Language Under the Radar
Controlling Spoken and Written Discourse

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From Multitasking to Control

- **Generative Question**
  - How do users handle multiple IM conversations? (American University multitasking study – Clem & Rabinovitz)

- **IM as "Language Under the Radar"**
  - Pick and choose which IMs command attention
  - More generally, IM can be a backgrounded rather than foregrounded activity (i.e., not always "instant")

- **Adjusting the Volume on Conversations**
  - Language users can "adjust the volume" on any spoken or written conversations, regardless of medium

Redefining What is Linguistically Important to Know about CMC

- Question of the 1990s
  - Is CMC a form of writing, of speech, or something else?
    - e.g., "Letters by Phone" (Baron 1998)
      Netspeak (Crystal 2001)

- Question of the Turn of the Millennium
  - Is CMC influencing F2F speech, offline writing?
    - e.g., AAAS Symposium, "Language of the Internet" (February 2005)

Redefining What is Linguistically Important to Know about CMC (cont.)

- Current Questions
  - Speech and writing
    - Are speech and writing becoming increasingly interchangeable?
  - Speed
    - How is the "fast-time" drive towards increased multitasking affecting the nature of social relationships?
  - Controlling linguistic engagement
    - How does CMC facilitate manipulating the terms of linguistic engagement, including choice of speech or writing?
    - Note: Both senders and recipients may be controllers and controlled

Controlling Linguistic Engagement
Traditional Issues

- Speech
  - Social avoidance
  - Eavesdropping

- Writing
  - "Return receipt"; Special Delivery
  - "Dear John" letters

Controlling Linguistic Engagement
Early Teletechnologies

- Telephone (Speech)
    - Answering machines (c. 1900, 1971)
    - Ringing and hanging up to avoid charges
    - Modern phones (voicemail, caller ID, call waiting, speaker phone)

- Telegraph (Writing)
    - Telegrams generate sense of urgency

    (cf. junk mail still packaged in yellow envelopes)

Controlling Linguistic Engagement
In-Place CMC Issues

- Email
    - Control when (and whether) respond
    - Control style of response
    - Forward messages to others
    - Increase social access (e.g., to people up the hierarchy)
    - Choose whether respond with email, phone, F2F

- IM
    - Language under the radar (manipulate when respond to whom)
    - Formation of Buddy lists
    - Blocking

Controlling Linguistic Engagement
Mobile CMC Issues

- BlackBerries (RIM: " Always on, always connected")
  - "Crackberry" effect
  - Ideal form of push technology

- Mobile Phones (Speech)
  landline affordances plus
  - Always on? [US vs. other countries]
  - Distinctive ring tones, misrepresentations of location
  - Bluetooth, corded microphones: ignore social space

- Mobile Phones (Writing)
  email affordances plus
  - Always on? [again, US vs. other countries]
  - Ling & Baron: current study of US mobile phone usage

Controlling Linguistic Engagement
Multitasking Issues

- Time-Driven: e.g.,
  - Doing email while talking on phone
  - Multitasking while doing IM (multiple IM conversations, surfing the Web, eating)

- Control-Driven: e.g.,
  - IM: blocking, choosing which conversation to participate in
  - Mobile phones: talking on phone while ordering coffee

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Why User-Control in CMC Matters

- ## Underlying Issue
  - What is necessary, what is contingent about human communication in a literate society?

- ## Effects of CMC Discourse
  - Does CMC obviate meaningfulness of traditional speech/writing dichotomy

  (e.g., can choose modality; choices often interchangeable)

Parting Questions

- As a society,
    - What do we gain or lose by blurring distinctions between speech and writing?

    - What do we gain or lose by speeding up discourse?

    - What do we gain or lose when users increase their control over when and how they participate in social discourse?