

Terrell Neuage Case Study 5

Chat used in this Case Study is at <http://se.unisa.edu.au/a5.html>

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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.

I took the dialogue I am primarily concerned with in this case study from a Talkcity^[1] 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 conversation, there was enough time to establish a communication community amongst the chatters present. 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 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 several months following the World Trade Centre collapse. Only at certain times do certain chatrooms become intensely active, when for example, when 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 discourse intent in non-purpose centred chatroom?

The research questions which guide the exploration of this case study centre on intent: ‘Does a chatter have a discursive intent when he or she enters a chatroom?’ I asked this question because of a peculiar utterance that is found throughout this chatroom by a speaker <B_witched_2002-guest> who repeatedly said <OHI> (see <http://se.unisa.edu.au/a5.html>).

When I looked over the transcript for this chat I was struck by the fact that some people may go into a chatroom with more than mere entertainment in mind. This is contrary to my original belief that chatrooms are so casual that people have no

intended purpose other than passing time. There certainly seems at first sight to be a casual ‘whatever-happens’ sense to a conversation in a chatroom. But after reviewing this room I wondered if there were other reasons for carrying on an online conversation. For example, if one is annoyed at something in their own life, will they go online to see if they can annoy others? Of course this is an impossible question to answer, because without intensive ethnographic work we can never know why someone is in a chatroom. There are however some obvious discursive markers in chatroom talk which lead one to think someone is in a particular room for a specific purpose. One recurrent one for example, is to seek. ‘Are there any females who want phone sex in here?’ is a common question in chatrooms. And yet, after five years of examining chatrooms I increasingly believe that most people go to chatrooms just to talk, not about anything specific, but just to talk as a means of making social contact.

This chapter sets out to examine how on-line conversation is structured in such circumstances.

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

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. Relocation of this research is already impossible, as the chat logs from Talkcity.com are no longer available. I am not engaging in statistical research, looking at, for example, the number of times a particular person visits a chatroom (see further research topics in the conclusion of this thesis) – work which is still possible using the resources of chatroom such as those on the Talkcity site. Here I am focusing on the actual linguistic strategies deployed by users at a particular moment in time: work which is already receding from easy research accessibility. While the numbers of people engaging in such unstructured or “casual” talk continue to increase, our capacity to understand how that talk works – and thus why it is so popular – declines. 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 is 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 socio-linguists working in a Foucauldian context (see especially Fairclough, 1989; 1992; 1996) – enables such analysis.

CS 5.1.2 Discourse Analysis

I am using discourse analysis^[2] 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 comprehends 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 4, above) 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 that two sentences taken together as a single discourse can have meanings different from each one taken separately. (Tannen, 1989). In a rapidly scrolling textual-chatroom taking lines seemingly out of context leaves an utterance uninterruptible. 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 of what he or she had just said. 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 that the person 'she' will not be in Orlando. By considering the larger discourse we discover that the person in question is going to West Palm and Miami in Florida. Discourse Analysis maintains the unity of language as both structure and event; as well as knowledge and action; system and process and potential and actual (Firth, Halliday, Hartmann, Pike). Discourse Analysis is seen as a subdiscipline of linguistics, having grown out of philosophy and the study of language. I have highlighted several Discourse subdivisions: in Case Study 4 I use Speech Act Theory and in Case Study 2 I use Pragmatics to research chatroom conversation.

With on-line 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 (meaning^[3]). 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 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^[4]). Discourse analysis is 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.

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; and Comber, Cook and Kamler, 1998, and Lee and Poynton, 2001, 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, “discourse” 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^[5] (see especially Tannen, 1989; Schiffrin, 1997).

A Discourse Relation Theory could provide a formal description of the possible relationships between events in a text that would allow an analysis of cut utterances. Cut utterances are frequent in chat-talk for several reasons. Chatroom utterances are determined by the discourse situation which is the rapidly moving text and the hurriedness of the communicational act. The 'speaker' could have mistakenly hit the enter key, they may want to emphasize a point or just to take up space. In the example below <soldier_boyedo835> makes three 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 the response is to,

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?

that <tab_002> answers even though it was not directed to him or her.

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: “co-speakers”, interpreting and “identifying” different relational strategies within the on-line flows of chat. In the above examples the relationships are shown as elaboration, continuation and explanation. Of the other six: narration, background, result, contrast, evidence and commentary are not found in this chatroom and are not common to any of the chatrooms that I have studied.

Background may be assumed in specific chatrooms such as Case Study One about Hurricane Floyd or Case Study 3 on Britney Spears or Case Study 7 on baseball as the subject matter of the conversations in the chatroom stay focused on the topic of the chatroom or its title.

CS 5.2 Findings

CS 5.2.1 Discourse and Frames

Framing is an important aspect for both task-oriented and frames of interaction (Cassell, 1999). 'Small talk' is one form of framing when meeting with someone. Within a sales environment it is 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 a feature of the person such as an article of clothing. Framing in a chatroom is often the greet frame includes the hellos and 'anyone want to chat?' forms of greetings in a room. A farewell frame is activated once a person is 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> says <SCUD>. This is 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"

Another category that Discourse Analysis uses to illuminate recurrent practices in chatroom discourse is “reframing”. '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, 'What activity are speakers engaged in when they say this?' (Tannen, 1998). This is common when we hear or read something that at first does not make sense to us and we go back and re-read or listen again. In chatrooms chatters, like in natural speech, will ask whether something is referring to what they thought it was. For example, in Case Study 1 in turn 104 <SWMPTHING> asks YOU AINT TALKING ABOUT MEX ROOFERS ARE YOU?>.

Chatrooms do not lend themselves to reframing easily. If a participant misses an utterance or misinterprets one, they will usually go on and talk about something else. I have in fact never seen in a chatroom someone attempt to reframe 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 referring to what had been said earlier. 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^[6] 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". Goffman uses 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 are natural to the way the person constructs his or her reality. Online framing has been used as a metaphor by Bays (2000) to explain online presence in virtual communities. For example groups will greet new comers in the room or together go against someone in the room. In this Case Study their chatters greet one another and ask how they are:

41) <MtnBiker99> Hello everyone

This is a social framing letting the others know <MtnBiker99> is present in this community and sees the others as worthy of greeting.

Goffman's second category of framing is the social frame. Social frames result from our past experiences, resultant predispositions, and world views. Some interesting questions can be raised about this chatroom. Firstly, can one attempt to identify the person who gets to control the frame of experience, secondly, how does this happen in a chatroom, and thirdly, if one does gain control of a discourse, what is the response of others in the chatroom?

Firstly, I attempted to find discourse coherence between the chatters in this topic-free room. Discourse coherency^[7] 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 eg. One says 'hi', another

responds. The 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.

scud4>

<scud4>

3) 3a. <jenniferv> SCUD

12) ^10 2c. <Leesa39> heyyyyyy scud

18) ^15 1b. <tab_002> hiya scud

Table CS 5:1

<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"

Table CS 5:2

<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 it could be 'Kisses On The Cheek' to frame the passionate nature of <skud4>. 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 able to understand this discourse without going beyond 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 on-line participants – can and do read 'difference' into each of these greetings, since scud's delivery of not only an intensive emotionalism, but an expert on-line 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 yet what appears on any reader's screen is the totality of what is said. [8] In most chatrooms there appears not to be a lot of 'in depth' correspondence between chatters when viewed as an outsider to the chatroom. Someone outside the usual participants in a chatroom, if indeed there were usual participants, would not be aware of the dynamics of the speakers interactions.

54) <tab_002>so how you been jenn?

While exchanges may be brief, they are obviously still significant, it would appear in this exchange above that <tab_002> knows <jenniferv> well enough to shorten the name to jenn.

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 J 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 in 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 discourse frame settled around <scud4> is not going to happen in this instance.

47) C/ ^46 6e. <scud4> bwitched stop scrollin in here

Table CS 5:3 complaint

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 discourse contribution. 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"

Table CS 5:4 hiya / thanx

These are both within the greeting and social etiquette (thanx leesa "S) format. In a chatroom the same linguistic conventions are applied as in face-to-face – 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 knows 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 click on a hotkey on the screen that will send an image, sound or generic pre-written text^[9], 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 miss 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 entrees in this chat event,

21) <scud4> <----on his way to the main room

36) <scud4> <----is now door testing

Table CS 5:5 <---- non-spoken intent

There are no utterances here as Scud4 activate an auto-text by leaving the room but there is intent of discourse. In real life when one ends a discourse, 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 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, and makes 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, see examples 1 and 2 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,

89, 95). 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 beyond 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 chat room 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 chat-room-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 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://se.unisa.edu.au/phd/chat/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"

Table CS 5:6 framed response

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 Bucholtz's essay: "Word Up: Social Meanings of Slang in California Youth Culture"^[10] 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.

Anti-language

There are many differences between online and natural conversation or 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 what a person may call an object or thing, instead of the proper name. Natural

conversation can 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> just as one may say in a person-to-person conversation to emphasize his or her sense of 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, 1982). 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 discourse analysis.

In a chatroom, the speech community, in order to construct itself first as a speech community, and then as a specifically “chatting” or on-line community of practice, must have an understanding of what is being said, written, uttered or

read - all four blending together as one “speech event”.

Another “Community of practice” in chatrooms that is different from person-to-person or natural conversation is the way abbreviations and emoticons are used. There are no equivalents to emoticons in person-to-person or natural conversation. Though there are some words commonly used in several language such as greetings and salutations and simple words like 'OK' or 'thanks' for chatters to talk in foreign chatrooms is difficult without knowing the language. Some chatrooms are 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 chat room. MultiCity.com have 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. However in internet speak the same use of emoticons demonstrates the commonality between chatroom practices in other languages. The examples below show a Japanese site that uses icons with English words ('welcome' and 'post') though:



[お店をはじめる](#) (ショッピングサイト開設サービス)

本格派ホームページならコチラ

ドメイン取得&ショッピングシステムがワンパッケージ。

わずか6300円/月で独自ドメインのショッピングサイトが開設できます。

SSLセキュリティサーバーによるショッピングカートやオークションを始め、

オプションでカード決済及びプリペイドカード決済、CGI構築をサポートいたします。



●初期設定料21,000円 - (税込) ●月額利用料6,300円 (税込) -

●初期設定料無料●年間利用料5,260円(税込)~

ポストを作る (メールホスティングサービス)
メールアドレスで差をつけよう!
独自ドメイン又は弊社提供ユニークドメインのメールアドレスを発行します。
6箇所までのメール転送、及びメールボックスがご利用でき、条件振分機能も付きました。

●初期設定料無料●年間利用料3,150円(税込)~

This is very similar to a chatroom where one is not familiar with the protocol involved or the interpretation of the emoticons. For chatters to graphically express emotions and simulate speech-phonology (through phonetic spelling) provides the potential for gesturally and linguistically created social-tension 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 antilanguage of chatrooms is 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 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 next chatter offers what may be an appropriate utterance within the confines of an anti-language of chat practice – but which bears little semantic loading for a mainstream speech community. What is the intent of the discourse? What communicative purpose is being served?

■<B_witched_2002-guest> OHI

<B_witched_2002-guest> OHI

Table CS 5:7 OHI

In interpreting this single utterance of [OHI] by <B_witched_2002-guest> one would need 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

Table CS 5:8 All 11 chatters

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 statement 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?) quit scrolling. However, undeterred, <B_witched> continues the same [OHI] for turns: 50, 52, 55, 56, 58-60, 62-65, and 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 has happened in this discourse 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 discourse 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):

■ <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 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

Table CS 5:9 <jenniferv>

As can be see there is no content in the sum-total of <jenniferv>'s conversation, beyond the relational and the greeting function. 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 Jennv :))))))

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 clear who the below 'rofl' is addressed to.

73) 3g. <jenniferv> rofl

It is not clear who the 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

Table CS 5:10 <jenniferv>'s conversation

With dialogue such as the above we are 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 “OHI” utterance in this chatroom? Is there a recognisable lexical wordlist 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." Haliday (1994 p. 310).

Many statements are ambiguous in isolation but clear in context - or at least amenable to logical analysis. Although there are scores of meanings of ‘see’, someone who speaks of ‘*seeing someone online*’ is not likely to be using the word in the sense of ‘*seeing you in front of me*’, although that is possible and may in some circumstances be so.

■HI nice to see you too Jennv :))))))

Example 11

1) 1a. <tab_002> HI nice to see you too
Jennv :))))))

6) <jenniferv> nice to see you to tab ;)

Table CS 5:11 see you

In this chatroom no one is actually being ‘seen’, but <tab_002> and <jenniferv> *see* one another, using the extended chatroom anti-language meaning of “recognize you as having entered this chat space with your usual logon name”.

In yet another twist, <tab_002> “sees” others, but the ‘see ya’ has different meaning in these two contexts. In example 12, <tab_002> is using the ‘see ya’ as a salutation as skud4 is leaving the chatroom.

Example 12 see ya

31) ^29 1c. <tab_002> see ya
scud

Table CS 5:12 see ya scud

Then in context we know, because this is a chatroom that does not boast cam-cameras (this was a couple of years before their general popularity) that seeing someone may mean seeing their action, or what they are doing – or may be doing later - in the chatroom. For example, <B_witched_2002-guest> says the same thing over and over and <Leesa39> responds to this annoyance by saying:

68) ^67 2g. <Leesa39> B_witched we
see ya

Table CS 5:13 B_witched we see ya

Her comment has a double load: the final somewhat irritated recognition that someone otherwise studiously ignored has actually logged on, and at the same time, a hint that the consensual ‘we’ that Leesa39 feels enabled to claim as HER “community”, but not B_witched’s, is “keeping an eye” on B-witched, and doesn’t much like the behaviour they see. As with so many other aspects of this curiously “empty” or phatic chat discourse, more can be conveyed than may at first appear. Here, it seems that the repeated contribution of B_witched may indeed be evoked by a community refusal to acknowledge them: an act which turns NON-speech into entirely meaningful activity.

CS 5.4 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 passing conversation, there was enough time to establish a communication community amongst the chatters present.

I asked in particular, ‘Does a chatter have a discourse 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 communicating, 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 or community^[11] in order to examine what I would call passing chat or by analogy, bus-stop-chat. No one was selling anything on this site, at a time when e-commerce activity is spreading rapidly into even the most inappropriate areas of the Web. After viewing many spiritual sites on Microsoft’s site (<http://communities.msn.com>) I am almost convinced that the sole purpose of spirituality on the Internet is to sell a product. There are thousands of spiritual communities and everyone is selling something^[12]; herbs, books, crystals, and clothing.

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 1 it was apparent that there was an ease of the speakers to discuss Mexican roofers in the midst of a discussion of a national emergency. In Case Study 7 the baseball chatroom has a community of practice where the participants are comfortable with their talk. In this case study the participants have not developed an in-depth discussion but there are the same practices of greetings as are shown in face-to-face meetings.

By examining discourse in a chatroom one may affect not only their own world-views but also others’. This is accomplished through exchange in an environment that is considered safe^[13] by the user. If the environment is not what the user wants then he or she is able to leave and find one that fits their communication aspirations. The freedom of expression in a chatroom is questioned on legal^[14], social, philosophical and political grounds^[15].

4:50 p.m. Feb. 27, 2001 PST ^[16].

A federal court ruling last week could make it much more difficult for

companies to successfully sue chat-room 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 chat-room 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."

[1] Talkcity has established partnerships with major media companies, Internet content companies, and Internet service providers. Talk City coproduces,

cobrand, and comarkets community services that leverage its partners' content, brand, or customer relationships. This is an associates program on steroids. Some of those partners include [General Electric](#)'s (NYSE: GE) NBC (which has a 12.2 percent equity stake in the company), [Cox Interactive Media](#) (a 6.5 percent stake), Hearst Communications (another 6.5 percent holder), [Starbucks](#) (5.2 percent), and WebTV Networks, a wholly owned subsidiary of [Microsoft](#) . Mack, Gracian. *July 21, 1999*. 'Talk City stutters on its first day' <http://www.redherring.com/insider/1999/0721/inv-talkcity.html> viewed, 4-04-2000.

[2] I am not referring to the French cultural historian and polymath Michel Foucault's writings on discourse. Foucault re-examined the prison system, and the history of human sciences, and how individuals and their perceptions of themselves were affected. He called a cultural domain of knowledge a 'discourse'. In this case study discourse is the flow of conversation and the text beyond the single turn taking in an electronic chat.

[3] 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' 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)

[4] 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).

[5] Teun A. van Dijk has a comprehensive online article on this topic, <http://www.hum.uva.nl/~teun/cda.htm> written in January 1988. Last

csited online March 10, 2002.

[6] Of course one could argue that all aspects of the Internet are commercial but what I am referring to is the lack of consumer sales in this chatroom

[7] 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 (1983: p. 147). Gumperz also suggest an integrated view of choherence (1982, 1984)

[8] This example I have given actually happened to me and in the sequential events of a chatroom conversation, of people coming and going, it seems to make a good analogy of chatroom interaction. In my case, I was living in Hawaii in 1970, and I had broken up with my girl friend and a few days later I was walking in Waikiki and had a thought, “I wonder if Carol Ann has gone back to the mainland?” and 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 (Illinois actually) and she had gone back the very morning of when the conversation combination of thoughts in my mind and the words passing by were brought together as a coherent dialogue. I would consider that this is an ‘indirect discourse’ where an embedded sentence conveys meaning to complete a thought.

[9] In virtual chatrooms such as MOOs these are commonplace, and in IRC and simple chat servers such as Talkcity.com simple commands are available.

[10] Bucholtz, Mary. “[Word Up: Social Meanings of Slang in California Youth Culture](http://se.unisa.edu.au/phd/chat/youth_slang.htm)” - http://se.unisa.edu.au/phd/chat/youth_slang.htm accessed, Tuesday, 10 December 2002

[11] 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!===*

[12] One site alone boasts 3729 spiritual sites. The interesting aspect that all the 3729 sites are under the banner site of, <http://moneycentral.communities.msn.com>. Money Central? The heads of several sites have names such as; MoonSpiritWolf, Silver RavenWolf, Sirona Knight, <Thêšpiri†1, Raven, Mystical, Dove, Little Grey Horse, Cailleach and Lady Etain)O(as well as a huge number of Master Teachers and Priests. And they have a vast array of products on these site to choose from, ‘One of the Largest Herb Sections on the Web, A BoS Totaling More then 1000 Spells and Rituals, a Monthly Magazine’. Or purchase information on ‘Druidism, Pict Magick, Viking lore, Chaos Magick, Wicca, Dark Magick, Runes, Spells, Chants, Oils, Powders, and much more.’ from the sites.

[13] 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 ID’s 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 etc 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.

[14] 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

[15] "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).

[16] 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>