Let's Chat: An Analysis of some Discourse Features of Synchronous Chat

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Computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies come in a wide variety of forms, and CMC researchers categorize CMC systems across two dimensions — synchronous vs. asynchronous and one-to-one vs. one-to-many or group communication (Wetherell et al 2001).

Synchronous communication requires both interactants to be present for interaction to take place. In a synchronous setting, interaction takes place in real time. A user enters a chat room and participates in an ongoing 'conversation.' Some systems are designed to facilitate communication between two users (one-to-one) or between several users (one-to-many or group interaction) (Crystal 2001). In asynchronous communication, conversation takes place in 'postponed time' (Crystal 2001). An asynchronous interaction does not require both parties to be present. Email messages, for instance, are sent asynchronously, that is, there is a delay between sending the message and receiving a response. Between synchronous and asynchronous settings, Crystal notes, synchronous interactions cause the most radical linguistic innovations that affect basic conventions of both spoken and written discourse.

Hale (1996) observes that CMC is incoherent in many ways. Coherence refers to the ways in which parts of written or spoken discourse are linked together to form a whole. According to Halliday and Hasan (1987), a text is characterized by coherence, that is, a text is coherent if it "hangs together." Coherence is brought about by the use of linguistic resources for linking one part of a text to another. CMC is described as fragmented, disjointed, and ungrammatical. Herring (1999), in considering the claim that CMC is interactionally incoherent, notes that the process of turn-taking and topic maintenance is constantly disrupted. This 'incoherence' may be problematic for some users; for others, however, the presence of disjointed features is what makes CMC exciting.

My paper examines some dominant discourse features of synchronous chat. Using the methods of Conversation Analysis (CA), it aims to provide evidence for dysfunctional conversational management in synchronous chat. It proceeds to examine the discourse strategies chatters use to maintain conversation and manage turn-taking.

Theoretical framework

Conversational analysis is directed at uncovering institutionalized practices and organization through which ordinary conversation is managed. It emerged from the work of Harvey Sacks on distinctive analysis of the organization of everyday language. CA, later developed in collaboration with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, sought to analyze TALK rather than written discourse and more specifically the kind of talk that is thoroughly interactive as opposed to monologic sequences (Cameron 2001).

Why use CA to analyze chat? Although chat manifests certain deviations from face-to-face conversation, it has many features that resemble spoken rather than written discourse. These features are the following:

1. Chat takes after spoken discourse in its synchronic mode of interaction. Unlike written discourse, chat provides 'real-time' context for interaction.
2. It is immediately interactive. Participants who engage in chat immediately respond or react to each other's recent posts.
3. It is not grammatically neat. One finds a lot of fragments and shifts in thought commonly found in spoken discourse.
4. It exhibits features of turn-taking and repair—two important concepts in CA.

Turn-taking sequential organization is the focus of CA. Sacks observes that central to a conversation, speakers speak one at a time and speaker change recurs with minimal overlaps. There is an ordered set of rules for the allocation of the next turn.   Cameron (2001) summarizes these rules:

1. The current speaker selects the next speaker. If this mechanism does not operate, then
2. The next speaker self-selects. If this mechanism does not operate, then
3. The current speaker may (but does not have to) continue.

In his early works, Sacks was interested in the way certain conversational actions go together.   He used the term "adjacency pair" to account for the structural properties of the organization of these paired units. Psathas (1997) summarizes the major dimensions of the adjacency pair structure:

1. There are at least two turns in length.
2. They have at least two parts.
3. The first part is produced by one speaker.
4. The second part is produced by another speaker.
5. The sequences are in immediate next turns.
6. The two parts are relatively ordered in that the first belongs to the class of first pair parts, and the second to the class of second pair parts.
7. The two are discriminately related in that the pair type, the first of which is a member, is relevant to the selection among second pair parts.
8. The two parts are in relation of conditional relevance; the first sets up what may occur as second , and the second depends on what occurred as first.

This description of adjacency pairs exhibits CA's concern with sequential analysis. It highlights how utterances cohere to become identifiable sequences of conversational actions that have regular properties. The identified adjacency pair sequences include the summon-answer; greeting-return greeting; question-answer; closings; invitation— whether acceptance or rejection; offer—either acceptance or rejection; and complaint-justification.

Another important aspect of CA is what Schegloff calls 'repair.' He wrote a series of papers analyzing repair as a sequentially structured phenomenon. A repair sequence starts with a 'repairable,' an utterance that is the source of trouble. In his study, Schegloff observed that self-initiated repair (repair that comes from the speaker of the source of trouble) is more prevalent than that which is other-initiated (any party other than the speaker). The self-repair may occur at the same turn as the source of trouble (called 'transition relevance place') just after an utterance is completed. Other participants may initiate repair and this is mostly done in the next turn.

The Data

   Recorded interactions in a Yahoo chatroom served as my corpus. Forty-three sets were collected from August 2005 to April 2006. Ethical concerns like privacy and consent were considered. Following the argument of Kukkonen (Cameron 2001), I saw no need to change the names of most participants nor get their consent. Kukkonen argues that Internet chat relay users log on using only a nickname that hides their identity. Yahoo chatrooms are also public rooms so conversations are not really private. Participants come and go and getting their consent is unnecessary, even impractical.

Analysis of data

   An examination of data yielded the following observations:

   Synchronous chat exhibits different types of turn-taking problems. The multiplicity of speakers all at one time results in rapid exchanges of turns. Medium constraints cause delays or 'lags' which in turn cause overlaps in exchanges. In CA, an overlap refers to talk by more than one speaker at a single time. In chat, the overlap is manifested in exchange sequences interrupted by other exchanges. Unrelated messages from other participants intervene between an initiating message and a response as shown in Example 1. I used different font styles to show different threads of conversations in the room. Those of the same font style and of the same speaker, although far apart, have intervening structures that are in other font styles. These interruptions between posts are called overlaps in chat.

Example 1:

    xoxo joined the room
    rebecca_kate2002: *nup*
    rebecca_kate2002: *lol hi*
    robin: *but that was after their time*
    janetaroesler joined the room
    OhhhBabeeee: hi Janet
    ~cherry~: hi janet
    janetaoesler: Hi, ohh and all.
    xoxo: Any teachers that can give me advice about a student?
    robin: **what song is this? (referring to audio)**
    cjra: hi janet
    OhhhBabeeee: Cher, is this robin-person yours?...because it is peeing on the rug
    mugs mcginty: robin this room is for grown-ups—mebbe you'd be happier with
      your own kind—whatever that may be
    robin: xoxo what's up?
    Maria: **thank you maya---that was very nice (referring to audio)**
    OhhhBabeeee: **YAY! MAYA (referring to audio)**
    OhhhBabeeee: **that was wonderful**
    ~cherry~: not mine, ohhh
    mugs mcginty: **maya (emoticon)**
    maya: **it was an impro for maria robin**
    robin: mugs when I want your opinion ill give it to you
    koreglioglu: agent green is a mycoherbicide that has been used in Colombia
    maya: **ty babeee**
    ~cherry~: he was behaving like a good pup, earlier
    windmen left the room
    robin: yea

mugs mcginty: hes an idiot now
Esprit: ba bayee babe
Maria: now he is a mongrel cherry
robin: sometimes I act up
OhhhBabeeee: he needs to be smacked with the newspaper
john_dipsn left the room
OhhhBabeeee: bye, Esp
robin: all I need is a good smack
robin: ohhh yessss
~cherry~: yikes
maya: (emoticon)
Maria: lol cherry
robin: and the whips and chains like we love to do it cherry…
cavham: I have a slingshot if you want
maya: *hi cherry*
~cherry~: *thanks maya*
……….
xoxo: I have a student who read word-by word, often hesitating and repeating
        words and phrases, uses her finger to follow words has difficulty distnguishinf
        between similar sounds, so she frequently mispronounces words. Paige confuses
        b and p, s and z, n and m, f and v and has much difficulty with medial and final
        sounds and vowel sounds. what strategies and techniques will she benefit from?
NurseClaudia: hello room
robin: **let me turn my duran duran on (referring to audio)**
NurseClaudia: maya
Maya: claudia hello
imghour joined the room
NurseClaudia: maya, you are holding out on me
Maria: xoxo—he might be dylselsic?
maya: **duran durn (referring to audio)**
robin: xoxo shes dyslexic
Maria: dyslexic

These exchanges are about topics embedded within a larger one, that is, about a misbehaving chatter named "robin."   Early in the chat, robin is reprimanded for rudeness and vulgar language. Rudeness and vulgar language may be "normal" in other chatrooms, but in this room, it is frowned upon as most of the chatters are teachers and graduate students. Robin continues with his bad behavior, thus causing other chatters to use figurative language to refer to him as a dog in need of smacking. In between exchanges about robin are discussions on music and chemistry. One chatter "xoxo" initiates a discussion on pedagogy by asking advice regarding a particular student. Although most of those engaged in the chat at this time are college professors, they are busy "disciplining" robin. Ironically, it is robin, a non-teacher, who responds to xoxo. xoxo's response to robin comes many turns after, because posts about robin from different chatters dominate the screen. The number of speakers posting messages and the length of xoxo's response contribute to the delay in the interaction between xoxo and robin.

Turn-taking in chat clearly does not adhere to the ideal turn-taking organization. The principle of adjacency pair is often violated because most of the time, there is no one-to-one correspondence between succeeding utterances (posts). A single initiating utterance may generate several responses that may or may not be related to the topic. In Example 2, "hagabear," another chatter, asks if there is anyone who knows the definition of the word 'matrix.' Three chatters respond—one gives a canonical response to the yes-no question of hagabear; two others give non-canonical responses. A canonical response is the simplest standard form of response, the most expected, predictable, and grammatically matched form, given the form of question (Dore in Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan 1977).

Example 2:

> hagabear25: Does anyone know what a matrix is?
> Heloise8008: *oh no Marie is still here*
> ShadoWolf: *but I suspect that Ronnie was before your time*
> homelesscamaroslut: does anyone have anything to say or ar we all content to listen to this rutting stag and some barren whore userp the microphone?
> Henwendebouin: wow Andrew I have ever been able to get as many syllables out of jesus
> Hardvarduniversity_m1978: Haga, yes… but I shall not aid no one.
> ……….
> rosesprd: a matrix is an array of numbers, haga
> hagabear25: why not?
> rosesprd: (don't pm me)
> Marie Antoninette: Hag, a matrix is a typical response to a rational argument
> anotherprofessor: live in the south or Midwest….that's how they say it ….Juh-hay-ee-sus.
> hagabear25: What's an array
> homelesscaaroslut: ok, I was a bit out of order there
> OhhhBabeeee: *Doffy…Huby's working*
> henwenbedouin: wow homeless you are certainly cut to the chase for you
> janetroesler: a linguistic professor who can't spell "usurp"
> homelesscamaroslut: I apologise
> karenlichina left the room
> ShadoWolf: << hasn't ever seen a rational argument on chat
> Homelesscamaroslut: janet—you are a pedant
> rosesprd: hmmm… think of a checkboard where each spot on the board there is a number

The chatter who goes by the name of "harvarduniversity_m1978" gives a canonical response but negates or turns down an offer to help hagabear with the definition. The two who give non-canonical responses provide definitions based on their own orientation. The chatter "rosesprd's" response generates another initiating utterance from hagabear ("What's an array?"). At this point, the other chatters prefer not to make further responses as it becomes clear hagabear has taken in roseprd's response.

In Example 3, a chatter named "R1999" comes in the room asking for help to write an essay. S/he gives the topic to be developed and tells the room that the essay needs to be submitted the following day. (Time is relative in chat as chatters come from different time zones.) In the main room, no one acknowledges the request for help as many of the chatters are engaged in the discussion of CMC and, later, on ebonics.   Several chatters post messages related to the post of R1999.   These posts can be interpreted as non-canonical negative responses to R1999's non-canonical request for help.

Example 3:

> R1999: I need essay about important of learning English
> Marianella left the room
> uncleskinny: Starting in the second quarter of 2006, customers of both services will be able to see their friends' online presence, share emoticons, and add new contacts frm wither Yahoo or MSN Messenger to their buudy list
> Molly: Where is it important to learn English. Certainly not in the US
> uncleskinny: I don't think you'd be able to enter yahoo chat through msn messenger though
> swindhunter: R slime out as you slimed in

Molly: were muticulturalllllllllllllllltural
ustm: I agree uncle
Maria: I wonder why ppl come here expecting instant essays
ustm: two separate companies
Andrew: I sell them maria
ustm: lazy to do maria
hechi left the rorom
swindhunter: gotta love that iggy botton. I wish it was .45-60 calibre
R1999: I need essay about important of learning English
swindhunter: they are weak maria…they lack the skill or desire to learn for themselves
Molly: You'd do better learning Spanish or ebonics
Andrew: $ 10,000 per essay, no buyers yet though
Marianella: what is ebonics?

All the comments that refer to R1999's post manifest the chatters' dislike not for the topic but the habit of some chatters in looking for instant answers in the room. Even "Andrew" who makes a funny comment on "Maria's" question subtly rejects R1999's request for help.

In extreme cases, initiating utterances may not even get a single response. In Example 4, a chatter named "simulacrum" asks interdisciplinary PhD students   to chat with him. No one responds. There are possible reasons for this. First, no one is an intersciplinary PhD student in the room. Second, no one is interested in chatting with simulacrum—he being a non-regular chatter in the room. Regulars are chatters who frequent the room and are familiar with each other. While some regulars are friendly and accommodating to newbies (newcomers), others are cliquish and prefer talking only among themselves. Simulacrum's posts remains ignored even when he uses capital letters for emphasis. The interaction however changes when simulacrum, perhaps out of frustration, starts asking chatters about the branch of McDonald's they manage, implying that chatters in the room are not really academicians nor graduate students but McDonald's crew members. This change in post catches the ire of some chatters that results in multiple responses.

Example 4

simulacrum: any interdisciplinary phd students wanna chat?
………..
simulacrum: any interdisciplinary phd Students Wanna Chat?
………..
simulacrum: ANY PH.D. STUDENTS HERE?
………..
simulacrum: Ph.D. in Medieval Literature? SO what McDonald's do you manage?
………..
simulacrum: I'm doing a Ph.D.
………..
simulacrum: on Sociology of music—will mcDonald's be hiring soon?
………..
DrCEJohnson: I don't think so Simula
………..
dar_gra: why don't you just go and work at McDonald's now and work your way up
………..
dar_gra: simul…..you've got problems
………..
simulacrum: problems?
dar_gra: yeah
kogzy: wut are you good at?

In this chatroom, when a chatter misbehaves, he is either ignored or reprimanded as seen in Example 1. In Example 5, despite several attempts at initiating conversations, a chatter named "Daddyman" remains ignored.

Example 5:

> Daddyman: Im a woman
> Daddyman: and Im drunk
> ………..
> Daddyman: anyone else drunk?
> ………..
> Daddyman: im on my hubby's puter
> ………..
> Daddyman:I talked to a lesbian tonight

Mismanagement of turns occurs not only because of lags but also because of the absence of extralinguistic features that can signal turn-taking. Turns are phonologically signaled by the cessation of sound, falling intonation, and other vocal productions like "ahhh" and "hmmmm". They are also bodily indicated by eye contact, hand gestures, even by "pointing mouths." All these features are absent in chat unless chatters go on audio and on camera. This dimension of chatting will be discussed later.

The dominant pattern in chat is the various threads of discussion on the floor. Participants try to keep up with the discussions and in so doing, they either post aggressively, or for others who are not used to chat discourse, take their time posting. Either way, such practices result in lags, flooding and overlaps.

The fragmentation in chat is compounded by the fact that as a chatter writes his/her message, s/he cannot fully concentrate on the various conversational threads in the room. Often, by the time s/he sends a post, other participants have initiated new threads producing what Werry (1996) calls "rigid shifts in topic and separate conversations intertwining."

Synchronous chat exhibits problems in coherence resulting from ambiguity in the use of referring expressions or what Schegloff calls "problematic sequential implicativeness." Problematic sequential implicativeness is defined as ambiguity brought about by the sequential import of the utterance as a whole. Chatters may misunderstand the function of initiating posts or the intention of the initiator and give responses that are either not relevant to the preceding post or that exhibit meanings different from those of the initiating post.

In Example 6, a chatter named "Lylin" talks about a fellow chatter "Nick" who has met an accident but was already out of hospital. The source of trouble is Lylin's use of "she" to refer to Nick, so another chatter "Moon" had to clarify who was in an accident. Lylin realizes her lapse so that after responding to Moon's question, she uses "he" thereafter. What is interesting in this exchange is the manifestation of the L1 (native language) interference in the speaker's use of pronouns. Lylin is Filipino and problems that involve the use of pronouns are common among Filipino speakers of English. In the pronominal system of Filipino, "he," "she" are both "siya" and it is not unusual to find Filipino speakers of English shifting from "he" to "she" and vice versa.

Example 6

> Lylin: yes. *He* was in a car accident last friday
> Maria: oh—sorry to hear.

………..
Lylin: *she* just came form the hospital
………..
Moon: who got into accident lylin?
………..
Lylin: moon, *nick*

In Example 7, chatters named "bluesman," "story" and "Lena" are talking about someone who has an allergy. Bluesman mentions having checked the detergent they were using so this could not possibly be the cause of the allergy. He notes that the only thing the person ate were cherries and a wonka bar. When chatter "cherry" asks if bluesman saw *the* film, she assumes blues shares her context; after all, a "wonka bar" is associated with the film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Bluesman's "which film"-question obviously shows he is not aware of cherry's referent.

Example 7

> bluesman: story, no, an allegic reaction to something, possible cherries
> story: oh dear.
> Greg: brb dinner is beeping… aka smoke alarm
> bluesman: a rash
> Lena: cherries
> ~cherry~: (emoticon)
> bluesman: well, the only new things he ate the day before were cherries and a wonka bar
> Tygerlilies joined the room
> bluesman: we checked the detergent—it hasn't changed for months
> ………..
> ~cherry~: did you see *the* film blues?
> ………..
> bluesman: cherry, *which* film?

Problems in chat also occur when chatters misunderstand the function of a question. In Example 8, a chatter named "Patrick" is asked how he feels about being in room 2. Patrick notes that "*it* seems more hospitable and less cliquish." "Maria" who is engaged in a thread of conversation with "Sunshine" catches the tail end of Patrick's comment and asks, " what is cliquish," referring to the room which Patrick compares with room 2. "Chatter Foxy," thinking Maria is asking for a definition, gives the meaning of 'cliquish'.

Example 8

> heloise: well patrick how you finding room 2?
> profdan4: what time is it in China, sunshine?
>   Sunshine: 5pm
> Maria: ß-kisses sunny
> samsaraii: unfortunately I moved to room 2 and they all seem to be following…
> samsaraii left the room
> profdan4: oh should I be seeing this?
> Sunshine: back to maria
> Maria: (emoticon)
> Patrick: it seems more hospitable and less cliquish
> goe usa: is there any hony arabic?
> heloise: sams always causing problems
> Maria: what is cliquish?
> patrick: room 2
> ………..
> profdan4: it is Patrick. We only have 1,000 in this clique

………..
foxytoknow: when people gather in small groips maria
foxytoknow: *groups
heloise: we try to stay human, and kind most of the time
Maria: lol foxy—I know cliquish
Maria: I just wanted to know the referent of cliquish

Example 9 shows leave-takings can also be troublesome. Maria's "bye tall-tc" (which is in response to atallgreyman's "bye") is understood by Sunshine as initiating a closing sequence. She thinks Maria is leaving so she says goodbye and wishes her nice dreams. When Maria declares she is not leaving yet, Sunshine is embarrassed and feels obliged to fulfill the closing sequence by declaring it is she (Sunshine) who is saying goodbye.

Example 9

Maria: *bye tall-tc*
sophocles: maria it would be dangerous for me to translate
Sunshine: **bye maria**
Atallgreyman left the room
………..
Maria: **lol sunny—am not leaving yet**
Sunshine: **nice dreams maria**
………..
Sunshine: **I am leaving then maria**
sophocles: maria is leaving?
………..
Maria: not yet—sunny is
Sunshine: **mari now that I said goodbye, I need leave**
Maria: **you don't have to sunny**

In Example 10, the source of ambiguity and misunderstanding is brought about not only by the unclear referent of "he" but also by the effect of chatter "mari's" post, "who is hot?" In this exchange, chatter "aud" talks about cybering with someone whose identity has not been established. She describes this chatter as "kinda hot." Because mari asks, "who is hot?" chatter "alternative-opinion" thinks mari is looking for someone "hot." The exchange leads to a verbal tussle between alternative and mari. Later, this tussel becomes the dominant thread in the room as other chatters started posting comments in defense of mari.

Example 10

aud: **he** was kinda hot
………..
mari: **who** is hot pen?
………..
aud: **joy chauffeur**
………..
alternative_opinion: **mari is looking for someone hot?**
………..
alterative_opinion: wasn't she busy?
………..
mari: alternative---mind your own business
………..
alternative_opinion: don't speak in the room mari
………..

alternative_opinion: as long as you express your desires in the here I will comment
  mari

………..

mari: **I wasn't looking for someone hot alternative—I was asking for the
  referent of hot.**

………..

alternative_opinion: mari was having fun

………..

mari: alternative—what is your problem with me?
tyhx: mari is wholesome looking

………..

alternative_opinion: and your lack of politeness and your lies
mari: you have no right to talk to me that way
alternative_opinion: I have the right to judge you
aud: *why are you talking to mari in such a way alt?*

………..

tyhx: *he is Indian, what the hell does he know?*

………..

BD: *whoa alternative, pipe down*
Jude: *what is wrong with alternative?*

………..

Jenny: *something wrong*
Lyninsouthchina: *mari, I have a similar experience with alt*
Tyhx*: kick his Indian ass*

………..

alternative_opinion: **you defend yourself mari**

………..

lyninsouthchina: *you have my sympathy mari*
aud: *hugs mari*

………..

alternative_opinion: **when you want to have sex with me mari**
mari: **excuse me?**
BD: *what a moron:*
tyhx; *yeah, like she want to have sex with an Indian*

………..

Jude: *stop spreading lies alternative*
BD: *click for being unmitigated moron*

It must be noted that regular chatters are usually civil to each other in the room. Abuses especially against chatters who are known to be pleasant and nice are not tolerated by other regulars. It is the regular chatters who usually reprimand misbehaving regulars like "alternative."

In Example 11, chatter "Lena's" conversation with "keithcastinrupt", which is intertwined with other conversations, becomes muddled as keith becomes suggestive and flirtatious. Lena tries to repair the conversation three times (italicized) — by subtly telling keithcastinrupt she doesn't get his point ("I miss the bus somewhere along the line") and later by explicitly asking keithcastinrupt what he means by his posts.

Example 11

keithcastinrupt: Lena where you at?
Lena: *keith…I miss the bus somewhere along the line*

………..

Lena: keith just sitting in my studio…New Zealand…where are you located?

………..

keithcastinrupt: Lena let me try to bother myself far ya own sake!
………..
Lena: *keith ok, but what do you mean?*
keithastinrupt: That is so sweet Lena!
keithcastinrupt: uhmm im mn tryin' to be protective you like that?
Lena: keith…yeah I think so…why?
………..
keithcastinrup: Lena I'm sorry to ask you this or should i?
………..
Lena: ask away keith
………..
Lena: I think
keithcastinrupt: alrite ya profession?
………..
Lena: keith its all cool
………..
keithcastinrupt: sure?
………..
keithcastinrupt: Lena, then let me know
………..
keithcastinrupt: Don't tell me yo upset with me Lena I mean I don't get you there
………..
Lena: *keith, no not upset but am not sure what it is we are talking about*

Seen from another angle (from the perspective of those who know Lena's chat behavior), this exchange exhibits what Schegloff calls "intentional misunderstanding." Lena sets up an intentional misunderstanding by using several repair initiations. She feigns naivete (misunderstanding) as her basis for subtly rejecting Keith's flirtatious moves.

Despite fragmentations, ambiguities and violations of turn-taking, why do people chat? Ironically, the limitations of chat as compared with face-to-face interaction works to the advantage of chatters. One of the controlling forces of face-to-face interaction is *saving face*. Embarrassment is quite minimal in chat. The anonymity that chat offers can be liberating. One can enjoy interaction without the risk of being involved more than he/she wishes. If one experiences embarrassment or insult, s/he can either take an aggressive stance or change his/her ID and chat personality altogether.

People chat for a purpose, no matter how serious or how mundane. Communication is purposive, and despite the disorganization, people still look for a semblance of meaningful interaction. Consequently, there is a need to internalize and adopt discourse skills that will allow them to manage and maintain interaction in the room. Although different in form from oral and written discourse, these discourse skills and strategies are basically the same in cohesive principles.

Earlier, I mentioned the absence of extralinguistic features or non-verbal cues (e.g., body gestures) in chat. In its stead, simulation of paralinguistic devices is relied upon heavily. Yahoo has come up with different smileys to imitate certain facial expressions. Chatters also adopt the orthographic style to express their emotional states. For instance, *grrrrr, ????, ALL CAPS, !!!!!* express frustration, confusion, anger, extreme emotion, respectively. Repetition of letters can also show a chatter's happiness or excitement over something or someone such as *Hi Judeeeeeeee* (Hi Jude).

Chatters also use meta-utterances to describe their actions or feelings. The use of meta-utterances allows chatters to think aloud in a manner similar to that of a comics bubble.

Example 12 illustrates how chatters may use meta-utterances. Some meta-utterances refer to action, others express mental or cognitive states.

Example 12

1. BD: <<< muckles foxy adoringly
2. cheeks: (---------ready to break a leg
3. Greg101054: (------been in a tornado
4. Molly: (I think he's got it)
5. Marianella<< is confused
6. Jenny(--thinks that Dan is a liar

Perhaps the most significant evidence to support the claim that there is coherence even in the midst of "incoherence" is the presence of various types of repair chatters use to make sense of the disjointed nature of chat. Schegloff categorizes repair into self-repair and other-repair. Self-repair comes from the speaker of the source of trouble and other-repair is initiated by a participant other than the speaker. Self-repair may be found in the same turn as the source of trouble or in immediately succeeding turns.

The data yielded the following types of self-repair:

Mistyped or misspelled words are usually self-corrected. Lapses in spelling is rampant in chat. Because of the rapid change of topic, chatters try to catch up by typing fast and posting messages immediately in the room. Typing fast often results in misspelled words. Some correct themselves immediately in the next turn.

Example 13

nazcancerian: wow—all the **freinds** are here
nazcancerian**: friends***

Example 14

dendriticstem: **aplle**
Maria: hi apple, homer
dendriticstem: **apple***

Example 15

mari: lol profdan—am now **ahy**
mari: **shy***

Self- repair is also done by rephrasing the source of trouble. To avoid ambiguity, some chatters take the time to qualify or clarify what they mean by rephrasing their posts:

Example 16

uglynakedguy: **it's** rolling soph…**the other room I mean**
Foxy2know: ain't is not old English img…it is **cockney slang….londoner's**
Most repairs found in the data were initiated by others. Chatters who misspell words are usually given time to self-correct. If no forthcoming self-correction is sensed by the room, other chatters take it upon themselves to correct the spelling.   Normally, misspellings are

tolerated in chat but it must also be remembered that the room is frequented by teachers, many of whom are uncomfortable with misspellings and abbreviations of words that resemble SMS register (e.g., h r u?).

Example 17

> homelesscamaroslut: does anyone have anything to say or are we all content to listen to this rutting stag and some barren whore **userp** the microphone
> ………..
> janetaroesler: A linguistic professor who can't even spell **"usurp"**
> ………..
> homelesscamaroslut: **liguistics** is about language
> ………..
> homelesscamaroslut: oops—**linguistics**
> ………..
> homelesscamaroslut: see am a terrible **typer**—not a terrible linguist
> henwenbedouin: no you are wonderful homeless
> janetaroesler: I am a ruthless extirpator of liars
> OhhhBabeee**: t-y-p-i-s-t**

In the example above, the chatter named "homelesscamaroslut" types "userp" for the word "usurp. "   The correction comes after several turns and after it is clear that there is no forthcoming self-correction. Other-initiated corrections are usually done for clarification.   The rather sarcastic tone of "janetroesler's" correction may be seen as the general tone of the room who finds homelesscamaroslut offensive and vulgar. This tone is reaffirmed by the posts of two other chatters, "henwenbedouin" and "OhhhBabeeee." Later, made aware of the room's attitude toward misspelling, homelesscamaroslut self-corrects. The correction of OhhhBabeee is not orthographic but morphological. This type of correction highlights the room's disbelief at homelesscamaroslut's being a linguistic professor.

Another type of other-repair is in the form of wh-questions.   Some chatters ask wh-questions to request clarification or extra information to facilitate the flow of interaction. While many put the wh-question in its traditional place (i.e., at the beginning of a question), others repeat the entire source of trouble and attach the wh-question at the end.

Example 18

> Jenny: **have you seen my temporary love ? mari lol**
> ………..
> Tom: hi jenny…isn't most love temporary?
> ………..
> Jenny: lol Tom, yes, but mari was asking lei whether she has seen her forever love or not
> ………..
> Tom: lol…well not to worry…
> ………..
> mari**: what was that again jenny?**

Example 19

> unshine: yank is **half guy** only, dan
> profdan4: **What** does **that** mean Sunshine?
> ………..
> MAN_KARACHI: yank is monkey lol

Example 20

> Mia: are there any professors in here?
> Marianella: mia, Maria is a professor
> Andrew: am a philosophy professor
> Maria: anotherprofessor is also a professor
> Imghour: **you're so so so so Maria**
> Donissio: psychology professor here
> Marianella: **what does so so so Maria mean?**
> ………..
> Maria: yeah—**what does so so mean?**

Example 21

> bluesman: Tyger, what is the room discussing?
> ………..
> Tygerlily: blues, don't ask
> Goddess_Enigma: we are discussing the fact that sex is not an addictive substance
> ………..
> bluesman: oh ok goddess
> ………..
> Tygerlily: **blues, are you practicing?**
> ………..
> bluesman**: practicing what?** lol

Example 22

> ~cherry~: the room does seem to be lagging
> ………..
> Jude: or not too many people are typing….hence this type
> ………..
> profdan4: not the room….**my lack of ability**
> ………..
> mari: **lack of ability to what?**
> mari: to kiss? Lol
> ………..
> profdan: **lack of ability to function adequately in the world of _**

Chatters in the room also use repetition as contingent queries or requests for information.   Repetition is a device used to establish joint reference with other chatters in the midst of various conversations in the room. Repeating verbatim seems the most convenient form of repair for most chatters. Repeating verbatim means the troublesome part of a post is highlighted, copied and posted in the room. Since time is crucial in posting, chatters simply copy rather than retype ambiguous messages. This copy and paste practice cuts down time, and repair is done at immediately following turns.

Example 23

> Q: when did name of room turn into a dating room?
> ………..
> Ania: **all rooms are dating rooms**
> mytusk: **all rooms are dating rooms?**
> ………..
> Ania: damn it , tusk
> omg_lol_brb: **conceptual dates**
> ………..

omg_lol_brb: why just last night I went on a conceptual date with cherry
………..
Korelioglu: **conceptual dates?**

While many of these wh-questions and repetitions are genuine requests for clarification, some are actually instances of language play among chatfriends. For instance, to go back to Example 21, "Tygerlily's" question, "are you practicing?" may be playfully interpreted as "are you practicing sex," given the topic of conversation. In fact, her question draws laughter from bluesman who has to clarify what she means. It turns out that Tygerlily is referring to something else although she used the current context to tease bluesman.

Another type of other-initiated repair is rephrasing troublesome parts to simplify or clarify previous posts.

Example 24

Lena: Marian would you like to see my **pussy** on cam?
Marian: yes lena, please. I love **pussies** you know
………..
Lena: I shall have her ready then
………..
Marian: Ace—you should see Lena's **pussy**
Ace: lol marian
simmeed: **pussy? Like penis? Penis of women?**
………..
Marian: Sim, you dirty-minded man! Lena, I will show you mine too
Ace: (wonders if pussy is a metaphor)
………..
Kjoyo: why dirty-minded?

In the example above, "Lena" and "Marian" are playing with the word "pussy."   Those who are familiar with the two ladies (like "Ace") would know they are merely teasing each other and are actually talking about a cat. Non-regular chatters like "simmeed" and "Kjoyo" obviously have a different interpretation as reflected in simmeed's paraphrase of "pussy."   Kjoyo has the same interpretation as simmeed's so s/he has to ask why simmeed is labeled "dirty-minded."

Example 25

Lena: simmeed **I don't know you**
………..
simmeed: wanna see me
………..
simmeed: it 's like this we kno weach other na
Lena: simmeed, **firstly I don't know who you are**, *please answer some questions.*
………..
simmeed: *interview?*
………..
Lena: sim, yes

In Example 25, Lena, a native speaker of English, linguistically accommodates simmeed by repeating and rephrasing what otherwise is simple and understandable expressions in English. Linguistic accommodation facilitates communication between speakers who speak different languages or different varieties of a language such as those found in international chatrooms. Because chatters in this particular room are teachers, it is not unusual to find them

being more tolerant of and engaging in foreign talk with chatters who are deemed to have difficulty in English.

Calling out chat IDs is another strategy of chatters to maintain coherence in the room. It is used to indicate a response to a post which might have been pushed up the screen by other chatters. Calling may also function as an acknowledgment of an initiating utterance. This room behavior is in keeping with the sequential coherence manifested by adjacency pairs.

Example 26   Summon-Answer

> Maria: **Andrew?**
> ………..
> Andrew: yes **maria?**

The summon-answer sequence is common in chat. This is one way of checking whether a chatter is still in the main room or in some other window, or if the chatter is all right, or to find out if the ID is a ghost ID. A ghost ID is left by a chatter who is booted out of the room or disconnected from Yahoo. Chatters who have not posted messages in a long while are usually "summoned" by other chatters.

Example 27 Greeting-Return Greeting

> profdan joined the room
>
> mari: **hi profdan**
> ………..
> Jude: **hi profdan**
> profdan: **hello mari**
> ………..
> ~cherry~: **hi profdan**
> rebecca_kate2002: **gday profdan**
> ………..
> profdan: **hi Jude**
> ………..
> Jude: < wonders why profdan is in hugging mood
> ~cherry~: no hug for cherry
> ………..
> profdan **hello cherry**!
> rebecca_kate2002: not even a hi for me

Regulars who enter the room are greeted and are expected to return the greeting. A chatter may choose to greet the room as a whole or greet individual chatters such as what profdan did. The situation is quite different for non-regulars. Non-regulars who greet the room may or may not be acknowledged.

Example 28 Question-Answer

> potentiallythisone: sav, are you feeling alright?
> ………..
> savina: potent… I am relatively ok now.
> kmzgirl: sav, you ok?
> savina: yea… I am ok

In Example 28, "savina" had to call out the name of "potentiallythisone" as other messages are posted in the room. Calling the ID is savina's way of referring back to

potentiallythisone's question. However, in responding to the next question, savina does not call "kmzgirl" since she already responds in the next turn.

Example 29 Closing

> tarzie2K: sadly…I must go soon
> ………..
> Andrew: sorry to see you leave so soon **tarz**
> mari: tc **tarzie**
> nanagrande: by **tarzie**
> ………..
> tarzie2K left the room

Regulars usually announce they are leaving the room and other chatters are expected to say goodbye. Non-regulars usually leave the room unannounced. If they say goodbye to the room, it is not unusual to get a non-response from other chatters.

Conclusion

Chat is an interesting medium that provides another dimension to interaction. The discourse in chat is very close to spoken discourse in that it exhibits a dynamic negotiation of meanings in the midst of what seems like interactional incoherence. However, breakdowns in communication are repaired through discourse strategies associated with both spoken and written discourse. Though CA can account for many features of interactional management in chat, there are areas that are best explained using other frameworks as well, such as the Speech Act theory, Interactional Sociolinguistics, and the various frameworks that deal with context like those of Firth, Hyme and Halliday.

What goes on in chat is not a simple matter of looking at turn-taking or sequential organizations. I saw the limitations of CA as a framework for analyzing chat. Much understanding and appreciation of my corpus came from knowing the context of my data, including the chatters (their personalities, their relationship with one another), the culture and the norms of behavior observed in the room, the kinds of register acceptable to chatters and the topics that are usually tolerated by regular chatters. I would recommend that a CMC Discourse Analysis be advanced. The paradigm for this approach must be able to account for the four domains of language—structure, meaning, interaction, and social behavior.

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