815 Thesis

Terrell Neuage Conversational analysis of chatroom talk - thesis

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Methodology

3.1 Introduction

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

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

> "Virtual reality poses a new methodological challenge for the researcher: what to make of on-line interviews and indeed, whether and how to use them." (Turkle, 1995, p.34), quoted by Hamman (1966).

Qualitative research

Not only does the researcher-research subject relation change online, but problems of validity and verification of results occur, since it is impossible to guarantee identity or access. It is also impossible to replicate the data as finding the same people in the same chatroom discussing the same topic would be extremely rare. Criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln (2000) focus on truth, value-credibility, auditability, fittingness and neutrality-conformability. Guba and Lincoln studied the issue raised in relation to qualitative research and how the researcher evaluates such studies. Methodological rigor of online qualitative research is difficult to carry on due to its diversity and lack of consensus about

rules to which it should conform and whether it is comparable to quantitative research. The view that there is nothing special about qualitative research and that it should be evaluated by the same criteria as quantitative studies with validity, reliability and generalisability (Jasper 1994; Cavanagh, 1997; Appleton, 1995) changes with cyber-ethnology due to advances in technology. For example for this study I have 'captured' conversation from chatrooms by cutting and pasting the chat turn-takings but in a java script chatroom the only way to save the chat is either by writing down the chat – which is difficult if the chat is scrolling by at a rapid rate – or by taking a screen-shot of the chatroom which would only show several lines of chat at a particular time. Qualitative research, using multiple methodologies, is about other people studied in their own social setting and understood in terms of the meanings those people themselves bring to their situation (Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 2). Chatrooms as communities are 'momentarily' social settings created not to last further than the immediate 'talk'. There are underlying paradigms to doing qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose four basic inquiry paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln 1989, 1994). Following their lead much qualitative research today is construed as interpretive science within a constructivist paradigm.

Research techniques

With the growing attention paid to CMC and to the Internet and other technologies of instant communication such as mobile phones (cell phones) and hand-held devices, establishing ways to analyze text-based 'talk' involves several disciplines as discussed in the previous literature review chapter. In this study I am using a different analysis approach in each case study to find what works with describing online talk. Conversation analysis predicts that conversations proceed in adjacency pairs where a remark from person A gets a response from person B. This means that the number of interactions should be roughly similar but in a chatroom this does not occur and I have used other theories to examine this turn-taking format.

Using one approach for communication as complicated as chatroom 'talk' is not sufficient. I use Discourse analysis in Case Study 5 to examine the message structure. How chatroom discourse is organized, how it is used (in what context) and how is it understood – how are we able to string words together to make a rational sentence is examined.

Discourse Analysis is the analysis of language beyond the utterance. This is only the partial picture of telling what is being said in a chatroom. Due to chatrooms having a strong emphasis on signs such as abbreviations and emoticons one of my case studies (Case Study 3) uses semiotics to understand online communication. In the same case study I use semantics and pragmatics to study the meaning of the language of chatters. Pragmatics is more concerned with what people mean in real life situations than semantics, which is concerned with what language (abbreviations, emoticons, usernames, icons) means in isolation from context. Semantics and pragmatics are concerned with two types of questions, respectively: Semantics: What does X mean? and Pragmatics: What did you mean by X? (Leech, 1983:6). Beyond the application of conversational analysis I investigate Speech Act Theory (Case Study 4) as it is the most practical use of language to achieve a goal. A speech act is a basic unit of language intended to express a meaning. It is not just used to designate something; it actually does something. Finding commonality in conversational theories along with differences is a way of establishing an online discourse analysis method (ODAM).

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

Ethnographic approach

My own proposal of analysis creates specific theoretical and methodological "focus points" within this multidisciplinary study, and establishes a new direction for such study.

I have taken an ethnographic approach to researching text-based chatrooms as it provides a method for learning about, and learning how to talk about, chatroom cultures, by placing the researcher in the research. I am part of the research I am investigating, as I need to enter a chatroom in order to 'capture' the dialogue[1]. Most research conducted online uses ethnography as a methodology (see Hamman, 1996, 1998, 1999). Ethnography at its simplest is just writing about cultures. Online cultures are discussed throughout this thesis (CS 2.2.1 see Hamman, Rheingold, Stubbs, Cyberrdewd, Turkle). Ethnography is one of the approaches within anthropology that emerged in the late nineteenth century (for histories, see Stocking 1983). A linguistic observer in a

cyberethnography field studies the chatroom as a cultural field and makes records, and interprets some aspects of the taken for granted culture of the people in the chatroom.

To capture the chatroom data, I had to be present myself. So I became a participant, albeit a silent one. A direct response was made to my presence in only one chatroom. There may have been indirect responses but they were not clear enough for me to have responded to. After informing the participants that I was doing a PhD and conducting research, someone asked me what I was doing and why. The other participants stopped talking, so I logged out. Unfortunately I was unable to capture this segment as it was all done in Java script. In two other chatrooms (see table 3.6) the lines following my words could have been responses to me, but they also could simply have been responses to what had been said earlier. In all the other chatrooms I was simply ignored, or at least not spoken to.

In Case Study Five, (a 5, table 4) these two responses follow my utterance,

<Neuage> ‘‘I am saving this dialogue, as long as I am in this room, to use in research on Internet Chat for a postgraduate degree. If anyone is opposed to me saving their conversation say so and I will not save the chat’.
1. 1a. <SluGGiE-> lol
2. 2a. <Mickey_P_IsMine> LoL

Table 0•1 Table showing responses of participants to my initial declaration

Whether, <SluGGiE-> and <Mickey_P_IsMine> were responding to me or something said before I entered the chatroom is unclear. The abbreviation ‘lol’ has several interpretations [2] in English speaking chatrooms, for example,

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

Table 0•2 Table showing different meanings of the acronym ‘LOL’

There are various ‘types’ of text-based chatrooms. For example, chatrooms can be divided into either moderated or non-moderated. Moderated chatrooms can be subdivided into chatrooms where people submit questions and answers are provided. This is most common in cases where people who are

publicly known are in the chatroom, i.e. sport stars, politicians, and experts on a particular topic. Moderated chatrooms are ‘controlled’ by a particular person who controls the movement, the turn-taking, of chat. For example, if there is inappropriate language, which is considered offensive to others in the chatroom, the participant infringing can be prevented from continuing in the chatroom. Or if the ‘speaker’ wishes to dialogue on a topic that is not the assigned topic at that time, the moderator can block the ‘speaker’s’ messages from appearing in the chatroom. Nine of the chatrooms that I investigated were the open non-moderated chatrooms, as these provided the opportunity to analyze flowing chat interaction. The remaining three chatrooms were moderated. I have not found any studies which discuss behaviours in moderated and unmoderated chatrooms.

I dealt with the role as the participant observer by lurking and not attempting to direct the flow of the conversation. Any chatroom observed has a bias to its selection. I chose a chatroom about Hurricane Floyd as I was an American living in Australia as well as wishing to have a chatroom that was on an emergency. I could have picked a chatroom on a disaster or crisis in another part of the world. I chose a baseball chatroom because my son is a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Whilst in chatrooms using technology hardware and software the user is invisible or an ‘actant’. Akrich argues that an actant is "whatever acts or shifts actions, action itself being defined by a list of performances through trials; from these performances are deduced a set of competences with which the actant is endowed". (1992). This view of communication between the user and the machine requires a constant movement between the technical and the social.

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

Major theoretical studies have examined conversation as interaction between participants with conversation understood as spoken communication. (See, Stone, 1995; Goodwin, 1981) One primary characteristic of conversation is that it is fully interactive; at least two people must participate in it, and they exchange messages in ‘real-time’. Participants take turns in exchanging these messages, so conversation is fundamentally a sequential activity (Nofsinger 1991: p.3). However, on-line sequential activity is rare. Conversation is often similar to bumper cars in a side show amusement park. Dialogue seemingly bumps and weaves, often without any discernable reason for its existence. The participants seem to be "thinking out loud". In a chatroom, turn taking has to be isolated in order to assemble conversation into meaning. My ‘gridding’ of utterances in the case studies promotes analysis to reveal problems and mis-directions in the flow of ‘talk’. I have put the turn-takings in rows and columns, looking for clusters of threads. Using chatrooms as case studies I will elaborate on the theories and methods of empirical research that already exist in both conversational analysis theories on Internet-

based communities (See, Bays, 2000; Bechar-Israeli, Haya, 1998; Rheingold, 1991, 2000, 1994, 1999) such as diverse types of chatrooms. Finding how internal meaning is transmitting is a primary concern of chatroom conversation. I discuss how words or objects (using emoticons) are linked to create a semantic chain to produce an identifiable and answerable sequence in Case Study 3.

‘The ethnographic approach emphasises the understanding of behaviour in context through the participation of the investigator in the situation being studied as an active member of the team of users involved in the situation.’ (Whiteside, J. 1988, p. 805). Ethnography is defined as "the acts of both observing directly the behaviour of a social group and producing a written description thereof." (Marshall, 1994, 158). In this study I will observe, analyse and present the discourse of chatroom and discussion group cultures. In ethnography the "description of cultures becomes the primary goal... the search for universal laws is downplayed in favour of detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture and the beliefs and social rules that are used as resources within it." (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, 10).

Culture’s influence on conversational styles in systematic ways or the ‘ethnography of communication’ is the central tenet of Conversational Analysis which examines how culturally generated rules determine the underlying structure of conversation (see, Wittgenstein 1984, p. 74e). The Net communities have not for the most part yet problematised either the sociological or the linguistic issues associated with online communication: that is, asked “what the rules of language let us say” or “how language is organised to let us say these things”. Using linguistic theories in this study will explore this issue of how the emoticons and abbreviations are organised to text-talk online. Ethnography employs multiple methodologies to arrive at a theoretically comprehensive understanding of a group or culture and the methods I use to understand turn-taking in chatrooms involves several discourse theories used in conversational analysis.

Using ethnographic methods online is quite different than what is encountered off-line and is beset with several problems such as not being able to replicate the turn-taking user environment and the frequent misinterpretations caused by the absence of physical cues and gestures in text based virtual environments. Knowing who is ‘speaking’ online creates problems for researchers concerned with identifying users.

On some chatroom servers such as American Online (AOL) and Microsoft Messenger (MSN) there are methods of obtaining data on the number of people using a specific chatroom and of determining the total number of chat rooms at a given point in time. With Instant Messenger (IM) servers, as discussed in chapter one (Introduction), there is also a way to access a "profile", a personal biography stating characteristics such as age and gender as well as listing hobbies and other interests, for chat room participants who wish to make their personal details public.

The researcher’s data on the parameters of the population of online chat room users is limited to the

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

An understanding of internet cultures is extended by the work of this thesis by finding how meaning is produced and interpreted by strangers who know nothing more of one another than the characters they see passing on the computer screen. As I have shown in my literature review in chapter two, there has been other work done on Internet culture that addresses it as community (Rheingold, 1985, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1999 and 2000; Stubbs, 1998; Cyberrdewd, 1999; Turkle 1982, 1984, 1995, 1996) as a place of power (Poster [3] , 1990,; Rola [4] , 2000; Schneider [5] , 1997) or a place to explore one's self (Hamman [6] , 1998; Albright [7] , 2000). While each of these contributes to an understanding of on-line 'talk-texting' as the relational base of Internet chat, none acknowledges the foundational act of Internet communication: in this case, its contact mechanism of rapid text exchange.

Essentially, I am interested in the meaning-making capacities of the marks on the screen as they appear, and in turn how meaning is derived from the often rapidly passing text on a screen, whether a computer or a device as small as the screen on a mobile telephone. I am concerned in this study with text-based chatrooms; however a possible heir to chat communicational conversation, SMS is a growing field close to IRC in its techniques of using abbreviations and emoticons to communicate. One can send, reply or forward e-mail from mobile phones and users gain access using any browser and computer connected to the Internet in the world. One particular 'snapshot' (shown below) of who was connected via the Internet to their mobile phone showed twenty users, between the ages of 13 and 34 in ten different countries and these figures are also similar to surveys of who is in chatrooms [8] . The advantage to doing research on a site that profiles users currently online is that the users location, age, sex and interests are revealed (providing the user provides their details accurately) whereas in chatrooms they seldom are.

Location	Age
London, United Kingdom	22
Karlsruhe, Germany	34
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	24

Derby, United Kingdom	14
Sandwell, United Kingdom	19
Wollongong, Australia	13
Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom	16
Sydney, Australia	26
Dubai, United Arab Emirates	24
Stuttgart, Germany	24
Kolkata (Calcutta), India	24
Kelang, Malaysia	27
Birmingham, United Kingdom	23
Leeuwarden, Netherlands	14
Liverpool, United Kingdom	25
Ankara, Turkey	16
Cairo, Egypt	19
Benoni, South Africa	34
Kota Baharu, Malaysia	20
Chichester, United Kingdom	34

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

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

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

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

It will be in the analysing of text on-line that I describe a new process of meaning making in conversation.

My study focus is on the utterances in text-based chatrooms where chatters engage in screen-texted dialogue as if it were conversation. There are other text-based chat areas, used in education and in entertainment, where character development and role-playing are more important than just turn-taking 'talk' sequences. These studies that exist focus mainly on MUDs (see; Reid, 1996; Warshauer, 1995; Bromberg, 1996; Churchill, and Bly, 1999; Lisette, 1995 and Utz, 2000) These studies show that MUDs used for entertainment or education give the user the ability to construct a complex linguistic self that is in constant communication with others. These constructs are more involved than the communication in

chatrooms as they also construct environments to communicate in. (see Introduction to this thesis). A lot of research has been done on the use of chatrooms for 'cybersex'. (See, Gilbert, 2000; Hamman, 1996, 1998). It is from these studies of MUDs and cybersexual domains that this study builds the sorts of interrelational work and collaborative structures, which can be carried into the fine-focus work of analyzing text-based chat.

The purpose of my selection of a 'language-in-use' methodology is to discover the structuring principles behind chatroom language. Internet communication is a form of rapid conversation. It is rarely 'frozen' for analysis, as it is when the chat is saved to examine. In other words, while my selection of chat-text makes it available for subsequent examination, it also tends to 'reify' it into scripted text – a direction contrary to the principles established in my earlier account of linguistic and 'reader reception' theories, in which I endorse a strongly active role for the act of interpretation in reception of internet chat 'utterances' – even suggesting that the less 'formal' the setting and technique, the more active and creative the meaning-making inside the exchange. By developing an analytical framework to study chatroom conversation on its own terms, as a set of distinctively different 'speech act' genres, I will show how the communicative act is represented when the source of the communication is unknowable. I will for instance identify differences between casual conversation used for entertainment and that found in information-seeking dialogues. For example in the first case study, 'Storm', because there is an emergency as the basis of the chatroom conversation, utterances occur mainly as information-seeking dialogue, whereas in several of the other case studies information seeking gambits are not present (Case Study 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7).

As online conversation is a casual form of communication, denoted by the term 'chat', analysis differs from studies in other generic structures (Eggins and Slade, 1997, p. 268) such as narrative (see Labov and Waletzky, 1967), gossip (Slade, 1995) and opinion (Horvarth and Eggins, 1986).

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

Most conversation analysis of face-to-face dialogue is in the tradition of ethnomethodology, which is the careful and detailed study of how people organize their thoughts. (See, Schegloff, 1979, 1987; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984b; Jefferson, 1987) The primary concern of conversation analysis is sequential organization, or the ways in which speakers organize their talk, turn-by-turn. With an on-line chat there is no apparent organization. Conversations overlap one another in chatrooms, and are easily misinterpreted, a feature which will be explored in depth throughout this thesis by focusing on theories of conversational analysis. For example is the speech-act (See chapter 4) dependent on the reading of the text (see chapter 1)?

In order to find a usable conceptual form to analyse chatting and conversation in this study I first looked at several descriptions. The word "conversation" comes from the Latin word "convertere" -- to turn around. It may also be interpreted as "to take turns". Jellinek and Carr (1996) identify three broad purposes of conversation:

- Transacting: conducted for the purpose of negotiation or exchange within an existing problem setting;
- Transforming: conducted when individuals suspend their own personal opinions or assumptions and their judgment of others' viewpoints; and
- Transcendent: where the purpose is to move beyond or "leap out" of existing mindsets.

Within chatrooms we find all three purposes used, often at once. Transacting or negotiation is more apparent in purpose-driven chatrooms such as in the examples I use of ‘Storm’, ‘astrology’, ‘baseball’ and ‘web-3D’. As there is more turn taking for a purpose in these, for example, to discover or exchange information, participants will often wait for a response. In Case Study 1, Storm, a person inquires where the location of the hurricane is.

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

Table 0 • 3 A person inquiring about the location of the hurricane

To find out something is a process of negotiation. If no one responds then there is no negotiated response. In this turn taking example above, the answer, to <guest-Tom> could be,

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

Table 0 • 4 A possible response

But maybe the answer is,

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

Table 0 • 5 Another possible answer

Is the answer to <guest-Tom> number 83 or 103? It would be assumed that the answer is turn taking number 83 and not 103 just because there are nine turns in between the turn 74 and turn 83 whereas there are 29 turns between turn 74 and turn 103. However, without reading all the turn takings in

between we cannot know for sure as neither <davesbraves> nor <Werblessed> addresses <guest-Tom> by name.

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

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

Key Assumptions

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

That people create a different 'textual self' for the chatroom environment they are in.

A chatroom can be like going to a costume party where no one knows who the masked participants are. The 'theme' if there is one of the chatroom can influence the username of the participants. For example, in Case Study 1 <IMFLOYD> is in the Hurricane Floyd chatroom. And because of the username and the chatroom the utterance, <when i pass into the colder north atlantic.....i will lose energy and die> has meaning. In Case Study 3 the user < baby_britney1 > is in the Britney Spears chatroom, <AquarianBlue> is in an Astrology chatroom (Case Study 4) and in the baseball chatroom (Case Study 7) <MLB-LADY> is representative of Major League Baseball.

That conversation within Chatrooms will change how we come to know others.

Taking away any of the physical cues and having only written-text in a turn-taking milieu creates a different means with which to know someone. Studies of people who have met offline after developing

an online relationship is one indication of the change in how we come to know someone differently than without online interaction. Because communication is textual it is also self-evidently performances which liberates the self from any concept of authenticity. (See Turkle, 1995, 1996; Rheingold, 1991, 1993, 1999; Hamman, 1998, 1999). The most obvious difference between in-person meetings and virtual meetings is the separation of distances but at the same time people are in the same place at the same time, though not physical.

That observational study of chatroom conversation can capture some of the adaptations of conversational behaviours

For example, in Case Study 7 in turn number 98 <NMMprod> asks < if you like the yanks press 3> and a series of responses have only numbers as the answerable utterances.

That this work gives us a better understanding of how, and why, Chatrooms are an important area in which to create new conversational research theory.

Without a method soundly grounded in language-in-use analysis, there can be no bridging through examination of the language used, into social contexts or consequences of these speech acts: in other words, no understanding of chat as related to and productive of discourses.

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

In other words, it is open to both ordinary users and linguistic analysis, since it is grounded in existing ‘live talk’ experiences – yet increasingly is developing its own range of divergent and specialized codes and behaviours.

A useable definition of chatting for this study describes chat as; “On the Internet, chatting is talking to other people who are using the Internet at the same time you are. Usually, this "talking" is the exchange of typed-in messages requiring one site as the repository for the messages (or "chat site") and a group of users who take part from anywhere on the Internet. In some cases, a private chat can be arranged between two parties who meet initially in a group chat. Chats can be ongoing or scheduled for a particular time and duration. Most chats are focused on a particular topic of interest and some involve guest experts or famous people who "talk" to anyone joining the chat. (Transcripts of a chat can be archived for later reference.)” http://www.whatis.com. This definition describes chat in its simplistic form but what is lacking it its ‘unproblematised’ view of the shift from talk to text.

3.3 Research Questions

In addition to these key assumptions, grounding a research methodology in ‘language-in-use’ studies allows me to develop the following five questions as a starting point toward analyzing a culture of electronic-talk:

1. Is turn taking negotiated within chatrooms? If yes, do the rules differ from live speech, and if yes,

how?

2. With the taking away of many physical identifying cues of participants (gender, nationality, age etc.) are issues of sex, race, gender, class, age, and political correctness as prevalent as in face-to-face talk? If yes, how are these matters signaled, read, and negotiated? If no, what are the consequences of abandonment of social sanctions existing elsewhere?

3. How is electronic chat reflective of current social discourse?

4. Is meaning contractible within Chatrooms? If yes, how does this occur?

5. Could chatroom discourse become a universally understood language? If so, what might it add to existing language behaviours?

I propose to answer these five general questions in chapter 5, the discussion section of this thesis (5.2.1 - 5.2.5), after careful analysis of the data of each of the Case Study chatrooms. In each case study I pose further questions specific to that case study.

3.3.1 Case Study Questions

Case Study 1

In the chatroom relation, is the ‘reader’ actually the ‘writer’ who is ‘writing the reader’?

In other words, how far is each participant in chatroom exchange working actively to interpret both an ‘interlocutor’ and a ‘self’ in the talk-texting? Is chat talk by necessity more heavily ‘encoded’ than live talk, to enable and steer reception – and is reception itself more conscious of the act of ‘decoding’?

Does the reader or the writer produce meaning within ‘this’ chatroom, or do they create meaning together?

How ‘dialogic’, in Bakhtin’s terms, is Internet chat?

How important is the particular chatroom context for the reader-writer interpretive relation?

Case Study 2

1. Do computers change conversation?
2. Are Instant Messenger chatrooms closer to offline-person-to-person conversation than dialogue in a multivoiced chatroom?

Case Study 3

Can a celebrity’s name as title of a chatroom create a difference in dialogue in chatrooms?

How does the coding of ‘shared cultural contexts’ alter the chat relation, as demonstrated in the nature

of the exchanges?

Are emoticons used more frequently in a youth orientated chatroom than in an ‘adult’ chatroom?

Do they signal heightened expressiveness as part of identity work?

Case Study 4

Can we use Speech Act Theory to describe what the language in a chatroom is doing? Are ‘felicity conditions' being met in this chatroom?

Using concepts drawn from speech act theory, is it possible to see both ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ work within utterances, deliberatively addressing the needs of reception?

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?”

In other words, does the epistemic paradigm behind expert chat also change the chat relations observable?

Case Study 5

Is there discourse intent in non-purpose-centred chatroom?

If so, how is it read by participants, and where and how can it be seen to be acting upon on-line talk relations?

Case Study 6

1. Are non-moderated chatrooms closer to casual conversation than moderated chatrooms, where there may be a perception of censorship, and attempts to steer the talk?”

   How do moderators intervene in or act to control chat? How does chat in such spaces vary from that of unmoderated spaces?

2. Do fewer participants in a chatroom make for a better and easier to follow discourse

Case Study 7

1. What is the function of grammar in chatroom language?

Are there emergent patterns of variation or innovative usage? When and where do these most commonly emerge, and what appears to be their purpose?

Is there a difference between grammatical usages in “live” conversational English and those of chatroom dialogue?

3.3 Theoretical Framework

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

Reading-response Theory (Case Study 1),

Computer Mediated Communication (Case Study 2),

Semiotic Analysis (Case Study 3),

Speech Act Analysis (Case Study 4),

Discourse Analysis (Case Study 5),

Conversational Analysis (Case Study 6), and several linguistic theories relating to discourse theories and

Linguistic schools of thought, which explore grammar in conversation and the construction of meaning, such as the Prague School of Linguistics (Case Study 7).

Together these methods provide sufficient range to enable me to develop a method for chatroom analysis, which encompasses more of the combined attributes than is possible within any one of the existing frames.

The method I will develop in this thesis I term an ‘Online Discourse Analysis Method’ (ODAM) which combines traditional conversational analysis theories with several features and behaviours (lurking, fleeting text, online grammar, symbols) that are particular to chatroom talk. With this method I will show how online turn-taking is related to the establishment of an online discourse, as well as linking to various broader social and cultural discourses. The ODAM construct and its uses in examining online talk-texting behaviours will be shown in the conclusion of this study.

3.3.1 Assumptions about conversation which remain necessary to the proposed ODAM construct

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

ASSUMPTION 1: COMMUNICATION IS A SYMBOLIC ACTIVITY

Gudykunst and Kim (1997) identify symbolic activity as occurring when "all have agreed on their common usage". (p. 6). Due to the rapid communication aspects of chatroom dialogue graphic symbols are frequently used as well as abbreviations. Because a symbol such as :) to represent a

smile has no cultural basis in a given language, everyone easily adopts it. However, an abbreviation such as btw (by the way) may not be as easy for someone not used to English. Therefore, chatroom conversation in foreign languages [9] follows a pictographic symbolic convention, depicted by emoticons (see Chapter 6 in this study on emoticon similarities from other languages), while the abbreviation of words and phrases will be language specific. However, the evolution of these two systems; the degree of conventionality across and within chat 'communities', and the ways in which conventions evolve and are applied, will all be examined, adding to the semantic load of messages.

Robin Hamman's work (1996, 97, 98, 99) on chatroom participation attempts to show how speech is constructed, and his work will be added to the analyses enabled by the range of language-in-use analytical techniques introduced in each case study. [10]

ASSUMPTION 2: COMMUNICATION IS A PROCESS INVOLVING THE TRANSMITTING AND INTERPRETING OF MESSAGES

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

In chatroom conversation the way we transmit and interpret messages is different from the Gudykunst and Kim model. They claim that only messages can be transmitted, not meaning – which is carried in the interpretive act of 'reception' as much as in the utterance. Their interpretation of communication between participants is thus based on the perception that messages are transmitted and interpreted based on our background: our culture, ethnicity, and family upbringing as well as on our unique individual experiences. Therefore, since no two people have the same background or individual experiences no two people are able to transmit or interpret messages in the same way. How this model is reflected in my chatroom analysis will be important to this study because there is no sure way with current technology to know any more about someone than what they reveal, and what is "revealed" could easily be a mis-representation.

Nor do the communicative conditions of online chat tend towards certainty in message exchange. Transmitting and interpreting several messages at once can cause confusion. If people leave the chatroom as we are quickly typing out what we want to say, we have 'hanging' conversations. To add to the confusion, a person may log on three times into the same chatroom using different log-on names. At some points the chatroom can disintegrate into nonsensensical communication. A result of this study into chatroom conversation will be to establish the limits of conversational analysis within the

chatroom environment. One limiting conclusion to three years of online chat analysis is that, due to the instabilities within the chatroom milieu, the analysis of conversation is not always conclusive - a limit on the ODAM research paradigm, which will be revisited in the concluding chapters of the thesis.

ASSUMPTION 3: COMMUNICATION INVOLVES THE CREATION OF MEANING

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

Gudykunst and Kim point out that if we do not know others, we use our stereotypes of their group memberships to interpret their meaning, such as their culture, ethnic group, social class and age. In chatrooms we seldom have such clues readily available, although we may still be able to decode such matters from within the utterances posted – a proposition tested within the case studies. We can also stereotype chatters by the room they are in, for example, in Case Study 7 'baseball chat' we would assume participants are baseball fans or players and not ballet enthusiasts. Despite the comparative brevity of chat postings, there is rich evidence for complex semantic layering. Conversations in chatrooms with others are usually carried on with short sentences. There are several reasons for this. Firstly if several people are 'speaking' at once, then it is necessary to respond quickly. Unless paragraphs of text are available to cut and paste, one is limited by both the speed at which one types, and the number of people in the chatroom. Secondly, if we do not know anyone in the chatroom short sentences may be 'spoken' in order to decrease misinterpretation as much as possible. The nature of the conversation will always determine how brief the conversation can be. Before we say 'the Indians suck' we have to be comfortable with whom we thought was in the chatroom, otherwise we would find ourselves being misinterpreted. Was the chatter referring to the Cleveland Indians baseball team, Native Americans, people from India, a sorority or any number of things? If we further qualify our conversation then there are fewer chances for misinterpretation. 'The Indians will never make it to the World Series', 'The Indians show no interest in baseball'', 'I reckon Pakistan will nuke the Indians'. Any variation of the word 'Indian' can clarify a conversation: Indian club (but a club as in a group of people or a club which is shaped like a large bottle used singly or in pairs for exercising the arms?) An 'Indian pitcher' could mean a pitcher for the Cleveland Indians baseball team, or a native American waterpot,

or to a person from Newfoundland it could represent their home (it is the floral emblem of Newfoundland); or to a botanist it could be the plant Sarracenia purpurea found east of the Rocky Mountains.

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

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

This is clearly shown in text-based chatrooms where we have no indication of who the other chatters are and what they are feeling or thinking except by what they decide to reveal which can be quite different from what they are feeling or thinking in real-life.

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

Most messages are ambiguous in chatrooms, and because they are offered in a multilog situation, they may be differently received by different participants.

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

This is discussed extensively in Case Study 3 using the analytical techniques of semiotics and pragmatics to decipher how meaning is read from signs such as emoticons.

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

Since we are unable to access or assess the context in which postings arise or into which they arrive, the texts-talk itself carries a heavier than usual load.

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

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

ASSUMPTION 4. COMMUNICATION TAKES PLACE AT VARYING LEVELS OF AWARENESS

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

Chatroom conversation is not necessarily a routine part of everyday life, because a person is rarely in a chatroom because they have to be. Chatroom conversation is intentional conversation. Unlike

conversation in which we engage because we need to: ie. the person is there in front of us (a partner, supervisor, friend, neighbour, family, shop assistant...) or because we have received a letter or e-mail and need to answer; chatrooms are where we go when we really don't need to have communication with anyone in particular.

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

ASSUMPTION 5: COMMUNICATORS MAKE PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE OUTCOMES OF THEIR COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOUR

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

Almost all communication in chatroom is based on each participant's pre-conceived concept of what type of people are in the chatroom. The nature of the chatroom will dictate the sort of conversation one is engaged in for the most part. Whether the chatroom is an Orthodox Christian, sexual, political, sport, or educational site, will make the conversation much more predictable. For example, a physicist wishing to chat on string-theories or worm-holes in space may not find the people to speak with in an Eastern-Orthodox chatroom. The communicative strategy is to be in the chatroom that appears to be of the same mindset – or in general chatrooms, to 'read' the likely responses to one's own postings, from those of earlier contributors.

ASSUMPTION 6: INTENTION IS NOT A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR COMMUNICATION

Gudykunst and Kim argue that intentions are instructions we give ourselves about how to communicate (Triandis, 1977, p. 11). Intent exists in all speech situations; what is different in a virtual space is that it is unknowable what the intent is. For example is the user there to gather information, exchange information, play performance games – such as taking on a role other than their real-life persona and acting a part or any other communicational reason? Finding intent in a chat is to determine, by following a user's turn-takings, what the participant is doing.

To establish a method to research what is being accomplished in a chatroom I have identified categories of utterances such as greetings, responses to other chatters or initiating statements.

3.5 Protocol of a transcription methodology

'Chatrooms with many interactants are 'multilogue' (Eggins and Slade, p. 24) environments. Separating these voices as conversation is a focus of this study, and something of a methodological challenge, involving the creation of new transcription protocols. As I have "captured" small numbers of turn-taking in these chatrooms I have not made use of Qualitative Data Analysis Software packages [11]

In developing a transcription system to accommodate and "capture" IRC multilogue, I will use symbols to indicate categories of utterances between participants. I have based these categorisations on simple human interactions of greetings or salutations and either questions or answers. (Table 3.1) With turn-taking in a chat there is the addresser and the addressee who must submit to one primary turn and sequence management protocol – that of only one person 'speaking' at a time as utterances are displayed on the computer screen in order of their insertion.

Code-switching introduces socio-cultural information in context, which is retrievable through conversational inference (Gumperz, 1982). In its simplest form there are four general categories involved in communication 'Addressee, Opening of Activity, Closing of Activity, Overlap' (Gumperz, 1982). These categories do not include the activity between the opening and closing activity therefore I have added to this with statements, answers, and questions as they reveal much of the activity that occurs in a chatroom. The addressee of an utterance can be coded using the following categories, addressing an unidentified participant (it is not clear who the speaker is addressing), addressing all participants in the chatroom which can also be addressing nobody. The table below shows the different types of conversation that I have identified, which occur in a chatroom. As well as the transcription method in table 3.1 I will indicate when there is a change of topic [12] and an introduction of a new topic. Each case study uses the same coding as below.

A/ = greetings or salutations
B/ = statement- open; addressed to no one in particular, just who ever who is in the chatroom
C/ = statement - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker
D/ = answer - to someone named or previous (earlier) speaker
E/ = answer - open - to whoever is in the chatroom

F/ = question - open - to anyone – whoever is in the chatroom
G/ = question - to someone specific or previous (earlier) speaker
?/ = undetermined or not classifiable by one of the criteria above
** = users' abbreviations such as lol
*) = users' emoticons in places of words or identify
#/ = new thread or direction of talk

This table shows the different types of conversation that I have identified, which occur in a chatroom. In the discussion chapter I compare the number of times chatters use these types in each case study.

- A/ = greetings or salutations

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

Opening a conversation in a chatroom with a greeting is standard, with <hi> showing a high degree of frequency. In face-to-face meetings greeters usually have the first topic--"How are you?" and so in the beginning, whoever greets controls the conversation. This control from greetings is problematic in a chatroom due to the chatter being able to give a greeting at any point in time – even after having been in the chatroom (with or without the knowledge of others) for a long period of time. As the two turns below (see Case Study 1) demonstrate, a user can simply say <hello all> or he or she can add more information as <guest-Jojo> does in turn 96. Turns 96 to 186 frames all of <guest-Jojo>'s conversation (five-utterances) in the chatroom with a greeting and a salutation.

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

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

Opening speech functions are conversational moves which open up new exchanges (Eggins and Slade, 1995, p. 192-195) between participants. Opening moves can be greetings as noted above or they can be used to change the topic as discussed below in 'new thread or direction of talk'. In a chatroom an opening move can be to get anyone in the room to respond, for example in Case Study 6 <Justin> is making her or his opening, not with a salutation but with a question directed at the room,

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

In Case Study 1, for example, the highest incidence of what I refer to in this study as chat behaviours is statements to whoever is in the chatroom as the table below shows,

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

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

This statement type does not address a specific person but as the conversation in this chatroom was about a storm <Miss Zena> is addressing the chatroom in general that it is her or his belief that the storm will weaken.

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

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

<ankash> in Case Study 1 is answering <guest-mandy> in turn 39 who has asked <any tornados>. The difference between this utterance and the one above it in turn 36 <I believe this storm will weaken> is that no one asked whether the storm would weaken and <Miss Zena> is but offering an opinion.

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

- E/ = answer - open - to whoever is in the chatroom

In answer to chatters earlier in Case Study 1, 'Storm' who were inquiring where Hurricane Floyd was <Kitteigh-Jo> in turn 13 says <We have rain n NJ>.

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

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

For example in Case Study 6 <Justin> is making her or his opening, not with a salutation but with a question directed at the room,

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

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

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

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

- ?/ = undetermined or not classifiable by one of the criteria above
- ** = users' abbreviations such as lol
- *) = users' emoticons in places of words or identify
- #/ = new thread or direction of talk

New threads or Topic changes: these are usually accomplished by a putting a space between the old topic and the new, and then opening the new with some sort of question/statement of topic introduction.

As well as the letter representatives for what I identify as speech classifications in these chat sessions I make other transcription notations,

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

Table 0 • 6 An example of a complete turn

Above is an example of the different types of notation in context, as I have used it.

In this example above

- '104.' means the 104th turn in this segment

What we are able to "see" in this text is that in the turns I have 'captured' this is the 104th turn. What went on before these turns is not knowable, however as it is turn-104 we would assume that it not the first utterance in this chatroom. In fact it is the eighth turn by this person as denoted by 6h – the 6 being the sixth person shown to speak in this room. Rarely is a log available for the complete chat. I have a complete log used in Case Study 6 in which eight speakers entered 511 utterances.

An example of a captured dialogue in this format is,

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

33)	A/	/\32	5i.	<judythejedi> hi night
34)	D/	/\32	3h.	<AquarianBlue> hmmmmmmm

The data for each chatroom is at;

Case Study 1 http://se.unisa.edu.au/a1.html
Case Study 2 http://se.unisa.edu.au/a2.html
Case Study 3 http://se.unisa.edu.au/a3.html
Case Study 4 http://se.unisa.edu.au/a4.html
Case Study 5 http://se.unisa.edu.au/a5.html
Case Study 6 http://se.unisa.edu.au/a6.html
Case Study 7 http://se.unisa.edu.au/a7.html

As the data can only be captured from the time the researcher enters a chatroom what has been entered prior is unknowable unless someone gives the log to the chatroom. This is the turn based on the pressing of the 'enter-button', not necessarily the complete utterance intended. The enter button does not always constitute an utterance and can be mistakenly pressed midway through an utterance as the example from Case Study 6 below shows where turn-197 is continued in turn 200,

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

This is similar to 'repair conversation' in CA where someone corrects what he or she has said. There are often preferred sequences consisting of either self-initiated self-repair or of other-initiated self-repair in chatrooms.
However, in a chatroom the repair may not occur for several turns. Whatever one says lays dormant

and does not exist in cyberspace until the utterance has been committed. Unlike person-to-person conversation when what is said is heard instantly, in a chat dialogue what is said is not heard until the speaker-writer wishes to reveal the content to the chatroom. Once the enter button is pressed there is no taking back what was said. If the chat can be saved, either by saving the screen shot of the chat or by copying and pasting or reading the chat logs the dialogue can be 'captured' for future reference. Two examples of repair from my case studies are given below. In the first, from Case Study 1, we see an example of self-initiated self-repair with <EMT-Calvin> realising the last word of his or her utterance ended in 'worl' and he or she changed it in turn-72 to 'work', but only by adding the letter 'k'. In Case Study 6 an example of other-initiated self-repair in chatrooms is when <Leonard> <Sort night for me tonight... Gotta take my oldest to scouts> and is immediately corrected in the next term and in turn six he or she responds with what was meant by the original utterance.

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

- 'D' shows that this is an answer to someone named or an answer to a previous question or statement in this case to the chatter <Jo Jo>
- '6h' is the sixth 'speaker' in the segment of chat that I 'captured',

Only if the whole chat is logged and analysed can we know how many turns the person has taken in most chatrooms. In some chatrooms the time of the person entering is placed before the utterance but this has not occurred in any of the chats that I have used in the seven case studies. An example of someone entering a chatroom is below,

	14:56:50	|||||||| Sascha just entered this channel
	14:57:06	MissMaca: the first plane to hit?

	14:57:12	oscar: sascha, ere you from NY?

'911' chat http://se.unisa.edu.au/september11/new_york_city_chat_chat.htm

- 'h' after the 6 shows the number of times this 'speaker' has spoken thus far and that this is this person's eighth turn, I use letters as to separate from the numbers, ie 'h' is the 8th letter of the alphabet)
- <ankash> the brackets indicate the user name; in this case the user name is 'ankash'
- '/\ ' means 'above'.
- '/\ 94' would refer to turn 94 above. I do this to show that the person is referring to turn-taking 4 above by answering turn 4 or making a comment or asking about the chatter in turn 4.

3.6 Data collection

There is a diverse possibility of online text collection and collation. There are several text data mining software packages available [13] with varying methods to collect and collate chatroom text. Technology maintains a permanent record of exchanges that occur in computer-mediated communication; data that is recorded automatically can be stored for future analysis (Gates and McDaniel, 1999; Mena, 1999) making computer saved text easier to scan for patterns than verbal conversation which CA researchers using tape recordings study. There are problems with doing online research. Firstly there is the problem of verification. With the volume of communication in email, newsgroups, and chat, manual techniques of information management are difficult to cope with. It has been estimated that over 430 million instant messages are exchanged each day on the America Online network [14]. The difficulty with any software for CMC is identifying who is speaking. The speaker is able to hide behind his or her screen-name (username). The researcher can only observe social and semantic relationships from topic to topic as I have done throughout the case studies.

Data Mining is a pattern recognition technique that does not require consent of the individual. Likewise there is no method to obtain who the user is other than requesting an email account, password and username. Data mining can assist the researcher in discovering previously unknown patterns about the word usage and topics or threads in the chatroom.

Secondly is that with online data collection, the sample is not representative of any particular population. (See, Kehoe and Pitkow, 1996; Bradley, 1999). I dealt with this by choosing several topic particular chatrooms that would attract a certain type of person. For example in Case Study 3 I chose a chatsite that was dedicated to Britney Spears and in Case Study 7 a chatsite dedicated to baseball. By choosing topic specific sites I sought to find particular speech language usage.

Thirdly there is no universal method used to research online projects. By some estimates, the number of studies on the Internet is more than doubling each year. The American Psychological Society [15] (APS) now lists more than 80 links to online psychology experiments, up from just 10 links in 1996, the year in which list was started.

And fourthly it is difficult to control the study environment because Web users use unlimited types of software, hardware and Internet connections.

Unraveling threads as topics or change in topics is one challenge of identifying what a user is saying. I have approached this using several methods. Firstly I have separated all the text by a particular user. For example a few lines from <EMT-Calvin> below from Case Study 1 shows that he or she is continuing a self-continuing thread without much change from whatever else may be going on in the chatroom. In this thread <EM-Calvin> has made five utterances during a 20-turn block in this chatroom.

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

–

Fifthly it is not possible to save chatlogs on some sites due to the use of java programming or 3D software that will not produce a sequential log to research.

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

at a later time [16] . However since mid-2000 most chatrooms are written in java script and appear in an applet [17] which disappears once the chatroom is logged off.

Table X12

Theory used	Case study	Title	Chat-log	# of users	Turns recorded	# words-[i] [i][i]
Reader-Response Theory Reading Theory - (also - hypertextuality)	chapter 1	storm	1	45	279	2001
Computer-Mediated Communication	Chapter 2	IM	2.	2		
Semiotics (Pragmatics)	Chapter 3	Britney Spears Chat Room '	3	17	70	297
Speech Act (SA) theory	Chapter 4	Astrology 'chat'	4	16	85	
Discourse Analysis (DA)	Chapter 5	General chat	5	11	89	
Conversational Analysis (CA)	Chapter 6	Web3d computer modeling 'chat'	6	8	511	

Linguistic theory schools of thought	Chapter 7	'baseball chat'	7	13	155	570
110	1189					

I have chosen 12 examples to try to capture a wide variety of chatrooms. The chatrooms were selected at random, however I sought themes in order to differentiate them as communities. The chatrooms were found by using the search engine 'Google', and searching for chatrooms based on the following themes. In Case Study One I copied an emergency based chatroom, where people were discussing ways of dealing with an impending hurricane in the USA. In Case Study Two, I used an 'Instant Messenger' chat, involving only two participants. For Case Study three I used a chatroom bearing the name of a popular movie star. In Case Study four, I went to an astrology chatroom. Case Study five was a general chatroom found on 'talkCITY.com. I used randomly, the first chatroom which appeared in my search. In Case Study 6, I went to a chatroom in which discussion on 'computer animation' was taking place. I received permission from the owner of this site to use the material [18] For Case Study 7, I used a baseball chat site, found by typing 'baseball chat' into the 'Google' search engine. I have also used three chatrooms 'captured' shortly after the World Trade Centre' tragedy on September 11 2001 as comparative examples, showing differences between moderated and unmoderated chatrooms, showing people's reactions immediately, and several days later, to a major disaster. Two remaining chatrooms have been used to illustrate other aspects of chatroom discourse. In my discussion chapter I tabulate, and comment on each case study showing the number of participants and percentages of types of conversation such as greetings or statements to others in the chatroom.

3.7 Ethical issues

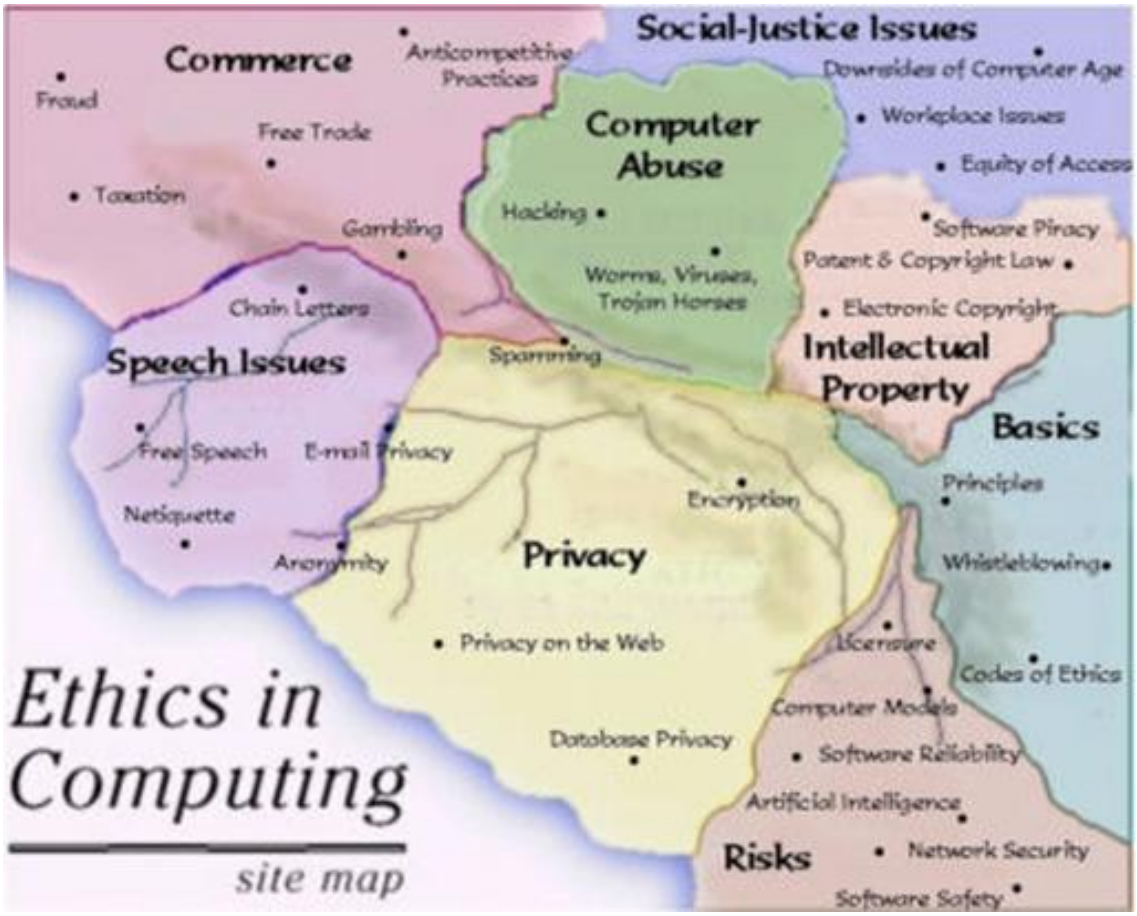

Image from http://legacy.eos.ncsu.edu/eos/info/computer_ethics/

Online research presents a number of challenges to the researcher who seeks to obtain the subjects' informed consent while maintaining their privacy. Many of the traditional research techniques do not adapt well for use on the Internet. (See, Roberts, 2000; Denzin, 1999; Frankel and Siang, 1999). The anonymity of the Internet and the ease of use of pseudonyms blurs demographics, such as age, gender, beliefs, ethnicity, and country of origin, normally important to research studies. Furthermore, capturing chatroom dialogue is not the same as collection of other online discourse. As it is often impossible to know who is online in a chatroom there are no identification issues as there would be with email where once a user's email address is known they can be contacted later. Identifying the computer the person is using will not necessarily yield results as the user could be using a computer at a library or Internet Café that would show no identifying link with the actual person. Studies have documented the tendency of people to become more open online than they are in person. Under a false or exaggerated expectation of privacy, participants may reveal more than what they might have done under conditions in the physical world. (See, Reid, 1996; Childress and Asamen, 1998).

As chatrooms (Relay Chat (IRC), and Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs)) are a synchronous media allowing for real time textual conversation, they are only saved by a researcher if the log of the chat is saved. This can only occur if the chatserver is in a text form and not in a java script or 3D animation.

Asynchronous media such as electronic mail, the most frequently used application on the Internet (Schaefermeyer, 1988). Usenet, with 50,000 topical groups as indexed by DejaNews (now Google Groups); Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), and Web Boards that pass 80,000 topical mailing lists e-mail distributed to many people (as indexed by Liszt.com, April 1998) which receive more than 100,000 message posts each day (Bonchek, 1997, p. 21), allow for delayed textual conversation. Internet communication therefore is open to the world communication.

My original proposal to the Ethics Committee for this research was that I would set up an online journal (ezine) for the University of South Australia and within that there would be a chatroom from which I would take the chat logs for this thesis [19] . However, no one visited the chatroom I set up during the two years of its existence. I therefore collected my data from other chatrooms that I visited. I 'lurked' in the chatrooms, making one entry at the beginning of each chat that I saved. When such a declaration is made, the consent of the participants is assumed. This is standard internet practice.

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

Table 0•7 Declaration written at the beginning of each segment of chat used for research purposes

Ethical issues are an important facet of data collection and analysis. Traditional academic research that relies on human subjects is governed by ethical standards and laws designed to protect the privacy and anonymity of the individuals serving as research subjects. Because the nature of qualitative observational research requires observation and interaction with groups, ethical issues that arise in person-to-person contact are not the same as ethical issues with captured chatroom talk. Miles and Huberman (1994) list the following requirements when analyzing data taken in real-life contact:

- Informed consent (Do participants have full knowledge of what is involved?)
- Harm and risk (Can the study hurt participants?)
- Honesty and trust (Is the researcher being truthful in presenting data?)
- Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Will the study intrude too much into group behaviors?)
- Intervention and advocacy (What should researchers do if participants display harmful or illegal behavior?)

Most researchers take cyberspace to be part of the public domain since newsgroups, bulletin boards and chatrooms are as accessible to anyone as a television, radio or newspaper interview. These researchers believe that the responsibility falls on the disseminators of the messages to filter out what

they might consider revealing or private information. Hence, they adopt the position that this type of research should be exempt from the informed consent requirement. (See, King, 1996).

In the next chapter I present seven case studies in which I use seven different analytical theories to investigate online chatroom covnversations.

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[1] I lurked in the chatrooms I have used in this study and did not engage in conversation except in Case Study 2 where I use two examples of Instant Messenger chatrooms to show a perspective of online conversation where only two people are engaged in discourse. The term 'lurker' or 'lurking' describes one who chooses just to read the exchanges, instead of joining in the chat by posting their own messages. Most people will 'lurk' in a chatroom at least until they feel comfortable about joining in.

[2] I have an Internet page with thousands of emoticons and abbreviations at, http://se.unisa.edu.au/phd/storm/abreviations.htm·

[3] CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere. Mark Poster_ http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html

[4] Rex T. Rola's Cyberspace as A Political Public Sphere. I have saved this site to the University of South Australia server at http://se.unisa.edu.au/vc/7-cybers.htm as the original is no longer available at the address it was at.

[5] Steven M. Schneider's PhD, Expanding the Public Sphere through Computer-Mediated Communication: Political Discussion about Abortion in a Usenet Newsgroup Submitted to the Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology May 2, 1997. examines a

conversation about abortion that occurred within the Usenet newsgroup ``talk.abortion'' between April1, 1994 and March 31, 1995. It tests the hypothesis that the form of discourse fostered by computer mediated discussion provides opportunities to expand the informal zone of the public sphere. Specific criteria by which a public sphere can be evaluated for its goodness of fit with the idealized public sphere described by Habermas are proposed and applied to the ongoing conversation. The conversation analyses consisted of nearly 46,000 messages written by almost three thousand authors in nearly 8,500 different threads. The public sphere created by the participants in the newsgroup was found to be diverse and reciprocal, but lacking in equality and quality.
http://www.sunyit.edu/~steve/abstract.html

[6] Robin B. Hamman Cybersex Amongst Multiple-Selves and Cyborgs in the Narrow-Bandwidth Space of America Online Chatrooms online at http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/Cyborgasms.html viewed 6-2001, and One Hour in the eWorld Hot Tub: a brief ethnographic project in cyberspace at http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/project.html

[7] Julie M. Albright, Online Love: Sex, gender and relationships in cyberspace online at, LAST ACCESSED ON-LINE Friday, 17 November 2000

[8] More than half (50.7 percent) of female chatters are under age 35, according to NetValue's research. (see http://cyberatlas.internet.com/big_picture/traffic_patterns/article/0,,5931_582491,00.html viewed Sunday, January 05, 2003)

[9] LOGOS (http://www.logos.net) has an instant International translation service and e-translation portal. The languages supported are English, Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Italian and Portuguese or in a separate chat room English, Korean and Japanese The user must have the proper font sets installed to view Korean and Japanese characters.

[10] (see *The Role of Fantasy in the Construction of the On-line Other*: http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/fantasy.html).

[11] Several software packages that computer-mediated ethnographers use are: 'HyperRESEARCH' available from ResearchWare, Inc. (http://www.researchware.com/); "NUDïIST" available from QSR International (http://www.qsrinternational.com); "The Ethnograph" from Qualis Research Associates, (http://www.qualisresearch.com/) and "Methodologist's Toolchest (MTC)," from Scolari (http://www.scolari.com/).

[12] One of the areas I am interested in researching is how, within chatrooms the original discourse changes. I aim to isolate and analyse the 'departure points' from original topics. Though it would be impossible to know without person-to-person conversation with a chatter I be interested in a departure point is because the person comes into the chatroom with an alternative motive are whether the topic is becoming boring and is in need of a shift.

[13] In the area of automatic classification and text mining, Eidetica employs t·mining to process the

content of all Flemish newspapers and enrich it with keywords every morning. The same software can be used in chatrooms to gather data over long blocks of time (http://www.eidetica.com); Miner3D is a program that turns text into 3d displays the information as sets of graphic objects spread over a space, (http://miner3d.com) 

; Upon studying the various factors influencing chat efficiency, The Virtual Worlds Group at Microsoft has developed the Status Client, a prototype of an interface that shows the status of each user, as determined by keyboard activity.

[14] B. Burkhalter, J. J. Cadiz and M. Smith. Conversation Trees and Threaded Chats. In the Proceedings of the CSCW'00 Conference. December 2-6, 2000, 97-105, Philadelphia, PA http://www.acm.org/cscw2000/

[15] http://www.psychologicalscience.org

[16] In taped conversational analysis many hours of transcription time is involved, one time span I saw on a listserv on August 04, 2001 said,

(http://listserv.emich.edu/archives/info-childes/infochi/CLAN/timeestimatesre1.html)

'I would figure about 15 hours of transcription per hour of tape recording. If you were simply transcribing words and not paying any attention to format, you could save maybe a couple of hours and this figure would be 12 hours for each hour of transcript, but then your file would not be in any consistent format.' Saving transcription online is accurate as nothing has to be heard as it would be when listening to tapes and there would be no errors.

[17] An applet is a program written in the Java™ programming language that can be included in an HTML page, much in the same way an image is included. When you use a Java technology-enabled browser to view a page that contains an applet, the applet's code is transferred to your system and executed by the browser's Java Virtual Machine (JVM). When the computer is turned off or the Internet site is left the applet program is no longer available until the connection to the chatroom is re-established. With a chatroom dialogue the chat is no longer available that was running before the site was left, making this a fleeting text.

[18] General Web3D Chat Log for Feb 2 2000

At http://web3d.about.com/compute/web3d/library/chatlogs/2000/blcl020900a.htm

[19] A copy of my ethics proposal is at: http://se.unisa.edu.au/ethics.html Several points I will raise in the Introduction to this thesis are from the ethics proposal. The original proposal has changed this is

what I was approved for;

1.1 The project

The project aims to examine conversation within chatrooms in the Internet, seeking to establish how social relations are constructed in virtual environments.

I am seeking ethics approval for two parts to this research involving data collection.

1. The setting up of an on-line journal, titled SouthernExpressway

2. The use of data gathered within a particular area of the journal: chatrooms.

The journal will be available for students and staff of the University of South Australia to submit material. I will monitor material sent in order to position it within the journal sections; e.g. reviews or material for different departments and schools. There will be a standard disclaimer on the journal's front page, to dissociate the University from any problematic content inadvertently accepted and retained on the site:

"The views expressed in SouthernExpressway are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of its editor. The University of South Australia provides the web-space only for this journal. All material from SouthernExpressway is copyright and the copyright belongs to the contributors. Contributions to the chatrooms are archived for use in research into conversational analysis in Internet milieus for the degree of Ph.D."

3.2 How volunteers will be recruited.

Volunteers will be recruited by participators engaging in conversation within the venue I am researching. As there will be a notification within each area being analyzed it will be up to the participants to dialogue or not.

3.7 Consent to participate.

It will be understood that participants in a chatroom with a "saved dialogue" notice have agreed that some conversation can be used in research. This is a standard Internet practice.
