

# Terrell Neuage Case Study 7 PhD thesis University of South Australia Adelaide South Australia

Chat used in this Case Study is at <http://se.unisa.edu.au/a7.html>

[THEISHome](#) ~ [Abstract.html/pdf](#) ~ [Glossary.html/pdf](#) ~ [Introduction.html/pdf](#) ~ [methodology.html/pdf](#) ~ [literature review.html/pdf](#) ~ [Case Study 1.html/pdf](#) ~ [2.html/pdf](#) ~ [3.html/pdf](#) ~ [4.html/pdf](#) ~ [5.html/pdf](#) ~ [6.html/pdf](#) ~ [7.html/pdf](#) ~ [discussion.html/pdf](#) ~ [conclusion.html/pdf](#) ~ [postscript.html/pdf](#) ~ [O\\*D\\*A\\*M.html/pdf](#) ~ [Bibliography.html/pdf](#) ~ 911 ~ [thesis-complete.htm/pdf](#) ~ [Terrell Neuage Home](#)

Tuesday, 10 December 2002 (word count 8552)

## [Case Study 7](#)

### [CS 7.0 Introduction](#)

[CS 7.0.1 Why this chatroom?](#)

[CS 7.0.2 Questions](#)

### [CS 7.1 Methodology](#)

[CS 7.1.1 Transcriptions](#)

[CS 7.1.2 Theories](#)

### [CS 7.2 Discussion](#)

[CS 7.2.1 Prague School](#)

[CS 7.2.2 Functional Sentence Perspective](#)

[Rheme and Theme](#)

[CS 7.2.3 Meaning-Text Theory \(MTT\)](#)

[CS 7.2.4 Grammar](#)

[Systemic-Functional Linguistics -Functional](#)

[Stratification grammar](#)

## Context

### Field

### Tenor

It is the usernames that establishes the social relationship between chatters,

### Mode

## CS 7.3 Findings

### CS 7.3.1 Altered language

## **Case Study 7**

### CS 7.0 Introduction

This is the last of my case studies on linguistic analysis of text-based chatrooms. As I have not discussed the grammar of online text-based chatroom it seems fitting to place it at the end of my research. Chatrooms do not demand use of formal grammar, even at the often relaxed and idiomatic levels of everyday conversation. Spelling in particular, because of the rapid rate of scrolling text, seems to be an unimportant aspect. Abbreviations on the other hand do become important – part of the “anti-language” established for an “in-group” of expert and rapid key-boarding on-line communicators. It is much quicker to write BTW than to write ‘by the way’. The abbreviation also functions as a way of signaling chatroom-use experience.

There are many ways in which chatroom talk could be considered an informal use of language. Will we stop using prepositions altogether, after extensive chatroom experience? 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, as to constitute a new “on-line grammar”.

For Case Study Seven I have used another topic-specific chatroom. The one I will examine is on the topic of the sport of baseball. This follows Case Study 3’s chatroom analysis of another topic-specific chatroom, ‘Britney Spears Chatroom’. Interestingly, in

chatroom three there were 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 1, and Case Study 6 on ‘3D animation’, there was more dialogue in the chatrooms on the topic headings for the chatrooms. In this case study, ‘Baseball Chat’ I will research several linguistic models for examining the grammatical functions most often evident.

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 below a useful modeling forum for researching online communication.

#### 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 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. I have had a long interest in baseball and one of my sons was signed as a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2001 and he is currently playing 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

## Table 5 CS7: 1

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 on 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 the initials for Major League Baseball and 'her' response to turn 4 (Λ4) is that she does not like the Cleveland Indians (the tribe) but she does like the pitcher (Jaret) Wright<sup>[1]</sup>. These turns are written in the abbreviated chatroom talk and the participators demonstrate their knowledge of baseball and chatroom talk in this room.

## CS 7.0.2 Questions

What is the function of grammar in chatroom language?

The questions I am posing for this review of chatroom grammar are firstly, 'Are there distinctive grammatical structures in chat dialogue?' For example, is there a similarity to the everyday usage of broken English as it is used by speakers who have English as a second language? One web site that caters to non-English users has an area for English-speaking people, 'CRIBE a Chat Room In Broken English'

'English is not the only language on our small planet. Chat Room In Broken English (CRIBE1) is a cyber chatroom system for users of english as a foreign languages and anyone tolerant of misspelling, mistyping, system lag and different culutures.' See <http://www.cup.com/> - <http://www.cup.com/bm7/crube.htm>

and secondly, 'Is there a difference between grammatical usages in "live" conversational English and those of chatroom dialogue?'

## CS 7.1 Methodology

The methodology for Case Study 7, Baseball Chat, will be taken from various 'schools' of linguistics that concentrate on structures of the utterance. I will give a short overview of their basic premises, followed by an analysis of the usefulness of their linguistic views as analytical tools for the case study using chunks of chat. In the discussion section to this thesis, chapter 6, I will formulate my own conversational analysis of chatroom 'talk' taken from the various schools and theories discussed in all the case studies. The chat I captured for this case study cannot be replicated as Talkcity<sup>[2]</sup> now uses java applets as shown above, and the utterance can no longer be cut, pasted and saved as they are in appendix six.

### CS 7.1.1 Transcriptions

The transcription method is the same as used in previous chatrooms. However, I have endeavoured to discover how conversation flows within the chatroom between particular speakers and have put each user's utterance in sequence in tables as well as showing the more conventional interactional utterances between the participants. Also, I suggest that removing usernames may not make much difference to the conversation in a text-based chatroom where people may not know each other, as each entrance of 'speech' is separated so that a reader can know 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

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

Table CS 7:1 Usernames removed

With the usernames not inserted above the conversation, apart from the <hellolady> utterance is a readable as it is with the usernames present. Usernames often are a source of greetings but once past that and there is a conversation developed or developing, it is the subject matter that is important. Therefore I am suggesting that the user names are NOT the codes chatters use to achieve de-threading.

### CS 7.1.2 Theories

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language. (Fromkin, ed. P. 19.) Trying to find an umbrella for all the theories available in linguistic dialogue is difficult. There are overlaps and overlaps of overlaps. Often there seem to be very little differences between Speech Act Theory, Discourse Analysis, Conversational Analysis and many other linguistic mazes. R. M. W. Dixon uses 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, Matthew S. 1995).” Therefore, for a

language describer, Basic Linguistic Theory can describe all of the “structuring” features which regulate communicative utterances, and make them consensually meaningful. In this case study I will examine chat using grammatical descriptions.

In all communication there is the use of grammar. Without grammar there would be no communication. It is not the formal grammar of educated written communication. And while it is closer to the relative informality of speech, it is different from that as well. Chatroom grammar therefore is a form that incorporates many traditional forms of grammar analysis. Several of the discourse theories and linguistic schools of thought which explore 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, Paul & Frank Collins, 1988), Tagmemic Discourse Theory (See, Edwards 1979, Pike 19983) and Systemic Linguistics and Optimality Theory (See, Archangeli and Langendoen, 1997). There are many Grammar Theories: Categorial Grammar (See, Wood, 1993; Morrill, 1994.), Word Grammar (See, Hudson, 1995), Dependency Grammar (See, Bauer, 1979; Fraser, 1994), Construction Grammar (See, Goldberg, 1995), Relational Grammar (See, Blake, 1990), Montague Grammar (See, Partee, 1980), Transformational Grammar (See, Roberts, 1992; Chomsky, 1957), Cognitive Grammar (See, Huttar, 1996), Generalized-Phrase Structure Grammar (See, Gazdar, Klein, Pullum, and Sag, 1985), Lexical Functional Grammar (See, Bresnan, 2001), as of December 2001 there were no publications regarding an Online Grammar which would use parts of some of these other grammar theories.

Grammar is 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 in 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 about its grammar. Conversely, in 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 quicken chat but there would not be the time to write it, hence the version of <no cleV fan but like wright>.

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) and linguistic processes (which describe how the resources can be used).<sup>[3]</sup> 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 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. In the example below,

17. / ^ 16 <dhch96> 5 b. big baby
--------------------------------------

Table CS 7:2 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. 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

- 1) the possibilities of English
- 2) the conventions of selection used in standard conversation
- 3) the specialized vocabulary and usage of “topic indicated” speech communities and the special on-line 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 still in use ‘old-methods’, ie. computer text-based chats of the late 1990s and first couple of years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which this study is concerned with, the structures of a new language are evolving. This new language is based on symbols (emoticons), abbreviations and misspelt words. Knowledge of this new evolving language permits one to connect with another person to communicate meaning through written thoughts. Knowledge of chatroom linguistics in the chatter’s mind reveals their knowledge of “the language”. Chatroom dialogue format – at least at the graphic level of emoticons – already goes past nationality, culture and individual languages. In the appendix to the conclusion (appendix-conclusion, table 4) to this thesis I compare chatrooms of several nationalities to show that the same emoticons are used in many languages. Abbreviations and the use of selected text forms are peculiar to the chatter’s native language but emoticons are becoming universal, posing the question whether text-based chat could become a universal language.

## CS 7.2 Discussion

Theories build upon one another, and linguistic theories are no different. My reason for briefly looking at linguistic theory as I have below and as I have throughout this thesis is to discover what is useful and what I believe isn’t useful from the many ‘schools’ to build a theory of online dialogue. It is not the purpose of my study to explore any one of these

theories in depth individually, rather I am looking at different methodologies employed by the different theorists to find one which can usefully be applied to this 'new' language of online communication.

### CS 7.2.1 Prague School

I have begun with the Prague School (1920s and 1930s) as several of those who were influential in it are still being cited and their work is being expanded upon. A central aspect of the Prague School of Linguistics'<sup>[4]</sup> 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 eventually was ended by Nazism in the 1940s. What it offers this study is its insight into the ways that language; as being formally regulated by such structuring systems as phonology, grammar and vocabulary formation, could be linked to analysis of 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 the 'already uttered', to make new utterances, the meaning of which belonged to both 'sender" and "receiver" of the utterance.

The simultaneous coexistence of competing discourses, provided a dialogue between 'voices' that anticipated then answered one another at the same time, unless as shown below the speaker carries a monologue. 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 a mosaic of voices competing with one another to be heard and answered. In turn 84 <smith-eric> states <cinni has already changed rules for jr.> (Cincinnati Red's outfielder Ken Griffey Jr.). There is no earlier indication of a thread to

discuss this player or what '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 homeruns Ken Griffey Jr. may hit. In 1997 and 1998 he hit 57 homeruns for Seattle which puts him on target to hit 60 plus homeruns in a year. Babe Ruth's record was 61 homeruns 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 are a multitude of voices with one voice seemingly alone, that of <smith-eric>.

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!

Both intertextuality and dialogism are central to chatroom conversation – yet even at the most basic of linguistic levels, Prague School thinking can be used to display new and inventive elements of linguistic change in play. Bakhtin gave the term dialogism in order to imply the double interplay of communication: language, and another logic of two communications progressing at the same time. The logic describes the distance and relationship between different units of a sentence or narrative structure, or in a chatroom the different turn-takings, indicating a becoming in opposition to the level of continuity and substance, both of which obey the logic of being and are thus monological as all chat turns are independent speech events.

Because the phonic elements of language are absent in print text, we learn as readers to use context to distinguish between those elements distinctive in meaning, but similar in phonetic composition. To some extent 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 absent 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

Table CS 7:3

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 gave a result of 13,300,000 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 phonological element become meaningful, but its communicative load may be immense – as in this case.

Secondly, is there a phonology for emoticons? When a chatroom user sees :) is there a 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 little evidence that the action or emoting actually occurs. What we come to then, as this thesis argues often, is that what is said in a chatroom is only translatable by those who know the online ‘chat acts’ of that room, and is quite strongly rendered in communicative elements which are outside the scope of live-enacted, face-to-face, “natural conversation”. In some special chat communities it is the vocabulary alone which signals the discursive frame. One who is not familiar with baseball 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

Table CS 7:4

<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 the knowledge of the 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] are in a different division (American League Central Division) than the other two lists.

It could be argued 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" (292).

Roger W. Shuy (1998)

In a spoken dialect, phonological cues are equally important when we identify what someone means. "Accent", read back as preferred pronunciation of some phonetic elements; selection of some lexical items and grammatical constructions, and recurrent arrangements of intonation, pitch and pace, is once again only partially available within chatroom practice. While the use of certain words or grammatical forms in speech marks a person's membership within the chatroom of that dialect, shared "local" meanings of emoticons and abbreviations are also used to compensate the loss of other linguistic markers. It should be anticipated that chatrooms are also segregated according to the 'accent' of their text. Therefore, as is shown in this baseball chatroom, having a shared knowledge (the beginning of the baseball season) is as important for a chat speech event to be accomplished as knowing what the shared language is.

126. / \ <dhch96> 5w. sox are gonna get radke

Table CS 7:5

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. It would be assumed that what is meant is that Radke will be recruited into the Red Sox team. This chatroom is at the beginning of the baseball season in April 2000, however a few months later it is clear that 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 on this night, Boston Red Sox rookie Paxton Crawford was a better bargain. USA Sports Today Jul 06, 2000.

[Online.](#)

In hindsight the second interpretation, “the Red Sox players will completely outplay Radke and leave him looking foolish” came true.

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.

There then is not one linguistic school of theory which can accommodate all of the necessary interpretive elements.

The next theory I will look at, as part of an understanding of how structure in a chatroom dialogue is established, is the theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP). FSP is concerned with the distribution of information as determined by all meaningful elements, from intonation (for speech), to emoticons and abbreviations to context.

### CS 7.2.2 Functional Sentence Perspective

Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) was developed in the early 1960s by J. Firbas<sup>[5]</sup> 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 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 rheme and theme.

Rheme and theme are the parts of an utterance representing given information which is the lowest degree of communicative dynamism (or CD): i.e. the amount that, in context, they communicate to addressees is the least. These form the theme. Parts representing new information have the highest degree: these form the rheme. Parts which have an intermediate degree are sometimes said to form a transition between theme and rheme.

## Rheme and Theme

The term 'Theme' is used to refer to the element which serves as the point of departure of the message. The remainder of the message, the part in which the Theme is developed, is called in Prague school terminology the Rheme (Haliday, 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, look at 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 a few words at a time, adding the Rheme to an utterance is unusual. Within FSP therefore, we are able to see that chat communication may carry comparatively low levels of dynamism.

Theme (themat-ic, -ization) carries the lowest degree of communicative dynamism. The theme is the part of a 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

Table CS 7:6

### CS 7.2.3 Meaning-Text Theory (MTT)

Meaning-Text Theory (MTT), was first developed as a theory by Zholkovskij & Mel'chuk (1965). MTT operates on the principle that language consists as a mapping from the content or meaning (semantics) of an utterance to its form or text (phonetics). In a chatroom, MTT is useful if the chatter is able to map content quickly enough to respond. However, if one entered the baseball chatroom for this Case Study and saw this complete conversation, how would they know, without reading the turn takings earlier, what the semantics here revealed?

In the turns, 99 – 111, every utterance, with six chatters involved, is linked by what was said before 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

Table CS 7:7 3 if you like the Yanks

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" 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, and perhaps beyond that the attention given to 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 discursive focus. In the next paragraphs I will look at a wide variety of grammar theories to see if any one or a combination of some may be useful in capturing this dual-focus emerging within online chat.

#### CS 7.2.4 Grammar

Once one learns the language, they then can speak like a native, being an online native speaker (ONS). 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)

To many people grammar refers only to the basis for "proper" communication<sup>[6]</sup>. 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 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 make 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. However, if she were communicating in a chatroom with many speakers and the text was scrolling by at a rapid rate her timely consumed utterance would quickly be lost in the shuffle. However, instead of being careful and typing slowly to be accurate with grammar and spelling she typed quickly the others in the chatroom would not take her doctor qualifications seriously. In a chatroom then we can assume that it is not the person speaking who is qualified outside the linguistic chat-circle but the one who is highly computer literate, especially with the use of emoticons and abbreviations who is taken seriously as one worth listening to. When <BLUERHINO11> is able to list the teams above we would treat him or her with respect and as one to listen to because of his or her knowledge to accomplish such a linguistic feat in such a short space of time.

### Systemic-Functional Linguistics -Functional

The function of language is central (what it does, and how it does it) within the field of Systemic-Functional Linguistics<sup>[7]</sup> (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, see Appendix 6, Table 5, the '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 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 technological based communication will always have changing values and redeveloped theories. Grammar is natural and organized around the text or discourse and with such a fluid chat as found in electronic communication of chatrooms, natural grammar is a grammar of change which embodies and discourages traditional rules of grammar at the same time. The rules, described as netiquette have been discussed in Case Study six (CS 6.2.3) the challenging of the rules in order to carry on a dialogue have been shown in this case study when several speakers decided to communicate through using numbers as language describers.

Central to SFL is the concept of 'stratification', analyzed by the four strata of Context, Semantics, Lexico-Grammar and Phonology-Graphology.

### Stratification grammar

Stratification grammar views language as a system of related layers (strata) of structure. Stratification grammar<sup>[8]</sup> 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 allows language to be examined for its relation to context, introducing consideration of what is called Tenor and Mode. 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, etc. (Halliday, 1985).

## Context

### Field

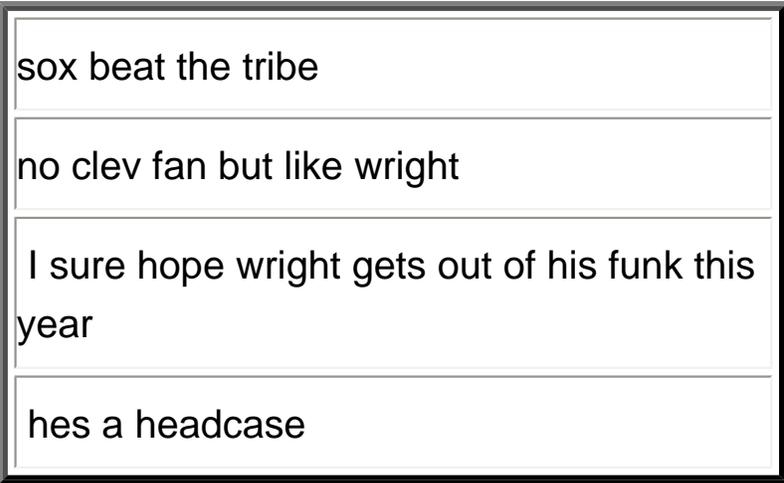
In "Online on Time: The Language of Internet Relay Chat," Juliet Mar refers to ‘Field’ as the context of the conversation: the activity, topic, and language choice. In my case studies of chatrooms I refer to the ‘Field’ as the chatroom itself, what the topic is about or what the chatroom concerns. It is also the activity that is going on whether there is a social air or flaming. The ‘Field’ in a sex chatroom is talk about sex, in a baseball chatroom as in this case study the Field is the interactive dialogue about the game of baseball. The ‘Field’ is announced as the title to the site:

#### 1. The ‘Field’ as topic title,



\*\*\* Welcome to Talk City \*\*\* baseball talk

#### 2. The ‘Field’ as activity,



sox beat the tribe

no cleve 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

Tenor is concerned with the social relationships among the participants. Power (or status)'

Tenor

Username forms the social roles between chatters and is the 'tenor' in the chatroom.

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 establishes 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, except for the probable pizza lover <Pizza2man> these names give no clues to the users. However, there are no socially unacceptable names, nothing that would stand out to be confrontational as one would find in a sex chatsite where the users are quite clearly identified to how they want to be identified and one would know by the usernames what the chat site is about:

:)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

The tenor of the speaker can set the tone for a discussion or development of a thread,

98. <NMMprod> if you like the yanks press 3

<NMMprod> began a thread that continued for another fifty-two turns, whilst <SWMPTHING>'s comment in Case Study 1 began a thread that continued for fifty-five turns.

75. <SWMPTHING> THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF MEXICAN ROOFERS IN N CAROLINA NEXT WEEK

## Mode

Mode is referring to the symbolic (emoticons and other typed representations) or rhetorical channel and the role which language plays in the situation (Halliday and Hasan 1985:12). The mode is the type of electronic discourse such as email, discussion groups or chatrooms. Mode in chatrooms is broken down to text-based chatrooms, visual chatrooms

(with web camera) and multimedia chatrooms. These chat-modes are broken down into the Instant Messenger (IM) with two participants or larger chatrooms with many participants.

Using the text-based modes of chatting mutes the visual and aural ranges of physical activities that offline 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 negotiate physical alignments and levels of involvement at will. The mode then becomes the framework that is chosen by the chatters to interact in a discourse. 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 easiest 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.

One just entering this chatroom, not knowing who 'jr. is about may assume that someone is selling tickets to the baseball game, even a young person as the letters jr. often denotes, junior. But in this case the person referred to is Ken Griffey jr., the baseball player discussed above. And he will sell tickets based on his popularity as people will want to come and see him play.

95.	<smith-eric>	jr. will sell the tickets!!!!!!
-----	--------------	---------------------------------

In this study I am researching the written word as the spoken word in its dialogic format, but because of the nature of turn taking in chatrooms also has a monologic quality to it, I am forced to consider a mixed-mode. There does not need to be another participant in the chatroom to enter script. Immediately SFL alerts me to an interesting social element of chat experience.

## CS 7.3 Findings

### CS 7.3.1 Altered language

In this chatroom on baseball all the linguistic approaches of grammar looked at do not explain the question asked at the start of this case study; *What is the function of grammar in chatroom language?*

Language in a chatroom is altered both deliberately and by mistake. Miss spellings and changes to language on the Internet may not be deliberate. Typing can lead to accidental changes in spelling and punctuation. On the other hand the grammar of chatrooms, if it is done intentionally is a highly sophisticated form of prose that is semantically innovative and daring.

Below, <CathyTrix-guest> in turn 108 says <2blech> which has no conventional linguistic place but in this chatroom it is appropriate grammar as the '2' refers to an earlier request for chatters to press the '1' (3)? key if they liked the New York Yankees. <CathyTrix-guest> emphasizes his or her dislike of the Yankees by pressing a different key than '1' and confirming it with a 'blech' which is not a word but has the same letters as 'belch' and most likely would be interpreted as 'belch' which is a fairly conventional vomiting representation. In that turn there is both deliberate and mistaken altered language. In turn 77 <MLB-LADY> asks if '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 miss spelling is a deliberate alteration to save time in typing. The removing of vowels in text-based chat is common, for example: msg for message, ppl for people and plz for please.

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

Table CS 7:8 Altered language

As well as leaving out letters single digits are 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 letter d.

In chatrooms, grammar is a developing protocol. Common practice theories of grammar are applied differently in chatrooms. In society, we use the use to 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, deliberately miss-spelling words by leaving out vowels as I have demonstrated. Unlike in face-to face conversation, one does not seek to impress others in chatrooms by the correct use of both spelling and grammar.

---

[1]

Pitching Statistics for Jaret Wright																											
TEAMS	W	L	P	C	T	R	A	G	G	S	C	G	S	H	O	S	V	IP	H	E	R	H	R	B	B	S	O
1997 Indians	8	3	.72	7	4	.38	1	6	1	6	0	0	0	90.1	81	44	9	35	63								
1998 Indians	12	10	.54	5	4	.72	3	2	3	2	1	1	0	192.2	220	71	10	1	22	87	140						
1999 Indians	8	10	.44	4	6	.06	2	6	2	6	0	0	0	133.2	144	90	18	77	91								
2000 Indians	3	4	.42	9	4	.70	9	9	1	1	0	0	51.2	44	27	6	28	36									
2001 Indians	2	2	.50	6	6	.52	7	7	0	0	0	0	29	36	21	2	22	18									
CAREER	W	L	P	C	T	R	A	G	G	S	C	G	S	H	O	S	V	IP	H	E	R	H	R	B	B	S	O
5 Years	33	29	.53	2	5	.12	9	0	2	2	0	2	0	497.1	512	283	57	249	348								

[2] Talkcity went bankrupt in early August 2002 and is no longer in existence.

[3] See [www.wagsoft.com/Papers/Thesis/01Introduction.pdf](http://www.wagsoft.com/Papers/Thesis/01Introduction.pdf) for further research on 'Integrating Diverse Descriptions'

[4] Vachek's Josef. The Linguistic School of Prague: An introduction to its theory and practice, published by Indiana University Press in 1966.

Below is copied from 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 Slavists held in Prague in 1929. These were published in the 1st volume of the then started series *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*.

The Theses 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.

[5] J. Firbas 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*.

[6] See, Grammar Rules and Other Random Thoughts at,

<http://www.csh.rit.edu/~kenny/misc/grammar.html> viewed 4/2/2002 12:21 PM.

[7] 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](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 at, <http://www.wagsoft.com/Systemics/Definition/chapelle.html> and Systemic Functional Theory, from the Systemic Modelling Group at Macquarie University at [http://minerva.ling.mq.edu.au/Resources/VirtuallLibrary/Publications/sf\\_theory.html](http://minerva.ling.mq.edu.au/Resources/VirtuallLibrary/Publications/sf_theory.html)

[8] Stratification grammar

[http://www.library.wvu.edu/cbl/ray/concept\\_dictionaries/fairhaven\\_student\\_work/stratification.htm](http://www.library.wvu.edu/cbl/ray/concept_dictionaries/fairhaven_student_work/stratification.htm)