

## Terrell Neuage 'Conversational analysis of chatroom talk' (Introduction)

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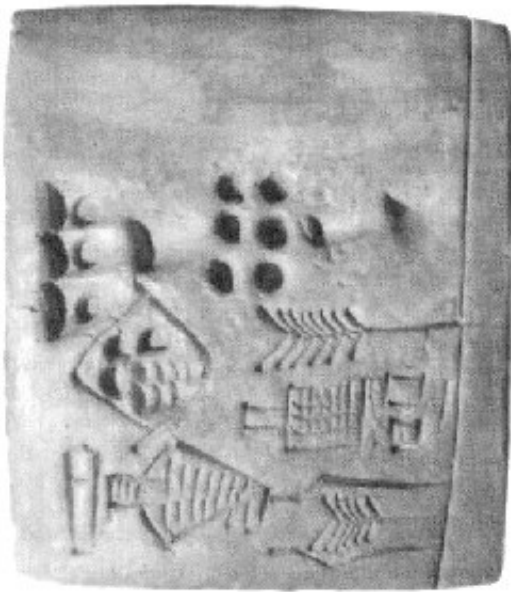
# 1. Introduction ('The Nature of Conversation in Text-based Chatrooms')

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

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

## 1.2 Evolution of language from early utterances to chatroom utterances [1]

The study of language is one of the oldest branches of systematic inquiry, tracing back to classical India and Greece, with a rich and fruitful history of achievement [2] (Chomsky, 2001). The basic building blocks of communication have changed little, but the methods through which we are able to use our linguistic abilities to convey ideas have changed drastically. From the era of pictograph accounts written on clay tablets in Sumeria [3] 5500 years ago, to the first evidence of writing during the Protoliterate period [4] (Sumerian civilization, to about 28 B.C.) it can be seen that forms of communication advanced and changed radically. For example, by 2800 B.C. the use of syllabic writing [5] had reduced the number of signs from nearly two thousand to six hundred [6]. Currently the English language uses 26 letters. Curiously, in the electronic era, with the use of emoticons in online communication there are once again hundreds of signs with which to communicate.



Sumerian Logographs -- circa 4000 BC

<http://www.liveink.com/whatis/history.htm> (c) Copyrighted Walker Reading Technologies, Inc. 2001

Early writing from Abydos, 300 miles south of Cairo, have been dated to between 3400 and 3200 B.C. was used to label containers.



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<http://www.archaeology.org/9903/newsbriefs/egypt.html> Günter Dreyer.

We cannot know what the world was like before human language existed. For tens of thousands of years, language has developed to what is our modern grammar and syntax. Language origin theories for instance are based largely on speculation. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were several proposals with labels which tended to signal the desperation of their authors: 'ding-dong', 'bow-wow' and 'yo-he-ho' theories (Barber 1972), each attempting to explain in general social terms the origin of language.

While such conjecture must always remain unresolved, the rapid changes in communicative technologies in the late twentieth century, together with their markedly social or participatory bias, allows us to glimpse once again the intriguing degree to which ordinary people are willing to push the limits of communicative systems. With chatrooms, language itself may be going through new and rapid development – or, on the other hand, enthusiasts may be taking advantage of a brief experimental moment, acquiring expertise in communicative techniques which prove to be short-lived. Or this period may well be a step in the long process of human communication. Certainly, chatroom communication (and its more recent take-up in mobile telephony's SMSing) separates from traditional language through regulated processes of word corruption and its compensatory use of abbreviations and emoticons. (I explore emoticons in Case Study 3 and abbreviations and other language parts in Case Study 7). But how did these new forms emerge? What produced them? What does it mean, that such innovation can arise in such a short time span? And are these limited, or generalisable, features of modern language use? These questions can only be answered in the future, but they can be discussed now as they are in this thesis.

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

All communication however – from the earliest conjectured formations to the multi-media flows of today - involves interaction, and thus forms a basis for social relationships: webs of cooperation and competition; expressiveness and message-conveying, play and work – social functions which treat even the human body as a tool for activity. Language itself, evolving as a secondary use of physiological apparatus with otherwise directed purposes – the tongue, teeth, lips, breath, nose, larynx – constructs a self willing to sacrifice time, effort and attention to others, by re-forming the self into a communicating being.

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

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

As new communication technologies advance the individual using the technology has to face who they are when they are represented electronically instead of in person. Technology, such as the use of computers and mobile phones can mask the identity of the user at the same time it reveals the person. With technological communication the individual’s identity is not clear. Firstly, there is the opportunity to create an identity that is different from the real life person. Secondly this identity can be tracked. There is a larger footprint<sup>[7]</sup> to identify an individual than there was with pre-online

culture. The online user is no longer an individual but a multifaceted product – with a possibility of a never-ending array of identities. When there was only print the communication process was an individual act, the communicator presented text and it was interpreted by the witness of the text. With online communication the text has no identity of its own but is associated with a user's self-created identity. Sociology Professor Sherry Turkle says in *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* that 'The primary difference between oral communication and electronic communication is how we re-address the Self' (Turkle, p.56 1995) and this feature of online presence is addressed throughout the case studies in this thesis.

Online communication is 'restoring the mode and even the tempo of the interaction of human minds to those of the oral tradition'. (Harnad, 2001). With the rapidity of computers computer 'talk' is similar to oral communication creating an oral-written text.

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

A major feature of modern communications is the telecommunications systems that are critical for the new revolution in communication. In the post-Gutenberg era this is the fourth revolution of knowledge production. The first revolution in the history of human communication was talk that took place hundreds of thousands of years ago when language first emerged in hominid evolution. Spoken language is a natural, biological form of human communication that began about 100,000 years ago (Noble and Davidson, 1996).

The second cognitive revolution was the advent of writing, tens of thousands of years ago. Spoken language had already allowed the oral codification of thought; written language now made it possible to preserve the code independent of any speaker/hearer. Reading is an invention that is only 6000 years old. Aristotle, observed the fundamental difference and relationship between spoken language and written language, saying, “Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience, and written words

are the symbols of spoken words.” (Aristotle --On Interpretation).

The third revolution took place in our own millennium with the invention of moveable type and the printing press. Habermas considers the press as “the public sphere’s pre-eminent institution” (Habermas, 1992a:181). With the printing press the laborious hand copying of texts became obsolete and both the tempo and the scope of the written word increased enormously. Texts could now be distributed so much more quickly and widely that again the style of communication underwent qualitative changes. Harnad in a technological determinism mode believes that “the transition from the oral tradition to the written word made communication more reflective and solitary than direct speech, print restored an interactive element, especially among scholars: and if the scholarly "periodical" was not born with the advent of printing, it certainly came into its own. Scholarship could now be the collective, cumulative and interactive enterprise it had always been destined to be. Evolution had given us the cognitive wherewithal and technology had given us the vehicle.” (Harnad, 1991) These three forms of communication had a qualitative effect on how we think.

Our average speaking rate has a biological parameter; it is a natural tempo dependant on the individual speaker, but with hand-writing the process of communication is slowed down, here the adaptations are strategic and stylistic rather than neurological. With electronic communication the brain can rapidly scan moving conversation as it scrolls in a chatroom - reading and understanding many conversations in progress at the same time the chatroom participant can engage any number of the conversations.

### 1.3 Internet-based communication systems

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

Together, these accounts of a developing communicative social order show that it is through the interactive forms of the day that society changes. The more accessible communication becomes to everyone, the quicker ideas can be exchanged and new meaning developed and shared. Through the exchange of ideas and information, we become better informed and thus able to make decisions, which affect not only ourselves but also the world in which we live. Twentieth century electronic media is a driving force of globalisation producing an acceleration of contact (See Giddens, 2000). As the globalised economic productivity arises to affect every person in the world the rapid flow of

information gives the advent to instant communication to make instant decisions for governments and businesses. Personalized consumption of telecommunication products is driving production of the global market, and instant electronic digital computer-mediated communication (CMC – see Case Study 2) is keeping it all moving fast enough to keep “desire” consumption revolving. Wireless LAN (Local Area Network) is expected to create the next boom for the networking industry making communication anywhere anytime further driving both production of technology goods and increasing the accessibility of communicative services for consumers. In 1999 the Internet turned 30 years old. The first e-mail message was sent in 1972. The World Wide Web was started in the early 1990s, and it went through an explosive expansion around 1995 growing at a rapid rate after that. (See A history of the Internet: Hobbes' Internet Timeline <http://www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/>)

James Carey proposed two forms of communication, the transmission view and a ritual view of communication. The central theme of transmission shows how information is conveyed or exchanged between communicators and the linear model of communication. Carry writes that the transmission view of communication is the commonest in our culture. It is defined by terms such as "imparting," "sending," "transmitting," or "giving information to others." It is formed from a metaphor of geography or transportation.' (1985) Computer-Mediated communication serves these functions of transmission at an increasingly rapid rate. The individual is left to decipher the information and at the rate it is transmitted there is the question of whether information is being communicated or uploaded in such large packets that it becomes useless. This is observed in chatrooms that have many participants and the text scrolls by at a rate that is almost impossible to decipher in order to respond to a particular utterance.

The ritual view of communication makes use of the information transmitted. The information is directed toward the maintenance of society in time and not toward the extension of messages in space. In a communication community the act of imparting information is a representation of shared beliefs. Not all chatrooms are communities of shared beliefs, interests or any other commonality. Topic specific chatrooms often form into communities and the same participants re-visit the chatroom but in many chatrooms visitors are random communicators passing through the communicative act.

...If one examines a newspaper under a transmission view of communication, one sees the medium as an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge...in larger and larger packages over greater



distances. Questions arise as to the effects of this on audiences: news as enlightening or obscuring reality, as changing or hardening attitudes, as breeding credibility or doubt.

A ritual view of communication will focus on different range of problems in examining a newspaper. It will, for example, view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one. What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world. Moreover, as readers make their way through the paper, they engage in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus. (Carey 1985)

Electronic communication has been an important facet of globalisation and the rise of modern society. The evolution of the media has had important consequences in the form that modern societies have acquired and it has been interwoven in crucial ways with the major institutional transformations which have shaped modernity. John B. Thompson argues that:

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

It is within an analysis of how 'chatrooms', as the latest form of communication, 'works' or does not 'work' that I explore electronic conversation as a force of social change.

The World Wide Web is one of many Internet-based communication systems<sup>[8]</sup> and the source of this thesis. This study examines the communicated message within the online environment and seeks to find how meaning is shared within text-based chat rooms. I am interested in the current on-line interactive environment, its departure from the culture of a print milieu and changes affecting both the reader and the writer in that environment.

Of the many on-line practices that are available, such as e-mail, newsgroups, virtual learning environments and chatrooms, both text-based and multi-media enhanced environments, I have concentrated on text-based chatrooms during the period of 1995 to 2001. This is an historical and

time bound communicative environment, caught at the moment before solely text-based chatrooms began to change, as they currently are, to include sound and video. As on-line chatrooms grow in popularity and importance and as the possibilities of these applications increase, so too, will the analyzing of these environments, both in depth and range. This study offers preliminary ways of conducting such analysis.

My exploration of the establishment of a "natural" language for the "unnatural" location of text-based chatrooms will extend to how it is constructed, within chatroom exchanges, in, Instant Messenger, and within discussion group environments such as listservs and Bulletin Boards. Eggins and Slade in *Analyzing Casual Conversation* (1997), write that "Interacting is not just a mechanical process of taking turns at producing sounds and words. Interacting is a semantic activity, a process of making meanings" (p.6). It will be in the analyzing of the "naturalising" processes which have been establishing text on-line as a communicative activity that I hope to find and describe a new process of meaning making in participants' conversation.

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

At the same time however, I am aware that Conversational Analysis (CA) has itself already shown that this apparent "formlessness" is not exactly the case in casual conversation (see ten Have, 2000; Schegloff, 1997; Eggins and Slade, 1997; Tannen, 1984). Within person-to-person talk there are clear conventions and rules such as 'turn-taking' when one person talks at a time before responding to the speaker, Adjacency pairs (knowing what comes next) when one turn is related in predictable ways to the previous and next turns and repair (when there is a mistake there is a correction), several examples of repairing a mistake are: the speaker corrects himself or herself, the hearer corrects the speaker, the hearer prompts the speaker by not responding or the hearer prompts the speaker, for instance by repeating back what he or she just said. My

research suggests that there are similar, contextual forms at work in on-line chat, and that any differences my analysis can establish will be more a matter of degree than of essence.

### 1.3.1 e-mail, discussion forums

At the outset it should be established that even this study cannot include all the forms of Internet communication. E-mail will not be included except as its usage in CMC, nor the many forms of discussion forums<sup>[9]</sup> such as Google groups which have absorbed many older online groups. Google offers a complete 20-year Usenet Archive with over 700 million messages dating back to 1981. I will only refer in passing to these other online forms of discourse in this thesis. For instance, in Case Studies 1 and the Post Script 911, I will give examples of message boards in comparison to the chatroom 'talk' on the topics covered in those case studies. In the first study I compare emergency messages left during a hurricane with the discourse in a chatroom about the same hurricane. In the second case I compare the first lines of chat from a New York City chatroom on the day of the World Trade Centre event with the first messages on a newsgroup that day. In each case, the more formal postings of the newsgroup discussions will be used as exemplars against which to further analyse and isolate the features of IRC styles and practices.

The most common form of Internet communication, E-mail, is replacing much of traditional letter writing and its primary difference is the rapidity of response expected when an e-mail is sent. Unlike letters, which often are not answered for a varying period of time, it is assumed that e-mail will be responded to within a day or two. Therefore, e-mails tend to be answered in haste with at least a short response, maybe even just a "got your e-mail, am too busy to answer now, but will in a few days". Though e-mail can be a form of turn-taking with people writing back and forth immediately after receiving correspondence, it does not provide the conversational turn-taking choices chatroom does. John D. Ferrier did his PhD thesis at Deakin University on e-mail in education. His findings were that there was a high level of e-mailphobia amongst the university staff (this was between 1990 and 1994) and that few wanted to engage with the activity at the time. The results from a survey of 354 staff showed that 94.3% were infrequent e-mail users and 97.6% were not frequent users of electronic bulletin boards. There were no surveys done on chatrooms. (Ferrier, 1998). Since 1995 however the use of the World Wide Web has increased vastly as I statistically show below (1.4 Online usage). Wireless e-mail and

chat servers have grown in popularity at the beginning of the new millennium with 36% of all firms and an additional 49% of all firms planning to provide it in the future according to 'Global Wireless IT Benchmark Report - 2002'. In the period 1999-2001 the proportion of all practicing physicians using the Internet has grown in the clinical work area (from 34% to 40%), in their personal offices (from 51% to 56%) and at home (from 83% to 87%), More doctors are communicating by e-mail with both professional colleagues (up from 51% to 55%) and support staff (up from 25% to 34%) (Wong, 2001). The number of Koreans using the Internet has also increased rapidly: 0.14 million in 1995, 1.6 million in 1997, 10 million in 1999, 19.04 million in 2000, and 22.23 million in September 2001 (Park, 2002).

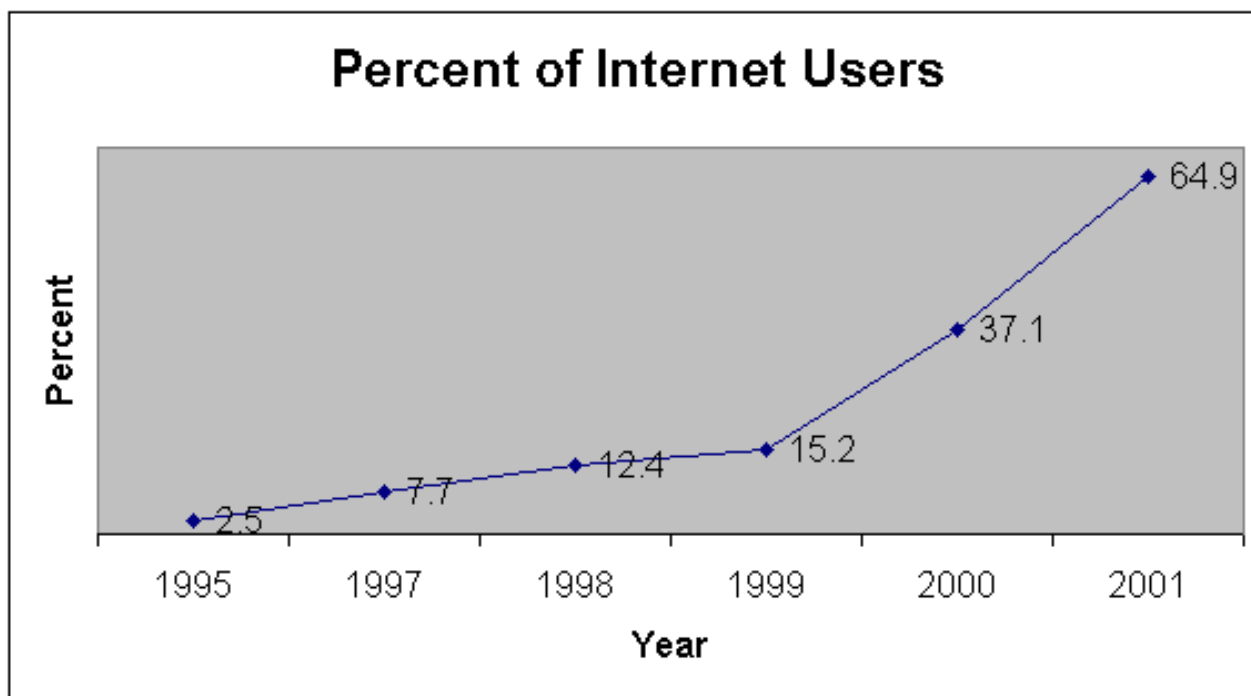


Figure 2. Percent of Internet Users in South Korea (1995-2001)

Sending and receiving e-mail was the dominant online activity in 12 countries over the first six months of 2002, according to the Nielsen//NetRatings First Quarter 2002 Global Internet Trends report. Nielsen//NetRatings, found that at least 75% of households with Internet access participated in e-mail. (<http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/>).

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

“China has seen a continuous decrease in the number of emails during the past two years, *Beijing Youth*

*Daily* reported Thursday.

The average number of emails sent every week by each web users in China dropped from 10 in July 2000 to 8.2 in July 2001 to 5.3 now, according to the latest report by the China Internet Information Center.

"The decrease is due to a decline of the number of free email boxes available, a more rational use of web resource and an increase of various ways of communication," said Wang Enhai, an official with the center. Many websites accelerated their pace to charge email service and web users began to give up superfluous email boxes.

The average number of **email** boxes owned by every web users dropped from 3.9 two years ago to 2.6 last year, and to 1.6 now."

([Shanghai Daily](#) August 9, 2002)

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

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

More than 50 percent of teenage cyber-surfers in big cities across China want to surf the Internet more frequently, a survey conducted by the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) has revealed.

More than 62 percent of interviewees said they play online games and 54.5 percent use online chatrooms.

The CASS study shows 56 percent of senior middle school students in big cities across China are Net surfers while 36 percent of junior middle school students and 26 percent of primary school pupils are Net surfers." *China Daily* 09/17/2001

Chinese teenagers spend an average of 30 minutes each day browsing the Internet, the survey shows. Outside of China there are Internet cafes in Baghdad, North Korea, Libya and all Middle East countries. (Gallagher, 2002) as well as most countries of the world where users can check e-mail or go to chatrooms in more **4.500** Internet Cafes in 170

countries (Larsenm, 2002).

### 1.3.2 E-chat beginnings

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

### 1.3.3 IRC

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is the most used online chat software and has many individual server companies. Below shows IRCnet in comparison with several other IRC servers.

Year	DALnet	EFnet	Galaxy Net	IRCnet	MS Chat	Undernet	Webchat
Max. 2000	78333	63985	16737	84231	15288	74945	17724
3rd Q. 1998	21000	37000	n/a	24500	n/a	24000	n/a

**IRC-Statistics / Kajetan Hinner ( <http://www.hinner.com/>) through the year 2000.**

The statistics below are from the individual IRC servers as of November 2002.

Efnet (<http://www.efnet.net/>) is the oldest IRC network; DALnet (<http://www.dal.net/index.php3>) claims to be currently the largest Internet Relay Chat (IRC) network, with over 140,000 concurrent users and 600,000 registered users, from all over the world; The Undernet (<http://www.undernet.org/>) is one of the largest realtime chat networks in the world, with approximately 45 servers connecting over 35 countries and serving more than 1,000,000 people weekly and GalaxyNet (<http://www.galaxynet.org/>) has about 25,000 users.

Internet Relay Chat gained international fame during the Gulf War in 1991<sup>[10]</sup>, where IRC users could gather on a single channel to hear updates from around the world as soon as they were released. IRC had similar uses during the Russian coup against Boris Yeltsin in 1993, where IRC users from Moscow were giving live reports about the unstable situation there. The tendency for political services to

dominate world use has continued into the current US-Islamic conflicts of today. Since the start of ArabChat in 1999 it has become one of the most famous IRC Networks World Wide, with more than 40,000 users and rising, and now ArabChat is one of the biggest IRC Networks in the World<sup>[11]</sup>.

IRC (Internet Relay Chat) provides a way of communicating in real time with people from all over the world. It consists of various separate networks (or "nets") of IRC servers, machines that allow users to connect to IRC. Once connected to an IRC server on an IRC network, one is able to join one or more "channels" and converse with others there. On EFnet, there are more than 12,000 channels, each devoted to a different topic. Conversations may be public (where everyone in a channel can see what you type) or private (messages between only two people, who may or may not be on the same channel). Conversations rarely follow a sequential pattern, "speakers" following one after the other. There are often jumps to an earlier speaker, or someone beginning their own thread. This is the first departure point from 'casual conversation'. When there are many "voices" at once, conversation becomes chaotic. The only way to follow who is "talking" is through the log-on names. To analyse conversation between two or more "speakers" I need to 'cut and paste' the "speakers" I wish to analyse. Even then it is not always clear who is speaking to whom, unless the "speaker" names the addressee in their message. The speech is then, seemingly inevitably, a "multilogue" or multi-directional system, rather than the more conversationally organised "dialogue" we find in print text. (See "multilogues", Eggins and Slade 1997).

Public IRC is a text-based, international, message-handling program that is on many Internet servers. Multiple communication channels (similar to radio channels) can be created. These created channels introduce the meta-message: "Let's make-believe and suspend disbelief" (Ruedenberg, Danet, & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1995). Allucquere Stone, professor in film and media at University of Texas claims that most computer users think of their computers not just as tools but as "arenas for social experience." (Stone, 1995, 15) Fantasy invitation is prominent on IRC where 'the other' can be as real as the 'self'. (Hamman, 1998; Calvert, 2002; Saarinen). The fantasy aspect of online chatting is discussed throughout this thesis, and is most evident in the use of a username to depict the participant. Generically these channels are variously designated as 'chatlines' or 'chatrooms' and provide for discussion on every conceivable topic. Access via a client

program allows users to join and listen in on (read) conversations on multiple channels on multiple servers. With experience, four of five different channels can be attended to at one time (see 'Multiple-Authorship in multi-chatrooms' in Case Study 2). Once the user logs in and writes, one line at a time, the 'talk' is distributed, via the servers, to everyone logged on reading that particular channel.

Jarkko Oikarinen in the Department of Information Processing Science at the University of Oulu, Finland developed Internet Relay Chat (IRC) in late August, 1988.<sup>[12]</sup> His original goal was to create a communications programme which would allow users of OuluBox<sup>[13]</sup>, a public access bulletin board service (BBS) administrated by the department, to have real time discussions online. Previously, synchronous on-line communication had been limited to two participants – a process which is now popular with Instant Messenger services (see Case Study 2). When Oikarinen began his work, OuluBox already had a programme called MultiUser Talk (MUT), developed by Jukka Pihl. MUT allowed users to chat in real time, but lacked the channel concept central to IRC. The existence of channels on IRC allows users to join into specific discussions by connecting to the channel where the discussion is taking place like a user of a citizen's band (CB) radio tunes into a specific channel.

#### 1.3.4 MUDs

MUDs as well as other constructs on the Internet, such as MOOs (MUD-Object-Oriented), MUSE (Multiple-User Dimension), MUCK (Multi-User Collective Kingdom and MUSH - the "H" stands for Hallucination (Harry Potter: Alere Flammas is a MUSH based on the Harry Potter universe at <http://digital-web.net/~hpotter/>) are computer programs, which users can log into and explore. Multi-User Dungeons, or MUDs present a world through text descriptions; players move around by typing English sentences. In MUDs, a user can communicate telepathically, shape-shift, teleport, create little machine selves, and conjure birds and pleasure domes out of thin air. The second person narrative is the viewpoint of choice for text MUDs the user is allowed to type in a direct command to the character. First person narratives alienate the user since the character will then be perceived as somewhat autonomous. The text becomes similar to a dairy or journal and the user is placed in the role of a passive reader instead of an active director. From these MUDs have evolved MOOs, which allow the players to manipulate the world of the game, creating objects and computer programs that run within the MOO. Users "read" these text-constituted virtual realms rather than only view them



graphically. Action is performed via keyboard while the players must render all scenes mentally from text typed in during the course of play. Text is an efficient medium online as a few words can evoke a rich response in the mind of the user, and text MUDs rely more on cognition than sensory perception. Spaces and avatars are not viewed on the screen but in the player's mind. 'Text MUDs are abstract and cognitive since the characters and scenes are conveyed symbolically rather than sensorially.' (Lisette, 1995 ; Turkle, 1995, 1996; Utz, 2000; Bromberg, 1996; Cicognani, 1996, 1997, 1998). For example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* ("Welcome to Hell! We hope you like it here!") is a MUD. A popular and very creative MUD is "Aetolia" (<http://www.aetolia.com>):



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

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

Join us now in the Midnight Age, and step into a realm of intrigue that will test your resolve, where

you have the power to tip the balance in the struggle between light and darkness.

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

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

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

### 1.3.5 MUDs vs. IRC

MUDs and MOOs as with IRC and World Wide Web chatrooms can be totally text-based. Multimedia is becoming available in all these programs but text is still the primary means

of navigation and communication. What makes MUDs and MOOs different from IRC is that in addition to being able to talk with other people, the user is able to move around in an environment that he or she helps to create. With IRC, someone opens a channel, others connect to the channel to chat, everyone enters lines of text in order to communicate, and the channel is closed when the last person leaves. With MOOs, the user connects via telnet to a program that is running on one computer, enters lines of text to communicate, and disconnects when done. Chatrooms do not have virtual structures to move around in and unless the user leaves the room and goes to another room there are no locational moves within an individual space. With IRC there is little more than occurring 'speech' with MUDs the user must know commands in order to communicate. In both applications users can chat in real time, talk to many people at once or send private messages, and show actions and emotions. Chatrooms are much simpler spaces in which to communicate and this thesis is centred on the performance of users in text-based chatrooms and not MUDs or other role-playing or virtual environments where participants act out character roles in imaginary worlds, all described in text. Like IRC, MUDs provide real-time chat, but are usually accessed by telnetting into a remote Internet whereas IRC can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The differences between the two is essentially that a MOO can be programmed, compiled, and saved while it is still running. This means that the MOO does not have to be shut down for work to be done on it. In order to program in IRC, however, it must be shut down, hacked, recompiled, and started up again. When an IRC channel is closed everything shuts down and is lost. However when a MOO is closed a visitor can open it and have an environment still in place with all the objects left by others.

## 1.4 New paradigm shifts

### 1.4.1 Print to computerization

Internet conversation, whether in chatrooms, America Online's Instant Messenger (IM), discussion groups, or in role playing games such as MUDs and MOOS, involves two new paradigm shifts. Bringing into being an "electronic interactive conversational analysis" requires a cross over between print and conversation-based analyses and theorisations. Firstly, there is the shift from print to computerization. Print relies on hierarchy and

linearity whereas online can be either hypertextual or hierarchy and linear. Webpages for example are hypertextual with the viewer becoming the author of how the content will follow. In a chatroom milieu there is sequential patterning. Chatrooms different from other forms of the World Wide Web in that only one line of text or one picture can be observed at a time before the next follows. Print mediums allows reading ahead - skipping the present and reading the end, whereas in chatroom real-time communication in the future of what one will 'say' can only be guessed at. Textual chatrooms are not clickable hypertextually except for entries to other rooms or to leave the Internet all together. In this sense then chatrooms are much like any print form where one lines follows another. The difference comes from the control the user has of the medium. When the chatroom texts scroll by there is nothing the viewer can do to prevent the next line from appearing unless he or she leaves the chatroom. Print media works on a flow of conversation or writing directed to an organised progression, on-line conversations fragment into multi-directionality. There has been a continuum of ideas that have progressively led to an evolution to define the author and reader (see the Case Studies in this thesis for further explanation, especially Case Study 1 which uses Reader-response theory to describe the communicative process).

Chatroom texts often are anonymous just as some texts don't require, or create, an "author" such as legends, myths, folk stories, fairy tales and jokes. Due to usernames (usernames are discussed throughout this study, see for example: 1.5.1; CS1.2; CS2.3.1; CS3.1; CS3.3; CS7.1.1) the author is not known except by what she or he reveals about her or his self and this is not necessarily who the author is but a created identity. The death of the author has been proclaimed by structuralist such as Foucault and Barthes. Both believe that an author is unable to express himself or herself exactly because of the use of words as the instruments of expression. It is Foucault's way of saying that the author is decentred, only a part of the structure of something original, and he replaces this decentred identity with the idea that the "author" is the product or function of writing, of the text. What an author produces, according to Foucault, is a "work." Barthes and Foucault deny the traditional view of the author as the only authority for interpretation and the origin of the text and its meaning. (see Case Study 1 which uses Reading-response theory to analyse the chatroom)

Similar to Foucault, Barthes puts into question a way of reading related to the author as

an authority. In 1968 Barthes announced 'the death of the author' and 'the birth of the reader', declaring that 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (Barthes 1977, 148). According to Barthes, "the author is a modern figure, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation" (1977). Roland Barthes refers to the writer of a text as the orchestrator of what is 'already-written' rather than as its originator (Barthes 1974, 21). With the death of the author, "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text then is a collaboration of lines or conversation.

Texts are framed by other texts in many ways. Intertextuality is a concept that each text exists in relation to other texts (See, 2.2.1.3 Kristeva; CS 3.3.1 and CS 7.2.1). Landow (1992) finds authors and their stories to be at a point of crisis: (see CS 2.3.1)

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

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

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

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

We are moving from "the culture of the book to the culture of electronic communication", and Brody sees this as being a loss instead of a gain.

#### 1.4.2 Notion of "discourse"

A second paradigm shift is taking place around the notion of "discourse", parallel to the shift from print to the Internet (see Landow 1992, pp. 1-11). While studies of "language" have consistently taken us from actual communicative acts – speech or text – in the direction of those structuring principles which regulate and enable such communication (Pennycuick, 1988) more recent focus on discourse has moved to show how socially and culturally regulated language selectively endorses or pre-disposes social groups and individuals towards preferred activities, behaviours and attitudes. Discourse is important in this study of online communication. "Not only did the Internet arrive with just such sets of predisposed discursive framings around its re-technologisation of communications (Castells, 2000), but within each of the variant communicative activities it enabled (email, IRC, MUDs, listervs, BBSs), "virtual communities" of users rapidly established innovative discursive cultures of their own". In this study I focus on chatrooms which are rapidly forming and disbanding communities. Often the participators have never met and will never communicate with others in the instant momentary communities. The primary difference between chatrooms and email, MUDs, listervs, BBSs is that they expect interaction in these other arenas of communicational online environments.

Within the Internet interactive environment there are, and will continue to be, further developments taking place. Recently there has been a shift from e-mail and discussion groups to chatrooms and "Instant messenger" ('IM').

#### 1.5 Purpose of examining online conversation

This research on electronic communication is being undertaken at the same time as chatrooms are

being used more (Mogge, 1999; Langston, 1996; Harrison, and Stephen, 1995 and the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship - <http://www.cios.org>). Online communication has become common practice Online statistics change rapidly and there are several companies that track moment by moment usage of Internet usage and participants in chatrooms. (See: Cyber Atlas, <http://cyberatlas.internet.com>; Internet Statistics, <http://www.internetstats.com>; Nielsen net ratings, <http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/>; Internet Society <http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/>). What is really happening in this new form, and what are the new perils? I wish to give a clearer understanding of this new communication form as a result of my study.

Like other areas of the Internet, chatrooms rapidly established etiquette, and rules of cybersense are continuously evolving. Netiquette customs and practices began in the late 1980s with the widening use of email and have been adopted in order to promote effective electronic communication. Netiquette has different rules for different online formats. The most generally accepted Netiquette behaviours are based on having respect for others in the online community. For example, Using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS is considered shouting and is hard on the eyes; "Flaming" or attacking others in the online community or inciting or provoking an argument; and "Spamming"- posting something in many places at the same time. It's also the name for junk e-mail sent to millions of people.

Jill and Wayne Freeze point out in their book *Introducing WebTV*,

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

"Rules" are however already established in online communication. For instance, the convention that capitals imply shouting is the same whether in e-mail or in text-based chatrooms. Other, more subtle conventions also are developing, as well as abbreviated "talk". This thesis proposes that such regulatory behaviours are arising not at random, but in ways which reflect the discursive framings of contemporary social and cultural realities – which include for the first time significant formational influence from the 'virtual' realm of mediated CMC activities. What may have seemed small and insignificant conventions, established who knows when or why, operating on the specially reserved space of the Internet screen, have spread rapidly, extended immense regulatory power, endured,

jumped communication channels (eg from IRC to SMS on mobile phones) and thus declared themselves meaningful or discursively active – for discourse, by definition, constrains both concepts and actions. If we find ourselves accessing punctuation keys to add a small smiling face to an email, we are forcing both minds and bodies into a discourse – and anticipating that our correspondents will too.

## 1.6 Online usage

More and more people are communicating through electronic online services. It is difficult to estimate the number of users online at any one moment. A large number of surveys of online usage are available. According to Nua Internet<sup>[14]</sup> an estimated 513.41 million users are on line as of August, 2001. Netsizer (<http://www.netsizer.com/>) has a counter in real-time on their site showing both how many hosts and how many users are going online every second. During the re-write of this thesis as of Thursday, June 13, 2002 there were 832,774,438 users and 203,592,240 hosts online and a few minutes later the number had increased by 500 more. Their real-time chart showed that as of June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2002 the ten fastest Internet growing countries were: Ukraine, India, Indonesia, Chili, Spain, Romania, Thailand, Brazil, Portugal and Mexico. Another survey showed that eighty-four percent of US Internet users have contacted an online group (Nov 01 2001), according to research from the Pew Internet & American Life Project<sup>[15]</sup>. Pew Internet also reports that of the 59 million Americans who go online daily, 49% send email, 10% send instant messages and 4% use a chatroom daily. More than 2.4 million Americans or about five million world-wide are in a chatroom communicating daily. As of 11/12/2002 there were more than 115 million registered users of the chat server ICQ, around the world according to [ICQ.com](http://www.icq.com). Other research results in January 2002 gave these figures: between 6% (Chilton Research) and 35% (American Psychological Convention) of online users participate in chats, roughly 4% of all online time is spent in chatting (Price Waterhouse) and 88% of teenagers dubbed online chat "cool" in a recent survey by the author of Growing Up Digital<sup>[16]</sup>. For a timeline of the Internet see Hobbes's Internet Timeline at <http://www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/>.

## Problems of researching online

Research online is different from face-to-face research. In investigating Internet based writing one comes across a different set of problems; such as, the researchers not being able to verify who the writer of the text is, thereby determining whether the writing has any validity to it, and not knowing if



what is read is a cut-and-paste of several other writing sources. Chatrooms offer even more complications to research.

I have identified four problems of researching online. These are identifying the 'speaker's' intent in joining the chatroom; selecting from the enormous range of chatroom material for analysis; identifying people in cyberspace using multiple names, and the consequent inability to do follow up work with participants.

Firstly, there is the problem of intent regarding why the 'speaker' has chosen to begin the turn-taking process in a specific chatroom. Researching writing has included a long history of questionable intent. Research based on unknown writing is, at the best of times, experimental. Chatrooms resemble oral story telling in that there is often no way to know the source of what someone is saying. This has been a feature of oral storytelling throughout history. For example, who wrote the Biblical line "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God" (John1:1)? If we read it today we do not know how many generations of "cut-and-paste" were involved. It is not possible to know what the original words were. Often we have no idea whose translation or interpretation we are quoting. We could ask 'what was the word that was in the beginning?' Was the word spoken in Aramaic, Hebrew or Greek? Does meaning differ as translations occur? Does the culture which framed the original discourse frame today's translations? (Note: the Norwegians are working on the Bible in SMS<sup>[17]</sup>).

Online research can have this same problem. With multiple on-line "authors", each with decontextualised origins, how are the discursive framings established?

Secondly, there is the enormity of the task in analyzing chatroom 'talk'. With millions of chatrooms there is a wealth of material. Any "sampling" must acknowledge its specificities, and the impossibility of establishing "universal" rules for all (chat) spaces or eras. I have narrowed this topic to a very few chat rooms, concentrating on seven chatrooms in seven case studies - although I have used several other chatrooms to show a characteristic that may not have been obvious in one of the chatrooms I 'captured'. But this is a minute sample of what is available, and is designed not to outline for all time what online chat "is" or how it is "produced" - since the conditions I uncover may already be past. For instance, one problem with a study of anything involving technology is the brevity of its relevance. In this thesis I argue that text-based chatrooms are being augmented by technology to the point that currently chatrooms have many features in common with telephone and Internet

conferencing communicative devices. But at a moment when both of these are moving to video services, much of what I establish here as “communicative enhancements” to supplement a visually-deprived communication, may so change. Instead, what I hope to achieve is to persuade communications scholars and Internet users generally that what may seem transient, trivial or temporary, was in itself richly meaningful, and that even the most fleeting of communicative regulatory systems in one of the most seemingly reduced or fragmentary forms – which I propose Internet Chat to represent – is still formed within predominant discursive systems, and able to carry complex communicative intent.

Thirdly, people in cyberspace often change their name for use in other chatrooms, and sometimes within a single chatroom they will change their name. For example, in an academic chatroom where there is scholarly discussion about an issue a person may log in as 'laProf'. In a sex-chatroom, the same person may be 'lovelylegs'. In a political chatroom the person may choose to be 'senator'. One's on-line character is only part of one's on-line repertoire. A person can be a feather, fire hydrant, cloud or a riverbank. How the person's 'speaking' persona changes in different chatrooms is an area I explore throughout this study, not to pursue the theme of on-line identity formation, common in first-generation Internet study (eg Turkle, 1995, 1996; Rheingold, 1991; Castel, F, 2000) but to examine how far language itself shifts with persona change. My first hypothesis (see hypotheses, 2.7) on whether people change their text-self in different chatrooms will bring to the fore some of the ways in which such changes might be described and identified.

Fourthly, the most difficult aspect is the inability to do follow-up work with participants in chatrooms. Unless the person is identified and their e-mail address is noted so that they can be tracked within chatrooms, they become lost to the researcher and rarely are the same people in the same chatroom at the same time, so that online chat studies can not be replicated.

A positive aspect of doing research online is the amount of material available. With millions of people on-line and thousands of chatrooms and discussion groups there is a wealth of material. At the same time, the size of the field indicates the growing cultural importance of on-line talk-texting' activities and the resultant need to establish means of analysis.

### 1.7 Are Chatrooms Public or Private?

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

chatrooms are public or private spaces. (Cybersociology)<sup>[18]</sup>. All exchanges within chatrooms, accessible to the public, are public, unless there is a notice saying all the dialogue is copyrighted. A chatroom where the participant has to log on as part of an organisation such as a university, company or government web site, could be private and confidential. The behaviour of the participants could be different from a chatroom that is open to the public without any registration details, e.g. e-mail address, and where participants make up usernames which do not reflect or identify them. This issue of public access versus privacy is one I had to consider in regards to ensuring that methods I chose for my study complied with the principles of ethical research. Mark Poster (1995, p.67) argues that "The problem we face is that of defining the term 'public' and posits that 'The age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over'. However, chatrooms can be private also if two people agree to talk in a room and not allow anyone else in. I define the term 'public' in relation to my work as meaning, what is available to be seen on the computer screen by anyone with an Internet connection.

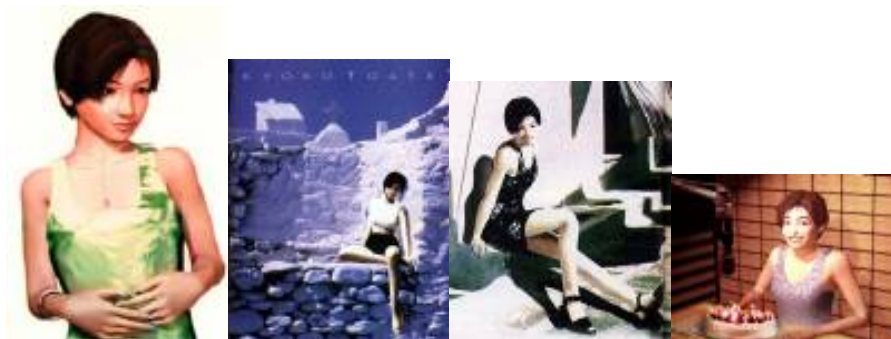
There are two primary categories of text-based chatroom communication. Public channels or chatrooms on the Internet that allow anyone to enter without registration are an open conversational arena and what is said is public. Secondly it is also possible to set up a chatroom which is by invitation only, such as those people set up on their computer<sup>[19]</sup> for IM or ICQ interaction, and these chatrooms are not displayed on the Internet unless the owner of the chatroom chooses to do so. This allows a number of participants to get together for a conference without anyone knowing. Some chatrooms allow chatters to use a "whisper" or private message mode, preventing unwanted chat inhibitors from witnessing the communicative act.

## 1.8 Is cyberspace real?

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

Real social interchange in person-to-person or real-life situations with “real” communication changes abruptly once in an online chat environment where the “other” is not known. The purpose of most communication is not the exchange of factual information, but the establishment and maintenance of social ties and structures. Firstly when we cannot identify the “other” we do not know whether there is credibility in what the “other” has to say, and they have the same problem with what we would say. The traditional philosophic approach holds that sincerity and competence are the underpinnings of credibility (Audi 1998). We need to know something about a person's social identity in order to know how to act toward them. In real life as well as online social conduct governs our behavior toward others and not knowing who the person we are communication with changes how we “talk”. With animated images (a machine attempting to pass as human) that communicate in chatrooms as well as in commercials and even television talk shows we can not know whether we are speaking with someone that is another human or a computer program.

Virtual star translate internationally. They don't age or throw tantrums, they can master any language or skill, and can appear in more than one place at the same time. "Real people have limits," (Lewis, 1997). Horipro created the worlds first virtual teen idol, Kyoko Date. Kyoko Date is an interesting subject. It stands on the edge between technology and society and is capable of carrying on conversations online.



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

This thesis clarifies some of the subtle distinctions between real life and online virtual communication, describes how they work, and presents some current research findings regarding online conversations that take place within our current forms of electronic communication.

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

### 1.9 Personal interest in researching online conversation

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

My interest in electronic communication is first and foremost an interest in communication. How do people exchange, relate and create meaning? Having 'done the '60s' in the United States of America I came in contact with others who were interested in a global mindset. I lived in Greenwich Village in New York City in the mid-1960s. Listening to Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, Joan Biaz, Alan Ginsberg (I read my own poetry with Ginsberg at St. Marks Place Church on East 9<sup>th</sup> Street) I became part of the wave of protesters at the end of the 1960s<sup>[20]</sup>. Being young and idealistic I followed the trek of those who were seeking change to San Francisco in 1967 to engage in the summer of love and to seek ways of communicating with people from other cultures and backgrounds. In 1969 I found myself in Hawaii and before long had joined a new age cult, the Holy Order of Mans. This Order was an extension of my beliefs and searching for a better way to communicate as an integration of a world mind (an 'Over-Soul') which connected the parts to make a whole.

It is my belief that out of this mixture of 1960s idealism, 1970s new-age spiritual explorations, 1980s multinational marketing and globalization and the growth of the Internet of the 1990s, a need to

communicate with every one has emerged. The paradigm has become 'we are the world'. With the growth of the personal computer, the Internet and then chatrooms, my once idealistic pursuit of communication with different mindsets and various cultures became a reality.(See also; Giddens, 1991; Turkle, 1995). After a study of 35-years of astrology, metaphysics, literature, art and philosophy I felt as if I had found what I had always been looking for; a way of turn taking in conversation where there was not an immediate dominance of culture, gender, philosophy, nationality or age. This thesis examines whether or not such a possibility has indeed arrived, delivered by what we so frequently dismiss as " Internet chat".

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[1] There are many texts on how language evolved. For example, 'The rise and fall of languages', by Dixon (1977). He traces the theoretical issues of languages from a comparative and historical linguistics view. For example, Dixon traces language prototypes over the 100,000 years humans are believed to have used language to communicate. What is interesting from the perspective of this study are how languages currently spoken and understood are changing with the globalisation of communication. As more people 'chat' on the Internet from different cultures, the more homogenised language may become. I will look at this issue in several case studies where I will compare chat rooms from different languages to discover whether the same abbreviations and emoticons are used or whether different languages use their own abbreviations (See CS5.2.3). For example, I will investigate whether abbreviations such as, BW, 'by-the-way' which is one of the more commonly used abbreviations in Internet chat, as well as in SMS messages on mobile and palm-computers, according

to my research, is the same in other languages.

[2] Language and Mind: Current Thoughts on Ancient Problems (Part 1) Noam Chomsky.  
<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/lin380l/nc-pap1.htm> viewed 25/10/2001

[3] See, [http://homestead.deja.com/user.robin\\_pfeifer/claytablets.html](http://homestead.deja.com/user.robin_pfeifer/claytablets.html) viewed 21/11/2001

[4] See <http://home.swipnet.se/~w-63448/mespro.htm>. viewed 21/11/2001

[5] See <http://www.halfmoon.org/writing.html> viewed 21/11/2001

[6] 'Rise Of The Human Race, The Civilizations Of The Ancient Near East'

<http://www.emayzine.com/lectures/sumeria.htm> viewed 21/11/2001

[7] Everything that we do as a consumer leaves an electronic footprint whether it is shopping or using electronic equipment. Whatever we do on a computer (and/or network, internet, email, instant messages) leaves an electronic footprint.

[8] For a history of The Internet from its source see  
<http://public.web.cern.ch/Public/ACHIEVEMENTS/web.html>

[9] Newsgroups and list serves enable a group of network users interested in a common topic to exchange message. Central server handles the forwarding of mail to all subscribers to the list or conference. Participants need to know only mailing list address, not the addresses of all participants. This model has been extended to create electronic journals.

[10] This quote appears on this page, there is no date or author:  
<http://www.provide.net/~bfield/polaris/topnoframe/top0151.htm> viewed 8-21-2000

[11] ArabChat can be accessed at <http://chat.arabchat.org/english/> as of 9-2001.

[12] Original IRC history memo is at <http://www.mirc.co.uk/help/jarkko.txt> Viewed August 10, 2000.

[13] For a history line of IRC see <http://www.efnet.net/?page=history> viewed September 23, 2000.

[14] (<http://www.nua.ie/surveys/>),

[15] (<http://www.pewinternet.org/>).

[16] See <http://www.growingupdigital.com/> See also Internet Demographics and eCommerce Statistics <http://www.commerce.net/research/stats/stats.html> for Internet traffic usage statistics.

[17] 'SMS translator's Anders Torvill Bjorvand and Johannes Holmedahl have signed a contract with Norwegian publisher Hermond Forlag to publish their SMS biblical work in a book in 2003. It will include such things as the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Gospel of St Mark in Norwegian in one column and SMS in the other. To demonstrate the idea, Bjorvand translated one of many versions of the Lord's Prayer from English to SMS.

- Our father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.
- Thy kingdom come. (SMS: Fthr n hvn. u r holy. Come) Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. (SMS: rule earth as hvn. Giv us food.)
- And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (SMS: Forgiv our wrongs. keep temptation n evil from us.)
- For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen. (SMS: All is yours. U rul in glory. Amn.) Viewed Thursday, November 14, 2002

[http://www.news.com.au/common/story\\_page/0,4057,5373495%255E13762,00.html](http://www.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,4057,5373495%255E13762,00.html)

[18] Research Methodology Online, Issue six: has valuable information on doing online research <http://www.cybersociology.com/>

[19] The free webpage provider, Geocities, provides individual chatrooms for its members to put on their homepage

[20] We marched on Washington DC to stop the Viet Nam War, to stop segregation, to give women more rights. I marched for so many things I forgot what we were marching for at times.