

Terrell Neuage Case Study Four Tuesday, 10 December 2002 (word count 7,449)

Chat used in this Case Study is at <http://se.unisa.edu.au/a4.html>

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## Case Study 4

### CS 4.0 Introduction

75) <jijirika> \*):) at da room

76) <AquarianBlue>\*\* lol@dingo

77) <safetynet10> \*\* OMG

**:) at da room**

Examples of chat in this Case Study are from the 'astrochat' chatroom unless otherwise indicated. (see [appendix a4](#)). The above three turns are provided to

show the difficulty of knowing what a particular chat is about when only a few turns are revealed. This is similar to a conversation that we may overhear or enter with out knowing what the topic is. However, as shown through these Case Studies there can be several conversations going on at any one time making it difficult to ascertain the topic(s). In the table above for example these are three voices which may not have any agreement in conversation as they may be in response to other chat-streams of talk. The chatroom used on this case study is titled astrochat and is one of thousands available through TalkCity.com. This is the second case study of seven. I refer to the chatroom I use here as a ‘user defined’ chatroom in contrast to a chatroom where the topic is open and the conversation can weave and wander from sex to religion to baseball to the price of tea in China. Any chatroom can attract people who will discuss any topic, however, my research into hundreds of chatrooms has shown that most chatrooms are used by people who go to them for the specific purpose of discussion of a defined topic. From the first three turns I captured when entering this room it was clear this chatroom would be on astrology:

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1) | <gina2b> everyones a know it all!                     |
| 2) | <dingo42> nicole wahts your sign ??                   |
| 3) | <AquarianBlue> yeah white told me to meet her tonight |

Turn number two from <dingo42> asks <nicole wahts your sign ??>. The third speaker has a user name of <AquarianBlue>

In a ‘user defined’ chatroom the user operates within the subject of the chat discussion indicated in the title of the chatroom. Therefore, chatrooms entitled; ‘astrochat’, ‘jesuschat’, ‘bondagechat’ or ‘54-year-old-white-adelaide-single-hetero-chat’ attracts users who are specifically interested in those topics.

However, as most chatrooms are open for anyone to enter at anytime<sup>[1]</sup>, the occupants of a chatroom are not necessarily only those who are interested in the

topic of the chatroom title. It is common enough to encounter “lurkers” who enter rooms without participating in the talk.

In text based chatrooms, we have little knowledge of the social identities of those present. In multimedia chatrooms, which are just beginning to appear (March 2002) we can view others in a chatroom in real-time. Text based chatroom talk as it is currently configured, is a short-lived historical phenomenon with probably a life of about a decade, from 1994- 2004.

## CS 4.0.1 Questions

In the speaking of a language we are performing speech acts, for example with making statements, giving commands, asking questions or making promises (Searle, 1965) and my questions for this case study centre on speech acts.

Firstly, ‘can we use Speech Act Theory to describe what the language in a chatroom is doing?’

Secondly, ‘can a difference be observed between speech online and speech face-to-face if the topic matter is the same?’ For example,

“Would an online astrological discourse differ from a face-to-face astrological conversation?”

## CS 4.0.2 Why I chose this chatroom

I chose an astrology chatroom, partly because I have a strong personal background in the field, and can therefore anticipate recognising many of the “typical” speech behaviours of this speech community, and secondly because, as a specialised knowledge arising largely outside formally recognised accrediting agencies, such as Universities, it can be expected to have a broader than usual range of variant or “localised”, even informal, usages.

How might the conversation in an astrological chatroom be different from a real

life room, full of astrologers, discussing the upcoming Saturn opposite Pluto aspect<sup>[2]</sup>?

It was also my expectation that this chatroom would be more technical and advanced in its discussions of astrology than it was. There are astrological sites where one would need to have studied astrology for many years, not only to carry on a conversation, but to understand what anyone else would be saying<sup>[3]</sup>. This astrochat site was far from advanced<sup>[4]</sup>, but I believe there is enough difference from content in other chatrooms I am studying, for the purpose of investigation. Speech act makes communication a form of human action and in a specific chatroom such as this one I would look for words, abbreviations and emoticons to produce interaction. In the example below <dingo42> is asking for a response from <Nicole528> <nicole wahts your sign ??> and <Nicole528> responds <im a gemini with tauras moon and scorpio rising>.

Traditional grammar recognises three classes of speech act distinguishable in many languages on the basis of their form as statements or declaratives, questions or interrogatives or commands or imperatives and therefore asking a question is performing a speech act. I chose this turn-taking sequence to show what I would have expected to find in a chatroom about astrology.

2) <dingo42> nicole wahts your sign ??

11) <Nicole528> im a Gemini

31) <Nicole528> whats your sign dingo?

47) <dingo42> im a libra..much scorpio with it...astrlogist after al;l

60) <Nicole528> im a gemini with tauras moon and scorpio rising

### **nicole wahts your sign ??**

Here, <dingo42> has asked what sign <Nicole528> is. The querant did not ask to know more than that. <Nicole528> replies with <im a Gemini>. <dingo42> claiming to be an astrolgoer, <...astrlogist after al;l>, provides more information to show how much he or she knows about the topic of astrology. This identifies him or her in two ways, firstly <dingo42> knows that astrologers are interested in more than one's sun sign and <dingo42> knows this information. Secondly, <dingo42> is giving a description of his or her self by saying what signs are involved. This is close to what I discuss below as an indirect speech act. There is a sense of too much information being provided. Two questions can be asked here, firstly why do we give more information than is asked for, when telling about ourselves? And secondly does the speech act initiated by the querant allow for this in a chatroom? I would argue that <dingo42> has given more information in order to have <Nicole528> divulge what her or his signs are.

## CS 4.1 Methodology

### CS 4.1.1 Transcription

The collection protocol I will use in this chatroom is the same as that used in the other case studies. I will look at the actual words written in this chatroom to

discover how a seemingly incoherent conversation is able to continue. This is a smaller sampling, 16 speakers taking 85 turns, than in Case Study 1, which had of 48 speakers using 275 turns. This chatroom used more abbreviations and emoticons than Case Study 1 but fewer than Case Study 3. Because there was no emergency involved as in the first chatroom, the talk is less immediately focused. The speakers seem more playful, constructing more linguistically-focused responses, and paying more attention to their performance as they communicate.

## CS 4.1.2 Speech Act Theory

The method of analysis for this case study is based on Speech-Act Theory. Speech Act Theory is a theory of language based on J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (second edition, 1975), the major premise of which is that language is as much, if not more, a mode of action as it is a means of conveying information (Henderson, Greig and Brown, Christopher, 1999). Speech Act theory was developed to explain how we use language to accomplish the goals of speech acts. Many utterances are equivalent to actions. When someone says: "I name this ship" or "I now pronounce you man and wife", the utterance creates a new social or psychological reality. (Austin, 1962). Whether this occurs in this chatroom will be discussed in this case study.

Speech acts are similar to the written act in a chatroom as both forms are interactive real-time communications. The 'speech act' when it is conducted as written has an altogether different coding from the coding of speech acts in person-to-person conversation. Firstly, whether the chat occurs in a chatroom where people are using voice or typing, what is missing are the physical cues so important in other communications. As my study has been based on text only chatrooms the taking away of voice<sup>[5]</sup> makes it difficult to identify the speaker through tone, gender or age. Using Austin's identifying of speech coding into locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts such as performatives I have been able to look at a particular chatroom to try and discover how meaning is exchanged using only a few characters on the screen. Locutionary acts define

the intentions of speakers while speaking.

## CS 4.1 Discussion

My focus in this chatroom is on the "speech-act", at its simplest terms. Even at this most reduced of levels, do the contributions made produce an "unhappy" response or a "happy" response - to use the terms of Austin (1962) and Searle (1965, 1969). *Speech Acts* involve uttering identifiable words that are perceived as coherent to members a given speech community (Gudykunst and Kim 1997 p. 153). But, from the start, we have difficulty with this concept in the chatroom setting. For example, is there a speech act in the example below? I will come back to this question in the conclusion of this case study.

<AquarianBlue>

12) ^9 hehe

29) ^26 sniff sniff

34) ^32 hmmm

42) ^40 \*\* wb jiji

76) ^61 \*\* lol@dingo

Is there a speech act in here?

At first the status of chatroom talk seems obvious and unproblematic. Surely the chatroom is a speech act community. There are speech exchanges and even continuous conversations. Yet this is a most unusual conversational milieu, which has never before appeared in any society. Chatrooms can produce a never-ending conversation. There are thousands of chatrooms available on the Internet



with no set hours of operation. Moderated chatrooms may have a set time, and people can meet an authority on a topic or a famous person and talk to them, but in other chatrooms one could spend days without leaving, and carry on continuous conversation. Even though people come and go, and potentially the same person could be in a chatroom with several usernames<sup>[6]</sup> chatting as different identities, there is continuous interactive dialogue, just as there would be in a real-life setting where everyone knows one another.

## Speech situations as speech events

The choice of the term “speech event” to describe text-based chatroom exchanges may be seen to imply that such exchanges are a form of speech, i.e. conversation. A number of researchers have examined this question (Shank, 1993; Veselinova & Dry, 1995; Maynor, 1994) and the general consensus is that of Shank (1993):

”Is Net communication like conversation? Quite a bit. Messages on the Net tend to be informal, to be phrased in conversational form, and can engender a great deal of direct and dyadic interchange. Is Net communication like writing? Absolutely. Messages are written instead of spoken.”

‘Speech situations’ (chatroom situations) are composed of ‘speech events’ (chatroom events) (Hymes, 1974) and these activities have rules governing the use of speech within particular circumstances (e.g. getting-to-know-you conversations - (Gudykunst and Kim 1997 p. 328). Often though, the whole chat, or the entire chatroom event, is little more than a ‘getting-to-know-you conversation. I have found from my research on many chat sites that most statements are of the greeting type:

32) <Night-Goddess\_> anyone cool in here?

## <Night-Goddess\_> anyone cool in here?

To understand speech act theory and what it offers for chatroom analysis we must first look at the vocabulary of speech act theorists.

Speech act theory as with most schools of thought has its own sets of terms. There is a specialist language to explain the language of speech acts. Most of these terms and ideas originated with Austin (1962), with Searle (1969, 1975) later developing Austin's insights.

### CS 4.1.2.1 Austin

The philosopher John Austin (1962) pointed out that many utterances do not communicate information but are equivalent to actions ("I apologize...", "I promise...", "I will..." or as shown in the example below, <i'll take her to Miami>). Austin argued that many utterances are equivalent to actions. When someone says: "I name this ship" or "I now pronounce you man and wife", the utterance creates a new social or psychological reality.

26) <judythejedi> ^\24 she'll stop in west palm , then i'll take her to Miami for a seminar

### **Performative revisited see 4.6**

Austin defined clear categories of speech, which used *performative verbs*. Performative verbs are verbs that can be used to perform the act they name These are used to indicate the speech act intended by the speaker from such speech acts

as: 'I name this star...' 'I pronounce you man and wife.'

<i'll take her to Miami> is a promise, what <judythejedi> has replied to <AquarianBlue> in turn 24. <i'll take her to Miami>) is a performative in this case as it performs the act of taking 'her to Miami'. Perhaps the person in question would not arrive in Miami without this 'taking'. For a performative speech act to be valid, certain conditions are required and these are known as felicity conditions (see CS 4.1.2.3 below).

John Austin's original classification of speech acts separates acts which are locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary, informative, performative, expressive, directive, commissive, declarative, and representative, each seeking to operate within those "felicity conditions" which will produce an appropriate speech act in response. Such utterances can be analysed using a threefold distinction: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

## Locutionary

A locutionary act is defined with reference to the intentions of speakers while speaking. These are simply the speech acts which have taken place. In a text-based chatroom locutions are the typed symbols that signify these noises, for example, <hehe> <sniff sniff> below are locutions, as they denote strings of sounds we create.

14) <Nicole528> 5-28<--- hehe
29) <AquarianBlue> sniff sniff

## Illocutionary

An illocutionary act is a complete speech act, made in an utterance which

typically consists of the delivery of the propositional content of the utterance and a particular illocutionary force whereby the speaker asserts, demands, vows, names, promises, apologizes and congratulates or suggests. Illocutionary acts refer to the real actions which are performed by the utterance, where saying equals doing. At the illocutionary level the chatter provides interpretation of the sentences as speech acts. For example, <Night-Goddess\_> utters <bye> in line 59. There is not only the word typed in the chatroom but <Night-Goddess\_> actually leaves the room.

An illocutionary act also has an effect on the hearer. Austin calls this effect the perlocutionary act.

## Perlocutionary

The perlocutionary act is the effect of utterances. 'This means that every utterance can be analysed as the realization of the speaker's intent to achieve a particular purpose' (Eggins & Slade 1997, p. 40). Perlocutionary acts include persuading, intimidating and incriminating. Perlocutionary and illocutionary speech acts are both found in this chatroom. Yet sometimes the medium used is so reduced that the speech act may not be immediately obvious.

1) <gina2b> everyones a know it all!

25) <gina2b> coocoocooco

56) <gina2b> ^\47 coolfool

## **Perlocutionary and illocutionary chat**

### **acts**

A perlocutionary act is present here. <gina2b> begins the session which I recorded with a statement intended to upset the others in the chatroom by responding to an earlier utterance (its actual content is unknown as the previous utterance has not been a 'captured' statement). There was a response from others and a discussion concerning who was cool in this chatroom which led <gina2b> into making one final statement in my recorded session, 'coolfool' in turn 56.

In Speech Act terms none of <gina2b>'s statements are perlocutionary acts because they do not assert, suggest, demand, promise or vow. As a perlocutionary act is a speech act that produces an effect, intended or not, achieved in an addressee by a speaker's utterance, <gina2b>'s utterance that <everyones a know it all!> could be interpreted as an insulting argument. As there is no recording of what went on before <gina2b>'s statement I would assume that there were several opinions given about someone or something. Much of what occurs in a chatroom can not be called a speech act as there is no act. Nothing is being said that can be interpreted or given response to. <gina2b>'s <coocoocooco> utterance does nothing but fill space in the chatroom. No one responds to and it is impossible to know what it is in response to.

## Felicity conditions

'every sentence is significant... but not every sentence is a statement-making sentence, but only those in which there is truth or falsity...' [7] Aristotle

A speech act is felicitous when it is uttered by the appropriate speaker, directed toward the appropriate hearer, and uttered at the appropriate time and place. If one or more of the above are not satisfied, the act is infelicitous.

A speech act has to be appropriate in context and social conventions. <judythejedi> in turn 26 saying, <she'll stop in west palm, then i'll take her to Miami for a seminar> would be grammatically correct but if <judythejedi> was in the chatroom saying this and at the same time living in Siberia and had no way of

leaving Siberia it may not be correct to say <...i'll take her to Miami for a seminar>

This utterance then would not meet the felicity conditions because it would not be able to fulfil expected performative options. Felicity conditions must be met for speech acts to be successful. Felicity conditions constitute the set of circumstances that must be satisfied, if a speech act is to be correctly and honestly performed. These 'felicity conditions' require an appropriate response to each speech act. In turn 25) <gina2b>'s coococoocoo can not meet 'felicity conditions' because there is no meaning for that utterance.

## Performatives

According to John Austin (1962), there is quite often more going on than the actual definitions of words that we share in person-to-person conversation. Austin used the terms “performatives” and “constative” acts, and both have much to offer analysis of chatroom speech acts.

Verbs in Virtual Communities which may not be considered performatives in spoken language, but are in virtual environments, such as open, close, lift, move, are performatives in a text-based virtual chatrooms as they perform actions to open another screen on the computer.(see Cicognani, 1996, 1997, 2000). For example in a chatroom that has private rooms one can click on the open button and the screen will change to where only the person to speak with is present.

In a chatroom, performatives are words, emoticons, acronyms and abbreviations; that ‘do’ instead of ‘describe’. For a speech act to perform and be successful, two qualities must be present: firstly, the speaker and addressee must share a common language. In a chatroom we need to add, not just the language, such as English, Spanish or French, but we must have the same meaning for abbreviations and emoticons. Secondly, the speaker must make an utterance understandable.

A performative utterance includes its own successful performance. Saying it, and

saying it this way, makes it so. This constitutes the conditions that a performative must meet if it is to be appropriate or successful. According to Austin, the performative 'I pronounce you man and wife' will be effective in marrying people only under the conditions that the person uttering it is qualified to solemnize marriages, that it forms part of a marriage ceremony, that the couple have agreed to marry, and so on. A performative is an utterance in which a speaker does something by the act of speaking, as opposed to a constative.

Performative verbs are used to perform the acts they name (e.g., in the sentences I promise not to lie, the verb 'promise' is performative because it performs the action of promising). They can also describe the action speakers perform with the corresponding sentences. When <Night-Goddess\_> asks <anyone cool in here?> in turn 32 <judythejedi> responds with <everyone is cool here>. Here the action is that everyone is cool.

Furthermore, the performative verbs are self-referential, in that they describe their own actions and execute them at the same time. When <tazzytaz1o1> in line 64 says <is Outta here!> that means the user is leaving and in saying so both describes the content of the promise (to leave) and makes it.

## Constative

The constative utterance is used to describe a state of affairs. It has the property of being true or false. Constatives can be concurring, insisting, affirming, disputing, claiming, identifying, conjecturing, informing, predicting, disagreeing, alleging, ranking, announcing, answering, stating, attributing, classifying, confirming, denying, disclosing, reporting or stipulating. The performance utterance, by contrast, can never be either true or false: it has its own special job; it is used to perform an action. For a performative to say it, is to do it.

They cannot be checked by looking at the actual word, (emoticon or abbreviation), eg. there need to be other words, (abbreviations or emoticons) to enhance the mark or one needs to know what particular abbreviations and emoticons represent. For example, <AquarianBlue> states <wb jiji>. If one enters

this conversation at this point they would have no idea without seeing the previous utterances what this would mean or refer to. However knowing only the previous two turns it is clear that <jijirika> has returned to the room and the abbreviation 'jiji' could be interpreted as <AquarianBlue> saying 'welcome back to jinirika'.

Two types of performatives are contractual (I will) and declaratory (I do).

## Contractual

In the example below <AquarianBlue> is expressing that he/she has already planned to meet 'white' in this chatroom. The character 'white' did not appear in the chatroom whilst I was there, however, I captured only fifteen minutes of the conversation. What makes this a contract is not only the fact that <AquarianBlue> has arranged a meeting with 'white' but there is a thread about this person. Two others, <judythejedi> and <IroquoisPrncess>, are also looking forward to meeting 'white', not only in this chatroom, but physically.

3) <AquarianBlue> yeah white told me to meet her tonight

## Contractual

## Declaratory

For a performative to be successful, several conditions are necessary.

The words, emoticons or abbreviations need to be appropriate to the circumstances. In a chatroom there can be much confusion in seeking appropriate responses. Firstly, the thread that the response is part of needs to be identified. Secondly, the response must be appropriate. For example,



84) <Nicole528> yea

### **Successful performative**

does not provide a successful response unless it is referring to turn 82,

82) <dingo42> just VERY passionate

### **Response to ?**

This would be my first choice, not only because it is only two turns prior to the 'yea' but also because <Nicole528> and <dingo42> have been carrying on an interchangeable thread. However, <Nicole528> could be answering other speakers.

And as in real life, where someone just acknowledges by saying 'OK', or 'yea' when someone announces they are present, or asks a generalized question, this response has many possible uses.

65) <tazdevil144> so hows every one to day

### **<so hows every one to day>**

One would think that <tazdevil144> who has just entered the chatroom is going to receive a response from others as one would if he or she entered any group of people. We would expect a response of 'we are fine' or 'I am a bit sad today' or some such returned speech but in this chat I 'captured' there was not any response to <tazdevil144>'s question. This not answering a question or responding to what

one has said is not unusual of chatroom dialogue.

Greetings in a chatroom are one of the most often used speech acts. Most often someone will announce their arrival into a room by making some form of greeting. In turn 64 <tazdevil144> says <so hows every one to day>, as this is his or her first utterance it is the beginning of their interaction with the others in the room. In some chatrooms when a person logs on a message will appear with that person's log on name. For example,

*** <b>jagat</b> (202.141.24) <b>India</b> / Welcome!!!
*** <b>rahul</b> (202.9.172) has left location <b>India</b>
*** <b>Preet</b> assi vi vadiya ncg
*** <b>neuage</b> (198.175.242) <b>India</b> / Welcome!!!

### Log on message

but in this particular chatroom this does not occur and a person could be 'lurking' the entire time they are present. In turn 65) <tazdevil144> says <so hows every one to day>.

Speech Act Theory, depending on who's definition is being followed refers to greetings as 'expresssives' (Searle, 1965, 1969), 'behabitive' (Austin, 1962) and 'acknowledgment' (Bach and Harnish, 1979).

Another state of a performative act is sincerity (intention) or the statement can not be a performative. As <AquarianBlue> writes <sniff sniff> there is not a performative used.

29) <AquarianBlue> ^26 sniff sniff

### What intention?

The user <AquarianBlue> is expressing the quality of being blue – being a bit down emotionally. The username coupled with the utterance, ‘sniff sniff’, taken alone shows at this time the username reinforces the utterance.

## CS 4.1.2.2 Searle

Philosopher John Searle<sup>[8]</sup> has classified speech acts into five categories: Commissives, Expressives, Declarations, Directives and Representatives.

### Commissives

Commissives involve agreeing, guaranteeing, inviting, offering, promising, swearing and volunteering

With commissives, speakers commit themselves to a future course of action, as <judythejedi> and <Seoni> do below.

26) <judythejedi> ^24 she'll stop in west palm , then i'll take her to Miami for a seminar

4) <Seoni> \*\* brb littletaker beak lol

### Commissives

### Expressives

The expressive function of language is to tell others our attitudes, feelings, and

emotions. eg apologizing, welcoming, sympathizing. Expressives are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker feels. They express psychological states and can be statements of pleasure, pain, likes, dislikes, joy, or sorrow, such as saying “I’m so happy!” or “It depressed me”.

In these two examples we have ‘sniff sniff’ as in the sounds of one crying to express how <AquarianBlue> is feeling about a situation and <Seoni> expresses anger about a personal matter. In turn 81 <Seoni> lets others know how he or she feels about the electric company. Instead of writing prose <Seoni> uses abbreviations to emphasize the hurriedness of the situation. <brb> - be right back – is used twice in this utterance, <cll> the vowel a is left out, and the electric company is shortened to <elc>.

29) <AquarianBlue> ^26 sniff sniff

81) <Seoni> \*\*is confused brb gotta cll the elc company i dont owe them they can kiss my white ass brb

## Expressives

### Declarations

Searle uses Austin’s term ‘declarative’ (CS 4.2.2.1) saying that declarations are a kind of speech act that changes one’s world. The speaker of an utterance brings about a new external situation, eg. christening, resigning, marrying, such as the statement ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’ as Austin would say with his performative verbs. Performatives are more useful in MUDs and virtual games when a verb such as ‘open’ performs an action of opening another space or room (Cicognani, 1996). In chatrooms there are several performative commands such as: **Whisper:** By using the keystrokes /w turns on the whisper command. whispering allows one to say something privately to another chatter. Other chatters will see the whispering, but they cannot hear what is being said. **Ignore:**

By using the keystrokes "/i turns on the ignore function. **Boot:** You may "boot" people out of the chat room. This parameter is configurable by the room owner and may not be allowed in all chat rooms. Some chatrooms have a "booting level" which corresponds to the number of different people which have to "boot" someone before they are knocked out of the room for a certain period of time. These functions may have different related keystrokes in different chatrooms and not all chatrooms have these functions.

In this case study there are performatives when users are coming and leaving the chatroom:

48) <Seoni> **brb littletaker beak lol
59) <Night-Goddess_>bye
64) < tazzytaz1o1> is Outta here!

### Performatives

And there are performatives when users push on quotes that are inserted into the conversation automatically.

40) <jjirika>is back
62) <jjirika>climbs back up the tree
72) <jjirika> toodles taz
75) <jjirika> *) :) at da room
80) <jjirika> as she quietly drinks her water

In the captured turns of this chatroom <jijirika> uses only the available commands.

Declarations seldom change an external non-linguistic situation in a chatroom as they are virtual spaces and unless there is a real person-to-person resultant contact following the chatroom exchange declarations are not a classification which can be used in chatrooms.

## Directives

Directives are speech acts that are advising, admonishing, asking, begging, dismissing, excusing, forbidding, instructing, ordering, permitting, requesting, requiring, suggesting, urging and warning.

The speaker wants the listener to do something. This is one of the most common usages of speech act in a chatroom. Below the chatter <dingo42> wants the listener, Nicole, to state his or her sign.

2) <dingo42> nicole wahts your sign ??

## Representatives

Representatives are speech acts which convey belief about the truth of a proposition, eg. asserting, hypothesizing (Crystal, 1992: p121). They are speech acts which state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Eg. The earth is flat.

In using a representative, the speaker makes words fit his or her world (of belief).

35) <judythejedi> ^32 everyone is cool here

73) <safetynet10> EVERYONE WANTS THE TRUTH BUT NO ONE GETS IT

### Representatives and truth statements

<safetynet10> with no one before making any comments about truth has decided to make an utterance to the chatroom concerning 'truth'. There may be truth in the proposition that 'EVERYONE WANTS THE TRUTH BUT NO ONE GETS IT' but not only is there no proof for the truth of a statement which refers to 'everyone', but no one responds to this statement in the next twelve turns (which is all I have recorded). If consensus is present, does a truth statement need approval? These words could have developed into an agreement by others in the chatroom or it could have been hotly debated. There could have been a response to this statement such as below, but there is no way of verifying it.

83) <tazdevil144> \*\* lol

### lol as answer

<tazdevil144>'s utterance could have been in response to some other utterance in the chatroom such as any of the three previous

80) <jijirika> as she quietly drinks her water

81) <Seoni> \*\*is confused brb gotta cll the elc company i dont owe them 157  
white ass brb they can kiss my

82) <dingo42> just VERY passionate

<tazdevil144> in turn 78) <tazdevil144> do be so rude

Had challenged someone to be rude and the following turns in 80, 81 and 82 do not seem to fulfil this request, however, to <tazdevil144> one of the answers does enough to give the response of (lol).

The difference between chatrooms and person-to-person conversation is the indeterminacy of chatroom exchanges. It is difficult to have more than a vague interpretation of what an action is. If we meet someone in a chatroom, then we meet him or her in real life, is our speech act made manifest? There is no other basis to identify an accomplished action within a chatroom unless there is something that happens. What could be the result of a successful speech act could become a physical event. However, it could be that two people meet again in the same chatroom. For example the following dialogue seems to have an action involved;

13) <judythejedi> ^6 i can't wait to meet her in person

17) <AquarianBlue> ^13 your meeting her judy? when?

But we need the other turn-takings in this group to know whether there is a result.

In turn 17 above <AquarianBlue> is responding to turn 13 (^13). To more fully understand this speech-event we need to look at ^6, to see who <AquarianBlue> is referring to but an answer is not provided because I entered the chatroom when this conversation was already in progress. I would assume that the person being referred to has already been named:



6) <AquarianBlue> ^5 shes a sweetheart

5) <judythejedi> she almost had me peeing my pants i was laughing so hard

As turn taking five is only the fifth utterance I 'captured' in this sequence there is no possibility of knowing how this thread developed originally. As has been said many times in this thesis, chatrooms are continuums, often with no recorded beginning or end. I have left a chatroom running on my computer for a week and there were 4,800 turns and that was not an active chatroom all the time (1.33 minutes per turn which is very slow in an active chatroom). Eg. At some hours there were 47 chatters at a time and at other times there were as few as 3. I recorded the chatroom from South Australia and the chatroom I was recording appeared to be mostly people in the United States (New York City Chat). There may have been more people online in the States during their day when it was night in Australia. What this shows is that this chatroom may have been regionally based with the main participators being in the same time-zone.

### CS 4.3.1 Threads

The features that I have highlighted in this chatroom are features of all chatrooms. The first feature is the disruption of the dialogue. There are several ways in which this occurs. Firstly, there are the threads or the breaking away from the main story to begin another one. Unlike a printed story which often has a single message a chatroom has many messages, and even many threads from the same author. The new thread can be from a person already in dialogue with others and who wants to begin discussing something else or it can be from a new chatter in the room. Continuing with the chat above, turn-taking 33 shows an example of a new thread from someone who has not had produced an utterance yet in this room,

31) <judythejedi> i don't think so..she's bringing amtrack down maybe

32) <Nicole528> whats your sign dingo?

33) <Night-Goddess\_> anyone cool in here?

Following <Night-Goddess\_>'s utterance [anyone cool in here?] a thread develops that discusses the issue about whether anyone is 'cool' in this room.

33)	A/	^32	5i.	<judythejedi> hi night
34)	D/	^32	3h.	<AquarianBlue> hm m m m m m m m
35)	D/	^32	5j.	<judythejedi> everyone is cool here
36)	D/	^32	6h.	<Nicole528> is cool lol
37)	A/	^35	11a.	<poopaloo> 10ty judy
38)	D/	^32	6i.	<Nicole528> is cold too
39)	?		12a.	* sara4u I LOVE YOU TO MUCH.....ACARD
40)	B/		13a.	<jijirika> is back
41)	D/	^32	15a.	<tazdevil144> cool

For this performative speech act to be completed there needs to be an understanding of what is being said by <Night-Goddess\_>. She could have been asking whether anyone was 'cool' but to an outsider, one from a different area of the world or different culture that did not follow the same linguistic slang used in

this chatroom, it could have meant they were in a cold climate. Reading the response does not clarify the story because everyone could be cool as they are using their computer whilst sitting in a refrigerator or they may be in Alaska in mid-winter. Or did <Night-Goddess\_> want to know if everyone was 'cool' in the slang term meaning they were good or all right or groovy? Whatever the meaning, there is a disruption to the earlier narrative about a person travelling to Florida on a Amtrak train.

### CS 4.3.2 Speech Act Disruptions (SAD)

Besides threads in a chat discourse there are other disruptions that are particular to chatrooms. On many chatsites there are the advertisements from the chatroom provider. After every so many lines of text, which differs from server to server, there will be an ad to purchase something available from the server. This disrupts the conversational flow at the time. However, from observing this in hundreds of chatrooms I have never seen anyone refer to the advertisement instead, participants continue what they were discussing or begin a new topic or thread of conversation. Disruptions are an ignored speech act. The speech act is the ad that says to buy a specific product or go a website to learn more about a service or product.

### CS4.4 Conclusion

Using speech act theory as a means to identify how one communicates and finds meaning in a chatroom because of the indeterminacy of the "response" mode in chat makes speech acts difficult to use as a conversational analysis method in chatrooms. It is difficult too to know how much of the intentional load is carried by para-linguistic elements such as emoticons or abbreviations.

The question to be answered in this chatroom at the beginning of this case study was;

“Are ‘felicity conditions’ being met in this chatroom?”

What is a successful speech act in a chatroom?

34) <AquarianBlue> ^32 hmmmmmmm

**hmmmmmmm**

It is not determinable whether <hmmmmmmm> is a truth statement or a representative of something else or an answer to the previous utterance of <Night-Goddess\_>.

Austin and Searle claim that the speech act is the basic unit of meaning and force, or the most basic linguistic entity with both a constative and a performative dimension. They both accept that there are illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts.

Searle does not distinguish between the illocutionary act and the locutionary act but rather between the illocutionary act and both an utterance act and a propositional act. As I discussed earlier locution and illocution cover language as meaningful and language as having conventional force. In this case study I interpret every mark, and how it is written (spoken) as whether it is exhibiting force. For example, when <safetynet10> says in capital letters,

73) <safetynet10> EVERYONE WANTS THE TRUTH BUT NO ONE GETS IT

we are left to ponder whether <safetynet10> is shouting at the others in the chatroom or not. However, looking at the other utterances of <safetynet10> (appendix 2 table 15) we see that all the written text is in capitals, meaning, that <safetynet10> either has the capital key locked on, or wishes to shout at everyone. Even misspelt words can provide meaning, though usually the meaning is that the writer is typing quickly and not overly concerned with spelling convention. However, what it does show is that the writer has decided that the addressee is comfortable with understanding what is being said. In other words the speaker is more intent on presenting text than grammar. Therefore the meaning is in how the word is seen by another person and not in the spelling or grammar. Unless a person is being addressed,

21) <dingo42> ok nicole its in the air

or there is a seemingly obvious response,

17) <AquarianBlue> your meeting her judy?  
when?

such as <AquarianBlue>'s response to <judythejedi>

13) <judythejedi>i can't wait to meet her in  
person

meaning is often unknowable. Who <safetynet10> in turn 15 is 'yelling' at is not clear. When <TheGods> utters the speech act directive <who?> it is unclear which of the former utterances is being questioned:

1)	<gina2b> everyones a know it all!
5)	<judythejedi> she almost had me peeing my pants i was laughing so hard
6)	<AquarianBlue> shes a sweetheart
13)	<judythejedi>i can't wait to meet her in person

Or in the selection below this same principle of not knowing who or what is being referred to is present:

35)	<judythejedi>everyone is cool here
39)	<sara4u> I LOVE YOU TO MUCH.....ACARD
43)	<safetynet10>OK NOW CORN ON THE COB YUMY
44)	<Night-Goddess_>oh really?

Describing what is going on in a text-based chatroom using speech act theory has limited use.

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[1] There are password-protected chatrooms for specific users such as for government or business people who are discussing specific topics. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain ethics clearance from the University of South Australia to capture any private chatrooms. This requires clearance from each person in a 'sensitive' chatroom, a process which is too disruptive to the chatflow to be easily obtainable.

[2] This aspect would have been discussed quite differently before September 11<sup>th</sup>. It was extensively written about and discussed for years previously and it was commonly believed amongst astrologers that a world defining moment would happen during that aspect. Some astrologers even spoke of a world war beginning, and the aspect was exact in September when the World Trade Centres in New York were destroyed.

[3] For example, this posting appeared in a more advanced astrological chatroom, '...my CAC had two Cinderella Transits and the MAGIcal Linkage when we met'

: CAC being for "Combined Aligned Chart": "Cinderella aspects" involving Pluto, Chiron, Jupiter and Venus in harmonious aspects to one another. The MAGIcal Linkage is a Venus-Chiron combination. (see: <http://www.magisociety.com> )

[4] This is a kind of question one would expect in an astrochat room, but it also could be asked in any chatroom. We know what the person is asking. What is nicole's Sun sign – the constellation that the Sun was in, when Nicole was born? To an astrologer this would be a very basic question.

However, in this chatroom there are some indications that there is more than just the simplest information being provided. <Nicole528> bypasses the basic social "tell me your sign" – "Tell me yours" exchange by qualifying more of who he or she is and by adding the moon and rising sign to the equation. Now others in the chatroom know that <Nicole528> was born during the time of the passage of the Sun through Gemini<sup>[4]</sup> (May 22 – June 21) and whilst the moon was in Taurus and during the time of day when Scorpio was ascending. Just from this small amount of knowledge, an informed astrology chatter could identify enough about <Nicole528> to wonder if he or she is currently going through relationship upheavals, as Saturn would have gone over this person's moon and is now influencing their sun-sign with both the moon and sun in the area of the chart which rules partnership and sex. As well as transiting Pluto would be in the second house meaning there may be financial changes. When I discuss this chatroom further down I will examine all the talk by <Nicole528> to see if there is any indication that there are indeed relationship or economic problem being discussed, or is this person giving so few clues in chatting on the Internet that I will not be able to identify any crisis? In a real life setting we could see <Nicole528> in the room and perhaps we could explain by their presence whether there were any immediate changes in their life.

[5] Voice in a voice forum such as in the traveller chatrooms is filtered so that it may sound high, deep, female, male, or even with sounds such as bells or tones and

therefore, is not a cue to the speaker as it would be in person-to-person conversation.

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[6] Synchronous communication program users identify others, often strangers, with similar interests and engage in conversations with them. Users of public synchronous chat programs are customarily identified by a descriptive nickname that is sometimes chosen to "promote a certain image or invite a particular response" (Newby, 1993, p. 35). A nickname can serve as a mask not only to hide identity, but to call attention to the person through the expressive power and imaginativeness of the mask (Ruedenberg et al., 1995). Nicknames and other personal information can be changed at will, so that anonymity can be maintained within IRC programs until users choose to reveal their true identities to each other (Reid, 1991), which may never actually happen (Phillips, 1995).

[7] Aristotle, 1950. "Categories" (translator: E.M. Edghill), in W.D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, Vol.1, Oxford University Press.

[8] Professor of the Philosophy of Mind and Language, University of California at Berkeley, 2002.