Handbook of Research on Computer Mediated Communication

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Chapter LXVI
Solidarity and Rapport in Social Interaction*

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the way online language users enhance social interaction and group collaboration through the computer mediated communication (CMC) channel. For this, discourse analysis based on the linguistic politeness theoretical framework is applied to the transcripts of a real time online chat. Analysis of the data shows that online participants employ a variety of creative devices to signal nonverbal communication cues that serve to build interpersonal solidarity and rapport, as well as by seeking common ground and by expressing agreement online participants increase mutual understanding and harmonious social interaction. This sets the tone of positive interpersonal relationships and decreases the social distance among participants. In turn, this engenders solidarity and proximity, which enhances social interaction through the CMC channel.

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the face-to-face setting, text-based computer mediated communication (CMC) modes impose conversational constraints to language users owing to lack of the contextual cues that are richly available in the face-to-face communication setting (Potter, 2004; Rice & Love, 1987; Witmer, 1998). That is, the CMC modes lack certain face-to-face communication features that facilitate an efficient process for encoding and decoding linguistic and paralinguistic communication among participants (Barnes, 2003; Baron, 1998; Herring, 1999; Potter, 2004). Paralinguistic features are supra-linguistic features that are added to linguistic elements. Prosodic features, a type of paralinguistic feature, such as high pitch, intonation, pause, tone of voice and accent enable speakers to convey a variety of socio-cognitive as well as emotional meanings.

In addition, the keyboarding required in the CMC channel demands more effort and time than speaking, thus delaying the transference of the communicator's message. Typing also does not deliver nonverbal signals such as gesture and facial expressions that convey interpersonal and

affective stances as well as modifying semantic meanings delivered by the linguistic elements deliver to the hearer. The text-based CMC modes do not afford communication participants use of any of these critical paralinguistic and nonverbal features.

The lack of contextual cues tends to create miscommunication and linguistic ambiguity vis-à-vis face-to-face communication. For example, misinterpretation of messages commonly occurs or constructive criticism can be misunderstood as sarcasm or insult. Thus, information seeking and sharing through the online communication mode frequently involves face threatening acts (FTA). Face threatening acts (FTA) are utterances or actions that threaten a person's public self-image, that is, *face*.

The goal of this chapter is to present the mechanisms by which online language users overcome communicational constraints imposed by the computer mediated communication channel. This chapter also aims to present the manner in which online language users promote active interaction and collaboration for successful information seeking and sharing during group discussion. For this, discourse analysis based on a linguistic politeness theoretical framework is utilized. This chapter closely relates to the communication and social interactional patterns of the various forms of the CMC genre, even though the study deals with a synchronous chat forum.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Linguistic politeness can be seen ultimately as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Lakoff, 1973), as indicated by its principal definitional characteristic as a so-called strategic device for reducing social friction by smoothing social interactions and by avoiding conflict during social encounters. As such, it is encoded within linguistic systems through filtering of given social and cultural attributes. Such linguistic realization can be conspicuously observed in lexicon and conventionalized linguistic elements.

One of these conventionalized lexical elements is "face," a cornerstone in theoretical frameworks of linguistic politeness. Goffman (1967) delineates the concept of face in the following way: "… the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact." Face-work encompasses all verbal and nonverbal expressions and rituals that speech participants abide to maintain and enhance each other's face.

Thus, we observe frequent indirect and ambiguous communication among speech participants in everyday language use. For instance, people tend to be indirect when they disagree with or request something through employment of various verbal and nonverbal expressions, such as the use of hint, humor or lengthy explanation using various lexical and syntactic hedges prior to expressing a disagreement to the previous turn. Such linguistic behavior underscores face-management of speech participants and accordingly underlies the interpersonal and interactive function of language use during social interaction.

Face is paradoxical in that two Janus-like aspects (i.e., *involvement* and *independence*) operate in communication, with differences in degree dependent on the setting and context of communication. The *involvement* aspect of *face* reflects the human need to be involved and connected with others; it concerns a person's needs to be considered as a supporting and approachable member of society. On the other hand, the *independence* aspect of *face* concerns the individuality of participants, reflecting the individual's autonomy and freedom from imposition.

Put another way, regarding these two opposite but interconnected *face* values, human beings have both the innate desire or longing for freedom from connection toward dissociation, independence, avoidance and distance, that is, the *independence/negative face*, as well as the longing for connection, association, interdependence, proximity

and approach, that is, the *involvement/positive face*. According to the coinage of Scollon and Scollon (1983), "*deference*" denotes Brown and Levinson's *negative face* and "*solidarity*" signifies the *positive face*.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) present the *involvement* aspect of face in the following way: "the positive consistent self-image or "personality" (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants." Thus, positive face desire relates to creating positive interpersonal relationships by reducing social distance between speech participants. There are a variety of politeness strategies for promoting positive face. By claiming common ground, shared interest and knowledge, by agreeing and avoiding overt disagreement and by delivering compliments, the speaker attends to the hearer's desire to be liked and appreciated; accordingly, this contributes to reducing social distance and promoting proximity and solidarity between interactants.

The other aspect (i.e., *independence*) is termed *negative face* (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61): "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, that is, to freedom of action and freedom from imposition." Negative face desire relates to maintenance of a certain degree of social distance between interlocutors so that the hearer can be free from imposition and be able to preserve personal space and territory. The most frequently employed politeness strategy for attaining negative face desire is the utilization of indirectness, apology and avoidance or hesitation.

The linguistic politeness theoretical framework manifests significant potential utility in analyzing communication patterns in computer mediated communication. It provides a framework for analyzing linguistic and paralinguistic features employed by language users to communicate their interpersonal and affective stances in the promotion of *face* during social interaction. Analysis of social interaction occurring in transcripts of the CMC mode is a cornerstone in promoting more successful communication and collaboration for information seeking and sharing among online discourse participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Discourse analysis based on linguistic politeness is a principal research area in various subfields of linguistics such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse. In related disciplines such as communication and anthropology, it is also a major research area that has been very actively studied, especially in relation to naturally occurring discourse in the face-to-face setting (see Duranti, 1997; Saville-Troike, 1996). However, discourse analysis based on politeness theory is relatively unexploited in computer mediated communication. This is especially true in the Library and Information Science (LIS) context regarding both online and distance education and virtual and distance reference, to the best knowledge of the author.

As will be shown in the data analysis in later sections, nonverbal communication cues function to convey socio-emotional content. In contrast to earlier studies on impersonal communication in the CMC channel, so-called "cues-filtered-out" due to the absence of nonverbal and relational communication cues, the study by Rice and Love (1987) demonstrates high employment of socio-emotional content in CMC. By employing interaction process analysis (IPA) (Bales, 1950), Rice and Love (1987) analyze 2,347 sentences from transcripts of bulletin board postings of a conference through the CMC channel. In IPA, socio-emotional content encompasses solidarity, tension relief, agreement, antagonism, tension and disagreement. As discussed below, such socio-emotional content relates to *face* (i.e., public self image) desire in terms of linguistic politeness. According to the analysis, approximately 30% of the content consists of socio-emotional sentences.

Out of this percentage, the primary socio-emotional content concerns *solidarity* (18%) followed by *provision of personal information* (8.4%).

Utilizing meta-analysis, Walther, Anderson, and Park (1994) examine the effects of time restrictions in employing socio-interpersonal content, as opposed to task-oriented content, in CMC. Contrary to the perspective of "cues-filtered-out" due to the absence of nonverbal and relational communication cues in CMC channel, the study by Walther et al. (1994) suggests that time limitations on message exchange serve to modulate employment of socially oriented content by language users in CMC. In other words, absent any time restrictions in exchange of messages, the use of socially-oriented communication is greater than in time-limited CMC interaction.

In addition to nonverbal communication cues, socio-emotional content is also delivered through the use of hedges in face-to-face communication. Hedges are discourse markers (e.g., *well, you know, oh*) that function to modify semantic meaning or mitigate the force of an upcoming utterance.

Discourse markers are phonologically reduced or unstressed and are typically short items that consist of one to three syllables. They form a separate tone group. Morpho-syntactically, discourse markers occur either outside the main syntactic structure or loosely attached to it, and generally occur in the sentence-initial position. Since they constitute a heterogeneous set of forms, that is, phrase (*I mean*, *you know,* etc.), adverb (*actually*, *now,* etc.), interjection (*oh*, *aha*, etc.), it is difficult to identify discourse markers as such in a standard dictionary.

On the semantic level, the nonusage of discourse markers in certain contexts may produce unnatural, odd-sounding and impolite sentences. Also, because discourse markers principally occur in spoken rather than written language, they have a tendency to co-occur with prosody, accent, or intonation as a separate tone group. In oral discourse, discourse markers are highly productive, occurring with high frequency (Brinton, 1996).

Brennan and Ohaeri (1999) examine the use of hedges (i.e., discourse markers) in the face-to-face setting as opposed to the synchronous online chat setting. The results of the study indicate that the use of hedges in computer mediated communication is less than in the face-to-face setting. This derives from the fact that keyboarding requires more time and effort to produce hedges than does speaking. Brennan and Ohaeri (1999) argue that the impression that computer mediated communication is less polite than face-to-face interaction is not because of depersonalization of the CMC medium, but rather because of the less frequent use of hedges.

Discourse analysis based on linguistic politeness theory is especially effective in examining interpersonal and affective social interaction (Park, 2006). By employing the theoretical framework, Park (2006) examines interpersonal and affective social interaction in cross-cultural context. As well, Park (under review) discusses the potential merits of linguistic politeness in examining text-based synchronous and asynchronous online social interaction in general.

However, as stated earlier, linguistic politeness theory has been unexploited in online and distance education and virtual reference in LIS contexts. Radford (2006, p. 1047) points out that few studies have been conducted examining relational dimensions (i.e., socio-emotional communication, interpersonal communication) in the virtual reference setting. Ruppel and Fagan (2002, p. 186) also point out the lack of qualitative study on patron-librarian interpersonal relations.

In analyzing interaction between librarians and users in the virtual reference context, Radford (2006) utilizes a communication theory from Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson's work *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (1967). This theory is closely related to the linguistic politeness theoretical framework. Accordingly, the subthemes for both *relational facilitators* and *barriers* in relation to interpersonal communication between librarian and client are closely interrelated with politeness

tactics. For instance, the subtheme "*rapport building"* can be understood as "*positive politeness strategy*;" the subtheme "*deference"* corresponds to "*negative politeness strategy*."

The importance of interpersonal and affective social interaction for reference service is demonstrated by the study of Ruppel and Fagan (2002). The study examines survey results relating to users' perceptions of the use of an instant messaging (IM) chat reference service vis-à-vis a traditional reference desk service. The comments in the free-answer box from the short survey (n=115 out of total participants n=340) indicate the importance of interpersonal relations, associated with terms such as "*friendliness*" or "*politeness*," for successful reference service. Radford (2006, p. 1046) also points out this aspect: "Relational aspects have been shown to be critical to client's perceptions of successful FtF reference interactions."

As well, Park (2007) examines the communication of text-based synchronous online discussion (chat) participants during the process of information sharing. This study addresses the communicational constraints imposed by the computer mediated communication (CMC) channel, analyzes the mechanisms participants employed to overcome these constraints and describes the characteristics of information-seeking in chat interaction. The findings of the study suggest that effective interpersonal and emotional communication is a critical factor in enhancing group involvement as well as information service in the CMC context.

Ruppel and Fagan (2002, p. 194) highlight the importance of conversational analysis of transcripts as a future research area (see also McKenzie, 2006, for audiotape-recorded transcript analysis in the setting of clinical midwifery care; also, Abels & Ruffner, 2006; Ward, 2003, for the use of transcripts for staff training in virtual reference). Unlike face-to-face interaction, discourse analysis based on transcripts of the CMC channel enables researchers to capture social interaction that otherwise would be obtrusive and difficult to obtain in the face-to-face setting (see also Radford, 2006 for the benefits of transcription analysis of CMC).

DATA

Data for this study is derived from text-based synchronous online discussion aimed at solving problems in the domain of mathematics through group collaboration. The data is generated and archived by the Virtual Math Teams (VMT) at Drexel University, sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The use of the data has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Drexel University and conforms to ethical guidelines on research on human subjects.

Text-based group discussion has been collected though AOL's Instant Messenger for the group chat forum. Group participants comprise 3 to 5 elementary and middle school students and a facilitator from VMT. Each participant receives his or her screen name through the official AIM site (http://www.aim.com/). Group participants in the chat forum are able to see each other's screen name. The chat forum runs approximately an hour. Before a chat forum, participants are provided with some suggestions for a session: sharing ideas to solve a math problem, asking about things that are not clear and sharing solutions and the best method for solving the problem.

Facilitator's roles are similar to these of a third party observer. Facilitators do not participate in solving the math problem. They post introductory or closing messages as shown below:

Hi ... For privacy reasons, we're not asking that you don't har[sic]e any personal information about yourself, such as your name, age, or where you live. Let's go around and have everyone share a greeting with the group.

The contextual information on the text-based synchronous communication channel of group

interaction of VMT illustrates the social variables of participants in relation to power and role. The power difference among group participants is symmetrical in the sense that all are in the same peer groups (i.e., elementary and middle school students). Conversely, the power difference between moderator and student is asymmetrical mostly due to differences in roles in the discussion forum. In addition to the power and role difference, there are other social variables at play such as age, ethnicity and gender. However, in the data this type of information is not readily available unless participants voluntarily divulge it during group interaction. The difficulty in accessing such social variables, especially those dealing with gender, age and social distance limits the study regarding the examination of factors implicated by these variables vis-à-vis communication and social interactional patterns.

Spatial and temporal contexts of the data reflect a synchronous online setting. The communication channel is through keyboarding, thus rendering a text-based setting. Discussion topics vary and are related to solving math problems. Text/discourse is unplanned and composed online. Thus, misspellings are frequently observed in the transcripts utilized throughout this chapter.

Transcripts are organized into three columns: numbered discourse lines, the screen name of participants, sentence/utterance. Transcript 1 illustrates this.

[Transcript 1.]

1	LAV	Let's go around and have everyone share a greeting with the group. I'll start by saying that I'm really looking forward to seeing you talk about math tonight!
2	AME	Ok
3	AME	Hi
4	KOH	Good Evening to all of you!
5	AME	U 2
6	KOH	both of you...
7	KOH	sure, thanks
8	LAV	If you create a picture that you would like to share with your group, you can IM it to MFpowwow.
9	KOH	Ok
	AME	Ok
	AME	Ya..... not much of a group is it.....

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION CUES: GESTURE AND FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

During social interactions in face-to-face settings, communication participants employ various nonverbal devices in order to align and modify their verbal exchanges. In face-to-face settings, language users employ such devices to enhance and promote communicational flow and progress. Nodding, eye contact and facial expressions to show interest, understanding or confusion in response to the speaker's utterance are such realizations of nonverbal communication. Through the process of language acquisition of a mother tongue, languge users are equipped with the capacity to use such devices effortlessly and tactically in face-to-face interactions.

In the CMC setting, online language users have developed devices to effect nonverbal communication through a variety of keyboard icons (Witmer, 1998). For instance, the so-called smiley-face [i.e., ☺, :)] is prevalent across CMC genres. In addition, a variety of other graphical symbols or emoticons are also observed in CMC. Emoticons are graphical representations of interpersonal and emotional features such as acknowledgement, thanking, expression of sympathy and happiness in the CMC setting. The same interpersonal and emotional features are expressed through gesture and facial expressions in face-to-face interactions.

Such interpersonal and affective features which are expressed through gesture and facial expressions in face-to-face interactions set the tone of positive interpersonal relationship and

[Transcript 2.]

1	GOH	moth is ahead!
2	YAG	?
3	YAG	kk
4	SKI	**slow doooooooooowwwwwwn**
5	SKI	**8-)**

decrease social distance between speech participants. In addition, such affective features convey solidarity and proximity, which in turn attends to the hearer's positive face desire to be liked and appreciated.

The synchronous group interaction in transcript 2 illustrates this:

The interaction occurs among three group members (i.e., GOH, YAG, SKI). As shown in the first line, one of the members (YAG, also known as moth) quickly progresses in solving a math problem assigned to the group. To this, in line 4 group member SKI expresses frustration by reduplicating certain vowel and consonant sounds (i.e., *slow dooooooooowwwwwwn*), followed by an emoticon (the so-called smiley-face) in line 5.

Emoticons function to index speakers' affective stances. In this example, in line 4 group member SKI expresses frustration in the form of a direct request (i.e., *slow dooooooooowwwwwwn*), which tends to threaten the hearer's face owing to its directness. However, this face-threatening direct speech act is mitigated by the "smiley-face." This functions to convey a friendly tone of request, softening the direct request of SKI's utterance.

PROSODIC FEATURES

Prosodic features enable speakers to convey a variety of socio-cognitive as well as emotional meanings. For instance, a sudden realization of new information can be encoded by prosodic features of the discourse marker *aha* with a high pitch on the second syllable *ha*. However, the text-based online communication channel does not afford communication participants use of prosodic features.

Interestingly, online communication participants creatively employ a variety of strategies for overcoming constraints on delivering the prosodic features imposed by the CMC channel. Linguistic devices drawn from orthography, such as spelling, punctuation and shorthand, together with typographic device such as capitalization, are widely used for this purpose in synchronous communication channel.

For instance, lexical substitutes (e.g., *hmmmm, huh, duh*) of prosodic features are commonly used in turn exchanges, as shown in transcript 3.

The lexical substitute (i.e., *hmmm*) marks the tone of voice of AME in relation to the previous turn. Such lexical substitutes of prosodic features set epistemic and affective stances of the speaker such as thinking, reconsideration, doubt, disappointment, frustration, sarcasm and misunderstanding. In the above case, a lexical substitute (i.e., *hmmm*) marks the speaker's thinking. Language users in the synchronous communication mode creatively use such prosodic features by manipulating orthographic letters such as reduplication of a certain vowel or consonant. This is illustrated in the previous transcript (i.e., *slow dooooooooowwwwwwn*).

To express affective stance such as appreciation of comments, language users of the synchronous channel also creatively employ punctuation marks

[Transcript 3.]

1	AME	Look kinda confusting
2	KOH	no, not really
3	KUM	I got 1,397,312,235
4	AME	**hmmm....**
5	KUM	looks wrong?
6	AME	no

(e.g., That's a great idea!!!). Synchronous language users mostly do not employ punctuation markers for grammatical purposes, such as the marking of a declarative or interrogative sentence/utterance. Instead, as with the exclamation mark, online participants employ punctuation markers to express affective and epistemic stances.

Silence and pause serve a variety of linguistic functions during social interactions. For instance, in Asian culture, communicative participants strategically employ silence to mitigate a disagreement which would engender a lessening of interlocutors' face. Silence is also a device for holding the conversational floor by signaling an unfinished and upcoming utterance. In the synchronous communication channel, communication participants utilize the ellipsis marker (i.e., …) to realize such functions.

Transcript 4 presents shorthand mechanisms utilized to compensate for the lack of prosodic features in the synchronous communication channel.

[Transcript 4.]

1	KUM	I have a History Exam to consider, bye
2	KOH	aw...
3	KOH	history seems hard
4	AME	ya history is bad
5	KUM	Especially myteacher
6	AME	Thats what everyone says....
7	KUM	I got the highest grade on the test, an 82
8	KOH	wow!
9	KUM	some people got 20's
10	KUM	That test was hard
11	KOH	aw...
12	KUM	anyway, cya
13	KOH	you are smart!
14	AME	bye
15		KUM has left the room.
16	KOH	**bb!**
17	AME	**2 late**
18	KOH	ok...
19	AME	**lol**

In the synchronous online channel, rapid feedback is possible to a great extent. This enhances group rapport among participants. In line 1, KUM offers the reason (i.e., history exam) he/she has to leave the online discussion. To this, in subsequent lines 2-4 group participants KOH and AME immediately provide their feedback and experience on the subject matter of history. This type of immediate feedback enhances group rapport. In consequence, KUM offers her/his own experience with a history teacher in line 5. This creates further social interaction among the group up to line 14.

Eventually, KUM leaves the online discussion as indicated in line 15, triggering a response by KOH in line 16, utilizing the shorthand *bb!* (i.e., bye bye!). In line 17 AME responds to the previous greeting by using the shorthand mechanism *2 late* (i.e., too late), since KUM has already left the discussion as indicated in line 15. KOH indicates understanding of KUM's departure in the next line by responding with *ok* in line 18. To this, AME expresses amusement, realized in the shorthand *lol* (i.e., laughing out loud) in the last line (19).

Also, in order to mark emphasis in the speaker's talk, synchronous online participants employ typographical devices such as capitalization of a certain word in the body of the message (e.g., *OVERALL, I'm substantially satisfied with my performance last year*). Such a typographical device is also used to express the speaker's emotional state, such as shouting for attention, anger, frustration and annoyance, as shown by employing an all-capitalized utterance or sentence.

The interaction in transcript 5 illustrates this.

The interaction in transcript 5 occurs between two group members (i.e., AME and KOH). Prior to this interaction, the two participants exchange their understanding of the math problem assigned to them. In the first line AME initiates solving

[Transcript 5.]

1	AME	So can we get started?
2	KOH	I just remembered the problem on time in Alice in Wonderland... Lewis Carol invented it
3	KOH	ok...
4	AME	What?
5	AME	Nvm
6	KOH	never read Alice?
7	AME	nah
8	KOH	what!
9	AME	I hate musicals
10	KOH	ok...
11	AME	Lets start
12	KOH	its not musical...
13	KOH	its a book
14	AME	Movie is a musical
15	KOH	not music!
16	AME	And I usually read Redwall series
17	AME	**ANYWAY**
18	AME	lets get started
19	KOH	ok...

the math problem. To this, in line 2 KOH brings up the problem adduced in *Alice in Wonderland*. AME expresses miscomprehension of KOH's remark in line 3 by an interrogatory (i.e., what?) and cancels his/her question in the next line by using the shorthand *nvm* (i.e., never mind). To this, KOH inquires if AME has read the book. To AME's negative response in line 7, KOH expresses his/her surprise in the next line. AME explains the reason that he/she has not read the book (i.e., I hate musicals) in line 9. AME once again suggests that KOH solve the math problem in line 11.

However, as shown in line 12, KOH ignores AME's suggestion to solve the math problem and continues the ongoing discussion thread on the book. After subsequent turn exchanges in lines 14-16, AME utilizes the discourse marker ANYWAY, significantly in all capital letters. Such dramatic change of capitalization from lowercase in lines 1-16 to all capitalized letters in line 17 signifies AME's emotional state, in this case emphasis for frustration. As shown in lines 1 and 11, AME keeps suggesting that KOH solve the math problem, without success. This emotional state is also perceived by group member KOH, as indicated in the last line 19 (i.e., *ok*).

As discussed, in spite of the lack of a mechanism to deliver prosodic features that carry affective and interpersonal meanings through the synchronous communication channel, online language users have evolved means of expressing such meanings by utilizing a variety of creative devices such as punctuation markers, typographical manipulation, orthographic manipulation through repetition of vowels or consonants and verbal shorthand. By doing so, a hidden and invisible "voice-over" text is realized even in text-based synchronous group interaction.

AGREEMENT AND INFORMALITY

By seeking common ground and by expressing agreement, speech participants achieve the goal of reducing social distance and building rapport. Common ground encompasses shared background in knowledge, interests or experiences. The illustration in transcript 6 illustrates this.

[Transcript 6.]

1	LLL	We used AOL's Instant Messenger because we know that a lot of people already have it. Do you think that was a good choice?
2	SKI	**yes**
3	GOH	**sure**
4	SKI	i go to another site
5	SKI	it uses a program
6	YAG	ya
7	SKI	that runs on java
8	SKI	it was real onconveneient
9	SKI	inconvenient

The interaction in trancript 6 occurs among three group members (i.e., SKI, GOH, YAG) and a moderator (i.e., LLL). In the first line, following the moderator's question, participant SKI expresses thoughts on AOL's Instant Messenger for online group discussion by commenting on the merits of the system in line 2. To this, in the next line GOH agrees with SKI. Such agreement engenders further elaboration, i.e., the reason SKI thinks that AOL's instant messenger is a good choice in comparison with another program (i.e., Java) as shown in lines 4-9.

During peer group discussion for solving math problems, disagreement or rebuttal among participants is inevitable; accordingly, this poses a threat to the hearer's positive face desire. The interaction below illustrates a positive politeness tactic for avoiding disagreement. Instead of expressing overt disagreement, the speaker may employ partial agreement or acknowledgement preceded by disagreement. Partial agreement functions to attenuate the force of an upcoming statement (i.e., disagreement or rebuttal) that potentially threatens the hearer's face. This attendance to the hearer's positive face desire results in the maintaining of a positive interpersonal relationship with the hearer:

The text-based computer mediated communications channel does not afford the participants visual context, as can be seen in the first line of the above interaction: group participant REA inquires whether participant PIN is still in the online forum, as REA has not noticed any conversational turn from PIN recently. Due to lack of visual cues, REA seeks to ascertain PIN's presence through a text-based device. After confirming presence in line 2, PIN presents his/her approach to the math problem in line 5. PIN also inquires if the suggested solution is helpful to REA in line 6. In line 7, REA initially agrees with PIN concerning the merits of PIN's suggested approach. Following this initial agreement, REA rebuts the merits of PIN's suggestion, as REA has already established it. However, without the preceding partial acknowledgement in line 7, REA's direct rebuttal in line 8 would potentially threaten the hearer's face.

Informal language usage is frequently observed in this online chat forum. For instance, colloquial terms such as *YA, HECK YEAH, NOPE* and *DIDDO* and omission of certain syntactic markers as in line 3 from the above illustration (i.e., (*I'm) checking*), together with in-group language usage such as *COOL* are all realizations of linguistic informality. In addition, expression of laughter through emoticons (e.g., ☺) and shorthand (e.g., *LOL: laughing out loud*) appears to be prevalent in this online interaction. Also, as in the last line (8) of the above transcript, misspellings (i.e., *estlabished)* are frequently observed in the data. In addition to real-time conversational flow owing to synchronous communication channel, informality also triggers frequent use of misspelling. Small talk, phatic exchange and exchange of jokes during group discussion for solving a math problem also occur frequently in this K-12 children's online interaction.

Such informal language use emphatically contributes to increasing social cohesion and solidarity among speech participants. It also brings forth proximity and reduces social distance among participants; accordingly, informal language usage promotes interlocutors' positive face desire to be liked, appreciated, approachable and to feel a sense of connection.

[Transcript 7]

1	REA	Are u there ping ponger 805
2	PIN	Ya im here
3	REA	checking
4	REA	u stuck cause i am:-(
5	PIN	well angle CED is congruent to angle B
6	PIN	if that helps
7	REA	**It helps**
8	REA	**but i already estlabished that**

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

This chapter examines the way online language users enhance social interaction and group collaboration through the computer mediated communication (CMC) channel. For this, discourse analysis based on the linguistic politeness theoretical framework is applied to the transcripts of a real time online chat.

Linguistic politeness can be seen ultimately as a socio-cultural phenomenon, as indicated by its principal definitional characteristic as a so-called strategic device for reducing social friction by smoothing social interactions and by avoiding conflict during social interaction. The linguistic politeness theoretical framework shows significant potential utility in the analysis of communication patterns and dynamic social action between speech participants. In the computer mediated communication setting, it provides a framework for analyzing linguistic and paralinguistic features employed by language users to communicate their interpersonal and affective stances in the promotion of face during social interaction.

Contrary to earlier studies on impersonal communication in the CMC channel, so-called "cues-filtered-out" due to the absence of nonverbal and relational communication cues, the analysis of the data demonstrates that online discourse participants employ a variety of creative tactics to signal nonverbal communication cues. In the face-to-face setting, nonverbal communication cues are delivered through gesture, body language, facial expression, eye contact or prosodic features such as intonation and voice quality. Such nonverbal communication cues function to convey a variety of socio-cognitive as well as emotional meanings.

In spite of the constraints in delivering such meanings through the CMC channel, online language users have evolved means of signaling nonverbal communication cues by utilizing a variety of creative devices such as emoticons, punctuation markers, typographical manipulation, orthographic manipulation through repetition of vowels or consonants and verbal shorthand. Through use of such devices, a hidden and invisible "voice-over" text is realized even in text-based CMC group interaction. As well, by seeking common ground and by expressing agreement, online discourse participants reduce social distance and build mutual understanding and harmonious social interaction. This sets the tone of positive interpersonal relationships and decreases social distance between speech participants. In turn, this engenders solidarity and proximity, which enhances social interaction through the CMC channel.

Future studies lie in application of this theoretical framework to a variety of CMC genres (e.g., online education, chat, virtual reference, Web logs). Communication and linguistic features such as discourse structures, speech act types, verbal and nonverbal elements expressing active involvement and collaboration, together with factors that lead to unsuccessful interaction (i.e., orphan online discussion threads lacking responses from the peer group) need to be examined. Future research also lies in examination of discourse genres in relation to discussion topic and task, the online community and user interface design serving to online social interaction and cross-cultural CMC.

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KEY TERMS

Interpersonal Communication: Communication with another person in a dyadic, public or small-group context

Linguistic Politeness: Strategic device for reducing social friction by smoothing social interactions and avoiding conflict during social interactions

Nonverbal Communication: Messages conveyed through gesture, body language, facial expression, eye contact or prosodic features such as intonation and voice quality.

Online Chat: Text-based real time communication using instant messaging applications

Rapport: Common and mutual understanding and harmonious verbal and nonverbal acts between speech participants

Social Interaction: A dynamic social action between speech participants

Solidarity: Feeling of like-mindedness between speech participants based on common background and interests

ENDNOTE

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