LANGUAGE IN COMPUTER–MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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Abstract **–** Computer Mediated Communication is a type a communication between humans using the medium of the computer. Main types of CMCs are: **E-mail:** It is non-interactive. Gives the freedom to send a person a message and also attach documents, pictures, videos. **Instant messaging** – It is a quick and easy way to talk to one or multiple people at the same time by way of sending typed messages. **Blogs –** When a blog is started, a topic is assigned to it and people post their knowledge and opinions on this topic. **Chat rooms** are sites on the internet where a number of users can communicate in real time. **Social networking** websites are very helpful for those who live far away from their home land when they want to contact their relatives in homeland. Some of the popular sites are: MySpace, face book, twitter, etc. One can post pictures, videos and share personal information. The use of language in CMC is something different where most of the times abbreviations, broken language and sometimes symbols are used. The present paper attempts at disclosing what CMC, its types are and how the language is used in such type of communication by way of examples from our day to day life.

Keywords – e-mail; blogs, chat rooms, social networking websites, linguistic features;

I.   Introduction

Computer mediated communication plays a huge role in everyone's life, whether they are aware of it or not. The main forms of computer mediated communication are email, instant messaging, social networking (such as facebook or myspace), blogs, chatrooms, etc... All of these forms of communication have become, and continue to become more and more popular as technology advances. As children are being exposed to computers at earlier ages, they are becoming more familiar and comfortable with them, relying on them to do homework, and most of all keep in touch with friends via email and social networking. Now, computer mediated communication focuses on the interaction between people via email, instant message, social networking site, and so on. The kind of language used in this medium is something which needs to be analysed.

II.   Different Types of Computer Mediated Communication:

A.   E-Mail

Email is the oldest form of CMC (computer mediated communication) which is also possibly the most well known form. Email is most commonly used in organizations and schools as the main form of communication between employers and employees, or students and teachers. It gives you the freedom to send a person a message and also attach documents, pictures, or videos if necessary, making it much more convenient than just a phone call. Although the speed of email communication is slower than the other forms, it has proved to be an extremely powerful tool.

B.   Instant Message:

Instant messaging is a very quick and easy way to talk to one or multiple people at the same time. It is exactly as it sounds, an instant message, so as soon as you send your typed message it will pop up on your recipient's screen and so on. When using an instant messenger program, you have a list of the people you talk to that shows you whether they are online or

not. If the person is not online it gives you the option to leave them a message for when they logon next. You are also able to setup a chat room so that you can include more than two people in on a conversation, so when you type a message and hit send, each person in the chat room can see what you have said. This form of communication has become very popular among teenagers and young adults, although as social networking sites gain more popularity, the need for instant messaging programs has declined.

C. Blogs

Blogs and forums have become yet another extremely powerful form of computer mediated communication. When you are "blogging" there is most likely a topic, such as politics, consumer product review, a question, etc... When a blog is started a topic is assigned to it and people post their knowledge and opinions on this topic. It is found that blogs are incredibly useful when trying to solve a problem, because more often than not, someone else out there has had a similar problem and has asked a question about it in a forum or blog, and many people give opinions and tips on how to solve it.

D. Social networking websites

Social networking websites have exploded in popularity in the past few years, and are the current "fad" of computer mediated technology. They in a sense combine email, instant messaging, and blogging. Some of the more popular sites are MySpace, Face book, and Twitter. With these websites you can post pictures and videos of you with your family and friends, what is going on in your life, and any other information you want to share with others. The websites have proven to be a great way to keep in touch with those you care about who may live too far away from you to see on a regular basis, and get in touch with the people from your past.

III. Linguistic features

A. Omitting Blank Space between Words

This type of omission refers to the fact that words are written together without spaces separating them. As for words being written in this way, the following examples were found commonly in chat transcripts:

(1) *watabtmee* [= *What about me?*].

(2) *whereufrom??* [= *Where are you from?*].

(3) *thanksalot* [= *Thanks a lot.*].

(4) *idontcare* [= *I don't care.*].

The omission of blank space between words is probably a consequence of the space as well as time pressure in Internet Relay Chat. Because IRC is fast-paced, messages must be written quickly in order not to miss to reply to a post, and in order not to annoy other participants with a long wait. Therefore, the blank space between words is sometimes omitted to save time and space.

B. Omitting Punctuation

This form of omission refers to the fact that punctuation in the form of full stops, commas, exclamation marks, question marks etc. is missing altogether. Regarding the lack of punctuation, the following examples were found in the chat rooms:

(1) *are u stupid* [= *Are you stupid?*].

(2) *ARE U CRAZY YOU SHOULD GO TO SLEEP* [= *ARE YOU CRAZY? YOUSHOULD GO TO SLEEP!*].

(3) *Does anyone know I know that I dont* [= *Does anyone know? I know that I don't.*].

(4) *should i know that well i didnt* [= *Should I know that? Well, I didn't.*].

(5) *do u care at all i dont think so* [= *Do you care at all? I don't think so.*].

As for punctuation, Crystal highlights that "punctuation tends to be minimalist in most situations, and completely absent in some e-mails and chat exchanges" (2001:89). Moreover, he adds: "some do not use it at all, either as a consequence of typing speed, or through not realizing that ambiguity can be one of the consequences" (ibid.). The omission of punctuation is in all probability a result of typing speed, and, in turn, a result of the fast-paced character of IRC. Due to time constraint, punctuation is mostly completely absent in most exchanges. However, the lack of punctuation sometimes leads to increased waiting time due to ambiguous utterances that require clarification.

C.   Unconventional Punctuation

Punctuation marks are used in an irregular and alternative way. For example, several punctuation marks in a row as well as a mixture of punctuation marks following one another. In light of this, the following examples were found in chat room conversations:

(1) *Anyone here?????????* [= *Anyone here?*].

(2) *are u nuts???!!!!!!* [= *Are you nuts?*].

(3) *ok,,,hmmm,,,,,can i call u back???* [= *Ok. Hmmm. Can I call you back?*].

(4) *idonno………* [= *I don't know.*].

(5) *he should come here,,,,tomorrow* [= *He should   come here; tomorrow.*].

Regarding this type of irregular punctuation, Crystal puts forward that "unusual combinations of punctuation marks can occur, such as (to express pause) ellipsis dots (…) in any number, repeated hyphens (---), or the repeated use of comas (,,,,)"; explaining that "emphasis and attitude can result in exaggerated or random use of punctuation, such as *!!!!!!!* or *£$£$%!* (2001:89). What is more, Crystal makes clear that "some odd combinations of punctuation marks can appear at the end of a sentence" (ibid.). In (1) above, there is an example of an exaggerated use of punctuation as to indicate emphasis (i.e. *Is there anyone here?*). In (2), the mixture of several question marks and exclamation marks also signifies emphasis the same way as in (1). In (3), (4) and (5), the repeated use of commas and full stops respectively expresses a pause as in spoken interaction. As Werry explains, punctuation is used "to create the effects of spoken delivery. Thus periods and hyphens are employed to create pauses and to indicate tempo" (1996: 56-61).

D.   All Lower-Case

The use of non-capitalized letters only refers to the fact that uppercase is missing completely. In terms of this usage, the following examples were found in the chat room conversations:

(1) *sure,,,why not where are u from im from Madras*
    [= *Sure. Why not? Where are youfrom? I'm from Madras.*].

(2) *i think we've met here before or???* [= *I think   we've met here before, or?*].

(3) *i would but i didnt know* [= *I would, but I didn't   know.*].

(4) *are u from here??* [= *Are you from here?*].

(5) *hi kumar □* [= *Hi Kumar □*].

Crystal clarifies that there is "a strong tendency to use lower-case everywhere" (2001:87). As a result, "the 'save the keystroke' principle is widely found in emails, chat groups, and virtual worlds, where whole sentences can be produced without capitals" (ibid.). The frequent use of lower-case is most likely a consequence of the fastpaced character. By avoiding capital letters the "save the keystroke" principle is in use, resulting in increased time saving. The use of only lower-case letters rarely causes ambiguity.

E.   All Capitals

The use of uppercase only refers to the fact that lower-case is missing. With regard to this usage, the following examples were found in the chatroom conversations:

(1) *AND YOUR MOTHER TOO!*

(2) *HELLLOOO!* [= *HELLO!*].

(3) *IM JOHN!!!!* [= *I'M JOHN!*].

(4) *I AM HERE NOW!!!* [= *I AM HERE NOW!*].

(5) *OKKKKKK* [= *OK.*].

With reference to the use of upper-case letters only, Crystal underscores that "messages wholly in capitals are considered to be 'shouting', and usually avoided" (2001:87). As noticed in the chat room, messages written in all capitals are considered to be shouting. Furthermore, the use of all capitals is sanctioned in various ways; e.g. by means of warnings and/or cancelled accounts.

F.   Mix of Lower-Case and Capitals

The mixing of these two types, in turn, refers to the fact that lowercase and capitals can co-occur in an unconventional as well as irregular way. In consideration of this way of mixing, these examples were found in the chatroom transcripts:

(1) *I like RaMeSh a lot!!!!* [= *I like Ramesh a lot!*].

(2) *HelloOoOoOoOo* [= *Hello.*].

(3) *anyone from DeLlLllIiIi???!!!!* [= *Anyone from   Delhi?*].

(4) ****HI EveryBody**** [= *Hi everybody.*].

(5) i am so CooOOooL [= *I am so cool.*].

Thornborrow makes clear that "one of the most fundamental ways we have of establishing our identity, and of shaping other people's views of who we are, is through our use of language" (2004:158). Moreover, she (2004:165) explains that we cannot always determine our social identity on our own, and that our social identity is bound up with how others recognize us. So, by being innovative and "play around" with language as in the examples above, one helps to establish his or her social and linguistic identity and thus status.

G. Unconventional, Spoken-Like Spelling

The notion of "unconventional and spoken-like spelling" refers to the fact that words are written in an alternative way that reflects the way we talk. As for this type of spelling, these examples were found:

(1) *whos tired???? Im not.* [= *Who's tired? I'm not.]* **(2)** *wanna see me live??????* [= *Want to see me   live?*].

(3) *gotta go now byeeee* [= *Got to go now. Bye.*].

(4) *I ain't been here before how does this thing work??   [= I have not been here before. How does this   thing work?*].

(5) [ø] *donno* [= *I don't know.*].

With reference to spelling that reflects the way we talk, Einarsson (2004:294) puts forward that chat language is very similar to spoken language; because when one is chatting he or she is simultaneous with the dialogue's "here" and "now". What is more, Adelswärd (2001:41) highlights that chatting is more like talking on the phone than writing letters, this despite the fact that you use the keyboard and, thus, actually write. The reasons why people, when chatting online, write in a way that reflects spoken language and speech may be many. Firstly, writing the way we talk is sometimes timesaving. For example, in (1), (2), (3) and (5) above, it is easier and more timesaving to write. Secondly, as in (4) above, writing the way we talk can sometimes detect our membership of certain social groups, our ethnicity as well as our level of education. Accordingly there is a difference between: *I ain't been here before how does this thing work?* and *I have not been herebefore. How does this thing work?*

H. Repetition of Letters

The reduplication of letters, noticeably, refers to the fact that letters are repeated, sometimes in long strings. In light of this, the examples that follow were found in the conversation transcripts:

(1) *nooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!* [= *No!*].

(2) *im from the usaaaaaaaaaa* [= *I'm from the USA.*].

(3) *bye bye be happyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy* [= *Bye-bye. Be   happy.*].

(4) *lollllllllll* [= *LOL/LoL*].

(5) *I love britneeey speeears yeeeeah!!!!!* [= *I love   Britney Spears, yeah!*].

In terms of one and the same letter being repeated several times in a row, Werry (1996:56-61) explains that "a complex set of orthographic strategies designed to compensate for the lack of intonation and paralinguistic cues that interactive written discourse imposes on its users" is made use of in Internet chat. For instance, he makes clear that reduplicated letters are "used to represent drawn-out or expressive intonation" (ibid.). As seen in examples (1), (2), (3) and (5) above, reduplicated letters are used to reflect the intonation of spoken language. However, in (4) the repetition of letters is used to indicate emphasis; i.e. that something is extremely funny in this particular case. In spite of the fact that examples (1), (2), (3) and (5) above also indicate emphasis, this becomes particularly evident in (4).

I. Repetition of Words

The reduplication of words refers to the fact that words are repeated, sometimes directly after each other. Considering this form of repetition, the following examples were found in the chat room conversations:

(1) *I love you you you you you………* [= *I love you (!)*].

(2) *justin timberlake justin timberlake justin timberlake* [= *Justin Timberlake.*].

(3) *wow wow wow wow ure hoootttt* □ [= *Wow! You're   hot* □].

(4) *yes yes yes i wooooon!!!! hahahaha* [= *Yes! I won!   Haha.*].

(5) *no no no plzzzz* [= *No. Please.*].

With reference to the one and the same word being repeated several times in a row, word repetition, like the repetition of letters, helps to highlight emphasis. Consequently, in all the examples above the repetition of words is used in order to put emphasis on something. Using this way of emphasizing something is also quite common in spoken language, e.g. when one, for example, says: *Well, well, well, would you look at that?* For example, in view of the above

examples, *yes yes yes i wooooon!!!!* is more accentuated than *Yes, I won!,* and, in turn, *no no no plzzzz* is more accentuated that *No, please!*

J.   Emoticons

The use of emoticons refers to the usage of textual expressions that correspond to the writer's frame of mind or facial expression. When it comes to the use of textual expressions on Internet chat, the following examples were found in the analysis of the chat room logs:

(1) *take care everybody* **---{--@** [=*Take care everybody* **---{--@** |rose|].

(2) *ure hottt* **;-)** [= *You're hot* **;-)** |wink|].

(3) *boooring* **T_T** [= *Boring* **T_T** |bored/annoyed/concerned|].

(4) *hahaha u dont know where i live* **:L** [= *hahaha, you don't know where I live* **:L** |tongue out|].

(5) *good job broh* **o/\o** [= *Good job my brother* **o/\o** |high five|].

(6) *u are sooo hot* **:)~** [= *You are so hot* **:)~** |slob|].

(7) *hellloooo* **(ˋ -´)>** [= *Hello* **(ˋ -´)>** |cheers|].

With reference to the use of emoticons, or so-called textual expressions, Werry explains that the IRC community "employs a set of codes and conventions whereby words and visual images are used to symbolize gestural qualities of face-to-face communication" (1996:59). Since it is impossible to see each other's facial expressions when chatting on IRC (unless one is chatting with a webcam plugged in), various strategies are made use of in order to overcome the problem; one of them being the usage of textual expressions corresponding to the writer's frame of mind or facial expression. For example in (2) above, the textual expression [**;-)**] indicates a wink corresponding to what the writer is thinking, or his facial expression. In (3) above, the textual expression [**T_T**] signals that the writer is bored or annoyed, whereas in (4) the textual expression [**:L**], illustrating an outstretched tongue, indicates that the writer is exasperating. By adding such textual expressions, it becomes easier for the recipient of an utterance to understand how the utterance in question is meant to be interpreted.

K.   Symbol Replacing Word

The use of symbols rather than words simply refers to cases in which a symbol is used instead of a word in a manner where either of them could have been used. With regard to symbol replacing word, the following examples were found in the conversations:

(1) *me & u forever and ever!!!!!* [= *Me and you forever   and ever!*].

(2) *do u have 2 or 3 siblings* [= *Do you have two or   three siblings?*].

(3) *u are such a X hahahaha :P* [= *You are such a X* [?]   *hahahaha.*].

As mentioned earlier, Hård af Segerstad explains that the production and perception in web chat is distributed in space as well as time pressure (2002:57). Therefore the use of symbols as a replacement for words is most probably a result of the space and time pressure in IRC, and thus the fast-paced character of the medium. In order to save time and keystrokes, symbols are sometimes used instead of letters and thus words. For example in (1) & (2) above, it takes slightly less time to write *&* than *and*; *2 or 3* than *two or three*. However, the use of symbols rather than words does not always serve a timesaving intention. In (3) above,

symbols are used instead of words in order not to get caught for using inappropriate language on the chat. By writing *X* and *Y* rather than bad words, the risk of getting caught is low.

IV. Conclusion

Computer mediated communication demonstrates a mix of feature from both spoken and written media. Text type has an important role in determining the nature of the language used in CMC. The constraints of real time interaction seem to be responsible for many of the features of CMC language. Socially, there seems to be some trend towards **group solidarity** amongst users of CMC. Thus, Several linguistic choices appear aimed at reducing social distance and emphasizing group membership.

V.   References

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