

DANCING AND RANTING IN THE CHAT ROOM:

SYNTHESIZING ORALITY AND LITERACY

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“I wish I could print out these sounds” Those words were spoken by my five year-old daughter Brittany while she was playing with a computer game called *Elmo’s Magic Music Maker*. Ironically, I was in the beginning stages of writing my thesis, struggling to figure out how to explain the way interlocutors in synchronous conversation spaces mirror sounds with words and symbols. After Brittany finished her game, she stood next to me while I was frantically typing away and asked, “Mommy, what are you going to be when you grow up?” I smiled, and answered, “A writer.” She innocently responded, “You mean you’re gonna take people for a ride?”

At first I laughed, then I thought seriously about her innocent question. It reminded me of how powerful writing can be, and what a great responsibility I have to ensure that what I write is not “taking people for a ride.” I must acknowledge Brittany first here. On more than one occasion her child’s logic has caused me to pause in the depths of my work, step back, and look at it from a different perspective. She has shown me hours of patience waiting for me to finish working so I can play. She has provided me with unconditional support and encouragement. And she has been a continual source of inspiration and motivation. She is a constant reminder of my purpose and goals for pursuing this degree.

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ABSTRACT

DANCING AND RANTING IN THE CHAT ROOM: SYNTHESIZING ORALITY AND LITERACY

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In the last decade, the technological development of real time online communication via a personal computer and a modem has created a discourse environment that is witnessing rapid changes and mutations in language usage. Synchronous conversation spaces such as Internet relay chat rooms and MOOs are contributing to the development of a new expressive form of language in literate societies. These virtual conversation spaces are textual, yet the text that is produced there is perceived by the interlocutors, the room members, characters, or chatters, as talking. The purpose of this study is to reveal how interlocutors in synchronous conversation spaces are morphing the language usage code for standard written prose and synthesizing it with the usage code for conversational oral communication.

In synchronous conversation spaces the text transcends the traditional logical structure of writing and mutates itself into the structure of speaking. Since the written texts between two or more writers are actually conversing with each other, it becomes a conversation. The text is talking. In this context of textual give and take, the spoken and written languages of the literate society morph into one creating a new form that is not altogether oral, nor is it altogether literate; it becomes oraliterate.

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Chapter 1

ARE WE TALKING OR ARE WE WRITING?

The purpose of this study is to reveal how interlocutors in synchronous conversation settings are mutating and morphing the traditional form of the usage code for standard written prose, and synthesizing it with the form of usage common to conversational oral communication.

In the last decade, the technological development of real time online communication via a personal computer and a modem has created a discourse environment that is witnessing rapid changes and mutations in language usage. Synchronous conversation spaces such as Internet relay chat rooms and MOOs are contributing to the development of a new expressive form of language in literate societies. These virtual conversation spaces are textual, yet the text that is produced there is perceived by the interlocutors, the room members, characters, or chatters, as talking. In the following excerpt of a textual conversation from an Internet relay chat room, the interlocutors who participate in the conversation thread are asked if the form of communication that they are engaging in is writing or talking. The excerpt is taken from an archive of the room SecretGarden¹ on the Microsoft Chat Servers on September 10, 1999.

^Maybe says:

are we talking or are we writing?

(wood_sprite) says:

talking

(wood_sprite) says:

i am

^^sweetnsassy says:

we are talking definitely.....

^^sweetnsassy says:

I write all day...this is not writing..its talkin for suree.....<S>

thumper says:

i chat maybe

thumper says:

i do

^Maybe says:

thumper chats

^^WVirginiaGirl says:

ok so what was the question?

^^WVirginiaGirl says:

hmmmmmmm

^Maybe says:

¹ This is an isolated conversation thread occurring in the midst of other threads. However, the chronological order of the statements occurred as it appears. None of the statements have been edited. Interlocutor nicknames have been changed to protect anonymity.

is chatting talking or writing?

^^WVirginiaGirl says:

talking

thumper says:

talking

-XrayEyes-1 says:

This is more like talking... It's not planned like writing usually is. In my job, if I'm writing a medal for someone or preparing operating instructions, I have to be incredibly attentive to what people might think when they read... Here, there's more room for error.

^^sweetnsassy says:

room for errors and good tyo=poe and oops....LMAO

-XrayEyes-1 says:

You can say something silly here and get away with it...lol

Even though the interlocutors in this conversation were actually writing, using a sign system that represents the oral language system of the culture, they believed they were talking.

Interlocutors who participate regularly in this type of discourse are abandoning the customary rules of usage for standard written prose. They are expanding and developing new methods of usage for writing in this specialized

discourse setting. Their new writing practices closely represent usage common to oral communication rather than written communication. The new discourse forming in synchronous conversation spaces is a developmental response to the interactive medium of communication. Although it is too early to evaluate the effect of the synchronous conversation discourse on the language system, this analysis establishes a foundation for predicting how interlocutors integrate their synchronous conversation usage practices into their own systems of literacy.

In any literate society, literacy depends on fluency and knowledge of the sign systems that represent the language. Members of literate societies know the usage rules of both the oral and written language. According to Walter Ong, all written texts are somehow related to sound or the “natural habitat of the language.” Conversely, “reading a text means converting it to sound” (8). Ong also writes that people who have interiorized writing “not only write but also speak literally” (57). The usage rules for both speaking and writing develop over time to ensure clarity, cohesion, and rational understanding. These rules allow for clear meaning in oral and written communication. However, individuals use different sign systems and employ different language codes for communicating through writing than they do for communicating through speaking. Written communication uses printed symbols, while oral communication relies primarily on sound and utterance.

Communication through Writing

In order to communicate effectively through writing, members of literate societies expect individuals to be knowledgeable, rational persons who can clearly express meaning, thoughts, and ideas without being misunderstood by using the established code of print symbols adopted for standard written prose.

Theoretically, according to Walter Ong, a standard written code of a language grows out of a language system's dominant oral dialect as the dialect develops chirographically, or develops a complex system of printed symbols of language representation, beyond the other dialects. The dominant oral dialect moves away from its original dialectical base, develops a standardized grammar, multilayered vocabulary, and syntactical peculiarities within its written code, until it evolves as the *grapholect* of the language. The grammar and usage of the grapholect codify the correct and appropriate form of the written code. Even those individuals who are fluent in the other oral dialects can effectively communicate with others through writing by learning and using the standard, written code of the grapholect (Ong 106).

Literate societies adhere to a standard code of usage in written communication primarily because texts produced in a traditional manner cannot respond to the reader. Writing separates the knower from the known and the text that the writer produces exists as a separate and independent entity away from its creator. Walter Ong believes writing is an autonomous discourse that is detached from the author and cannot be questioned (78). Written texts reduce the active,

present state of oral communication to objective things. They present themselves as something complete and self contained that can exist in the past or the future (132). A written text is a detached entity from the author produced in an objective frame of reference that can disallow the author's presence and/or existence at will. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates explains to Phaedrus that writing may appear to "speak" to the reader with intelligence, but when questioned it always repeats the same thing. Writing has no control over whom it speaks to, nor can it defend or protect itself (Bizzell 141).

Texts are most often written, published, and distributed without the readers having any direct contact or immediate interaction with the author. Because a text is static, it has no verifiable context to clarify its meaning and expression. Ong believes the words on a page contain no gesture, facial expression, or intonation, and no existential context in which to interact (104). Thus, it is vitally important for the author to adhere to a written code that the readers of the text expect and know in order for the author's meaning to be clearly understood and not misinterpreted.

Communication through Conversation

Literacy involves not only understanding the written code of the language system, but also the oral code. These two code systems are different. The written code requires a strict adherence to established standards of usage. At least that is what we like to assume about the written code. The sounds of the oral code, however, allow much more flexibility and room for creative expression. The oral

code has the advantage of being dynamic rather than static because it is grounded in present and situational contexts.

Distinguishing from written communication, oral communication, according to Ong, is the dynamic structure that shapes thought and meaning through expression of verbal intonations of sound that occur as part of an "existential present" in a specific time and setting (101). The concepts and thought processes of oral communication are grounded in human experience, are highly situational, and operate within frames of reference particular to the community and "close to the living human lifeworld" (Ong 49). Because oral communication can employ other elements of expressing meaning outside of the verbal sign system such as bodily gestures, phatic elements, facial expressions and changes in tone and inflection, meanings of words are acquired from their "insistent actual habitat" and include "gestures, vocal inflections, facial expression, and the entire human, existential setting in which the real spoken word always occurs" (Ong 47).

Conversation is oral communication that occurs between two or more persons who may immediately react and respond to each other. An addressee is essential in conversational oral communication because, as Ong explains, the verbal exchange between persons is a mode of action that determines verbal expression and develops thought processes (32-33, 102). Interaction in a conversation allows for more creative risk taking, spontaneity, and margin for error because any misunderstanding or misinterpretation between two persons can

immediately be clarified and resolved. In a conversation, no separation from the author or speaker exists. It does not carry with it the detached objectivity of a written text that can only manipulate the limited set of printed signs it embodies. The interpretive experience of the spoken word guides the development of human personality structures that foster common communal attitudes and beliefs. Susanne Langer describes the function of language as a "dynamic vehicle of communication that structures perceptions, expresses experiences, and creates and communicates knowledge within a community" (qtd. in Lyon 265). When a society communicates orally, it characterizes orally based thought as unifying and centralizing with harmonious tendencies and situational thinking with human action at the center (Ong 73).

"Kludging" Conversation and Written Communication

If written communication is a static, detached entity limited in its expressive capabilities because it cannot respond to its reader, and oral communication is a dynamic, experiential action that allows for creative risk taking and unlimited expression because it can immediately respond to its listener, what happens when written communication imitates oral communication? The dynamic action of conversational oral communication attempts to pass itself off as written communication with new, acceptable standards of usage.

In a synchronous conversation space where this language phenomenon occurs naturally as a direct response to the virtual medium, writing transcends the traditional form of usage for standard written prose and attempts to mold itself

into the language code appropriate for conversational oral communication. Interlocutors understand the standard conventions for the written language code. They are aware that they are producing texts. However, because other interlocutors are immediately responding to their texts, the tone is that of a conversation and not written prose. Therefore, interlocutors abandon the standard conventions for the written code in favor of using forms that imitate the oral code. Continued participation in the space using this imitation of the oral code in writing encourages the development of new language elements that are unique to the synchronous discourse setting. As the synchronous conversation space becomes the primary mode of communication for interlocutors, these new language elements begin to spill over into the written and oral language codes of other discourse settings. As the new elements become more common in a variety of discourse settings, they eventually work their way into the standard, acceptable code for written prose. The following figure illustrates this concept:

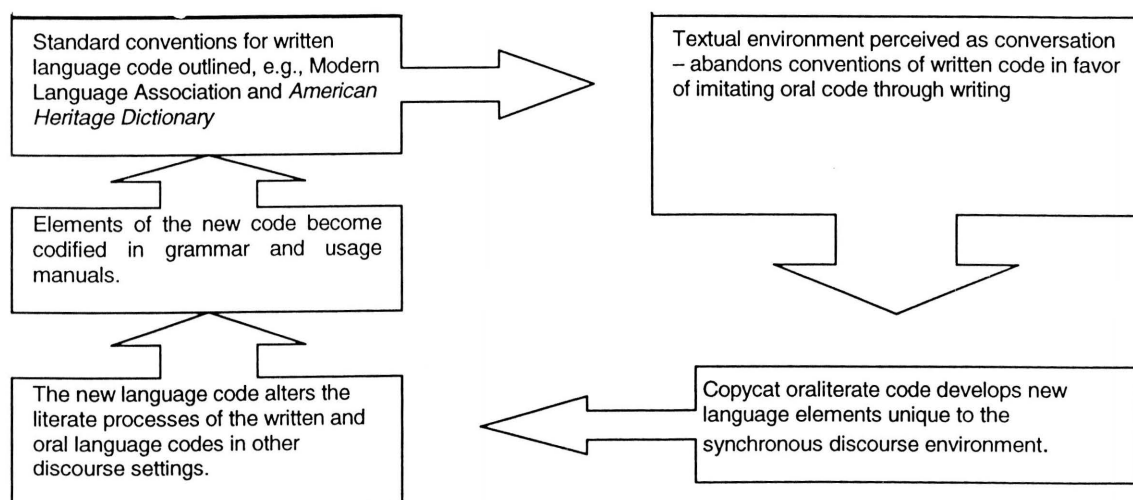


Fig. 1: Circuitous Oraliterate Usage Mutation

Interlocutors participate in an oral give-and-take through writing. In doing so, they are rearranging the written code of language usage to represent the oral code, which, to them, more closely represents thought, emotion, and meaningful experience in this context. As formal usage morphs into oraliterate usage, oral but understandable usage, the text talks back.

The statements of the text rarely occur in complete sentences. The majority of the statements are simple fragments. The logic is heavily subjective and rarely objective. The level of expression and emotional intensity is revealed through the untraditional manipulation and use of punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

Most often, the conversations are full of various degrees of cleverness, wit, and humor. Cleverness and wit determine sincerity as opposed to the formal, persuasive tone of public discourse and standard written prose. The content of the statements revolves around the private and personal experiences of everyday life as opposed to the public and persuasive content of non-fiction prose. Interlocutors type as if they are talking, without editing or revising their texts. Since they perceive their writing in this synchronous context as an oral conversation that is not a written text, the content, sincerity, and level of expression establish a higher ethos in the identities of the interlocutors than the correctness of form or the logic of their written statements. Thus, they build an online community of trust through using the language.

It is not the goal of interlocutors to change the way people write or communicate, or to cause radical and revolutionary changes in the usage of the language system. Their goal is simple: to express their thoughts, knowledge, ideas, and emotions in a conversational manner by using the keys and symbols on the keyboard. In order to achieve this goal and effectively communicate with each other, they change the spelling of words, the way the words and sentences are punctuated and capitalized, and they use other symbols of punctuation in creative fashions to form new structures that represent emotion and facial expression. This statement by SecretGarden Room Leader Wood Sprite shows many common trends in this type of discourse:

Host (Wood_Sprite)_RL says:

i didnt do nuffink Maybe!!

Notice the lack of capitalization, not only for the personal pronoun *I*, but also for the initial character of the first word of the sentence. She also excludes the apostrophe in the contraction *didn't*; and uses two exclamation points at the end. Also, note the changed spelling of the word nothing to *nuffink*.

Interlocutors also incorporate into their texts an esoteric evolution of the language in the form of acronyms, which are only understood in the synchronous conversation setting. The most commonly used acronym is *lol*, which means “laugh out loud.” In this statement, interlocutor Fred capitalizes it for extra emphasis:

((Fred))) says:

LOL Beach yup you got it bud

Studying the language code of synchronous conversation spaces has opened a whole new culture and a whole new way of perceiving the English language. There is actually a method to the unconscious and unintentional madness of interlocutors' writing habits. Through this experimental discourse, interlocutors take advantage of the freedom to dance and rant with the language, coercing it into an expressive code that represents both the oral and the written. Even without the standardized rules of the written code, they understand one another clearly, and communicate easily and fluidly with one another, bringing together the long separated orality and literacy of our language.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE: SYNCHRONOUS CONVERSATION SPACES

Over the past two decades, the rapidly advancing technology and the popularity of synchronous conversing has sparked a resurgence of research and inquiry into this phenomenon. The ability to communicate instantly and anonymously with other people in a textual format has raised many questions about the physical, psychological, educational, and sociological aspects of human communication. Synchronous conversing has also stirred many controversies about the rhetorical aspects of the texts that are generated in these spaces and their effect on our society's level of literacy. In a synchronous environment, it appears natural to let go of the conventions of standard English usage for writing and adopt written conventions that attempt to imitate the oral usage code.

Standard English Usage

Standard English usage is the language code that frames the current controversies and research surrounding synchronous conversation spaces. But who decides what the standard is? The Modern Language Association is the dominant organization that maintains the grammar and usage standards for scholarly writing. Academia establishes and teaches these standard conventions in grammar and usage for forms of written communication. According to the *MLA Style Manual*, “Conventions by definition are general agreements about basic principles and . . .

conventional practices are readily understood by others” (63). This is a plausible reason for having standard conventions of usage and a governing body to help define what is standard.

Dictionaries such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* set standards for usage for spelling. The scholars who research, review, and revise the written code of standard English usage for *The American Heritage Dictionary* are a multifaceted, multinterested, multiprofessional group chosen on the assumption that, “The reader is best served by being told what practices a sample of educated, careful users of the language take to be correct” (Nunberg 36). The members range from NBC news commentator Edwin Newman, to poets and authors Maya Angelou and Gloria Steinem, to biochemist Isaac Asimov, to personalities such as senator/professional basketball player William Bradley, actor Tony Randall, and *The Boston Herald* bridge and games columnist Frank K. Perkins.

In the essay he wrote for *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Geoffrey Nunberg believes the canons of good usage are only applied in consideration of expository prose (“English and Good English,” 34). Nonetheless, our ideas about what constitutes good usage in any discourse setting formed in the eighteenth century and have continued to be the reigning criteria used to judge language usage even today (35). Dwight Bolinger contends that usage in writing should be determined by the prevailing usage of speaking, assuming that, “ ‘speakers’ includes ‘writers’ and that ‘language’ is both spoken and written” (Usage and Acceptability 30). Bolinger further states that a person, by age ten, has already

learned ninety percent of the language structure required to communicate - well before “any serious attention can be given to what ‘should be’ (in terms of usage)” (30). Bolinger agrees with *The American Heritage Dictionary’s* resolve that “the prevailing usage of its speakers should be the chief determinant of acceptability in language” (30).

Contrasting Bolinger, William F. Buckley adopts a more aristocratic, narcissistic view. He claims that it does not matter how prevailing an element of usage is if those who are acclaimed to judge acceptability for usage do not deem it acceptable. He writes, “Lexicographers are sufficiently conversant with their craft to make judgments, yea, even unto designating a word, or a usage, *illiterate*” (33). After all, Buckley asks, “What is the purpose of a *guide* to usage if not – as required – to exclude?” He concludes, “It is not a sign of arrogance for the king to rule. That is what he is there for” (33).

Grammar and style manuals rarely make any significant changes in the written usage code. Many changes are arbitrary. When they do make changes, it sometimes takes thirty years or more before the change becomes widely known. An example is a change in punctuation practice the Modern Language Association made around thirty years ago. MLA changed the punctuation practice of using two spaces after a colon to using only one (72). Freshman composition students thirty years later are still shocked and surprised to learn that this rule has changed. Nonetheless, the MLA and *The American Heritage Dictionary* provide

the basic, conventional guidelines that frame the comparisons between standard usage for written prose and the usage for synchronous conversing.

In a synchronous environment, it appears natural to let go of the conventions of standard English usage and adopt written conventions that attempt to imitate the oral usage code. The Modern Language Association outlines the conventional, standard usage for most of the elements examined in this thesis research regarding punctuation and capitalization. MLA lists *The American Heritage Dictionary* as a credible reference source for standard usage regarding spelling. The *MLA Style Manual* and *The American Heritage Dictionary* are the two guides used in this thesis to examine and evaluate the usage code in the Internet relay chat room used in this study. However, many usage elements of synchronous conversation spaces, such as emoticons, or punctuation used as a form of facial expression, acronyms, and macros, are not addressed by the MLA or any standard dictionary. For these elements, there is not a formal standard yet.

Consequently, technorhetoricians and cyberwriters the questions and controversies surrounding the standards of synchronous conversing. As technorhetoricians and cyberwriters explore, examine, and evaluate the rhetorical climate of this communication medium, they address – positively or negatively – several important facets of the synchronous conversation space.

Technorhetoricians

Technorhetoricians are academics that should, by definition, hold to strict standards of usage in any discourse setting. However, they embrace synchronous

conversation spaces. Their research concludes synchronous conversation spaces are a positive place capable of supporting a rhetorical community that is "characterized by a multiplicity of languages and perspectives" (Zappen, Gurak and Farina 415). The research and experience of technorhetoricians such as John Barber, Hugh Burns, Stephen Doheny-Farina, Dene Grigar, Laura Gurak, Cynthia Haynes, Gail Hawisher, Jan Rune Holmevik, Don Langham, Sherry Turkle, Victor Vitanza, and James P. Zappen show that real-time online conversing can be, and most often is, a positive experience with unbound potential for developing and understanding human communication.

Sherry Turkle describes synchronous conversation spaces as places where people test and redefine the boundaries of what is real and what is virtual. Turkle believes synchronous conversation spaces allow interlocutors to create a "new real" that encompasses both the physical world and an acknowledgment that the virtual world is intertwined within the physical and cannot be separated from it. MOOing, she notes, gives interlocutors the power to make themselves in the mirror image of language (18).

Dene Grigar and John Barber agree stating that synchronous conversation spaces give interlocutors permission to develop an alternate, virtual self. They describe the alternate self as "a dynamic facsimile of human intellect and personality [that can be] created, preserved, and interacted with within a computer system" (214). In the MOO Grigar designed at Texas Woman's University, TWUMOO, she is exploring the boundaries of preserving human intellect. The

primary goal for Grigar is to archive and preserve for posterity the women's scholarly voices expressed through various discourses that, historically, have been silenced and destroyed.

At TWUMOO Grigar expands current scholarly methods of archiving in paper text. She opens up the limitations of that method by archiving and preserving the discourses of human intellect and personality in as many media formats that can record them, holding the discourses together in a synchronous, interactive MOO environment. In TWUMOO, an interlocutor can access and interact with prominent scholars and their works in a textual format, graphic format, or video format. Many oral presentations made at conferences and at lecture series that previously would have been lost to academia are now preserved in the MOO. The scholarly voices of women that once may have dissipated into silence are now preserved.

In contrast to the preservation focus of TWUMOO, Cynthia Haynes and Jan Rune Holmevik describe the MOO they designed, *LinguaMOO*, as an "archi/TEXTural community . . . where writing IS the landscape." *LinguaMOO* focuses on writing as a community action that synthesizes the people with the written language through conversing in the space. For Haynes and Holmevik, the MOO is a place where language and understanding through writing become more than strings of words on a page. In *LinguaMOO*, Haynes and Holmevik believe "language and people are woven together like fine lace" ("Welcome to *LinguaMOO*").

Don Langham believes synthesizing textual language and people in synchronous conversation spaces, particularly MOOs, is "an answer to Socrates' critique of writing, and to modern condemnations of electronic media" (1). He writes, "unlike the telephone, synchronous conversation spaces encourage the perception that . . . interaction occurs in a shared location," and "what is significant about [the MOO] is that it is possible [for users] to build structures within this space that can contextualize and give meaning to human interaction just as physical structures do" (4).

The synchronous interaction of people and textual language builds a conversational environment quite different from a traditional classroom. After conducting an experimental class in Diversity University, a MOO, Zappen, Gurak, and Farina conclude that a synchronous conversation space provides a forum that breaks down barriers and hierarchies inherent in traditional classroom structures. Their study reveals that the synchronicity of the space virtually levels the playing field, allowing for a multiplicity of educational levels, philosophies, and cultural beliefs. In these spaces, interlocutors find a common ground and sense of community in one space.

The multiplicity of this communication medium is the reason Hugh Burns reflects on the challenges facing teachers using synchronous conversation spaces for writing instruction. In 1991, after conducting "a multisite, multinetworked, multimedia, multicommentary, multipersonality class discussion among strangers in this strange new setting" (1), he explains that the significant changes occur in

the people, not the technology. A new software design philosophy emerges that “emphasizes the human dimensions of being and understanding” (2). Burns wonders if it would be heresy to admit that something may be learned about how people write without writing in the standard, familiar context referred to as writing.

Victor Vitanza asks a similar question about writing in his article “In Between: or Writing on the Midway.” He describes the current tradition of print “writer/writing” as a death and disappearance, but not a negative thing. In a MOO, he feels he is “Dying in that writing space, but living on in some other way.” He refers to interlocutors who MOO as “dead avatars under-going metamorphosis into something else” (21).

Cyberwriters

Cyberwriters approach their interpretation of this communication medium from a non-academic perspective, and one would expect a liberal viewpoint from these researchers. However, cyberwriters do not perceive synchronous conversation spaces as a positive metamorphosis nor a synthesis of people and language. Cyberwriters lump synchronous conversing into a broad category of computer-mediated communication. Although they embrace technology, cyberwriters such as Gary Chapman, John December, Mark Dery, Robert Merkle, and Michael Strangelove criticize synchronous conversation spaces in particular for their failure to uphold standard conventions of language usage.

Mark Dery claims that synchronous conversation spaces are negative places where people do nothing but abuse the language as well as each other, and reduce rhetoric to nothing but a vulgar animation. He identifies the way people in many synchronous conversation spaces use language as "ranting" or "on-line demagoguery in which users give themselves over to inspired hyperbole and wild, zany capitalization and punctuation." Parallel to Dery, Gary Chapman rebukes on-line conversation spaces as vast libraries of pyrotechnic insults that "already contain broken furniture and have mud on their walls." He claims the synchronous electronic style is closer to Beavis and Butthead than to Pericles (348-50).

John December describes the World Wide Web as a social pool of knowledge that *reveals* relationships between information and people that can be recorded and threaded. But he calls synchronous conversation spaces ephemeral places *incapable* of creating and building, not only human relationships, but also significant changes in humans' methods of communication (4).

Michael Strangelove lumps synchronous conversation spaces into a class of technology that he says "is the largest uncensored form of communication in history" because it "is clearly potentially subversive as it allows bi-directional, unfiltered, uncensored mass communication" comparable to uncontrolled sex and illicit drugs (3).

Robert Merkle believes participating in a synchronous chat room is standing in front of a firing squad of hackers, phreaks, and cyberpunks who lurk in these rooms waiting for unsuspecting prey. Merkle writes, "Terrorists love chat

rooms . . . They can elicit information from you in ways you may not expect" (58, 62). He explains ways hackers can find out all of an interlocutor's personal information, shut down browsers with Java Attack Applets, and scan hard drives simply by lurking in a chat room.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING SYNCHRONOUS CONVERSATION LANGUAGE CODE

The research methodology for this study of language usage in an Internet relay chat room was a naturalistic and qualitative ethnography. Relatively new to researching technological settings, ethnographic research is a valid form of research for observing and validating human behavior. Cynthia Selfe believes in the importance of not only examining the events that occur within virtual environments, but also in examining how the discourses are formed, how they function, and how the users in the space construct knowledge and adapt to the environment (35). Andrea Hermann calls for ethnographical research as well writing "as we continue to investigate the impact of computers on writers and writing, what is required, finally, is a shift in our governing gaze to include methods of research, such as ethnography, that embrace the social perspective" (133-134).

In this study, two different forms of ethnography were used: operational naturalistic inquiry and participant observation.

Operational Naturalistic Inquiry

An operational naturalistic inquiry required being present in the environment and becoming familiar with the protocols and characteristics of the situation, but not necessarily actively participating. Yvonne Lincoln and Egon

Guba characterize operational naturalistic inquiry as an “instrument capable of coping with the ever shifting, multiple, and indeterminate characteristics of the immediate situation. "It relies on tacit, or experiential knowledge—common sense—which is capable of dealing with qualitative knowledge (187).

An operational naturalistic inquiry was performed by logging into the chat room called SecretGarden as an inconspicuous observer, lurking for a few hours, then saving the chat history for statistical evaluation. This operational naturalistic inquiry allowed objective examination of static texts, but with a subjective knowledge of the intended meanings of the textual elements such as letters, words, and signs.

An ethical concern of this research methodology is retaining interlocutor anonymity. Notifying every interlocutor who enters the room that they are being recorded and archived for research purposes is an unrealistic expectation. Likewise, gaining written permission from every interlocutor to use statements as examples in this text is just as unrealistic. Therefore, all interlocutor nicknames in this study have been changed. The posted statements, however, have not been altered.

Using operational naturalistic inquiry not only provided insights into the qualitative aspects of the usage code, but also the quantitative data. Observing the usage patterns in their present contexts made it easier to identify the most redundant patterns in the space outside of the standard code. Lincoln and Guba call the identification of a redundant pattern "purposive sampling" (188).

Information redundancy aided in determining a reasonable time to stop collecting data and information. When a usage pattern that deviated from the standard written code was so widely used by the majority of the interlocutors in the space that it became normal and redundant, then that pattern was marked as one for quantitative analysis and comparison against a standard convention (if a standard existed). In the following excerpt of a chat history archived on September 9, 1999, the redundancy of the usage pattern of not capitalizing the first letter of a sentence is obvious:

Host SG^^quacker^^ says:

z.. windy.. please stop <\$>

JoeBlack says:

i hate those kind

Host SG^^quacker^^ prefers to simply think of herself as..... kinda cajun

^Maybe says:

thank you thank you and see ya? lol

Host SG^^quacker^^ says:

lol

(^Zarion says:

sorry Quack

Host SG^^quacker^^ says:

hmmm...

JoeBlack says:

lol not even close

Host SG^^quacker^^ says:

hi maplesyrup

quervo says:

ty windy, no wonder i can't get a cup of cofee next to my name

(^Zarion says:

I am not sure how I got it Sabrina....lol

(~windy~) gets the duck a quacker

^Maybe (Back2good_ M-Box20.wav)

§abrina says:

lol zarion

§abrina says:

wb ng

^Maybe says:

not even close?

Host SG^^quacker^^ says:

hi neighbor

penguin says:

(^Fred^) {ng}

ty ty

Hi quacker

[illegible]

nope

I am not sure how I got it Sabrina....lol

neighborgirl made the second one:

neighborgirl says:

Hi quacker

Although the usage pattern of not capitalizing the first letter of the first word of a sentence or statement is not 100% consistent, it is redundant enough among all the interlocutors participating in the conversation to conclude that this is a normal usage pattern in this discourse setting as opposed to the standard convention of capitalizing the first letter of the first word of a sentence or statement.

Using purposive sampling and information redundancy, the most redundant usage patterns that could be compared to a standard convention were identified as:

- Not capitalizing the first letter of the first word at the beginning of a sentence
- Omitting the *g* from words ending in *-ing* when correctly spelled
- Omitting the silent *-gh* from words that included a silent *-gh* when correctly spelled
- Abandoning use of a period to terminate a sentence
- Using more than one question mark or exclamation point
- Using ellipses to indicate pauses instead of using commas
- Abandoning the use of apostrophes
- “Hugs” using punctuation symbols such as (), { }, [], < >
- Not capitalizing proper names

- Not capitalizing the personal pronoun *I*
- Using capital letters for emphasis instead of italics

The most redundant synchronous conversation usage patterns not standardized by the Modern Language Association or *The American Heritage Dictionary* were identified as:

- Reducing small words to one letter
- Abbreviating words to shorter versions
- Combining short words into one word
- Graphic emoticons
- Bracketed emoticons
- “Hugs” using graphic macros
- Acronyms

These usage patterns are unique to the synchronous discourse setting. They are an esoteric form of the language code developed and used primarily in this space.

Operational naturalistic inquiry provided the means and insight to examine *what* interlocutors were doing with the language code, but it did not provide any insight as to *why* interlocutors were developing a new code for use in this particular discourse setting. Operational naturalistic inquiry involves no control or intervention, only observation (Allwright and Bailey 42). When the conversations are reduced to static text, the human element is removed from it. It is simply too easy to forget that the text was recently a “voice” with a human being behind it.

Operational naturalistic inquiry provided the static texts for the quantitative analyses of the information, but to understand why a new language code existed here, active participation in the creation of the dynamic and interactive text was required.

Participant Observation

Gaining access to an insider's point of view became necessary to make inquiries into why *we/they* use the language the way *we/they* do. Interlocutors in these spaces are naturally wary of newcomers and lurkers primarily because the ease of anonymity within this medium can lead to dangerous consequences if an interlocutor is not careful about who they trust. Interlocutors have good reasons to be suspicious of people they do not know asking thought-provoking or personal questions even in the name of research. Taking the necessary time to become an active participant in the space and to become personally acquainted with many of the regular interlocutors who frequented the SecretGarden established credibility and trust with the other interlocutors and made them feel comfortable about discussing the interpretation of their unconventional language code.

Danny Jorgensen defines participant observation as "human interaction and meaning viewed from the insiders' viewpoint in everyday life situations and settings." In this method, "practical and theoretical truths [are] formulated as interpretative theories" (23). Actively participating in the conversation created the memory of the dynamic interaction with the other interlocutors in the space at that particular time. The memory of the dynamic and emotive values inherent in the

language code when it was ephemeral and alive scrolling up the screen revealed how the different elements of the language code caused different reactions and emotions to rise up and present themselves, even while reading and examining the static text afterward because the memory of the experience could be recalled.

Data Gathering

The archived history samples chosen for the quantitative analysis span a period of inquiry covering one year. Thirty-five different dates between January and December of 1999 were analyzed. Each archive covers a time span that varies from two to five hours. Archives from different periods of the day on both weekdays and weekends were chosen. The day and week was divided into the following periods:

Morning	Afternoon	Early Evening	Late Night
8 am-12 pm	12 pm-5 pm	5 pm-10 pm	10 pm – 3 am

Weekend = Friday, Saturday, Sunday

Weekday = Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

The breakdown of chat histories is as follows:

DATE	DAY	PERIOD	TIME SPAN
Jan 8	Friday	Late Night	2.5 hours
Jan 16	Saturday	Early Evening	5 hours
Feb 5	Friday	Late Night	4 hours
Feb 6	Saturday	Late Night	3.5 hours
Feb 14	Sunday	Early Evening	2 hours
Feb 22	Monday	Early Evening	3 hours
Mar 7	Sunday	Late Night	2 hours

Mar 9	Tuesday	Early Evening	4.5 hours
Mar 27	Saturday	Early Evening	5 hours
Apr 16	Friday	Late Night	3.5 hours
Apr 28	Wednesday	Late Night	2.5 hours
May 6	Thursday	Late Night	4 hours
May 22	Saturday	Early Evening	5 hours
June 7	Monday	Late Night	2.5 hours
June 8	Tuesday	Late Night	2 hours
June 20	Sunday	Early Evening	4.5 hours
July 20	Tuesday	Morning	2 hours
July 26	Monday	Morning	4 hours
July 28	Wednesday	Afternoon	3.5 hours
July 30	Friday	Morning	2 hours
Aug 1	Sunday	Morning	2.5 hours
Aug 2	Monday	Early Evening	3 hours
Aug 3	Tuesday	Early Evening	3 hours
Aug 5	Thursday	Early Evening	2.5 hours
Aug 6	Friday	Afternoon	4.5 hours
Aug 7	Saturday	Afternoon	3.5 hours
Aug 10	Tuesday	Afternoon	3 hours
Aug 11	Wednesday	Afternoon	3 hours
Aug 17	Tuesday	Afternoon	2 hours
Sept 4	Saturday	Morning	4 hours
Sept 9	Thursday	Morning	2 hours
Sept 10	Friday	Afternoon	4.5 hours
Sept 11	Saturday	Afternoon	2.5 hours
Oct 1	Friday	Morning	3.5 hours
Oct 27	Wednesday	Morning	2 hours

The following table was used for each transcript to compare and interpret the most redundant usage patterns in the synchronous space to a standard convention (if it existed) defined in the *Modern Language Association Style Manual* and the *American Heritage Dictionary*:

MLA/AHD Standard Usage for Written Code	Number of Statements Containing Usage Pattern	SCS Usage Code	Number of Statements that Deviate from Standard Usage
-ing used for present participle verbs		Omit -g from verbs ending in -ing	
Words spelled with silent -gh: night, light, right		Omit -gh from the spelling of words if it is silent: nite, lite, rite	
Use an ! for emphatic or exclamatory statements		Use an amount of / equal to the level of emotion in the emphatic or exclamatory statement	
Use a ? to indicate uncertainty or to ask a direct question		Use an amount of ? equal to the level of uncertainty or urgency in a question	
Use a comma to set off an expression that requires a pause in reading Use a 3 point spaced ellipses to indicate omission of words in a direct quote; use a 4 point spaced ellipses to indicate omission of words at the end of a sentence		Use an unspaced ellipses to indicate a pause in a sentence, or to indicate that a sentence will continue in another message posting; the # of points indicates the length of the pause	
Use a period to complete a sentence or statement		Do not use a period to end or complete statements	
Use an apostrophe to indicate possession for nouns or to indicate letter omission in a contraction		Do not use an apostrophe	
Capitalize the first word of a sentence		Do not capitalize the first word of a sentence	
Capitalize proper names		Do not capitalize proper names	
Capitalize the personal pronoun I		Do not capitalize the personal pronoun I	
Use parentheses for enclosing information that is not essential to the sentence.		Use parentheses to indicate a hug for another interlocutor.	

Original Form in Standard Written Code	Reduced/Abbreviated Form in SCS	Number of Occurrences
Words reduced to one letter: <i>you, are, see, okay, oh</i>	<i>u r c k o</i>	
Phrases combined into one word: <i>what are you, want to, got to, going to, let me, shut up, out of</i>	<i>whatcha, wanna, gotta, gonna, lemme, shaddup, outta</i>	
Word that changed spelling: <i>you, because, would, could</i>	<i>ya</i> <i>cuz/cos wud cud</i>	

Emoticon	Number of Occurrences
Graphic:	
Bracketed:	
Macro:	

Acronym	Number of Occurrences

Operational naturalistic inquiry made it possible to gather data, classify it systematically, and analyze it quantitatively. Participant observation made it possible to evaluate *what* interlocutors were doing with the written language code in this discourse setting, and to interpret *why* they were developing a new code.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIQUE DISCOURSE

This study confirms that usage elements of the written code do indeed mutate into a closer representation of elements of the oral code. Within this unique discourse setting is a dance of textual voices and a rant of expressive emotions. Interlocutors change, reduce, and morph words to adapt to the constantly scrolling page, and they play with punctuation and capitalization as a symbolic representation of emotion, facial expression, and vocal inflection. What begins as an intuitive response to a rapidly scrolling screen, grows into an interactive attempt to mold the standard usage code for written language into a form that more accurately represents the usage code for oral language. The new code not only contains new words and word forms, but it also includes elements and components that attempt to represent facial expression, physical emotion, and body language.

Speed

Synchronous conversation spaces are so named because all of the interlocutors in the space have the same opportunity to address and respond to the conversation at the same time. Response time is critical in a synchronous conversation because, just as in a face-to-face conversation, interlocutors are participating in a continuous give and take and exchange of thoughts and ideas, and therefore expect an immediate response to their messages. But unlike a face-to-face conversation, the interlocutors cannot see each other. The lack of physicality in the conversation makes response time in a synchronous

conversation space more critical because there is no physical eye contact or body language to bridge the silences that naturally occur in any conversation.

Awareness of this critical response time affects the way interlocutors converse. The need for speed encourages interlocutors to write more economically. It takes less time to write in sentence fragments, to shorten words by changing the spelling, to disregard punctuation and capitalization, and to use acronyms to represent common and repetitive phrases. The changes in sentence structure, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation set an informal and light tone to the conversation. The informality makes interlocutors feel more relaxed and comfortable while in the space. The interlocutor who goes by the name of ^Swoops says “it’s like changing out of a suit and into shorts and a tshirt...lol” (ICQ Private Chat 7/99). The secure comfort level encourages spontaneous language play and risk-taking in the space, which allows for a broad margin of error without any consequence. The interlocutor -XrayEyes-1, who is a surgeon in the Air Force, explains:

-XrayEyes-1 says:

This is more like talking... It's not planned like writing usually is. In my job, if I'm writing a medal for someone or preparing operating instructions, I have to be incredibly attentive to what people might think when they read... Here, there's more room for error.

^^sweetnsassy says:

room for errors and good tyo=poe and oops....LMAO

-XrayEyes-1 says:

You can say something silly here and get away with it...lol

(9/10/99)

This chat room is a safe place where these interlocutors can be unconcerned about the consequences of their language usage.

Expressive Aim

As interlocutors become more familiar with the dynamics of the space, the medium, and the language usage, the informality and secure comfort level builds an expressive aim to the discourse. Kinneavy defines expressive discourse as “that kind of discourse which focuses on the encoder . . . it is by discourse that [the encoder] expresses and partially achieves his own individuality” (398). Kinneavy quotes Gusdorf who writes that “only in the discovery of a personal style does the individual find himself, such a discovery involves a divorce from conventions.” The For-Itself (the encoder for Kinneavy) interprets the linguistic environment according to the elements of the current situational context (430). By structuring a field of reality (the chat room) in order to realize a project (effective and economical communication), interlocutors find that certain aspects of the standard inherited conventions in the language code are no longer meaningful (430).

Interlocutors begin to approach conversing in the space with a sort of existentialist philosophy toward using language fully, both as oral and as written text. They approach language usage and its symbols of representation on the computer keyboard in much the same way that Sondra Horton Fraleigh describes approaching a dance. They come to the space as if there is no predetermined essence. Interlocutors use the virtual space as a medium for experiment and play like a dancer uses an open stage, and they do not always

present the language according to standard conventions. Figure four represents the logical levels between synchronous conversing and fulfilling an expressive aim for the discourse. This cascade displays an understanding of how and why interlocutors deviate from standard codes, yet still communicate completely and fully:

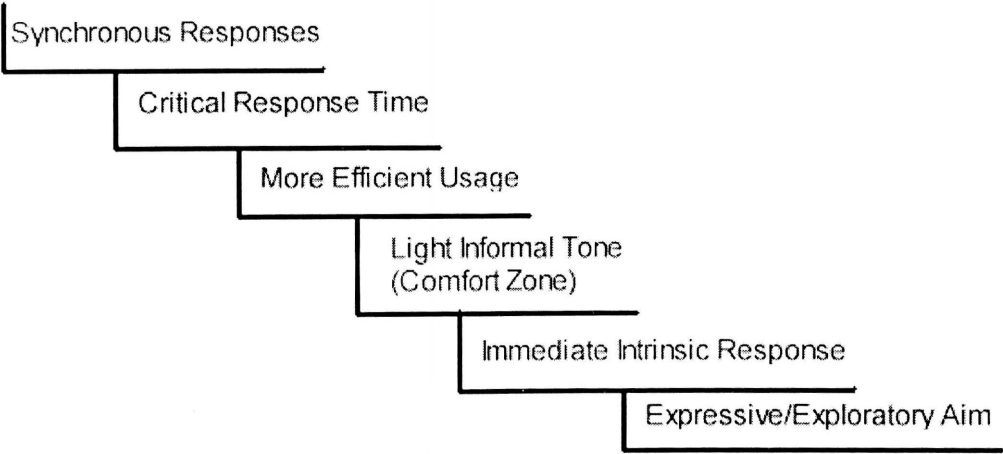


Figure 4: Response to Expressive Cascade

The pressure for a speedy response time also encourages interlocutors not to think before they type, but to type as they think. Pushing keys on the keyboard becomes their voice and rarely do they stop and edit their message postings. Most often, they treat postings as true speech to allow for the quickest and deepest intrinsic expression. The interlocutor who goes by the nickname Street explains, "as for some we imagine as we type.....place ourselves in a creative environment that allows the imagination to flow" (ICQ Private Chat 4/16/99).

John Dewey writes that “the expression of the self in and through a medium . . . is *itself* a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess” (65). The textual messages of synchronous conversation spaces often express the self through the objective conditions in the medium of the virtual space in such a way that not only alters the form and use of the language code, but also the emotions of the interlocutor.

Just as in a face-to-face conversation, when people have trouble articulating their thoughts to another person, they may talk in circles with lots of pauses before they actually find the words to say what they mean. The textual messages of synchronous conversation spaces are treated in much the same way. For example, during an invitation only chat session on the ICQ servers, among approximately twenty-five interlocutors, one man was trying to express his feelings for a particular woman to whom he was attracted. His message posting read as follows:

well since I am not going to be here until the wee hours of the morning maybe i should get it out of the way now....i feel like a teenage boy again...lol.....I think..no no. i know that i am falling for you and that i am infatuated with you...oh hell just say it dmbass....I am falling in love with you actually already fell is more like it...there I said it please dont quit tlaking to me now that i did
(ICQ private chat 2/19/99)

The honest issuing forth of the self in this situation not only presented the written language code in a textual form that it did not previously possess, or that did not adhere to convention, but it also altered the emotional state of the interlocutors.

Nineteenth century rhetorician Henry Day validates self expressing discourse stating that "in all discourse, the whole spirit moves, as a thinking, feeling, willing power, ever one and undivided" (867). Before Day, eighteenth century rhetorician Hugh Blair also argues for the "proper language of the passions":

. . . in what manner any one expresses himself who is under the power of a real and a strong passion . . . we shall always find his language unaffected . . . he has no other aim, but to represent that in all its circumstances, as strongly as he feels it. If he stay till he can work up his style, and polish and adorn it, he will infallibly cool his own ardour; and then he will touch the heart no more. It will be the language of one who describes, but who does not feel (826).

Had the above quoted interlocutor stopped to edit his message according to the standard usage code for writing before sending it, he could have reduced it to one single sentence: *I love you*. However, that would have destroyed the feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and insecurity that accompany this type of confession in a face-to-face situation. By typing as he was thinking and by not editing his text, his emotions were preserved. Street calls this a *roll*. He defines it as:

a roll is where once you start to type you find yourself submerged into the depths of thought[t] that the words flow off your finger tips as if the[y] were magically created from thin air.

no concience [sic] thought

all how do i say flow is the only word i can find

(ICQ Private Chat 4/16/99)

Gusdorf explains this phenomenon by claiming that, “every spiritual or intellectual revolution demands a previous transformation of the established language” (qtd. in Kinneavy 430). In the moment of crisis for this particular interlocutor, aspects of the inherited conventions were no longer meaningful.

Spelling Practices, Punctuation, and Capitalization

The most obvious changes to the written language code in synchronous conversation spaces occur in spelling practices, punctuation uses, and capitalization. Interlocutors have also developed an esoteric library of acronyms and creative emoticons. Although there are many other elements of usage in interlocutors’ language code worth examining and evaluating, the most abundant and obvious changes occur in these four areas.

Spelling

It is important to discriminate intentional spelling changes from typing errors to determine if a spelling change is intentional or not. An intentional misspelling may be a common practice in the synchronous conversation space.

Considering the speed that an interlocutor must type to keep up with the conversation, spelling in this research was mostly correct and accurate. Most spelling errors were typing mistakes. The most common typing error was leaving out a letter in a word. Words that had letters omitted were often more than five letters in length. Out of

the thirty-five transcripts examined, only two instances of words with omissions had four letters or less. The other most common typing error was letter substitution. In this type of error, a correct letter is substituted by an incorrect one. These mistakes most often occurred in small words such as *you*, *at*, *who*, *well*, *how*, *of*, *to*, *go*, *and*, and *bye*. *You* was often misspelled as *yoy*, *at* as *ay*, *of* as *og*, *who* as *whp*, *well* as *will* and *how* as *hoe*. *And*, *to*, *go* and *bye* were most often reversed as *adn*, *ot* and *og*, and *bey*.

How was it evident that these mistakes were typing errors and not actual misspellings? When a typing error in spelling occurred on screen, the interlocutor who made the error sometimes offered a correction for the error soon after the error was made. In most instances, the interlocutor entered the correction of the misspelled word as a posting. Sometimes the interlocutor would point out that the corrected word was a correction of a previous typing error. For example, one interlocutor who misspelled *perfect* as *prefect* immediately followed with the posting "perfect even" (2/5/99). Following the corrected version of the misspelled word with "even" was a common way to admit to the mistake with a touch of humor. Another common method was to use an ellipses and the word "typo". For example, one interlocutor misspelled *everyone* as *eberyone*. She immediately posted afterward: "everyone...typo" (2/5/99).

If a typing error was one of letter omission, often the interlocutor would post the missing letter soon after the typing error. When an interlocutor who typed the word *anothe* left off the *r*, a posting by the same person followed that only showed the letter "r" (2/6/99). Another common method of correcting these types of typing errors was by posting the

missing letter with a plus sign in front of it. An interlocutor who posted the word *ood* in a sentence immediately followed with a posting of "+m" (2/22/99).

Interlocutors sometimes intentionally change the spelling of words to more accurately represent pronunciation. The most frequent intentional change was reducing the word *you* to *ya*. *You* became *ya* 32% of the time it was used, as in this example:

^^CrAzYbOuTyOu says:

hehehe,,hiya Pet,,,how ya been? (8/2/99)

Dropping the silent *gh* from words such as *night*, *tonight*, *right*, *though*, and *although* making them *nite*, *tonite*, *rite*, *tho* and *altho* was also common. 30% of words that have a silent *-gh* when correctly spelled were missing the *-gh*. The most frequent word missing the silent *-gh* was the word *night*, demonstrated by this example:

wood_sprite says:

byeeeeeeeeeee babe!!!!!!!! have a good nite

(8/2/99)

Another interesting spelling change was combining short words into one word that reflected the actual speech pattern of the interlocutor. For example, *want to* was shortened to *wanna*, and *going to* was shortened to *gonna*. *Got to* was reduced to *gotta*, *let me* to *lemme*, *shut up* to *shaddup*, *don't know* to *dunno*, and *out of* was changed to *outta*. 20% of the time that these word combinations appeared, they were combined into one word as illustrated by the following:

(Cleopatra) says:

**this icq thing is gonna take a while.... gonna go and give someone else a space to
get in here and chat..... see you all later..... luv yas!**

wood_sprite says:

i dunno Maybe but i'm not about to find out either lol

^DogDays says:

ive been trying to stay outta trouble Crazy...lol...not much success...lol

(8/2/99)

Other frequently used words such as *because*, *would*, and *could* were totally reduced and changed 15% of the time that they were used. For example the word *because* was changed to either *cuz* or *cos*, as in this example:

^Swoops^ thinks windy should sit back down cuz shes not interrupting anything

(8/1/99)

14% of the one syllable words *you*, *are*, *see*, and *oh*, and the word *okay* were reduced to a single letter. *You* became *u*, *are* became *r*, *see* became *c* and *okay* became *k* as in these examples:

Pete_P says:

k one sec

-----Pookiebear40----- says:

hey pal how r u

(8/1/99)

11% of the words that end in *-ing* when correctly spelled were missing the *g* on the end. Some examples are *listenin*, *payin*, *interestin*, *goin*, *gettin*, *talkin*, *lookin*, *fittin*, *slumin*, *workin*, *feelin*, and *nothin*. For example, when one interlocutor placed herself in "away from keyboard" status, the reason she posted was:

(--windy--) is away: **sittin here listenin to my wavs not payin attention** (2/22/99).

The changes and emerging patterns in spelling are a reflection of the medium in which interlocutors are communicating. Because they are participating in an actual conversation with other people, interlocutors mold their writing to resemble their speech both in tone and in phonetics, but not necessarily to standard conventions. Wayne Booth explains that finding grounds for a multiplicity of ways of knowing need not be a theory that provides fixed and proven principles from which all genuine reasoning proceeds, it need only be a revitalization of what we naturally assume (99). In a sense, interlocutors in synchronous conversation spaces are revitalizing the words, finding multiple ways of using them to represent knowledge besides the previously fixed and proven spelling principles.

Because time is of the essence in a synchronous conversation space, and it is difficult for most interlocutors to type as fast as they think, reducing a word to its most economical form without losing its meaning makes sense. In fact, this becomes a necessary skill in order to keep up with the conversation. The spelling changes in synchronous conversations are changes in the language code that an interlocutor accepts while actively participating in this communication setting. The interlocutors do not appear to be illiterate or bad spellers. They are attempting to communicate their oral language code in a written form that not only more accurately represents the oral code, but that is more efficient and does not sacrifice meaning.

Punctuation

The standard use of punctuation symbols in this chat room was largely disregarded. 98% of the posted statements did not terminate a sentence with a period.

Interlocutors used question marks and exclamation points to express varying levels of emotion. 73% of the time interlocutors used more than one question mark to indicate uncertainty or ask a direct question, and 60% of the time they used more than one exclamation point for emphatic or exclamatory statements. The number of marks an interlocutor used depended on the level of emotion the interlocutor wished to express. For example, one interlocutor who was greeted affectionately by someone she did not know posted this message:

I am fine Luv how are you???.....and who are you??????

(2/14/99).

The exclamation point was often used in a similar manner. Upon entering a room, one interlocutor showed how she was in a particularly good mood that day by posting:

hello to all!!! beautiful day here in california!!!

Another interlocutor posted a message in response:

Ack!!! I just left California! So glad I survived the drive out of state!!

The careful attention paid to capitalization in the response is totally lacking in the first message, yet the response freely plays with punctuation as the first message does. (2/14/99).

Interlocutors used the comma 35% of the time in accordance with punctuation standards to set off an expression that required a pause in reading. However, 65% of the time, interlocutors used unspaced ellipses to separate thoughts and indicate pauses reflective of actual speech as in this example:

He got in my face tonight..and that scares me....He is a very big guy

This interlocutor used two points to indicate the first pause and later in the sentence used four. The number of points correlates to the length of the intended pause in the statement. Another interlocutor who was going to be away from the keyboard for a few minutes posted the following message that used commas for ellipses:

DONT SAY ANYTHING FUNNY „ILL BE RIGHT BACK,,,WAIT FOR ME..... :)

(2/14/99).

Interlocutors chose not to use apostrophes for contracted words or to show possession 34% of the time. Many interlocutors disregard apostrophes entirely as in this example:

ty fallen its mine and my babys song :)

(3/7/99).

Emoticons

The emoticon, or the use of punctuation as a form of facial and physical expression, is an esoteric form of expression in the synchronous conversation space. Emoticons were the brainchild of Kevin MacKenzie, a member of the MsgGroup, the first virtual community formed in the days of ARPAnet. Many members of the group used different types of computers and had different needs. The debate was often heated and users began misinterpreting each others comments as personal attacks. The MsgGroup was almost torn apart by the misinterpretations which made flaming frequent. As a new member, MacKenzie introduced the idea of the emoticon. He was immediately flamed for his suggestion according to Richard Hafner who documented the incident:

On April 12, 1979, a rank newcomer to the MsgGroup named Kevin MacKenzie anguished openly about the "loss of meaning" in this electronic, textual bound medium. Unquestionably, email allowed a spontaneous verbal exchange, but he was troubled by its inability to convey human gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice all of which come naturally when talking and express a whole vocabulary of nuances in speech and thought, including irony and sarcasm. Perhaps, he said, we could extend the set of punctuation in e-mail messages. In order to indicate that a particular sentence is meant to be tongue-in-cheek, he proposed inserting a hyphen and parentheses at the end of the sentences, thus : -). Mackenzie confessed that the idea wasn't entirely his; it had been sparked by something he had read on a different subject in an old copy of *Reader's Digest*. About an hour later, he was flamed, or rather, singed. He was told his suggestion was "naive but not stupid." He was given a short lecture on Shakespeare's mastery of the language without auxiliary notation. "Those who will not learn to use this instrument well cannot be saved by an expanded alphabet; they will only afflict us with expanded gibberish." (Hafner, 217 - 218)

Regardless of the emoticon's early dismissal as naive, it became a popular method of emoting gestures, facial expression, and tone that MacKenzie and many others who came after him criticized as lacking in this communication medium. Emoticons have greatly expanded from MacKenzie's first tongue-in-cheek smiley face. Their punctuation

combinations now represent a wide range of emotion and expressions. Interlocutors in this study included either a graphic or an angle-bracketed emoticon in a message approximately 5% of the time.

The interlocutor in this example expressed disappointment with a graphic emoticon:

^^CrAzYbOuTyOu looks at maybe :ol

(8/2/99)

Some other examples of commonly used emoticons are:

Simple faces that smile and frown:

:) :(:> :< =(=D

Faces with noses:

:o) :^) =o) :-)

Faces with eyebrows:

{:> }:> }=0)

Faces that express surprise:

:^o =^O {=^O

Faces that wink:

;> ;) ;^) };>

Faces that stick out a tongue:

:p~ }=p~ :^p

Faces that kiss:

:^* {=* :- x

The VoraciousTigress has her own signature expression of punctuation that depicts her name:

=<^:;^>= _____/~~~~~

Besides graphic emoticons, interlocutors also used angle-bracketed emoticons.

The most common are:

<g> - grin

<eg> - evil grin

<weg> - wicked evil grin

<s> - smile

<bs> - big smile

<vbs> - very big smile

Interlocutors increase or decrease the level of expression with angle-bracketed emoticons by combining them in different ways and by using either upper or lower case letters as in these examples:

(((BmansBabe says:

ty Gruff <S>

^^Southern_Charm says:

yep <EG>

(8/2/99)

In standard punctuation, parentheses should be used to enclose information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. Interlocutors, however, use parentheses to

hugs made of (), [], { }, or < > as in these examples:

^^Southern_Charm says:

(((((((((((((((Dog))))))))))))))))))

^^^StrawberryMuffin says:

<<<<<<<<<<< dog >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>.

((BmansBabe says:

[illegible]

(8/1/99)

Particular to Internet relay chat and interlocutors who use a chat client software program, another show of affection for friends in the room is to enter their name into a macro drawing. Macros are a skillful and creative use of punctuation and symbols created by simple programming in Visual Basic programming language. A few examples are:

♥ξ♥ξ♥ξ♥ξ♥^ ^quacker^ ^♥ξ♥ξ♥ξ♥ξ♥

^^Winginator☾°☽☾,,☽☾°°☽☾,,» ♡

$(\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit\mathfrak{E}(\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit\mathfrak{E}(\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit\mathfrak{E}(\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit\mathfrak{E}(((\wedge\wedge\wedge\wedge\text{CONCRETECAT}))))\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit)\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit)\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit)\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{R}\heartsuit)$

(3/1/99)

The primary use of punctuation in this chat room appeared to be to provide an aesthetic quality to emotions, both physical and mental, that interlocutors wished to express to other interlocutors in the room. Punctuation was rarely confined just to the standard conventions.

By combining punctuation symbols that alone have no intrinsic qualities, interlocutors provided them with an aesthetic quality that allowed them to be emotionally and qualitatively experienced. John Dewey's theory regarding intellectual experience claims experience is represented by signs or symbols that have no intrinsic quality of their own, but stand for things that may, in another experience, be qualitatively experienced.

Sondra Horton Fraleigh defines aesthetic qualities as those in objects that influence feeling. Further, she defines aesthetic values as those that indicate an object's unique potential to elicit an emotional response (45). Interlocutors use punctuation as objects that have the aesthetic qualities capable of expressing aesthetic values that transform the punctuation into concepts that cannot only elicit emotional responses, but also express emotional experiences that closely replicate actual thought, feeling and speech. They integrate emotion and experience with the symbolic transformation.

Using punctuation symbols as language in symbolic transformation, interlocutors create experience and express emotion by creating virtual objects that are aesthetically valued within the community because the interlocutors relate to them and value them intrinsically in experience (Fraleigh 46). Susanne Langer claims symbolic transformation of experience into concepts is the primary motive of language. She believes language creates and communicates knowledge within a community (qtd. in Lyon 265).

Dewey describes this sort of double change of new and old forces as having all the elements needed to define expression. The present use gains form and solidity while the old use is given new life through meeting a new situation in a re-creation. Things

retained from the past experience become coefficients in new adventures with a "raiment of fresh meaning" (60-61). Thus, interlocutors give the familiar symbols for punctuation a fresh meaning by using them in a new situation of emotional and physical expression in a textual setting.

If Dewey's, Fraleigh's, and Langer's theories are accepted, then interlocutors in synchronous conversation spaces emotionally experience the aesthetic emoticons.

Capitalization

Interlocutors most often adhered to the standard convention for capitalizing proper names. Proper names were capitalized 50% of the time. Using a capital letter for proper names depended on the personal preference of the interlocutor. However, if an interlocutor who regularly capitalized proper names failed to do so on an account, no attempt was made to correct the mistake as sometimes happens when a typing error occurred in spelling.

Concerning the standard convention for using a capital letter to begin sentence, interlocutors capitalized the first word of a sentence only 21% of the time. Many interlocutors did not even bother to use a capital letter for the personal pronoun *I*. 48% of the time that it appeared, *I* was not capitalized. Most statements looked like this example:

----Pookiebear40---- says:

antwain shut up for i kick your butt

(8/2/99)

In this synchronous conversation space, interlocutors use capitals for emphasis 100% of the time as in this example:

oh NOW you want to talk to me.....

(3/27/99)

Not using capitals was not wholly intentional. Using capital letters hindered interlocutors' ability to type rapidly enough to translate thoughts into words. Most interlocutors reported that they did not use capitals because they often have to type so fast to keep up with the conversation that using capitals properly slowed down their postings. Some interlocutors reported that they often "miss," i.e. did not hold the shift key down long enough to capitalize the proper letter. However, no interlocutor reported that the lack of proper capitalization interfered with understanding the meaning of the postings or with keeping up with the conversation. Ignoring the conventional use of capitalization in favor of using lower and upper case letters to indicate the tone and inflection of actual speech is consistent with interlocutors' emphasis on expression of meaning over correctness of form.

Acronyms

Acronyms are an esoteric form of communicating in chat environments. Not only do acronyms represent laughter and emotion, but also frequently used phrases and vulgar words. 30% of the total number of message postings included an acronym, and the most popular one, *lol*, comprised 41% of all the acronyms used.

The following is an alphabetical list of some of the most common acronyms:

afk – away from keyboard

bak – back at keyboard

bbl – be back later

brb – be right back

bro – brother

btw – by the way

g/f – girlfriend

gmta – great minds think alike

icq – I seek you; a download program that allows a person to know when his or her friends are online, and has the capability of sending instant private messages between contacts. Comparable to America Online's buddy lists and MSN's Instant Messenger.

j/k – just kidding

lmao – laugh(ing) my ass off

lol – laugh(ing) out loud

ltns – long time no see

omg – oh my god

ppp – pretty pretty please

rl – real life

rofl – rolling on floor laughing

rtfm – read the fucking manual

ty – thank you

wav – a sound wav file; members frequently trade these.

wb – welcome back

wtf – what the fuck

wth – what the hell

yw – your welcome

To a new interlocutor, or a "newbie," acronyms could be very confusing; especially when interlocutors used them in combinations, or used more than one acronym in a posting. For example, one posting read:

wb beach ty for the wav sorry i was afk earlier when you icq'd me.....btw hows the cyberbaby?? lol

(3/7/99)

Obviously, if an interlocutor was not familiar with the acronyms, it could become quite difficult to keep up with the conversation.

Interlocutors combined acronyms, extended them, and capitalized them for more emphasis. Often *lol* is written either as *LOL* or as *lololololol*. One of the highest degrees of laughter that can be expressed with acronyms is *ROFLMFAO*.

Abbreviating commonly used phrases into acronyms created a unique and esoteric language that was understood clearly in this discourse setting. However, the idea of a rhetorical, communal language inherent in a cultural construct of reality was actually a sophistic idea. The Sophists saw all language as rhetorical and persuasive in intent, capable of expressing meaning. They believed that members of a community collectively construct a value-laden world-view and reach agreement on how to act together for their mutual benefit. Human nature was not uniform, but was shaped by social circumstances (Bizzell 22). Members of a community could unite on common grounds, not of a common humanity, but a common recognition that humanity could express itself in many ways that were not subject to ranking by an absolute standard (23).

The language of acronyms is far from standardized. It is continually rearranged and reorganized by different interlocutors depending on the meaning or level of emotion they try to express. In addition, new acronyms are frequently added to the language by no other means than by a few interlocutors beginning to use them. If an acronym is useful, it is usually accepted without much resistance by the rest of the community. This discourse setting has no need for a governing body like the *Modern Language Association* or *The American Heritage Dictionary* to decide if a new element is acceptable. If it is useful, they use it.

Some examples of new acronyms that are growing in popularity are:

gyb – glad you're back

igtbb – I'm glad to be back

iyok – if you only knew

ihnfc – I have no fucking clue

isul – I'll see you later

gns – good night sweetie

Some modern scholars theorize that knowledge and meaning are constructed by common communal attitudes. Sondra Horton Fraleigh states that people of a discourse community “seek a common ground of understanding and display a desire for communion” (61). More emphatically, Susanne Langer bases all human meaning in the relationships between a community, its discourse, and the individual. Langer explains that symbols express the individual’s conceptions of meaning, and language is the

instrument that allows human beings to share those meanings. In other words, symbols construct our reality (qtd. in Lyon 271).

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

WILL WE WRITE AS WE SPEAK OR SPEAK AS WE WRITE?

As the popularity of chatting continues to increase, this study concludes that the language code used in this virtual discourse will likewise continue to evolve and change, shifting the written and oral language codes in both virtual and non-virtual discourse settings.

As developments in network technology continue to increase at a rapid pace, dancing and ranting in virtual communities continues. Computers will continue to become ubiquitous in daily life. Workplaces rely heavily on computer networks, and academic institutions incorporate as much network technology into classrooms as their budgets allow. Personal home computers are becoming as common as telephones and televisions, and the trend will continue as computer prices drop.

Communicating with network technology is cheaper, faster, and more convenient than other modes of communication and communicating in a synchronous conversation space is the easiest way for people to meet, converse, and socialize with as many different people as they choose without ever leaving their homes. In September 1999, the Internet Relay Chat web site reported an average of 50,000 users logging into their servers per day. These 50,000 people using the Internet and communicating in these spaces conduct business, provide education, and develop communication technology. Many interlocutors spend, on average, six to eight hours a day in a synchronous

conversation space. Some heavy chatters report spending anywhere from twelve to eighteen hours a day in a chat room.

The majority of the users in Internet relay chat are between the ages of seventeen and forty. The dominant professions include technology, academia, and sales. Many interlocutors report that they are either currently attending college or have acquired an academic degree beyond a high school diploma. In addition, most of them are American.

Interlocutors not only prefer this medium of communication for its convenience, but also for its sense of community and shared experiential values. The interlocutor Bille states "i tell the people in this room things i wud nvr feel comfortable telling my wife" (ICQ Private Chat, 11/10/99). This virtual space of synchronous conversing is a textual medium where people can actively abandon the rigid traditional expectations of language use. They create their own transformations of the language to affirm their existence in the space, to preserve their intrinsic and emotional expressive selves, and to communicate more effectively what they perceive as true meaning in this setting. Interlocutors take advantage of the freedom to play and experiment with the *self* in this virtual space by dancing with the language and ranting in the language code. Experiment and play allow interlocutors to represent, not just the knowledge of the mind, but the assimilation of the mind, soul, and body as an inseparable entity that is found even in a textual, virtual environment. In *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, Wayne Booth advises readers to "forget the notion that we know with one part of our minds, souls or bodies and feel with some other part." In doing so "we can then search for what we agree on, what we meet in, where we are together" (101).

Being together is a sense that interlocutors in the SecretGarden seek to culminate through their online presence. The interlocutors observed in this study did not try to separate themselves from the environment, or approach their interaction in the space as if they were thousands of miles away from the other interlocutors there. Although the space is virtual, they did not attempt to separate the mind from the soul or the body. Interlocutors molded the space to fit themselves inside of it as whole entities of thinking, feeling, acting, communicating beings using computers as extensions of themselves that allow them to commune together in a common space.

Perceiving the mind, soul, and body as an inseparable entity creates an intersubjective field of awareness where people experience themselves as seen, touched, understood, misunderstood, loved, or despised. It becomes a field of communal interaction between our own body-of-action, of others' bodies-of-action, and our awareness of what passes between them (58). In the SecretGarden, this field of awareness develops through using language.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study only examines a small segment of this communication setting. Several areas of intriguing research remain untouched. This virtual discourse is laden with aesthetic values, which interlocutors now have some control over, that are worth close evaluation. Elements such as text color, font type, size, style, and emoticons all bear aesthetic qualities and values. Other subjects concerning this discourse setting that are worthy of study are the grammar, syntax, and style of the discourse. Whether or not gender plays a role in how interlocutors converse in this space is worth further study as

well. Another interesting topic is the role that interlocutor nicknames plays in identity construction and perception.

Implications for Future Consideration

As this virtual discourse setting continues to evolve, and as technology moves closer to the post PC era, where text creation and production could possibly be all voice activated, it will be interesting to see which language code is adopted for voice activated translations. Will we adhere to our eighteenth century standards for written prose? Will we shift the paradigm and use the oraliterate code of the synchronous conversation space? Or will we compromise and develop yet another new language code that is a combination of both? Or, perhaps these textual conversations will be a part of history and all network communication will be through teleconferencing using programs such as NetMeeting.

Regardless of what the future holds, the virtual discourse of the synchronous conversation space carries the potential to shift and change the way interlocutors think and translate thought into text. Ferdinand de Saussure points out that any significant changes in the language of a society enter our field of observation only when they have become accepted by the community as a whole (97). The language code of the synchronous conversation space is accepted by its interlocutors. Thus, it deserves to enter our field of observation. Because our society depends on a common literacy for communication, progress, and development, it is imperative that we look closely at any discourse that may alter our language system. This thesis has illustrated that synchronous conversation space discourses are altering our language systems.

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SAMPLE CHAT ROOM HISTORY AND DATA ANALYSIS

^^DevilOfMercy says:
wb SC
^^CrAzYbOuTyOu says:
Imao,,took care of that problem,,Imao
^^Southern_Charm says:
ty rainy
WildWoollyWoman says:
<G>
^^Southern_Charm says:
ty Lacy
^Maybe says:
ty
^^Southern_Charm says:
<S>
^^DevilOfMercy says:
yw SC
^^CrAzYbOuTyOu says:
((((((((((((((((((((((((maybe)))))))))))))))))))))
Lipstick says:
hey hey hey
(((BmansBabe says:
ty Gruff <S>
^^Southern_Charm says:
ty <S>
^Maybe says:
ty SRG ltns :>
^^CrAzYbOuTyOu hmmmmm,,,no hug?
Hot_1 (PASCPORT.mid)
^^CrAzYbOuTyOu :oP
^^^Hot_n_Toasty has returned.
^Maybe says:
oh alright
^^^Hot_n_Toasty says:
ewwwwwwww BAD wav hot
wood_sprite says:
rehi Toasty
^Wave^ says:

wb Toast
 ^^DevilOfMercy says:
wb Toast
 ^*Maybe hugs SRG*
 ^^Southern_Charm says:
wb Toast
 (--windy--) has returned.
 ^^^Hot_n_Toasty says:
tytytytytyt
 Hot_1 says:
k one sec
 (--windy--) says:
wb Toast
 (((*BmansBabe is goona go surf the web*
 WildWoollyWoman says:
wb windy
 ^^CrAzYbOuTyOu *looks at maybe :ol*
 ^^^rainy says:
windy wb
 wood_sprite says:
rehi windy
 (--windy--) says:
ty www
 ^^DevilOfMercy says:
windy
 (--windy--) says:
ty rainy
 WildWoollyWoman says:
yw
 ^^DevilOfMercy says:
wb
 ^^Southern_Charm says:
wb windy
 (--windy--) says:
thanks wood
 (((BmansBabe says:
I was stood up!!!!!!!!!!!!
 (--windy--) says:
ty sc
 (((BmansBabe says:
I hate that
 ^^Southern_Charm says:
yw
 wood_sprite says:
yw windy
 ^Maybe says:
lol that was a hug what what lol
 (((BmansBabe says:

{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{(pooh)}}}}}}}}}}}}}} you party animal

rutroh

[illegible]

hmmmm

hiya Maybe

heheheh WWW

<BG>

You are now ignoring WildWoollyWoman.<-----lmfao

well goodnight all... see you tomorrow!

hey pet how are u

i'm back

```
{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{{^PetFetish}}}}}}}}}}}}
```

nite babe

LMAO

byeeeeeeeeee babe!!!!!!!!!! have a good nite

[illegible]

^Wave^ cranks the volume

wb windy

hiya Crazy!!

[illegible]

wb windy

you all have fun... see yas later

[illegible]

Hot_1 (Debussy's Claire de Lune.rmi)

niters babe

wb windy

hehehe,,hiya Pet,,,how ya been?

```
(--windy--) says:
```

^PetFetish says:

```
(--windy--) says:
```

^PetFetish says:

wood_sprite pulls the core out of her eye, and puts an eye patch on

-----Pookiebear40----- says:

Domino says:

^Maybe says:

^Wave^ pasces Tylenol to Pet

(--windy--) just took Tylenol PMs lol

ive been trying to stay outta trouble Crazy...lol...not much success...lol

amigo shut up for i kick your butt

^^CrAzYbOuTyOu i know the feeling,,,,<EG>

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

you go pooh

WildWoollyWoman says:

(--windy--) walks around the garden pickin flowers

thinks amigo needs a butt kicking **HAPPY**

Imao Pooh

Hot_1 (~Hot_1

(--windy--) (Without You_Mariah Carey .wav)

^she_devil (~uh_huh.911.411@208.170.18.XXX)

^PetFetish says:

ok..ill stay as

ood_sprite (IfartInYourGeneralDirection.wav)

^Wave^ says:

Pet?

Most He

^she_devil says:

hi ya room

PetFetish say

i never got sick

-windy--) says:

wood?

^^^rainy

I think I'm in l

^CrAzYbOuTyOu lool

^Wave`s~Angel~ is away: **gone**

-----Pookiebear40----- says:

i think not u dont one

PetFetish says:

Wave??

Maybe so

hiya she

ood_sprit

well what are w

Wave^ (barf.wav)

wood_sprite says:

lol

Na⁺

LOL

enee

^PetFetish says:

grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

-windy--) looks back at Ur

^Maybe says:

hiya renee

---Pookiebe

renee

ood_sprite says:

lol Wave

PetFetish

Domino says:

whatcha do

(Straite LoVeS CrooKeD thru up after getting dr

76

WildWoollyWoman says:

hi sparrow

^^DevilOfMercy says:

```

{{{
{{{
{{{Sparrow}}}}}
}}}
}}}
}}}

```

^^^Hot_n_Toasty says:

```
<<<<<<<<<<<<< sparrow >>>>>>>>>>>>>> hey you!
```

Ratchet (~Ratchet@24.30.126.XX) has left the conversation.

^^DevilOfMercy says:

brb

This data set only represents the elements in the previous ten pages of chat history. It is an example of how the data was analyzed.

MLA/AHD Standard Usage for Written Code	Number of Statements Containing Usage Pattern	SCS Usage Code	Number of Statements that Deviate from Standard Usage
-ing used for present participle verbs	24	Omit -g from verbs ending in - ing	1
Words spelled with silent -gh: night, light, right	9	Omit -gh from the spelling of words if it is silent: nite, lite, rite	3
Use an ! for emphatic or exclamatory statements	10	Use an amount of ! equal to the level of emotion in the emphatic or exclamatory statement	7
Use a ? to indicate uncertainty or to ask a direct question	18	Use an amount of ? equal to the level of uncertainty or urgency in a question	7
Use a comma to set off an expression that requires a pause in reading Use a 3 point spaced ellipses to indicate omission of words in a direct quote; use a 4 point spaced ellipses to indicate omission of words at the end of a sentence	42	Use an unspaced ellipses to indicate a pause in a sentence, or to indicate that a sentence will continue in another message posting; the # of points indicates the length of the pause	33

Use a period to complete a sentence or statement	177	Do not use a period to end or complete statements	177
Use an apostrophe to indicate possession for nouns or to indicate letter omission in a contraction	21	Do not use an apostrophe	12
Capitalize the first word of a sentence	205	Do not capitalize the first word of a sentence	199
Capitalize proper names	145	Do not capitalize proper names	75
Capitalize the personal pronoun <i>I</i>	24	Do not capitalize the personal pronoun <i>I</i>	13
Use parentheses for enclosing information that is not essential to the sentence	242	Use parentheses to indicate a hug for another interlocutor	37

<i>Original Form in Standard Written Code</i>	<i>Reduced/Abbreviated Form in SCS</i>	<i>Number of Occurrences</i>
<i>Words reduced to one letter: you are see okay oh</i>	u r c k o	<i>3 out of 33 occurrences reduced</i>
<i>Phrases combined into one word: what are you want to got to going to let me shut up out of</i>	whatcha wanna gotta gonna lemme shaddup outta	<i>6 out of 11 occurrences were combined</i>
<i>Word that changed spelling: you because would could</i>	ya cuz/cos wud cud	<i>14 out of 25 occurrences changed</i> <i>5 out of 33 occurrences changed</i>

<i>Emoticon</i>	<i>Number of Occurrences</i>
<i>Graphic:</i>	3
<i>Bracketed:</i>	10
<i>Macro:</i>	0

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Number of Occurrences</i>
<i>Total</i>	99
<i>lol</i>	76

APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

afk away from keyboard	ICQ I seek you; a download program that allows a person to know when his or her friends are online, and has the capability of sending instant private messages between contacts. Comparable to America Online's buddy lists and MSN's Instant Messenger.	omg oh my god
bak back at keyboard		ppp pretty pretty please
bbl be back later		rl real life
brb be right back		rofl rolling on floor laughing
bro brother	igtbb I'm glad to be back	rtfm read the fucking manual
btw by the way	ihnfc I have no fucking clue	ty thank you
g/f girlfriend	isul I'll see you later	wav a sound wav file (members frequently trade these)
gmta great minds think alike	iyok if you only knew	wb welcome back
gns good night sweetie	j/k just kidding	wtf what the fuck
gyb glad you're back	lmao laugh(ing) my ass off	wth what the hell
	lol laugh(ing) out loud	yw your welcome
	ltns long time no see	