate how the implementation of computers in recent creative work in language, music, art, and virtual reality, presents a new philosophy of creativity in the digital age.

3. Katherine Hayles, (1999) How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics. Hayles explains that ever since the invention of electronic computers five decades ago they have inspired a shift in how we define ourselves both as individuals and as a species. Though Hayles does not provide data on subjects her history of computers and the ideas of becoming part machine and part human in the future are interesting in light of the fact that MUDs are, though only by text, a medium to become something "other" than ourselves.

4. Robins, Kevin. 1995. "Cyberspace and the world we live in," in Cyberspace, cyberbodies, cyberpunk: Cultures of technological embodiment. Featherstone, Michael, and Roger Burows, eds. London: SAGE Publications. p. 146.

[55]

In Sherry Turkle's "Virtuality and Its Discontents, Searching for Community in Cyberspace" she describes a virtual place called Dred's Bar, which she had visited with Tony, a persona she had met on another MUD. What is of interest to my research here is how the use of words online can create images to others which are similar to what they would experience in real life.

"After passing the bouncer, Tony and I encountered a man asking for a $5 cover charge, and once we paid it our hands were stamped. The crowd opens up momentarily to reveal one corner of the club. A couple is there, making out madly. Friendly place . . . You sit down at the table. The waitress sees you and indicates that she will be there in a minute.
[The waitress here is a bot--short for robot--that is, a computer program that presents itself as a personality.]
The waitress comes up to the table, "Can I get anyone anything from the bar?" she says as she puts down a few cocktail napkins.
Tony says, "When the waitress comes up, type order name of drink."
Abigail [a character at the bar] dries off a spot where some drink spilled on her dress.
The waitress nods to Tony and writes on her notepad.
[I type "order margarita," following Tony's directions.]
You order a margarita.
The waitress nods to ST and writes on her notepad.
Tony sprinkles some salt on the back of his hand.
Tony remembers he ordered a margarita, not tequila, and brushes the salt off.
You say, "I like salt on my margarita too"
The DJ makes a smooth transition from The Cure into a song by 10,000 Maniacs.
The drinks arrive. You say," L'chaim."
Tony says, "Excuse me?"

After some explanations, Tony says, "Ah, . . ." smiles, and introduces me to several of his friends. Tony and I take briefly to the dance floor to try out some MUD features that allow us to waltz and tango, then we go to a private booth to continue our conversation.

[56]

Currently Holland is active on the Internet and is the "listowner" of PSYART, a usergroup on the Internet (not available as of Friday, 22 February 2002) and he is the editor-in-chief of "PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychology of the Arts," started in 1997 and still available online (22/02/2002: http://web.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/journal).

[57]

Holland comments that men easily get into "mine-is-bigger- than-yours games. My hard disk, my chip, my screen is bigger or faster or newer or more powerful". Sherry Turkle also discusses this in her book. The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit. I refer to Turkle in several places in this thesis; Chapter 1, Introduction; Chapter 2, Literature Review, especially on the topic of MUDs.

[58]

Norman N. Holland "The Internet Regression" http://www.rider.edu/users/suler/psycyber/holland.html viewed, 22 February 2000.

[59]

Iser's theory of "aesthetic response" is developed in his major books, one critical (*The Implied Reader,* 1972) and one theoretical (*The Act of Reading,* 1976).

[60]

Fish is a professor of English and law, and immediate past chair of the English department at Duke University, now executive director of the Duke University Press. He developed a reader-oriented perspective which he called an "affective stylistic".

[61]

See "Grammars and Description: Studies in Text Theory" and "Text Analysis -Research in Text Theory", Vol 1. (1977), "Discourse As Social Interaction Discourse Studies - A Multidisciplinary Introduction" Vol 2. (1997); "Discourse and Literature Critical Theory" Vol 3. (1997); "Handbook of Discourse Analysis Discourse and Dialogue"Vol. 4 (1985); "Prejudice in Discourse An Analysis of Ethnic Prejudice in Cognition and Conversation Pragmatics and Beyond" Vol. 5 (1985);

[62]

(See http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/1.2/features/eyman/bakhtin.html).

[63]

These are from the field of nursing, an interesting example of a research field arising in quantitative scientific research, but moving into qualitative social-science modes. See *Should we evaluate qualitative studies if so, how?* Online http://www.icn.ch/resnetbul05_02.htm

[64]

I lurked in the chatrooms I have used in this study and did not engage in conversation except in Case Study Two where I use two examples of Instant Messenger chatrooms to show a perspective of online conversation where only two people are engaged in discourse. The term "lurker" or "lurking" describes one who chooses just to read the exchanges, instead of joining in the chat by posting

their own messages. Most people will "lurk" in a chatroom at least until they feel comfortable about joining in.

[65]

I have an Internet page with thousands of emoticons and abbreviations in the appendix on the CD emoticons2.doc

[66]

CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere. Mark Poster
http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html

[67]

Rex T. Rola's Cyberspace as A Political Public Sphere. I have saved this site the accompanying CD called VC as the original is no longer available at the original address.

[68]

Steven M. Schneider's PhD, Expanding the Public Sphere through Computer-Mediated Communication: Political Discussion about Abortion in a Usenet Newsgroup, submitted to the Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology May 2, 1997. examines a conversation about abortion that occurred within the Usenet newsgroup "talk.abortion" between April 1, 1994 and March 31, 1995. It tests the hypothesis that the form of discourse fostered by computer mediated discussion provides opportunities to expand the informal zone of the public sphere. Specific criteria by which a public sphere can be evaluated for its goodness of fit with the idealized public sphere described by Habermas are proposed and applied to the ongoing conversation. The conversation analyses consisted of nearly 46,000 messages written by almost three thousand authors in nearly 8,500 different threads. The public sphere created by the participants in the newsgroup was found to be diverse and reciprocal, but lacking in equality and quality. http://www.sunyit.edu/~steve/abstract.html

[69]

Robin B. Hamman Cybersex Amongst Multiple-Selves and Cyborgs in the Narrow-Bandwidth Space of America Online Chatrooms online at http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/Cyborgasms.html%20viewed%206-2001, and One Hour in the eWorld Hot Tub: a brief ethnographic project in cyberspace at http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/project.html

[70]

Julie M. Albright, Online Love: Sex, gender and relationships in cyberspace online at, http://www-scf.usc.edu/~albright/onlineluv.text Last accessed online Friday, 17 November 2000

[71]

More than half (50.7 per cent) of female chatters are under age 35, according to NetValue's research. (see http://cyberatlas.Internet.com/big_picture/traffic_patterns/article/0,,5931_582491,00.html viewed Sunday, January 05, 2003)

[72]

LOGOS (http://www.logos.net/) has an instant International translation service and e-translation portal. The languages supported

are English, Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Italian and Portuguese or in a separate chatroom English, Korean and Japanese. The user must have the proper font sets installed to view Korean and Japanese characters.

[73]

See *The Role of Fantasy in the Construction of the Online Other*: http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/fantasy.html).

[74]

Several software packages that computer-mediated ethnographers use are: "HyperRESEARCH" available from ResearchWare, Inc. (http://www.researchware.com/); "NUDïIST" available from QSR International (http://www.qsrinternational.com/); "The Ethnograph" from Qualis Research Associates, (http://www.qualisresearch.com/) and "Methodologist's Toolchest (MTC)", from Scolari (http://www.scolari.com/).

[75]

One of the areas I am interested in researching is how, within chatrooms, the original discourse changes. I aim to isolate and analyse the "departure points" from original topics. Though it would be impossible to know such moments with certainty without person-to-person conversation with a chatter, I am interested in departure points as markers of topic-shift, and so indicators of the act of talk-text reading by participants.

[76]

In the area of automatic classification and text mining, Eidetica employs t·mining to process the content of all Flemish newspapers and enrich it with keywords every morning. The same software can be used in chatrooms to gather data over long blocks of time (http://www.eidetica.com/); Miner3D is a program that turns text into 3d and displays the information as sets of graphic objects spread over a space, http://miner3d.com). Upon studying the various factors influencing chat efficiency, The Virtual Worlds Group at Microsoft has developed the Status Client, a prototype of an interface that shows the status of each user, as determined by keyboard activity.

[77]

B. Burkhalter, J. J. Cadiz and M. Smith. Conversation Trees and Threaded Chats. In the Proceedings of the CSCW'00 Conference. December 2-6, 2000, 97-105, Philadelphia, PA http://www.acm.org/cscw2000/

[78]

http://www.psychologicalscience.org/

[79]

In taped conversational analysis many hours of transcription time is involved. One time span I saw on a listserv on August 04, 2001 said, (http://listserv.emich.edu/archives/info-childes/infochi/CLAN/timeestimatesre1.html)
  "I would figure about 15 hours of transcription per hour of tape recording. If you were simply transcribing words and not paying any attention to format, you could save maybe a couple of hours and this figure would be 12 hours for each hour of transcript, but then your file would not be in any consistent format." Saving transcription online is at least accurate, in comparison to audio-tape transcription of recorded live conversation.

[80]

An applet is a program written in the Java^{TM} programming language that can be included in an HTML page, much in the same way

an image is included. When you use a Java technology-enabled browser to view a page that contains an applet, the applet's code is transferred to your system and executed by the browser's Java Virtual Machine (JVM). When the computer is turned off or the Internet site is left the applet program is no longer available until the connection to the chatroom is re-established. With a chatroom dialogue the chat is no longer available that was running before the site was left, making this a fleeting text.

[81]

General Web3D Chat Log for Feb 2 2000 At
http://web3d.about.com/compute/web3d/library/chatlogs/2000/blcl020900a.htm

[82]

I have also saved sections of chat from September 11, un-moderated chat as well as a moderated chat of the same event with an ABC radio moderator. These chats are on the accompanying CD. The moderated chat had a heading: "How easy is it to hijack a plane? Are pilots trained to handle such a situation? ABCNEWS Aviation Analyst John Nance will answer your questions about today's events in a live chat at 7:30 p.m. ET. Nance is a decorated Air Force pilot and a veteran of Vietnam and Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He serves as a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserve and has extensive flight experience, having logged more than 13,000 hours of flight time in his commercial airline and Air Force careers. Please post your questions for him now in the space below". At the same time I "captured" a chat from a un-moderated chatroom: afghanchat. This comparative sample of chatroom dialogue is stored on the CD at Afghanistan_chat.doc

[83]

Not all chatrooms reveal what is being said letter by letter. In most chatrooms the writer of the text needs to click the "enter" key before the writing appears on the screen ready for others to see.

[84]

Metaphysical-chat-linguistics is anticipating what will be said before the completion of the utterance, either due to the writer-speaker hitting the "enter'" key on the keyboard or the chat server not allowing more than a couple of lines at a time to be shown on the screen, thus breaking the conversation before it is completed.

[85]

The alphanumeric keyboard keyboard is the same on computers, electronic organizers and typewriters.

[86]

Wolfgang Iser's first sentence in the preface to his book, "The Act of Reading" (1978, p. ix) is, "As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analysing the reading process".

[87]

Fish wrote that "readers belong to the same "interpretive communities" with shared reading strategies, values and interpretive assumptions" (ie, shared "discourse"). His "informed reader" fits well into this discussion of an ideal reader, who shares values and strategies in order to enter, comment, maintain and even to change the discourse in a chatroom (Fish, 1980, p. 36).

[88]

The hermeneutic philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, (2000) says, "The idea of the original reader [and hence of a recoverable

historical meaning] is full of unexamined idealization".

[89]

Lurking in a chatroom is when someone enters the discussion but says nothing. Whether lurking is an actual turn or not differs according to the person describing the turn taking. I have saved a dialogue from the Internet listserv group languse on turn-taking on the CD

at lurking.com.

[90]

There is not the scope to research SMS Messaging in this thesis except to say that it has different ramifications. Chatrooms are quite often used for entertainment or needs of a psychological, sociological nature, while SMS is still dominated by instrumental message exchange.

[91]

Grabe (1992, pp. 50-3) lists six: the perceptual automatic recognition skill; linguistic skills; knowledge and skills of discourse structure and organisation; knowledge of the world; synthetic and critical evaluation skills and metalinguistic knowledge and skills.

[92]

It is now possible to be in a conversation with a chatter-bot (bot being a computer robot) without knowing it. Chatter-bots can and do participate in online chatrooms and e-mail lists without necessarily being identified as bots. Online, the source of chatter-bot conversation becomes ambiguous. In an Internet chatroom or on an e-mail list, it can be impossible to know whether you are conversing with a human being or a piece of software (Auslander, 1997). What happens to the writer – reader when they don't know they are interacting with a robot online? Some example of chatter-bots are the Eliza Bots, which try to match a pattern in your input and produce an answer from a list of available answer patterns for this input pattern. If there is none it will try to launch the conversation with a few random sentences or it also might look at you and your inventory and say something about you for the same purpose. A site that provides software so anyone

can create their own chatter-bot is at, http://tecfa.unige.ch/guides/js/ex-intro/chatter-bot-text.html.

[93]

One definition of Fish's on meaning is; "...[Meanings] will not be objective because they will always have been the product of a point of view rather than having been simply "read off"; and they will not be subjective because that point of view will always be social or institutional. Or by the same reasoning, one could say that they are both subjective and objective: they are subjective because they adhere to a particular point of view and are therefore not universal; and they are objective because the point of view that delivers them is public and conventional, rather than individual or unique." (Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? pp. 335-6).

[94]

There are many large chat servers. Several of the well known ones are:

WIS chat	http://www.wis.sa.gov.au
Excite people & chat	http://chatesp.excite.com/

Yahoo chat	http://chat.yahoo.com/?myHome
WWB chat	http://wwbchat.com/login/index.shtml
Chat Planet	http://www.chatplanet.net/
Chatbase	http://www.chatbase.com
OmniChat!	http://www.4-lane.com/
Microsoft's Chat	http://communities.msn.com/people

[95]

The three main areas of TalkCity are; Hosted Rooms ("Our safest rooms, with hosts who help keep the conversation on track -- and help new chatters feel at home"), rooms in this area are: TalkCity-Lobby+, TalkCity-News+ and TalkCity-NewToChat+. Featured Rooms ('Rooms where chatters prefer to follow Talk City Standards. Rooms may be owned and hosted by members. Conversations on TalkCity run the gamut from personal lives to sports to world events. Here are some rooms with a focus on different subjects. This is a good starting place for finding people with interests similar to yours."), rooms in this area are: Local-Texas+, TeenTalk+ and Headlines-Computers+. Finally there are Open Rooms ("Open category rooms are not regularly moderated or monitored. Visitors accept additional risks when chatting here".) Some of the rooms in this area (there are more than 500 rooms) are: MarriedNLonely,

Tennessee-Chatters and Wellness as well as the rooms I list below which I visited.

[96]

Talk City can be viewed as the second largest city in the United States, in between New York City and Los Angeles. http://www.talkcity.com/notice/letter_oct1.html viewed, 2002-05-28.

[97]

Hurricane Floyd Messages are saved on the CD at 1a.doc

[98]

Hurricane Floyd Message Boards begin at;
http://www.viexpo.com/discus/messages/81/327.html

and on the CD at hurricane Floyd message Board.doc

[99]

Nielsen NetRatings is available online at: http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/ See also How Many Online? http://www.nua.com/surveys/how_many_online/

[100]

In the transcription method used in this Case Study I have not used the usernames of the participants. In the conversation between the male and female chat participants I have identified their turn-takings with ****** in front of the female utterances and ###### in front of the male's turn-takings. This notation device has no other point to it than to differentiate the two speakers. In the second transcript I "captured" for this study the female turn-takings are identified with @@@@@@ and the second speaker, myself, with T Neuage in front of the turn-takings.

[101]

Holy Order of Mans was a cult pseudo-new age religious group that existed from 1968 until 1976.

[102]

Nunamaker et al. (1991) say that groups make more extreme decisions than individuals. They express either very risky or extremely risk-averse behaviour. This phenomenon is called *group polarisation*. The group polarisation effect is illustrated in the following figure (see Group process gains and losses at http://infolab.kub.nl/pub/theses/w3thesis/Groupwork/gains_and_losses.html)

[103]

Centre for Arab Studies at Georgetown University is at http://www.ccasonline.org/

[104]

"The Media History Project" Promoting the study of media history from petroglyphs to pixels http://mediahistory.umn.edu/index2.html viewed Monday, 29 March 2003.

[105]

What do users do on the Internet? Standford University has some statistics on Internet usage at: http://www.stanford.edu/group/siqss/Press_Release/press_detail.html

[106]

see Dewey, 1966, http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/ (September, 2002)

[107]

How Many Online? http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/

[108]

File transfer allows text and images to be uploaded to a chat at any time.

[109]

Avatars are representatives of the self in a chatroom represented by a figure: character of an animal, structure or any abstraction imaginable that is displayed in a single pictorial space. Avatars can be a simple smiley faces or a Medieval animated drawing. Text is still used for conversation. As long as one is connected to the Internet server of the chatroom presence is maintained by one's graphical representation which remains as long as the chatter is in the chat arena. One problem that avatars present is that they can distort

or limit conversation by providing the same representative expression that over-rides all communication. Avatars as of early 2001are not as complex as word description is.

[110]

ICQ is available in the following languages as of November, 2002: ☐, Português, Italiano, Norsk, ☐, ☐, ☐, ☐, English, Español (Iberian), Français, ☐, Dansk, Svenska, Deutsch, ☐, Nederlands, ☐, Türkçe (see http://www.icq.com/download/)

[111]

A bulletin board Forum: "*Intelligence & Machines*" with the thread, "*Man is obsolete*", discusses the AI (Artificial Intelligence) concept of a computer with a conscience. E-communicative device computers displace prior off-line-person-to-person discourse mechanics in favour of new forms of symbolic exchange.

[112]

Several online dating services claim that people who have met online through their services and who have corresponded via IM or other chat facilities have formed real-life relationships. See RSVP - http://www.rsvp.com.au; Friend Finder - http://www.seniorfriendfinder.com./; Soul Mates http://www.soulmate.com

[113]

Yahoo Messenger began in 1998, http://docs.yahoo.com/docs/pr/release158.html

[114]

Yahoo describes their services: "*IMVironments are interactive, themed backgrounds for Yahoo! Messenger conversations that appear directly in the instant messaging window!*"

[115]

America Online Announces Limited Beta Release of AOL Instant Messenger(TM) http://media.aoltimewarner.com/media/press_view.cfm?release_num=181

[116]

Microsoft Launches MSN Messenger Service
http://www.microsoft.com/PressPass/press/1999/Jul99/MessagingPR.asp

[117]

A comprehensive site on net-etiquette is at http://www.the-eggman.com/writings/etiquitte_1.html

[118]

See American Temple at http://www.americantemple.org/

[119]

The turn-takings which these turn-takings refer to are:

10. ######: I PRACTICE THE 4 RULE. I HOPE YOUR NOT INTO THE EQUALITY TRIP BUT I FEEL THE MAN ONE THE WOMAN 4. THAT WORKS GOOD, SHE REALLY SMILES A LOT AFTER THAT HE LOL
31. ******: dont get it...please explain better for us illiterate unpsychic ones 4 what?....ask i thus
32. ######: THE WOMAN HAS FOUR ORGASIMS, A LEAST ONE VERY BIG TWO MEDIUM AND ONE OR MORE SMALL THE MAN HAS ONE BIG AND MAYBE A FEW SMALL ONES
33. ######: THIS RATIO KEEPS THE NIGHT ALL NIGHT.
34. ******: oh my god!...thats what i thought you were going to say.....but i didnt want to go there!

[120]

Whatever one says lies dormant and does not exist in cyberspace until the utterance has been committed. Unlike person-to-person conversation when what is said is heard instantly, in a chat dialogue what is said is not "heard" until the speaker-writer wishes to reveal the content to the chatroom. Once the enter button is pressed there is no taking back what was said. If the chat can be saved, either by saving the screen shot of the chat or by copying and pasting or reading the chat logs, the dialogue can also be "captured" for future reference. This "archiving and review" function also has potential impacts on chat performance, although the data captured for this study provides no clear examples of this.

[121]

 "Pop Idolization May Be Hazardous to Girls." Marketing to Women, 13(9): 8, September 2000.

[122]

Some of the groups listed in the Google Groups section for her (In just one group, alt.fan.britney-spears, there were 50,000 threads in early 2000), depict more in the group name than just a person singing songs. Several of the online groups (each has a chatroom included in the online group) are:
Group: alt . fan . britney-spears-anal-sex. There were 3,030 Threads in alt.fan.britney-spears.anal-sex in March 2000.
Group: alt . fan . britney-spears . blow-job. There were 665 Threads in alt.fan.britney-spears.blow-job in March 2000.
Group: alt . fan . britney-spears . boob-job. There were 1,040 Threads in alt.fan.britney-spears.boob-job in March 2000.
Group: alt . fan . britney-spears . sex. There were 3,290 Threads in alt.fan.britney-spears.sex in March 2000.
As well as the four Google groups above there are dozens of groups dedicated to Britney Spears in Yahoo Groups, such as:
- The_Perfect_Britney_Spears_Fans group which had 140 members since being founding in March 2001. The page colours are glaring and hard on the eyes and the grammar and language is what would be expected at a primary school level.
 ("If you a perfect Britney Fan you should help out to and post you pics and news. Have a great day and tell everyone about this group and tell them to join. IT WILL BE AWESOME. ...")
- Britney Spears Legs Club group was the largest group with 1489 members since October 23, 2000.
("If you love Britneys Legs then please join, you wont regret it, some of the best leg shots are here, 323+ pictures and still growing.")
- Naughty_Britney_Spears with 191 members since August 2001
("So Join and you'll recieve a naughty story! Do YOU Have Any (NAUGHTY) Dreams About Britney? If so, Send Your Dreams To This List")

- Hottest_Britney_Spears_Pixs with 78 members since September 2001.

("This Group Will Be So Awesome if you JOIN!!! I Will Not Let You Down!!! I Will Send out Pictures Daily!!! Maybe Some News As Well!!!")

- Oops_Sweet_Britney_Spears with 18 members since March 2001

("If you a briteny Fan this Group for you")

There are many other groups with fewer members and interesting titles such as this one; Britney_Spears_butt_pics ("If you like britney's butt, than come in here!") [sic]

[123]

For this case study I have incorporated ideas and quotes from the works of several theorists and writers on semiotics and pragmatics including M. A. K. Halliday (1978), S.C. Levinson (1983) and Robert Nofsinger (1991).

[124]

Chat Utterance Sentence Structures (CUSS). The sentences of a chat turn-taking. Unlike sentences with nouns and verbs grammatically positioned and sequenced to establish a complete thought, chat sentences are typically made up of two to five words or emoticons, with an emergent but comprehensible "grammar" of their own. I have averaged the number of words in twelve chatrooms, consisting of 1357 lines (turn takings) and found the average word count, including abbreviations and emoticons, to be a mere 3.7 items per turn. The communication however, as my analysis shows, is still markedly complex.

[125]

As no avatars were used in the chatroom from this Case Study I have used another chatroom to show avatars in use. These icons are from the "Fantasy & Role-Playing" site at http://www.chatropolis.com

[126]

"It is possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. It would form part of social psychology, and hence of general psychology. We shall call it semiology (from the Greek semeîon, "sign"). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance. Linguistics is only one branch of this general science. The laws which semiology will discover will be laws applicable in linguistics, and linguistics will thus be assigned to a clearly defined place in the field of human knowledge" (Saussure 1983, 15-16; Chandler, 2001).

[127]

To represent a smile or the fact that what was said was not intended to be serious one can use the emoticon, :) which is two keys pressed on a keyboard. If there are picture icons on the chatroom screen, they can be used with one press of the keyboard.

[128]

List of chatrooms running 3D avatars and virtual worlds.

http://dmoz.org/Computers/Internet/Cyberspace/Online_Communities/

[129]

In the Sam project (Cassell, 1999), an embodied conversational avatar (ECA) encourages young children to engage in storytelling.

[130]

There are password-protected chatrooms for specific users such as for government or business people who are discussing specific topics. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain ethics clearance from the University of South Australia to capture any private chatrooms. This requires clearance from each person in a "sensitive" chatroom, a process which is too disruptive to the chatflow to be easily obtainable.

[131]

This aspect would have been discussed quite differently before September 11th. It was extensively written about and discussed for years previously and it was commonly believed amongst astrologers that a world defining moment would happen during that aspect. Some astrologers even spoke of a world war beginning, and the aspect was exact in September when the World Trade Centres in New York were destroyed.

[132]

For example, this posting appeared in a more advanced astrological chatroom, "…my CAC had two Cinderella Transits and the MAGIcal Linkage when we met"; CAC being for "Combined Aligned Chart"; "Cinderella aspects" involving Pluto, Chiron, Jupiter and Venus in harmonious aspects to one another. The MAGIcal Linkage is a Venus-Chiron combination. (see: http://www.magisociety.com/)

[133]

The question asked of participant Nicole for instance, cited above, indicates a very basic level of inquiry into astrological matters. This is the kind of question one would expect in an astrochatroom, but it also could be asked in any chatroom. We know what the person is asking. What is Nicole's Sun sign – the constellation that the Sun was in, when Nicole was born? To an astrologer this would be a very basic question.

However, in this chatroom there are some indications that there is more than just the simplest information being provided. <Nicole528> bypasses the basic social "tell me your sign" – "tell me yours" exchange by qualifying more of who she is and by adding the moon and rising sign to the equation. Now others in the chatroom know that <Nicole528> was born during the time of the passage of the Sun through Gemini (May 22 – June 21) and while the moon was in Taurus and during the time of day when Scorpio was ascending. Just from this small amount of knowledge, an informed astrology chatter could identify enough about <Nicole528> to wonder if she was currently going through relationship upheavals, as Saturn would have gone over this person's moon and be influencing their sun-sign with both the moon and sun in the area of the chart which rules partnership and sex. As well as transiting Pluto would be in the second house meaning financial changes. Again, inside its own subcultural context, the very brief communicative exchanges in this site could be very revelatory and rich to expert astrochatters.

[134]

Voice in a voice forum such as in the traveller chatrooms is filtered so that it may sound high, deep, female, male, or even with sounds such as bells or tones and therefore, is not a cue to the speaker as it would be in person-to-person conversation.

[135]

Synchronous communication program users identify others, often strangers, with similar interests and engage in conversations with them. Users of public synchronous chat programs are customarily identified by a descriptive nickname that is sometimes chosen to "promote a certain image or invite a particular response" (Newby, 1993, p. 35). A nickname can serve as a mask not only to hide identity, but to call attention to the person through the expressive power and imaginativeness of the mask (Ruedenberg et al., 1995). Nicknames and other personal information can be changed at will, so that anonymity can be maintained within IRC programs

until users choose to reveal their true identities to each other (Reid, 1991), which may never actually happen (Phillips, 1995).

[136]

      Professor of the Philosophy of Mind and Language, University of California at Berkeley, 2002.

[137]

      Talkcity has established partnerships with major media companies, Internet content companies, and Internet service providers. Talk City coproduces, cobrands, and comarkets community services that leverage its partners' content, brand, or customer relationships. Some of those partners as of start-up in 1999 included General Electric's (NYSE: GE) NBC (which has a 12.2 per cent equity stake in the company), Cox Interactive Media (a 6.5 per cent stake), Hearst Communications (another 6.5 per cent holder), Starbucks (5.2 per cent), and WebTV Networks, a wholly owned subsidiary of Microsoft . Mack, Gracian. J*uly 21, 1999.* "Talk City stutters on its first day"

http://www.redherring.com/insider/1999/0721/inv-talkcity.html viewed, 4-04-2000.

[138]

      I am not referring to the French cultural historian and polymath Michel Foucault's writings on discourse. Foucault re-examined such social institutions and regimes as the prison system, and the history of human sciences, and how individuals and their perceptions of themselves were constructed within specific "discursive" forms, at specific cultural moments. He called such cultural domains of knowledge, expressed in and through language as well as practice, a "discourse". In this case study discourse refers primarlily to the flow of conversation and the text, beyond the single turn-taking in an electronic chat.

[139]

      In using the word "meaning" I am not referring to the philosophical context of all the layers and hues involved in such a word as "meaning". I am considering "meaning" as being no more than the mechanics of a response. How one interprets the mark on the screen is often unknowable by others. For example, lol at the end of an online utterance may mean "lots of love", "laughing out loud" or any number of things. However, it usually means one of the two mentioned here. In this instance the abbreviation is up to the beholder to interpret. Saying, "you are the one for me lol", could mean it isn't serious – I am laughing at you, or it could mean I love you a lot.

"Meaning…does not come…from contemplation of things, or analysis of occurrences, but in practical and active acquaintance with relevant situations. The real knowledge of a word comes through the practice of appropriately using it with a certain situation" (Malinowski, 1923, 321).

[140]

      Stubbs describes discourse analysis as that which is concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence or utterance, with the interrelationships between language and society and with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication (Slembrouck, 2002).

[141]

      Stubbs suggests a need for multiple theories of discourse coherence; "…we also need an account of speech acts, indirect speech acts, context-dependence of illocutionary force… in other words, we have to have multiple theories of discourse coherence" Stubbs (1996, p. 147). Gumperz also suggests an integrated view of choherence (1982, 1984).

[142]

      An example of this "discontinuity" still building into coherence actually happened to me in real life conversation, and helps

explain what occurs online. I was living in Hawaii in 1970, and I had broken up with my girl friend. A few days later I was walking in Waikiki and thought, "I wonder if Carol Ann has gone back to the mainland." Immediately following that thought two people passing by were speaking quite loudly to one another, and one said "She left this morning". Weeks later I discovered my girl friend had gone back to the mainland, the very morning of the "recombined" conversation. I would consider this an example of the sort of "indirect discourse" often occurring online, where an embedded sentence serendipitously conveys meaning to complete a thought.

[143]

In virtual chatrooms such as MOOs these are commonplace, and in IRC and simple chat servers such as Talkcity.com simple commands are available.

[144]

Bucholtz, Mary. "Word Up: Social Meanings of Slang in California Youth Culture" – saved on the CD as youth_slang.doc

[145]

Any chatroom can be considered a community, as in the community of chatters at that moment. However, I am saying that this chatroom is not within a specific community where people of similar interests have joined, such as the "Ask a Witch Community" which claims 10,164 members as of March 10, 2002. *We are dedicated to helping out the beginning witch, and lending support to the practiced witch... AAWC is a resource where you can find accurate information and intelligent content and discussion. For all Witches, not just Wiccans. For all faiths and all people. Come learn, share and be part of a great positive experience! Silver RavenWolf makes her second appearance to AAWC in the chatroom on Oct. 30th at 7pm CST!*

[146]

Safety has many levels of meaning. However, the safety I am speaking of in Internet chatrooms is that of the safety of non-identity, where one is free just to express and place text on a screen knowing they can turn off the computer at any point and thus no longer be part of the chatroom. Eg. many people have created online IDs that allow for a freedom of expression that had been significantly lacking in their personal lives. (This is well researched by "cyberdude", Sheryl Turkle and many others). There can be an associated lack of safety however, if the chatter's computer is traced through their server to their physical locale. As mobile computers become more popular and people log on from non-personal computers such as at university, business, shopping malls or an Internet Café and use untraceable e-mail addresses such as Hotmail or Yahoo the traceability of people and their freedom to enter and leave a chatroom and say whatever they wish and appear as ever who they wish to be will be protected.

[147]

Australian State Governments (e.g. NSW and SA) have introduced Internet censorship Bills in Parliament to "complement" the 1999/2000 Commonwealth laws (which only apply to ISPs and ICHs). The proposed State laws apply to ordinary users and content providers and would make it a criminal offence to make content unsuitable for minors available online, even if the content is only made available to adults.

[148]

"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized." Amendment IV, The United States Constitution (1791).

[149]

More on this particular story can be found at any of the following urls (as of Monday, 11 March 2002);

http://www.wired.com/news/print/0,1294,42039,00.html
http://www.privacydigest.com/2001/02/28
http://www.smallbusinesscomputing.com/biztools/article.php/686531
http://www.enforcenet.com/EnforceNet/news_archive.htm#smear (many articles on this)

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA – actual court orders: (Plaintiffs have sued defendant Ilena Rosenthal for her postings about them on the Internet) http://www.casp.net/rosen-1.html

"*Subpoenaing John Does on the Internet:civil action to bully the anonymous poster*". http://gsulaw.gsu.edu/lawand/papers/su01/manion_norris_youngblood/

Free Speech Impeded Online The courts are beginning to define the scope of free speech on the Web. http://www.business2.com/articles/web/0,1653,9619,FF.html

[150]

The url for this introduction is at: http://web3d.about.com/mpchat.htm

[151]

I have used this as a moderated chatroom because this is on a specific topic and the owner of the chatroom was in the room at the time and answered questions as well as maintained the dialogue. However, on the site for this chatroom in the "guidelines" section it states: "First things first. This is an unmoderated chatroom. Your About.com Guides may be present during scheduled events but the Guides do not constantly monitor their chatrooms on a 24 hour basis and, therefore neither the Guide nor About.com, are responsible for any content and behavior in the chatrooms."

[152]

http://web3d.about.com/library/chatlogs/2000/blcl020900a.htm?once=true&

[153]

I requested permission to use the logs for this chat from the owner (moderator of the site) "Sounds cool...no objections at all...good luck finishing ;-) Sandy" http://web3d.about.com/mbiopage.htm

[154]

There are many interpretations of Conversation Analysis. Several on which I will base this brief look at CA as it applies to chatrooms I cite below:

Conversation Analysis is a disciplined way of studying the local organization of interactional episodes, its unique methodological practice
[154]
has enabled its practitioners to produce a mass of insights into the detailed procedural foundations of everyday life… (Paul ten Have).

The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, soically organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behavior and understand and deal with the behavior of others. A basic assumption throughout is Garfinkel's (1967, p. 1) proposal that these activities – producing conduct and understanding and dealing with it – are accomplished as

the accountable products of common sets of procedures (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984).

[155]

See appendix4 the glossary for an expanded definition and sources on ethnomethodology.

[156]

See http://www.uni-saarland.de/fak4/norrick/vlda.htm for an essay on Functional theories of language (ethnomethodology and - more recently - in discursive psychology. See Sacks, 1972 a) "An initial investigation of the usability of conversational data for doing sociology". In: D. Sudnow, ed. *Studies in social interaction*. New York: Free Press: 31-74.

[157]

(Daniel Chandler; The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:

http://www.aber.ac.uk/~dgc/whorg.html).

[158]

(See for instance, http://www.geocities.com/picture_poems/thesis/moderated.htm).

[159]

See for instance Kuiper's work on masculinity and sporting talk in New Zealand Rugby Union football locker rooms (1998).

[160]

See www.wagsoft.com/Papers/Thesis/01Introduction.pdf for further research on "Integrating Diverse Descriptions"

[161]. Vacheks, Josef. The Linguistic School of Prague: An introduction to its theory and practice, published by Indiana University Press in 1966.
Below is copied form the Prague School's front page, http://www.bohemica.com/plk/plchome.htm (29 March 2002).
I have copied it for reference purposes due to often occurring disappearing pages on the Internet.
"The Prague Linguistic Circle was one of the most influential schools of linguistic thought in pre-war linguistics. Through its former members like Roman Jakobson or René Wellek (http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/indiv/scctr/Wellek), it influenced modern American linguistics as well as many other linguists in the world.
Although the 'classical period' of the Circle can be dated between 1926, the year of the first meeting, and the beginning of WWII, its roots are in much of the earlier work of its members, and also it did not completely cease its work with the outbreak of the war. Among the founding members were such personalities as Vilém Mathesius (President of PLC until his death in 1945), Roman Jakobson, Nikolay Trubetzkoy, Sergei Karcevskiy, Jan Mukařovský, and many others who began to meet in the mid-twenties to discuss issues of common interest. The, at first, irregular meetings with lectures and discussions gradually developed into regular ones. The first results of the members' cooperative efforts were presented in joint theses prepared for the First International Congress of Slavicists held in Prague in 1929. These were published in the 1st volume of the then started series Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague. The Théses outlined the direction of the work of the Circle's members. Such important concepts as the approach to the study of language as a synchronic system which is, however, dynamic, functionality of elements of language, and the importance of the social function of language were explicitly laid down as the basis for further research. "

[162]

In hindsight the second interpretation, "the Red Sox players will completely outplay Radke and leave him looking foolish", came true

[163]

 J. Firbas (1992) has written extensively on Communicative dynamism. See *The Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective as a Reflection of an Effort Towards a Means-Ends Model of Language*.

[164]

See Grammar Rules and Other Random Thoughts, at

http://www.csh.rit.edu/~kenny/misc/grammar.html viewed 4/2/2002 12:21 PM.

[165]

For a good introductory article by Matthiessen and Halliday, see: http://minerva.ling.mq.edu.au/Resources/VirtuallLibrary/Publications/sfg_firststep/SFG intro New.html . viewed 4/2/2002 12:21 PM. More notes on Systemic-Functional linguistics, by Carol A. Chapelle, are at http://www.wagsoft.com/Systemics/Definition/chapelle.html and Systemic Functional Theory, from the Systemic Modelling Group at Macquarie University, can be found at http://minerva.ling.mq.edu.au/Resources/VirtuallLibrary/Publications/sf_theory.html

[166] http://www.library.wwu.edu/cbl/ray/concept_dictionaries/fairhaven_student_work/stratification.htm

[167]
 911 chat (chat data is on the CD 911.html)
Afghanistan chat (chat data is on the CD afgan.htm)
Bondage chat (chat data is on the CD bondage.htm)
CNN News chat on 911 (chat data is on the CD CNN.htm)
Christian chat (chat data is on the CD christian_chat.htm)

[168]

Some of the definitions used in CA can serve as a starting point to describe what happens in between these turns. Three terms in common CA practice are gap, lapse and pause. A gap does not "belong" to anyone. It is a place of transition. A gap is a silence; the speaker has stopped speaking, and the next speaker "self selects". In chatrooms this silence may be occupied by others reading the chat.

When there is a silence, the next speaker has not been selected, and no one self selects, we have a "lapse". It is only possible to distinguish a gap from a lapse after the event. Again in chatrooms, the next speaker may already be writing the response, reading the previous response, or there may simply be a silence in the same sense as the CA definition.

A pause is silence when the current speaker has selected the next speaker and stopped talking, but the next speaker is silent. A pause is also silence that occurs within a participant's turn. A pause "belongs" to the person currently designated speaker.

[169]

This is a page from several pages of a CA workshop held on Fridays in 2002 at the State University of New York at Albany.

[170]

For example in the very crowded 911 chat during the World Trade Centre destructions there were 644 turns and 4833 words of spoken text covering 80 minutes or an average of 8.05 turns per minute. Often there were utterances logged at the same second.

| 595 | 16:14:08 | tippybond: can someone field me to another other chats for ny |
| 596 | 16:14:08 | Gary: i woke up to this and i just cant belive it....my heart goes out to all who have been injured |

[171]

Active Worlds, a Virtual-Reality experience, lets users visit and chat in 3D worlds that are built by other users. Viewed 12-2002, http://www.activeworlds.com/

ATMOSPHERE, with Adobe® Atmosphere™. With Atmosphere, users add a third dimension to their Web experience by creating realistic and immersive environments that offer a revolutionary approach to content, navigation, community, and communication. Viewed 12-2002, http://www.adobe.com/products/atmosphere/

EXCITE CHAT, Text-based and graphics-based chat, events, and web content. Viewed 12-2002, http://www.excite.com/

HABBO HOTEL, Graphics-based chat where the user visits different hotel rooms or creates his or her own room. Viewed 12-2002, http://www.habbohotel.com/habbo/en/

Moove German-created 3D visual chat program. Viewed 12-2002, http://www.moove.com/
A continually updated list of other 3D chatrooms are at http://www.thescarletletters.com/Blah/LipSync.html Viewed 12-2002.

[172]

Mann (1997) suggests five characteristics of a wearable computer:
(1.) it may be used while the wearer is in motion;
(2.) it may be used while one or both hands are free, or occupied with other tasks;
(3.) it exists within the corporeal envelope of the user, ie, it should be not merely attached to the body but becomes an integral part of the person's clothing
(4.) it must allow the user to maintain control;
(5.) it must exhibit constancy, in the sense that it should be constantly available.
Mann, S. (1997) Conveners report of CHI '97 Workshop on Wearable Computers, Personal Communication to attendees. Viewed 12-2002 at http://www.bham.ac.uk/ManMechEng/IEG/w1.html

[173]

Cognitive radio, a radio that is programmable to send messages on its own is part of the array of devices for wireless providers, for voice and data communication for the fourth-generation, or 4G, wireless services beginning in 2004. Viewed 12-2002 http://www.techextreme.com/perl/story/20731.html

[174]

Electronic Performance Support System Viewed 12-2002 http://wearables.gatech.edu/EPSS.asp

[175]

There are two claims for the origins of the smiley. One is that in 1972 journalist Franklin Loufrani created a simple concept for *France soir* and other European newspapers. He displayed icons to communicate news and especially good news. He gave this original icon the name of Smiley. It was published for the first time on Jan 1st 1972. Under Loufrani's supervision, SMILEY quickly spread across the world, easily crossing political, social and economic boundaries with his ever-increasing vocabulary of instantly recognizable emotions. (See The Smiley World at http://www.smileyworld.com/). The other claim for the origin of the smiley is that artist Harvey Ball created the first "smiley face" around December 1963 for one of his clients. He designed a yellow pin with the smiley face. This pin was handed out to company employees and clients and soon became a big hit. In a short time the "smiley face" appeared on all sorts of products. By the end of the 60s "smiley" had spread around the world (see World Smile Corporation at http://www.worldsmile.com/). World Smiley Day was proclaimed for October 03, 2003.

[176]

See, four possible types of message posted to a mailing list McElhearn, 2000, and Gruber, 1996.

[177]

The results cited are from a survey on Assessing Student Learning Outcomes online at http://www.csusm.edu/acrl/imls/Q3Report.htm Sited online October 21, 2000. Other online surveys and viewers responses include; Test of an Internet virtual world for teen smoking cessation online at http://www.trdrp.org/PageGrant.asp?grant_id=2423; Hispanics in the U.S. 16 years of age and older, 38 percent are using the Internet on a regular basis, according to a new study released by AHAA and 43% are using the Internet for chatrooms, http://www.ahaa.org/Mediaroom/Roslow%20Research%20Study.htm. INTERNET USE AND THE SELF CONCEPT: LINKING SPECIFIC USES TO GLOBAL SELF-ESTEEM College freshmen at a mid-sized university in the mid-Atlantic of the USA were surveyed on chatroom behaviour - http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/crisp/crisp.8.1.html

[178]

Cybercafes worldwide are added constantly to at http://www.cybercafes.com/ Cited November 30, 2002

[179]

THE HARRIS POLL® #16, April 3, 2002 online at
 http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=293

[180]

See A Brief History of UK Text online at http://www.text.it/mediacentre/default.asp?intPageID=567