COMMUNICATION STYLES IN INSTANT MESSENGER USE

by

RACHEL VOTTA

(Under the Direction of William Kretzschmar, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

With the increased importance of the Internet in recent years as a site for communication, increased academic study of the medium is necessary to understand its significance in human communication. This study aims to understand how styles are developed in online communication between members of specific communities, known as fandoms, and how rules of English are bent in the face of new options for communication. The history of communication over the medium is addressed as well as the new and developing technologies in the field today. There is specific focus placed on the difference between local and global Internet communication and how global communities create the need for more specialized techniques of communication.

INDEX WORDS: community of practice, online communities, computer-mediated communication, fandom, instant messenger, blogs, social network.

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DEDICATION

To my parents and brother, for the everlasting love and support. Also, to the amazing community of fans that have welcomed me and helped me on this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Eighty-seven percent of American teenagers are online using technology to stay connected with their peers. In recent years their styles of communication online have shifted. Email, which was once dominant overall, has become a domain of contact with authority figures and a means to convey long and detailed information, while newer tools such as social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, LiveJournal) and Instant Messenger programs have become the means for casual conversation with peers (Lenhart et al 2005). With these new, real-time tools, users are finding innovative and unique ways to create conversational cues in a purely written form of communication. However, styles are not uniform. The type of community of practice in which users engage changes their arsenal of tools for Internet communication, and that division occurs most starkly between local and non-local communities of practice.

In most studies of community, geographical proximity has been emphasized and local ties defined communities. This was done for practical reasons; in the past there was no reasonable way for people to have dense and multiplex connections over great distances. Telephones changed that somewhat, but the Internet finally made it possible to have continuous contact without the mode of communication interfering with functionality – someone cannot be on the telephone all day with multiple people simultaneously, but they can keep multiple computer-mediated modes of communication open while conducting daily activities. Multiple lines of communication can be conducted simultaneously over any distance and users can connect daily in synchronous situations allows for as much contact, if not more, than in a face-to-face community

setting. This is essentially important to fandoms, or fan communities, which are communities that thrive on intense and active contact over distance. They are the focus of this paper.

In this thesis I will first approach the ideas of social network and community of practice, addressing them in the framework of current research and application. From that point I will discuss the evolution of communities online, with specific focus on fandoms, mapping their history and development, showing how fan communities are a specialized form of a community of practice. After establishing this, I will spend the latter half of this thesis addressing my specific community of practice, the Harry Potter fandom, and exploring a subset community of that larger group and their use of specific linguistic features that define them as a distinct community. By establishing the community's specialized use of forms of emotional and action expression, I show how fandoms are communities of practice, although different from traditional conceptions of communities of practice thanks to the unique situation of the Internet and the space for language play and different sense of spatial relations.

What is a social network?

When talking about patterns of how people communicate, it is often the case that we talk in terms of macro-level constructs such as class, gender and ethnicity. While these have been useful in highlighting broad sociolinguistic patterns, it is not the method by which we determine, as linguists, what a variant means to the people that use it because it is too broad. We can make generalizations that hold true about the macro-level constructs, but to understand language in use we move down to more micro-level human

interactions. To achieve that, we must look through the filter of social networks, or the interconnection of individual speakers. Individuals form communities to engage in daily life in a meaningful way, and the structure and relationships in these communities may vary. Users may have multiplex and dense connections with one another that support local linguistic ties, with others might form weaker ties that allow for other types of linguistic variation. Understanding the complexities of the social networks allows researches to see why one community might favor a certain change as opposed to another (Milroy and Gordon 2003.) A related concept, the community of practice, is also essential for understanding how language change occurs. Communities of practice are groups of people coming together around a common enterprise (Eckert 2000). Regarding language change from this vantage point centers on understanding how communities come together to form dense and multiplex dimensions that maintain or shift language, while a social network approach focuses on the connectedness of individuals.

Penelope Eckert explored the significance of communities of practice on language variation through an ethnographic study of high schoolers. Eckert engaged in a participant observer at a high school in the suburbs of Detroit, spending time with students, understanding their social connections and interviewing them to isolate linguistic variables for study. Eckert employs the community of practice model because it emphasizes the day-to-day interactions of participants, which is key to understanding how people form identity and construct communication. It also puts emphasis on both individual variation and the construction of a community identity, both of which play a role in communication style. Her study establishes that variation carries local meaning while still embedded in a global context. While both social networks and communities of

practice are local and have dense and multiplex ties between members, communities of practice explain the occurrence of different groups in one place based on activity of participants. Extending this idea to the Internet proves tricky because Internet communities are not local in the traditional sense and have fluid definitions of what is a place online.

Digital Communities

At the time of Eckert's study, the only type of communication she had to observe was face-to-face. There was no Internet on which students could communication and further construct an identity. However, nowadays youth communities of practice stretch to the Internet and organize there in new and dynamic ways, fueled by a variety of new methods of communication available in the digital age. The earliest studies of communication on the Internet focused on email messages, bulletin boards and Internet Relay Chat, or IRC, technology. Researchers studied how email was formed, structure of capitalization and signatures, as well as how personality was presented on bulletin boards. IRC, because of its real-time nature, became the site of research for speech-like communication. Brenda Danet, Lucia Ruedenberg-Wright, and Yehudit Rosenbaum-Tamari tackled the playful nature of IRC communication, studying play with identity, play with frames of interaction, and play with typographic symbols (1997). John Paolillo developed a social network approach to online language, looking specifically at IRC discourse of a community of Indian nationals using the IRC system (1999). Paolillo explores the role of strong and weak ties to the network in the maintenance and enforcement of linguistic norms in the system.

AOL, or America Online, was founded in the 1980s as an online game site, but by the end of the decade and the beginning of the 1990s it had switched to a broader focus, including chat rooms and private Instant Messaging functions. It has allowed people to communicate over the Internet in a format that was modeled for those unfamiliar with the Internet, in contrast to IRC and other forms of computer-mediated communication which were the domains of the more computer-savvy. AOL was marketed to the masses as an easy way to use the Internet, given out free to first-time users to get them to join the system with packaged games and the chance to chat with information. The AIM, or AOL Instant Messenger, program, also known as IM, is one of the most popular features of the service over the years and was removed from the pay service of AOL so even if users were not subscribers to AOL they could still have an AIM identity. Currently AIM has 53 million users, over 20 million more than the next closest competitor. More recent research into real-time communication online has focused on this technology.

The first research on Instant Messenger communication, a one-to-one synchronous form of computer-mediated communication (Baron 2002:13), was based on survey data and informal interviews (Grinter & Palan 2002; Randall 2002; Schiano et al 2002; Farmer 2003.) In 2004, Baron built the first real sociolinguistic corpus of IM conversations for analysis, and Tagliamonte and Dennis followed suit in 2005, completing research on youth IM users with local network ties (2005). Tagliamonte has spent years researching youth speech in Canada, with particular focus on quantifiers and quotatives. The majority of her work is on data from spoken language, but recently she has become aware of the importance of electronic communication in youth speaker's

lives. At the New Ways of Analyzing Variance (NWAV) conference in 2005, Tagliamonte and her student, Derick Denis, presented preliminary findings on a corpus of AOL Instant Messenger data collected from Denis' social network. Logs were taken of previous IM conversations between Denis and his friends, as well as between Denis' friends. These teens are all locally connected in the Toronto area, attending school together and not often seeing each other outside of the online environment. IM conversations are supplemental to face-to-face or voice-to-voice communication in this corpus. They are not the primary means of communication for users, although they do play a significant role in increasing the daily contact level of speakers. Tagliamonte and Denis' findings show which IM forms participants favor over others, and draw comparisons between intensifier use in IM versus spoken discourse for speakers in local contact situations.

The Tagliamonte research does not take into account that much of the discourse happening over IM channels overall is occurring between users with no local connection, thus changing the style of their communication, which is evident in the fandom community I study. There are researchers who have approached computer-mediated communication in global networks from a community of practice framework. Luciano Paccagnella sets the foundations for how researchers can approach the Internet as a site for ethnographic study, outlining the benefits and drawbacks of the setting, in a case-study of an Italian conference. Lynn Cherney's MUD research, *Conversation and Community: Chat in a Virtual World (*1999*),* approaches the ElseMOO users as a community of practice. A MUD, or Multi User Domain, is a text-based virtual environment that multiple people connect to, which allows them to communicate in real

time with other people and text-based objects in a virtual setting. The first MUD, called MUD1, was developed in 1978 at the University of Essex, inspired by single-user text-based fantasy games where players solved puzzles using action commands. The first MUDs were adventure MUDs, where participants performed tasks and engaged in quests, and were not able to change the environment without reaching certain status in the game. There are also other kinds of MUDs, called MOOs, which are object oriented, meaning focused on the relationship of players to their environment and other players, instead of goal oriented, or focused on the completion of tasks to reach a conclusion of the game. MOOs are a gathering place for people to connect in a virtual setting.

Cherney engaged in the ElseMOO, which was an offshoot of a much larger MOO known as LambdaMOO. ElseMOO was closely tied with LambdaMOO, which regularly had 200 members online at one point, while the smaller ElseMOO only had 30. Cherney engaged in the MOO as a participant observer, logging discourse and conducting interviews with other members to understand the community structure and the norms of communication within the structure. Her study pinpoints specific discourse features like emoting and turn taking online. Cherney explores the limitations imposed by computer-mediated communication and the methods users employ to surpass these limitations. In turn these inventions stretch and recontextualize the discourse as a new type. While these MUDs were a precursor for how communities formed online, relevant to my own research of communities, it is no longer a major site for communication. Likewise, however relevant MUDs register is in relation to current computer-mediated communication, it is no longer a widespread medium for discourse.

Sites of community have moved away from text-based settings like the MUDs and MOOs into more multimedia avenues, the most recent being Web 2.0. Developers of Web 2.0 platforms have sought to define their products in an ever shifting market place, where what "Web 2.0" means today may not be the same as what it means tomorrow based on new technological developments. O'Rielly (2005) offers a convenient outline of some basic tenets of Web 2.0 technology as it differs from other web technology. According to O'Rielly, Web 2.0 is services, not packaged software, meaning that the applications are not something a user must download on to their own computer to use. They are essentially mobile, and thus prone to constant development and change. The key is that the data and usability of a Web 2.0 product gets richer as more people use it. Users are invited to be co-developers and have input to the design and usability of the product. The platforms also work on the collective intelligence of all their users. The systems falter if they are approached as dictatorships, with the maintainers and creators controlling every aspect of development. This was evident in the case of Friendster, a Web 2.0 system that flourished initially but lost its user base when developers started banning users and limiting user control (Boyd 2006). Web 2.0 systems are collective works, built up by use and not by actual developers, making them only functional if users engage and create on their systems. It is in that essential aspect of their existence that we find how community structures are inherent in the Web 2.0 system in a way that they were not in early generation web programs. The following Table is an abridged version of the one that appears in Malcolm Brown's 2007 article, "Mashing up the Once and Future CMS" in Educase Review. It compares the characteristics of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0.

TABLE 1 – Web 1.0 vs Web 2.0

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
Publishing	Participation
Individual, large-scale Web sites	Blogs
Subscription services	Free or low cost services
Macro-content	Micro-content
Versions and major releases	Continuous micro-enhancement
Created defines content, design	Users define content, design
Value indifferent to the amount of usage	Value increases the more it is used
Harnessing of authority's intelligence	Harnessing of collective intelligence
Example: Encyclopedia Britannica	*Example: Wikipedia*

MySpace was launched in July 2003, and has come to replace Friendster as the networking site of choice for the general public. Currently MySpace is the eight most popular Web site worldwide. On MySpace you find a cross-section of Web 2.0 users – college students and recent grads staying in contact, bands and music fans, gays and lesbians, youths, mainstream famous people and their circles of less-famous friends, and Internet-famous cult figures. Each of these categories is not black-and-white, of course; a college graduate can be using the site to both connect with old friends and find fellow music fans. But all purposes for uses do create separate social networks functioning simultaneously. To form these social networks, users must be actively participating in

the system. Just joining a site does not make them contributors to the social network. These networks are in some way visual representations of the sociolinguistic concept of social network, but more than that they are dedicated communities of practice or interlapping communities of practice that do not encompass a user's entire social network.

Danah Boyd is a researcher at Berkeley who specializes in Web 2.0 and youth culture, with a particular focus on MySpace. Boyd studied MySpace's youth contingent as a participant observer, based on her previous experience studying Friendster users. While Friendster collapsed and lost popularity under the weight of an influx of users, MySpace has thrived because it allowed users immense flexibility and control, giving them the freedom to override the system's design to modify their pages and even remove the sites ads to suit their own desires. Boyd points out that the majority of users do not do this, as a sign of respect to the system's maintainers. Teens, according to Boyd, flocked to the site because it is an extension of their other computer-mediated communication, but instead of just being a way to communicate, MySpace allowed teens to build a digital identity through profiles that are both representations of themselves and a space for hanging out and talking to their friends, as exemplified in frequent exchanges back and forth between friends leaving comments on each other's pages in real time, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – MySpace profile and Comments exchanged in real time.

One reason Boyd cites for the demand for this space is the lack of public youth space in American culture. As teens' time and access to real space to "hang out" is restricted by

adults, teens have sought out that same public space on the Internet, somewhere they can escape the watchful eye of authority figures. However, with the increased media attention on MySpace and safety, some of those public avenues on the Internet have gone private for users. It remains to be seen if MySpace lasts as a major site for youth congregation or tool for communication.

Chapter 2: The structure of fandoms online

While the Internet as a whole, and social networking sites specifically, are being used to foster and redefine communication, to look at Internet style and use broadly would be as ineffective as trying to find a general human communication style. There are too many users, who use the Internet in too many ways, to approach it so widely. Instead the specific community using the technology shapes communication.

One area in which the Internet has increased and altered a specific communication style is with fan groups. Fan communities, known as fandoms, have most recently been defined as a subculture composed of like-minded fans, characterized by a feeling of closeness to others who share the same interest (Thorne & Bruner, 2006), for example, the congregation of fans around television series like "StarTrek" or the Star Wars movie universe. The term both applies to the fan culture surrounding a single topic or the interconnected social network of individual fandoms, many of which overlap.

Any popular media product, and many not so popular ones, most likely has some sort of fandom culture grown up around it. Today one of the major cultural activities that define a fandom is the production of fanfiction, or fanfic. Broadly, fanfiction is defined as fictional works based on an original work, either using the characters, the setting, or a combination of the two. The new work is created by fans of the original, and produced for a community of like-minded fans. In some interpretations, fanfiction is a modern equivalent of the oral literature tradition of retold stories, like folk tales, shared in a community and reinterpreted. The term *fandom* itself dates back to 1903 used in reference sports fandoms, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, Fanfiction-based

fandoms can be traced to 17th century publications of sequels to Don Quixote, and in the 19th century fan-versions of *Sherlock Holmes* and *Alice In Wonderland*. In the 1920s fans of Jane Austin wrote fan fictions and published their own fan magazines of the works, according to online fan histories.

The idea of contemporary Western fandoms was popularized in the 1970s with the development of a fan culture around the "StarTrek" television series (Jenkins 1992). Other series and movies also grew dedicated fan followings, some of which were short-lived like "Beauty and the Beast," while others like "Star Wars" have continued over time. Henry Jenkins is the foremost authority on fan cultures. His 1992 book Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture defined the state of fandom of the time. Jenkins focuses on the interaction of fans with the canon of the text, outlining how fans engaged with the text on a deeper and more focused level than casual viewers. He also explores the culture of "slash" fandom, or writing homosexual pairings of canon characters when they are not homosexual in the original work (although in more modern fandoms where there are gay characters, or gay pairings, in the original the practice of writing these pairings is sometimes also called "slash"). The term comes from the front-slash mark (/) between the characters' names such as Harry/Draco (although this format is also used in non-slash pairings). Jenkins is a proponent of the oral folklore view of fanfiction and fandom and sees fan activity as culture's way to reclaiming folklore and myth that is owned by corporations. Following in Jenkin's footsteps is Matt Hills, with his overview of fans and fan theory in the 2002 book Fan Cultures, which explores a variety of forms of fan groups, such as Elvis impersonators, "X-Files" fans, and "StarTrek" fans, and links fan devotion to the notion of cult. In addition to Hills there are

numerous other smaller-scale fandom studies (Browne 2003, Harris 1998, Tankle and Murphy 1998). While studies focus on different aspects of fannish participation and culture, most share the common thread that researchers approach studies as participant observers, often filling the participant role first. It is very unlikely that people would successfully research a fandom in which they do not also have membership, owing to the special knowledge required to understand the community.

Historically, the structure of most fandoms is similar: fans held conventions and communicated through "fanzines," or fan produced magazines, which contained fan works such as fanfiction, meta analysis of the canon, or original, text and art based on the canon, or "fanart". In addition to these items, fans also produced other fan works derived from the canon including "filk," which are songs about a canon, and "fanvids," or video montages or re-imaginings of the canon. Some fandom members became more popular or read than others, known as Big Name Fans, or BNFs. Most fandom members, however, enjoy several friendships with others as part of the larger network of all fans. These connections are the formation of communities of practice, building network ties among users and establishing communication paths to pass along and reinforce sociolinguistic traits. All the physical materials of fandom were originally passed hand-to-hand or through the mail after preliminary connections between fans had been established. Thus, to be a member of fandoms at the time, you had to know someone already in the culture.

As computers became more prevalent, many fandom members were early adopters of new technology. Many were in college with access to new technology, and they used this technology to organize fandom. Usenet, which was developed in 1979 at

Duke University, became a site for discussion of fan topics (Baym 1998). Users could email topics to a variety of newsgroups that were set up like bulletin boards. In Nancy Baym's long-term research on soap opera fans she approached their use of Usenet groups to organize and communicate, focusing on soap opera fans' tendency to speculate, criticize, and rework texts, as well as the expansive possibilities of the Internet on the potential for fan interaction. Andrea MacDonald also addresses the Usenet system for fan discourse in her paper "Virtual Fans."

Development of new computer technology and the spread of the Internet into the private sector continually changed the medium and means of communication for fans. Other early computer technology that allowed fandom congregation included MUDs, such as ones around "Star Wars" environments. With the development of the World Wide Web and the increased prominence of the Internet in daily life, participation in fandoms has become an online activity. The ability to reach and connect to more people quickly has expanded both the ranks of fandoms and the breadth of active fandoms. The Internet made production and distribution of fan works less costly than it was before. Most recently fandoms have used Web 2.0 technology to congregate. Any Internet user is a Google search away from finding likeminded fans, and a few easy steps past that to creating an online identity that can negotiate multiple fandom spaces. Credibility, which was once obtained by knowing someone already in the community, is not a given anymore when anyone can stumble upon the community and join. Participants must earn a place and the trust of their fellow fans, as well as develop status in the community of practice.

A good example is the development of the Harry Potter fandom, which is the common fandom that ties the women in my data set – although they all have multiple fandom memberships. In 1999, a year after FanFiction.net, a multi-fandom archiving site, opened, the first Harry Potter fan fiction story was archived there and soon Harry Potter stories became the most numerous stories on the site. Soon afterwards the first Harry Potter fan fiction Web site, MOO, and mailing lists were founded, setting the stage for traditional fandom interaction as seen in previous fandoms like "X-Files," which was the largest fandom prior to Harry Potter. Expansion of a variety of mailing lists and sites, including slash-based ones, continued through 2000, following the model of most developing fandoms at that time. However, in 2001 the fandom broke the mold and transitioned from mailing lists and web sites to the LiveJournal system, thanks to a few pioneering members. Slash fans were the first major group of fans to transition to LiveJournal, and to this day LiveJournal is highly populated by slash contingents of all fandoms. Virtual word-of-mouth encouraged more and more fandom members to join the site, and eventually having a LiveJournal address became as important as having an email address and penname.

LiveJournal is a blogging tool that allows users to post their content in a format that allows for visible networking, and enables a Real Simple Syndication (RSS) system that allows users to read all their favorite blogs in one place by automatically collecting all the posts of users and placing them on an aggregated feed for easy viewing. While there are other social networking tools online that fandom members use to network, there are three key factors that make LiveJournal the site of choice for fandoms. First, the program has a comment and comment threading system that allow a dialogue-style

discourse between users, which makes LiveJournaling like a hybrid of message boards and instant messenger technology. Users can clearly see who is talking to whom and can direct their comments accordingly. This leads to a more spoken-discourse style of communication instead of a written-discourse style.

Figure 2 – Example of threading in LJ comments

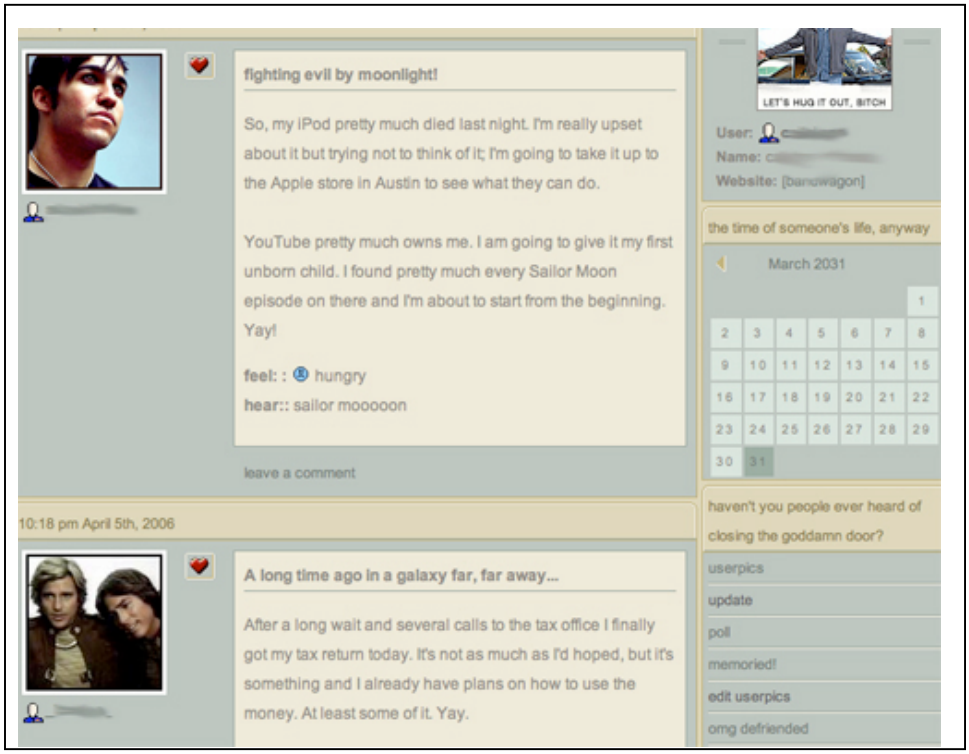
(All usernames have been blurred to preserve anonymity)

Second, the memories and scrapbook features, which allow users to catalogue and archive fan fiction and fan art in an easily accessible manner, are attractive for fandom members. LiveJournal has not completely replaced Web sites, and high status is still placed on having a web site of your work or having your work hosted on a major Web site, but there are many works in fandom now that can only be found within the

LiveJournal system. Also, the memories and tag features allow fandom to archive all discourse for easy access in future debates or discussions.

The third factors are the friending and community features imbedded in the system. The friending features allow you to add certain users to an RSS feed and give them access to your locked posts, which are posts that are encoded to appear only to specific users. Friends are a list of users who are allowed to read any locked posts and a list of users who you wish to read aggregated in one place. The community features allow users to create topic-specific communities that show up on a "friendspage," or a RSS feed of other users' journals, like a regular entry. Figure 3 below shows the layout of one user's friendspage and how entries appear in chronological order. This builds a community structure where users can clearly see social network ties from user to user.

Figure 3 – Friends Page



These final features are the crux of why LiveJournal is such an attractive fandom tool. Users are able to negotiate several different sub-communities without leaving their friendspage. It comes back to the dual definition of fandom. It is both the group related to a particular interest, and the wider collection of all fandoms. Instead of having to negotiate several web sites to maintain a multifandomed persona, LiveJournal allows users to visit a single site that serves the main needs of all major fandoms. "Friendslists" can include posts by friends in many fandoms and users' posts can be filtered down to specific people and subgroups. While a user can friend anyone and anyone can friend them, only users who are mutually adding each other are able to interact completely. What aspect of a journal is made visible to whom is the choice of the journal's owner, but audience is only determined by who chooses to add someone back and look.

Because of these new tools available to fandoms, expectations of fandom relationships and communication styles have changed. Older avenues of online fandom communication are not as useful for widespread intimacy, or at least the impression of intimacy, between users without considerable effort and outside means. Message boards are not conductive to getting to know other posters intimately, for instance there is no personal narrative to a message board personality that is traceable. True, people who post messages on a message board do have personalities, and use icons, names, and signatures at the bottom of their messages to keep a cohesive identity from post to post, but to find and follow a single poster is difficult, and cultivating a personal relationship requires using email, which for some is seen as too forward for contact from a relative stranger online. On LiveJournal, connection is a simple comment away, and users invite those on

most of their posts (there is an option for turning off all comments). This also changes community structure: people become more than just single comments on a thread, and they also have an entire journal worth of personality and personal connections with other fandom members.

Since LiveJournal is not exclusive to fandoms in general or to a fandom in particular, there is much room for crossover, both from fandom-to-fandom and from fan life to everyday life. The ability to cross between multiple fandoms and fandom and offline life is both a blessing and a curse for some users. Like blogs, LiveJouranls and fannish involvement have caused some fandom members to lose jobs when bosses found their journals. As a result, many avenues of LiveJournal fandom are locked down, and only people with appropriate fandom ties are allowed access to the inner circles of information and involvement. LiveJournal may make fringe fandom involvement easier, but inner core membership is still a case of whom you know and how well you know them.

Fandoms are not the only communities using LiveJournal. The other major group on LiveJournal is teenagers. Teens are using the sites as personal journals and ways to keep their local friends up to date, but just as one part of their arsenal of Web 2.0 tools, along with MySpace, Facebook and other social networking sites. However, the connectivity features of LiveJournal make it very easy for youth users to become integrated into a fandom culture, or create their own subsets of fandom culture. This is especially evident in band fandoms. There are distinct teen fandom communities of practice on LiveJournal, as well as adult communities of practice, all part of the greater social network of fans. Oftentimes, through following links and searching for more fan

fiction or fan art, youth users stumble upon the adult fandoms and transition into those subcultural spheres. Overall, youth users are seeing the Internet as an appropriate place to organize and congregate, as well as meet and make friends with people outside their local networks, leaving them ripe for fandom activities as they get older.

Harry Potter faced this intermixing aspect, with youth fans and fandom members coming into contact during the shift to LiveJournal. Overall, the shift to LiveJournal made the community more segmented; instead of all types of fans existing on the same mailing lists or major sites, they self-organized into topic-specific or pairing-specific communities, and networking with specific friends instead of with the entire system of fans. Thanks to the system of LiveJournal friending, fandoms became visibly networked. Popularity could be quantified by network ties, in-group status could be seen by how many people you were connected to, not just by how much feedback you received in terms of messages praising your fan works, although that continues to play a part. Also, since LiveJournal allowed for people with multi-fandom membership to have one point of fandom activity instead of several points. Anime fans, or Japanese animation fans, especially, flooded to Harry Potter after the shift to LiveJournal, but used their journals in multiple fandoms. Additionally, as fandom members left the Harry Potter fandom to explore other fandoms, they generally kept the same journal and same base of friends, only adding new friends they found through new fandom interests or deleting old friends as they found they no longer had anything in common, reshaping their personal network. After the shift to LiveJournal most fandoms that developed after 2001 began on LiveJournal first, then developed Web sites, making the base for many current fandoms surround LiveJournal. LiveJournal also offered a convenient place for crossovers, or fan

production that involved characters from more than one fandom. For example the yearly fandom fic exchange run on LiveJournal, an event called Yuletide where users write specific fics for other users, is not tied to a single fandom, but is open to many fandoms (generally underrepresented ones.) Several other events run on LiveJournal, like icon creation challenges or fic exchanges and archives, allow for multiple fandoms to be represented, highlighting the abundance of multifandom membership in the community.

The Community

While LiveJournal is the major site for organization and congregation, the limitations of dialogue there are evident. Communication is variably instantaneous. In some comment threads discourse goes back and forth between one or many participants in real time. At other times a thread can lay dormant for minutes, hours, days or even years before discourse might be picked up again: for instance, a comment I left on a journal in 2005 was finally replied to in June 2007. This is obviously problematic for a researcher who wants to see how people "talk" online, since the additional time to craft a response alters the mode from spoken-discourse style to a more written style. While LiveJournal communication shows how users communicate, to get at a more spoken style it is essential to look at Instant Messenger communication. To focus on an entire fandom the size of Harry Potter and attempt to make generalizations about how Instant Messenger communication was structured would be too great an undertaking for this project, simply for the fact that collecting private IMs from a random sample of members would be difficult to achieve in a limited time frame. Instead I opted to look at a group of

high-status community members and analyze their communication style over Instant Messenger and LiveJournal with each other.

The community I queried was a group of women who were respected members of the fandom. Some of them were considered Big Name Fans (BNFs), or famous fandom members, and the others were mildly popular either by association with the BNFs or thanks to small followings of their own. The women were defined as a cohesive group by the fandom in general thanks to the style of fanfiction they produced, and the women embraced that group status and identified themselves as such. They are actually one of the few examples of a fandom group being defined so specifically by non-members, as far as names of authors being listed by non-members as members of the group. While many other fandom subgroups exist, they are often self-defined, such as groups that preferred certain pairings or characters. The women in my community primarily talk to other women inside the group and congregate over a few shared interests, forming a dense and multiplex network of speakers. While the women did not create a specific "LiveJournal community," or central journal for posting topics relating to a group interest, to facilitate communication, they were all friends on the system and frequently posted entries that were filtered only to other members. They also conversed on Instant Messenger both one-on-one and in group chat settings every day.

Data Collection

The main corpus for this research was constructed of member volunteered transcripts of chat. Instant Messenger has an option for logging all chat on the systems and members were asked to query their log files and submit any discourse between group

members to the project. To ensure confidentiality, participants were allowed to remove any private information on their own. Once the data was submitted all names were changed to numeric identifiers and any remaining identifying information was removed from the data set. Data was kept in its original form otherwise, with each "utterance" of a speaker composing a single line, determined by when the woman hit the "Send' key. Thus each utterance is defined by the speaker, although a single speaker could have multiple utterances one after another.

[001]: Wish you guys could come!
[003]: WHY AM I INDOORS?
[003]: I SHOULD BE OUTSIDE ENJOYING THIS DIVINE WEATHER.
[001]: Is it v. beautiful there?
[001]: Oooh, here too.
[999]: It's raining here
[001]: Yet here we are, inside
[001]: online

Once the data was processed, it was analyzed with WordSmith Tools to spot trends. WordSmith Tools is a corpus linguistics computer program that allows for large-scale handling of linguistic data. With WordSmith I was able to pinpoint the most frequent lexical items and lexical clusters in the text. I was then able to focus on both comparing the data to previously collected IM data, placing the IM data within the larger context of communication in the fandom as a whole. To do so I engaged in the fandom as a participant observer, learning the norms of the community and witnessing fandom communication through a variety of avenues.

One thing that struck me as I began interacting with fandom was the prevalence and variety of "emotes," or emotional and action responses, in the talk. They seemed

incredibly frequent and both ritualized and flexible to the situation. While some were more general to the Internet, others were completely new constructs to me and required some experience before I felt comfortable using them in my discourse. Either way, the volume of such constructs stood out as an important site for linguistic investigation.

Chapter 3: Results

Ways to Emote in IM

In an AIM situation, the speaker has several options for expressing emotional responses to discourse, each dependant on the context of the discourse. Online speakers demonstrate several different methods of emoting, categorized by the discourse situation in which they occur.

The first is an emoticon, or a pictorial representation of facial expressions using a combination of letters, numbers and punctuation. The history of creation of emoticons is debated, but by most accounts they originated in 1982, when a computer scientist from Carnegie Mellon University named Scott Fahlman first suggested the use of :-) as a marker for expressing a joking nature in message board posts and :-(as an indicator that the message was to be taken seriously (the latter later evolved into a marker for displeasure). Another account says Kevin MacKenzie used the first emoticon in a 1972 e-mail with -) for "tongue in cheek" (www.nerdtimes.com). Regardless, Fahlman's suggestion in the 1980s was the one that caught on more forcefully, and within weeks multiple versions of emoticons had developed. Today many Internet providers such as AOL and Microsoft translate the combinations of letters, numbers and punctuation and turn them into upright cartoon faces. Emoticons have basic meanings, determined by their basic shape. However, every community does not make use of the full range of possible emoticons and can sometimes attach specific lexical meaning to certain often-used emoticons.

Second, the speakers use onomatopoeic representations of sounds. One example of this is "hahaha" (with any number of ha's; there is no distinction related to the exact

number, only that more implies a stronger reaction) or variations such as "ahahaha," "hehehe" or "heh heh" to represent laughter in a conversation. The form of representing laughter is often used outside of computer-mediated communication, including transcripts and written dialogue.

Third, use of asterisk to offset emotional response words, for example * laughs *.[1] The word in the asterisks is usually a verb, though it can be in several different tenses, or a short phrase such as * falling down laughing * or * cracks up*. Additionally, asterisks around a word can be used to denote emphasis – in word processing programs the command often either italicizes or bolds the enclosed word. This emphasis function can show, in the relation of emotion, intensity in the action.

Two other options for expressing amusement exist. One option for expression of emotion is simple statements such as "That is funny," or "You're making me laugh." While this is a valid form of emotional expression, it is not Internet-specific and can be found in written and verbal communication regardless of medium. One other method that began by being Internet-specific is acronyms, such as LOL for "laughing out loud" or ROTFL for "rolling on the floor laughing." These now appear elsewhere, in mainstream publications and advertisements, and in other text-based communication environments like texting on a cell phone.

While Internet users have the potential to be exposed to and utilize all these forms, specific communities of practice do not always incorporate and endorse every method. Variation is present, both from community to community and between individual speakers. Looking at two distinct corpora, one of locally connected speakers

[1] Asterisks are not the only form of punctuation available for offsetting emotional and action response. Punctuation varies, although outside of asterisks it is usually doubled such as ::laughs:: or >>laughs<<, etc.

and one of globally collected speakers, we can begin to see some community-related reasons for the endorsement of certain forms.

Figure 4 – Local versus Global

Local (Tagliamonte) Corpus Forms

Form	N	% of total N
Hahah	17111	0.68
LOL	2004	0.08
om(f)g	1096	0.04
Hmm	854	0.03
Shit	691	0.03
Kk	655	0.03
damn(it)	572	0.02
Crap	372	0.01
Brb	321	0.01
Ass	303	0.01
Ttyl	303	0.01
Btw	230	0.01
Arg	153	0.01
Nvm	69	0.005
Gtg	47	0.005
Np	41	0.005
Wtf	23	0.005
Total	25052	1

N is the total of Internet forms from a 1.2 million word corpus. Percent of N is the frequency of the occurrence of the form in proportion to the total of Internet forms.

Global (Votta) Corpus Forms

Form	N	% of total N
Hahah	126	0.37
LOL	84	0.25
om(f)g	34	0.1
Hmm	15	0.04
Shit	18	0.05
Kk	0	0
damn(it)	22	0.07
Crap	0	0
Brb	2	0.01
Ass	14	.04
Ttyl	0	0
Btw	11	0.03
Arg	3	0.01
Nvm	0	0
Gtg	0	0
Np	0	0
Wtf	3	0.01
Total	332	1

N is the total number of Internet forms in a corpus of 500,000 words. Percent of N is the frequency of the occurrence of the form in proportion to the total of Internet forms.

Acronym	Translation
LOL	Laughing out loud
Om(f)g	Oh my (fucking) god
Kk	Okay (okay)
Brb	Be right back
Ttyl	Talk to you later
Btw	By the way
Nvm	Nevermind
Gtg	Got to go
Np	No problem
Wtf	What the fuck

One difference we can see right off is the corpus size. The total for words in my corpus is smaller than Taligamonte's. While the possibilities for building corpora of online communication are endless, since all communication can be logged automatically by the system, cutting down on time-consuming transcription and formatting, taking all available data is not always best. While I could have mined my entire chat log history, I chose instead to focus on a community that has network ties, making the conclusions I can draw more relevant. Over time such a community can build an impressive corpus. We can also see that in my corpus the Internet forms are used much less frequently than in Tagliamonte's overall. However, when looking at percentages, we can see how specific forms are favored comparatively.

We can also see that the orthographic form of laughing (hahaha and its variations) is more prevalent in the local data set than the global one. The percentage of the total tokens is twice as large in the local set as it is in the global set, while LOL as a form is more frequent in the global set. Overall, in both data sets we see very small percentages

for what would traditionally be considered IM forms, such as abbreviations, also true for more general youth speech like curse words. While abbreviations are occurring, they are infrequent in the data and, when they are frequent, are usually emotional response type phrases (such as LOL or arg) and less temporal phrases (such as brb or ttyl). Looking only at these points, besides the differences in the representation of laughter between the sets, the global and local networks seem to have similar characteristics.

One item completely missing from Tagliamonte's list is asterisk emotion/asterisk action, the most prevalent Internet-specific form found in my data set.

> [003]: I find myself nervous and terrified and very ambigious.
> [003]: *screams in outrage*
> [003]: I DO NOT WANT TO GET MARRIED!
> [001]: Well, anyway.
> [003]: *hugs [001]*

This is, in fact, a form of subject ellipsis. Subject ellipsis, or the dropping of a subject in conversation, is a phenomenon that does not receive much attention in English. English lacks the rich inflectional system that makes pro-drop acceptable in other languages. Pro-drop is possible in languages because of extensive subject-verb agreement and morphological traces on the verb predicate to indicate the subject of an ellipsis. In English, a phrase like "got in late" is indistinguishable in all forms because the verb does not differ in conjugation. The speaker could me "I got in late" or "You got in late." However, language does not exist in a bubble. Discourse, the effects of prior conversational cues and expectation of future output, shapes the way hearers interpret language. If, in conversation, the discourse appeared as this:

Speaker 1: Why are you so tired this morning?

Speaker 2: (I) got in late.

There is no mistaking that the ellipsed subject is first person because there are turn changes in the discourse, where one speaker is responding the cue of the other speaker. Subject ellipsis in English is primarily found in conversation and casual writing, as opposed to the formal written English upon which most grammatical accounts are based (Stirling and Huddleston, 2000). At first glance, it appears that English operates on the simple system of dropping first person subjects in declarative phrases and second person in interrogative situations. Intonation and stress come to play important roles in this type of ellipsis, but this does not account for instances of ellipsis in non-verbal contexts, where speech sounds are null. Further Nariyama (2004), who approached English subject ellipsis by analyzing a corpus of casual speech, found that things are more complicated than such a simple rule. According to Nariyama, subject ellipsis occurs in very constrained linguistic environments in English. These constraints ensure that they are retrievable without the benefit of morphological markers and present different connotations than their full-form counterparts.

Recoverability is the key in subject ellipsis, and for it to work in English the subject must be understood thanks to information elsewhere in the discourse. Ellipsis is employed as a means of economy and style of language. In fact, in a pro-drop language where ellipsis is the norm, un-ellipsed forms have a different meaning than their ellipsed counterparts, and the same holds true in English. English subject ellipsis can be divided into two types of context: situational context and linguistic context (Evans 1993).

Situational context applies when knowledge is derived from shared situational context between speakers and addressee. This includes deixis in that the speaker is represented by the first person and the addressee is the second person, and that reference changes depending on who is speaking. It also includes mutual background knowledge, social setting, and relationship between participants. This type accounts for the assumption of first person in a declarative statement and second person in an interrogative. Linguistic context applies when comprehension is the result of knowledge of grammaticality. In terms of syntax, English subject ellipsis is only allowed in anaphoric situations, when the ellipsis is in reference to previous utterances, including coordinate structures ("John cut his hair and went to the store"), non-finite clauses, and prepositional phrases. Conversational situations, however, bend these rules and extend the presence of subject ellipsis.

Nariyama used a corpus of conversational speech and writing samples to ascertain the constraints on English subject ellipsis. In the study, first person is generally favored in English ellipsis, but there are instances of second and third person ellipsing in the corpus. Four triggers were outlined to signal subject ellipsis in English, centered on the idea of recoverability to the addressee. These include anaphoric deletion due to linguistic context, deixis relying on situation context, dummy subject, and conventional expressions. Figure 5 displays the four triggers in Nariyama's corpus.

Figure 5 – Triggers of ellipsis

Anaphoric deletion:

Speaker 1: Where's dad?

Speaker 2: (He's) birthday shopping, I bet.

Deixis:

Speaker 1: (I'm) stating the obvious.

Conventional expressions:

Speaker 1: Don't worry about it.

Speaker 2: Thanks Gotta go.

Dummy subject:

Speaker 1: I saw Rachel yesterday. I brought her flowers and we had a chat.

Speaker 2: (It) clearly did her a lot of good.

First person has a special status in English ellipsis, tied with epistemic knowledge of the speaker, according to Nariyama. Speakers are allowed to make judgments of their own state and ellipsis, but not for other people. Language that expresses opinion and emotion are clear examples of this, as shown below.

1. (I'd) love a coffee. *(Would you) love a coffee?

2. (I'm) feeling fantastic. * (Are you) feeling fantastic?

The speaker is allowed to ellipse that they love something, but not make the assumption that another speaker loves something. Nariyama has proposed a framework

for studying subject ellipsis in English. Further study is necessary to increase understanding of English subject ellipsis as a whole.

In the context of the Internet, we can see a new potential for subject ellipsis in action and emotional constructions. The asterisk action option found in this corpus is a form of ellipsis. The speaker is dropping the subject of the phrase, generally a first person pronoun. However, the verbal inflections of the phrase align with third person, instead giving the phrase a different reading, wherein the speaker is removed from the situation.

Asterisk action is the most frequent Internet form in the corpus, but the verb inserted in the asterisks is variable. Either the verb can appear alone in the asterisk, or it can be a case of a modified phrase like *runs around the room *.

Figure 6 – Emote cluster frequency

Cluster	Frequency
* dies *	139
* giggles *	106
* laughing *	73
* dying *	68
* cracks up *	62
cries	56
*sobs *	48
* sniffles *	45
* hugs *	41
*nods *	40
*weeps *	38
* dances *	35
pauses	32
*screams *	31
* sighs *	31
* waves *	31
* hides *	28
*stares *	24
*squeals *	22

*This table does not account for modified phrases like *hides under a table* or any other instance of an argument being attached to the phrase. The numerical count is the number of occurrences in the corpus of 500,000 tokens.*

There are more than 1,500 instances of asterisk action in the corpus. Of these, the most frequently clustered use is the *dies* construction. This is pertinent because it is a variable response. To die, in terms of Internet linguistics, can both signify intense laughter:

> [001]: (You inow you've been a slashetoo long when you look at the air-conditioning abbrev. and are like, "oh, what pairing is that?")
> [003]: *dies*
> [003]: HAHAH.

Alternatively, it can signify intense embarrassment:

> [001]: well ya get my point
> [001]: **dies**
> [001]: that shut me up!

The duality of this phrase (and variants including *falls over dead* or *dying* shows the flexibility inherent in the emote system. Users are playing with language, finding unique and diverse ways to represent their physicality in a non-physical environment by presenting their actions in text. Any verb can be used in an asterisk action. The breadth of forms is only limited by the speakers' imaginations. Utterances can be a short as a single word, or long and twisting descriptions.

> [999]: *puts her hand to her ears at [001]"s shout...remembers she is missing one ear, thanks to [001]*

These verbs are subject to frequency in terms of both overall corpus and for variation between speakers in the community.

Variation among community members

However, if we look at variation between individual speakers it is evident that the asterisk version is heavily weighted by frequent use of the method by [003] . She employs asterisk action 429 times in the corpus, while other speakers are spread among the remaining thousand instances. In terms of asterisk action, an "instance" can be a single word token or multiple words long, so figuring an average of 2 word tokens per asterisk action instance, this increases [003]'s use of the form to 856 times per the 500,000 total words in the corpus. Each other community member shows instances of these forms in the transcripts, varying from 100 to 267 instances of the form. In the "hahaha" category the frequency of use is more weighted to [001], with 51 tokens, while [003] has 23. Overall, [003] and [001] dominate the corpus with respect to the number of tokens, and this is indicative of their place within the community. Both are central figures to the group of friends, and both serve as jokesters and humor supporters in the group and individual chats. By using these forms and setting the standards for use of certain forms over others, such as virtually eliminating the use of emoticon forms within the corpus by not employing them themselves, the two community leaders, [003] and [001], reinforce the community of practice structure, passing linguistic norms to the rest of the community.

Progressive tense in asterisk action

In the context of the greater corpus, certain verbs occur most frequently, and it is the manipulation of these verbs that can uncover some regular rules for the construction.

Progressive (or continuous) aspect expresses an incomplete action in progress at a specific time. As noted above, it is formed with a conjugated form of "be," and the present participle of the main verb. In some active asterisk action construction we see this formation.

[001]: Dobby=Prissy
[003]: *is sobbing with laughter*
[003]: My jaw hurts from laughing.

However, oftentimes the "be" verb is also dropped in active constructions. With the dropped "be" verb the construction does not translate directly

[001]: Sorry.
[003]: *laughing hysterically*
[999]: I am going to have 1 million of his babies
[002]: Wow, that should keep you busy.

This may simply be a function of the desire to conserve space and time in online communication, the same desire that leads to acronyms and abbreviations and forms that omit vowels, such as "srsly" for "seriously" or "orly" for "oh really."

Argument structure in asterisk action

Most commonly, asterisk actions occur without an overt argument. *Hugs* is one example of an asterisk action where the transitive verb hug requires a direct object argument, the "what" or "whom" the speaker is hugging. However, most frequently the form appears in the corpus as simply *hugs*, without clarification of the recipient of the action. *Kiss* is another example of a form that takes a direct object but is often left without on in the corpus. While most of the time the direct object is recoverable from the discourse, sometimes in a multi-participant chat it remains unclear. Most of the verbs

used in the corpus are intransitive, or have flexible valiancy and are able to appear as intransitive or transitive. This is because most asterisk action is inwardly focused; speaking on about actions the speaker herself is taking, which affect only the speaker's physical state. It is more rare that the speaker steps outside herself to inflict action upon another participant. Of note, it is generally only positive actions, like hugging or kissing. In the community there are no violent acts.

Without direct object:

[001]: We will. Well will.
[999]: *giggles*
[001]: **hugs**
[001]: EARLIER THAN X-MAS
[999]: We all need to move to the same city, damnit
[003]: I KNOW.

With direct object:

[001]: I haven't the words!
[001]: >_<
[999]: *hugs [001]*

Variations in person

Understanding in what person asterisk action appears is not as simple at first glance. Clearly, in most constructions the speakers is speaking from the first person. However, the inflectional markers on asterisk action verbs do not conform to first person the majority of times. Instead, the inflectional ending of the verb aligns with the third person.

[001]: I look so young and tender!
[003]: So nubile!
[001]: How accurate.

[003]: Whereas I am matronly!
[002]: The better to eat you!
[003]: *waggles eyebrows*

The last line in this passage reads as "[003] waggles eyebrows." However, the entirety of the self-discourse in the corpus is not in a third person format. Looking back at the first line we can see [001] speaking in the first person**.** Oftentimes, a single speaker even switches consecutively between first and third person in the discourse.

[003]: *is an idiot*
[003]: I DID!
[003]: I told you about it!

This creates a dichotomy between the person users are speaking in when using asterisk action and their person at all other times. One colleague has suggested to me that the nature of the output of the message, with the speaker's name displayed directly next to the speech allows for this ellipsis, slotting the name output into the subject position and bringing the unavoidable conventions of the system into the speech signal. However, if this were the case then constructions like the one shown below would not be possible.

[002]: This is for your own good, honey. *takes cheese away*

The asterisk action appears divorced from the speaker's name, thus not allowing the name to become part of the speech signal thanks to simply display techniques. It also does not account for use within the LiveJournal system, where the asterisk action can

appear anywhere within the discourse, and where the conventions of the system do not allow the asterisk action to appear directly beside a user name, as shown in this example from a LiveJournal comment.

> Which is to say, *humps Patrick*

The asterisk action comes at the end of a long comment without a tie to the user name. Instead of seeing this as a simple convention of display in online systems, it is clear that the practice of asterisk action signifies a shift in how the speaker is presenting herself to the group, removing herself to the third person as a means to display action and emotion, akin to stage directions in a script. To understand why this form evolved as it did, we must look to the historical roots of such a construction.

History of Emotes

Emotes trace back to MUD (Multi-User Domain) culture, which were text-based virtual environments on the Internet. In these environments, action commands were entered in the simple present tense and displayed as "Julie eats beans". Many early MUDers became active in fandoms, and brought these conventions of acting to new chat systems, especially when engaging in role-playing games. Eventually, these styles diffused to general conversation, and the emote style is now a convention of fandom interaction. What is interesting is the way the style of fandom uses transferred. According to Cherny (1990), when emotes are displayed in he logs of MUDs they are as full phrases

1 Lynn says, “ray is a mass noun? There are three of it?”

2 Tom nods solemnly.

The output “Tom nods solemnly” would be triggered by a user entering a code in their speech box, “>nod solemnly.” This differs from the “say” command in MUDs, where users just type their speech and it would appear as in line 1 above. These specialized commands are known as social or antisocial commands (depending which MUD you are studying), which are programmed verbs for social interaction. Much of the reasoning behind developing these systems was to help active users who were suffering from Carpal Tunnels Syndrome cut down on the amount of typing they had to do to communicate, but the motivation was also to institutionalize ritual commands that the communities were using frequently.

At the same time, IRC culture (Internet Relay Chat) was developing and institutionalizing its own rituals for communication.

Kang: Thanks dude *puff * *hold*

Ruedenberg, Danet and Rosenbaum-Tamari (1998) note that these forms may be either nominalizations or infinitives. Some users also used third person forms to represent their actions. While there was clash of styles, documented by Cherny, when users of both systems tried to negotiate the other communicative space in the end what we see today as emotes is in fact a combination of both styles, with the capping off of the

expression with a second punctuation not required in MUD settings and the shift from first person to third person as the standard form. The punctuation in MUDs is an act of programming, not part of the text.

But how do these all tie into fandom usage? Fandom is a site of storytelling, for the most part. Much of the setting of MUDs and other virtual communities were sites of storytelling as well. When MOO users began chatting more general platforms that did not support the pose features, they could have very well retained the output style and continued talking in third person, typing out the display instead of now defunct input. However, the power of habits comes through clearly here. Users who were used to typing such forms just continued to type them, even though they did not yield the old results. While the direct link from MUD to modern fandom construction is not traceable, most likely shared knowledge of the input system made meaning recoverable, and over time the ability to elide the subject became par for the course, even if that was not the original intention of the construction. Now, fandom members who have never used a MUD program understand the elided forms and use them with ease.

The storytelling aspect of the community leads to the ability to use "true" third person ellipsis, where the intent is to speak about a third party and not about oneself. Community members use "true" third person ellipsis when they are writing about fictional characters and either their reactions to the discourse in the chat, or are writing out fan fiction scenes with other members of the chat. However, these instances are anaphoric, and members must refer to the characters explicitly before they are able to use the asterisk action to drop the subject. (Sections of the example below were shortened because they did not directly apply to the topic at hand.)

[999]: *Tom approaches the house slowly from down the road….*
[006]: *Martin sees Tom when he's still thirty or so feet from the house. …*
[999]: *keeps the same walking rhythm as he approaches the house, even after he recognizes Martin in the distance. His right hand is tightly clenched around a piece of parchment*

As you can see, after Tom was introduced as [999]'s character, [999]'s next turn as the character displayed true third person ellipsis thanks to anaphor.

Second person ellipsis in asterisk action is never used in my corpus. To do so would require a speaker to symbolically inhabit another speaker's digital body and talk for them. Such kinds of language play are highly invasive and taboo in online communication, since it is a medium that is rife for faking identities. To take over someone's identity online is akin to stealing their social security number in offline life, and in such a close community of practice no one wants to offend other members.

Double-emoting

A very common occurrence in these conversations is double emoting features. Speakers will use more than one method for emoting in response to the same situation, for example:

[001]: *surreptitiously removes a_hitler from friends list*
[002]: HAHAHAHHAHAA
[002]: okay, I did assume there...
[002]: sorry.
[002]: social gaffe!
[002]: :-[
[003]: *dies*
[003]: HAHA.

In all instances of double emoting in the community, asterisk emoting precedes the second form. This is not limited to any one speaker; all members of the community employ the same method of asterisk before onomatopoeia:

> [003]: AND YOU KNOW WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT GUYS WITH BIG NOSES!
> [003]: *beat*
> [003]: BIG NOSEBLEEDS!
> [002]: **dies**
> [002]: HAHAHHAA

This again relates to the group constraints in a non face-to-face interaction. The group is demonstrating action first, noise second. This convention is generally followed in the RPG games the women take part in: the actions of the character are described before the speech in most cases, for example:

> **Player 1**: *opens the door and sidles through* Good morning. *holds the basket out in front of him like a peace offering* Ah. Want some raspberries?
>
> **Player 2**: *smiles, reaches for the glasses on his desk, unfolds them* Good morning. *crosses to him, glasses still in hand, reaches to take a raspberry*

This convention easily carries over into the personal communication of community members because interaction online becomes akin to writing stories or role-playing situations where the emphasis is placed on visualization of a situation over hearing. Dialogue, which includes non-speech utterances, is inherent in computer-mediated communication, but community members must stress the visuals of an

encounter for them to be perceived by others and contributing to a richer communication environment.

Headdesks structure

This subject ellipsis form is not yet a universal in computer-mediated communication. This was made evident by conducing a simple web search. I queried Google Blogsearch (www.blogsearch.google.com) for highly specialized asterisk action forms for embarrassment, the *headdesks* and *facepalms* variants. I looked with a LiveJournal setting, which is the epicenter for fandom activities online, and within all other blog publishing platforms including Blogger, which is a more public setting, for these options, presented in Figure 7. All blogged materials left public on all platforms is searchable by Google Blogsearch, the only exempt data is that locked or protected by users. The asterisk action format is significantly favored in public posts of LiveJournal users over Blogger users.

Figure 7 – Asterisk forms in LJ versus other blog programs

	Within LiveJournal	All Blog platforms (including LJ)
Headdesk(s)	7,778	8,215
Facepalms(s)	5,454	5,990

Queried Jan 31, 2006. This query takes into account only public journal entries.

* Headdesk(s)* and * Facepalm(s)* also displays a compounding structure not normally found in English outside of the computer-mediated context. In most English compounding the two types of words compounded contribute to the new word's function.

Thus, if two nouns are compounded the resulting word will function as a noun, such as dog and house to form doghouse. In cases where two different types of words combine, like the adjective black and the noun board to form blackboard, one lexical category of words overrides the other. However, the headdesk and facepalm compounds do not fit the structure of English compounding, or any language I have found examples of. Instead of a lexical category inherent in either of the compounding words determining the new words functionality, instead compounding the two nouns create a verb. When asked what the terms mean, fandom members described the first as "like smacking your head against your desk" and the latter was "as if you put your head in your hands," clearly putting the constructs into the realm of asterisk action.

While it is impossible to query general IM use of such variants, based on my data we can assume the construction is more frequently used by fandom members. One can find many functional users of the Internet who have never encountered these forms. However, part of the intent of this study is to uncover the distinction between those who use the Internet as a supplemental tool for everyday live, and those who engage with the Internet and on the Internet as an integral part of everyday life. Those in the latter group are vastly more invested in social Internet technology and are the innovators of linguistic trends in computer-mediated communication. Emoticons started the same way, the invention of a small community to mark the seriousness of messages, and has since gone mainstream and diverse.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Communication has been reshaped by the emergence and importance of the Internet, and studies like this one aim to contextualize the role of new communication strategies in what we already know about how humans interact within communities. While speakers do not break norms completely, they do shift them and create new variation possibilities thanks to the new medium.

In taking these instances of linguistic variation in the community, we can see how the separate members both fill individual roles and come together to create a community structure defined by shared use of certain linguistic norms. Members use and enforce structures such as the asterisk action formation as a signifier of in-group status, while not using other Internet forms, such as acronyms. The groups are made up of people with dense and multiplex ties to each other, ranging from different cultural boundaries (sex, gender, orientation, ethnicity) to interests (different fandoms or activities). However, these communities do not wholly fit the mold of the community of practice, because thanks to the properties of the digital space, they do not conform for the ideas of geographic proximity that has been key in communities of practice in the past. Members must not be within the same traditionally geographic area to be in the same community, and removal from the geographic area does not destroy the ability for the members to have strong ties to one another and frequent linguistc contact. The real-time, multimedia aspects of Internet communication allow a fuller and more face-to-face like communication than any other distance communication in the past. Instead of being a subset of the old community of practice, they are a new type of community of practice that is able to move beyond local through the Internet.

Now, with an understanding of how the new digital communities are structured and how new linguistic innovations are possible in the new medium, linguists can approach them as communicative spaces for study. Too often, in recent years, researches have gone to the Internet for an easy site for data collection. It is simple to think that you can collect a great deal of conversation data with a minimal amount of effort by visiting Web 2.0 sites and saving discourse. But approaching these communities without sufficient understanding of the structures of conversation and norms of the community puts the research at a disadvantage to actually conclude anything useful from their study. There is much to be learned from how people talk online, and with the proper tools and framework researchers can approach these sites of conversation informed.

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