



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

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?