

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Development and Emergence of the Internet

The Internet began originally as ARPANET, a computer network set up by the United States Advanced Research Projects Agency, an arm of the United States Department of Defense, for the use by the U.S. Military. The Internet was developed at the University of California, Los Angeles campus in 1969. The network linked two universities in the United States in a bid to facilitate research and communication. Over time more educational institutions joined the network. In 1983 ARPANET was split into two networks: ARPANET for research and MILNET for military use. From then on, a civil Internet was developed using file transfer program (FTP) on closely linked computers in local office settings. Electronic mail (e-mail) messaging began to appear as a viable means for communicating text across large distances, using a phone line and a modem. In 1991 computers began to be linked globally in the emerging World Wide Web (www) with the development of satellite communication technology. A virtual explosion of Internet services has followed this that has provided programs for the general public to communicate through e-mail, newsgroups, bulletin boards, chatrooms and other applications. Up to 2003, there are over 600 million users connected to the Internet in the world (Searls & Weinberger, 2003).

The Internet could be considered as one of the most liberating media forces in the world today. It has an unplanned open network structure with no central control. No

corporations, Government or global organization is able to claim ownership of the Internet. Instead, the Internet has evolved into arguably the largest and most uncensored information provider in history.

Users of the Internet can communicate in a variety of ways: electronic mail (email), usenet or network news, talk, Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). IRC, a designed chat tool, which is the focus of this thesis, was a program developed by Jakko Oikarinen in 1988 which enabled many users to communicate with each other at once in real-time, something not possible with existing programs. Within IRC there are channels which act like rooms in which discussions take place. These channels (both public and private) are necessary to divide the 5,000 plus users that are on IRC at any one time. Anyone can join a public channel to participate in the discussion, however private messages can also be exchanged between two users which are unavailable to anyone else.

The potential of the Internet is such that it allows the rapid exchange of information between people all over the world. It is frequently argued that the Internet, more than any other medium, makes possible free, open and equal access to information. The Internet also allows communication between people who would not previously have been in contact. People from all around the world, it is claimed, have the opportunity to engage in conversation and form relationships without the barriers of ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, gender and age, enhancing the possibility of global 'community' (Rheingold, 1994; Reid, 1991, 1993).

All communication on the Internet, for example, is textual (text-based virtual community) and the people communicating are invisible to each other. This means that

communication is at least different to that which takes place on a face-to face (FTF) level in a normal conversation. Under such an environment, the new forms of interpersonal communication that came about with forms of CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) such as IRC and MUDs provide available services to the citizens through World Wide Web in this virtual community. Text-based Virtual Communities, such as IRC and MOOs (MUDs Object Oriented), are composite environments in which both in-real-time (synchronous) and delayed (asynchronous) communication can take place. Chat rooms and e-mail are the products of such a development, which enable people of different races and culture to communicate in a long distance and an unknown environment.

1.2 Forms of CMC

With the development of computer science and the emergence of Internet, CMC – computer mediated communication, has become a new-born medium for human communication. Like other kinds of media as telephone, radio, and television, CMC is another electronic means to help human beings to express and diffuse their ideas and purposes. As above mentioned, there are different ways of CMC on the Internet, such as e-mail, chat room. But what is the specific use of each CMC form?

1.2.1 What is CMC?

What exactly is CMC? Rice (1984) defines the systems used in CMC as “media that facilitate the exchange of semantic content, transmitted through telecommunication networks, processed through one or more computers, between individuals and among

groups". Another definition comes from Walther (1992) who defines CMC as "synchronous or asynchronous electronic mail (e-mail) and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in text their messages that are relayed from senders' computers to receivers". From the above definitions it can be ascertained that CMC is either asynchronous or synchronous and that it involves the exchange of messages first typed on one computer screen and sent to another person's computer in order for that person to read the message and reply appropriately.

Asynchronous CMC refers to applications such as electronic mail and network news which enables a person to send a message to another person's computer which is then stored until that person is able to read it and then reply. Asynchronous CMC has been available for much longer than synchronous CMC and as a result the bulk of research has been into this area.

Synchronous CMC deals with computer conferencing and 'real time' interaction. One example of this is 'talk' where two people are able to communicate simultaneously. Another form, which is the concern of this thesis, is IRC where many people are able to talk to each other at once in real time. In synchronous CMC people are able to communicate immediately with another person as if they were talking to them on a FTF basis. The research into this area is still in its early stages, but more studies are beginning to emerge (such as Reid, 1991, 1993; Rheingold, 1994).

Peters P, Collins P, and Smith A (2002) summarized CMC with the following categories:

- 1) E-mail

- 2) World-Wide Web (www)
- 3) Net news
- 4) Bulletin boards
- 5) Chat programs
- 6) Chatrooms
- 7) Mobile phone text messaging (which is a variety of CMC, as it can be used to exchange short messages with computers, such as IM and SMS)

1.2.2 The Main Situational Features of CMC

Wilson A. (1992), Crystal D. (2001), and Peters P, et al (2002) describe the prototypical features of CMC in Table 1 below:

Table 1. The Prototypical Features of CMC

	Channel limitation	One-way / two-way	Public / private	Prepared / impromptu
E-mail	yes	one-way (a)	private	both (c)
www	yes	one-way	public	prepared
Net news	yes	one-way (a)	public	both (c)
Bulletin board	yes	one-way (a)	public	both (c)
Chat program	some (b)	Two-way	private	impromptu
Chatroom	some (b)	two-way	public	impromptu
MP text	yes	one-way (a)	private	usually impromptu
Conversation	no	two-way	private	impromptu
Letter	yes	one-way	private	prepared
Book	yes	one-way	public	prepared

- (a) E-mail etc. is primarily non-interactive; however, the recipient may sometimes reply very swiftly, so that an exchange of correspondence occurs that approximates to a conversation
- (b) Participants can see other writing in "real time", but do not normally have visual contact.
- (c) Writers of e-mails and other non-interactive texts may choose either to compose in "real time" or to plan and edit the material before sending.

1.3 Language Revolution on the Internet

Language never ceases its revolution every time when there is an innovation with the technological progress in human history. For example, when Russians sent their spaceship into the outer space (1957), people called the spaceman (Yuri Gagarin) a 'cosmonaut'; and as Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin (the Americans) landed on the moon (1969), they were known as 'astronauts'; and then in 2003, China successfully launched their spaceship with a man (Yang Liwei) into the space, one of the German websites addressed him as 'taikonaut' (taiko, a Chinese term means space). Such phenomena, with the advent of the Internet in the late 20th century, are further proved by the development of CMC with the designed tools as MOOs or IRC. Through them, users' ideas are able to soar freely in the text-based virtual communities without language constraints. Either by communicating time pressure (typing instead of saying) or by creating novel expressions (exploiting paralinguistic functions like emoticon), they are practicing a language revolution which characterizes the time of the advanced science and technology. There are reasons for these happenings as Crystal (2001) described in *The Internet: A Linguistic Revolution*:

"What is revolutionary about e-mails is the way the medium permits what is called framing. You receive a message which contains, say, three different points in a single paragraph. You can, if you want, reply to each of these points by taking the paragraph, splitting it up into three parts, and then responding to each part separately, so that the message you send back then looks a bit like a play dialogue. There's never been anything like this in the history of human written communication."

"Real-time Internet discussion groups - chatrooms - also offer a revolutionary set of possibilities. You see on your screen messages coming in from all over the world. If there are 30 people in the room, then you could be seeing 30 different messages, all making various contributions to the theme, but often clustering into half a dozen or more sub-conversations. It's like being

in a cocktail party where there are other conversations going on all around you. In the party, of course, you can't pay attention to them. In a chatroom you can't avoid them. It has never been possible before, in the history of human communication, to 'listen' to 30 people at once. Now you can. Moreover, you can respond to as many of them as your mental powers and typing speed permit. This too is a revolutionary state of affairs, as far as speech is concerned."

Crystal, D. (2001)

In a sense, the users on the Internet are not cavalier about their typing accuracy, permitting misspellings, omitting capitalization and punctuation, and even intentionally imitating the natural spoken discourse (see Example 1 and 2). This is a rather minor effect, which rarely interferes with intelligibility. It is patently a special style arising out of the pressures operating on users of the medium, plus the idiosyncratic and daring desire and tendency among the young or young-minded people.

There is a further reason for the revolutionary status of the Internet - the fact that it offers a home to all languages - as soon as their communities have a functioning computer technology. Its increasingly multilingual character has been the most notable change since it started out - not very long ago - as a totally English medium. For many, indeed, the language of the Internet 'is' English. And, perhaps, there are some other situations that English 'chatrooms' are designed for people to practice English, say, in China, Singapore, and Malaysia. However, when these non-native English speakers gather in an English speaking environment, there tend to be some combined cultural elements that would appear in the course of chatting, as a vivid demand in *Alamak Chat*, which rules: "Welcome to Alamak Chat (Singapore) room. To promote communication please use English or Singlish in this room" (see Appendix B).

There was a headline in "The New York Times" in 1996 which said simply: 'World, Wide, Web: 3 English Words'. The article, by Michael Specter, went on to say:

'if you want to take full advantage of the Internet there is only one real way to do it: learn English'. He did acknowledge the arrival of other languages: 'As the Web grows', he said, 'the number of people on it who speak French, say, or Russian will become more varied and that variety will be expressed on the Web. That is why it is a fundamentally democratic technology'. And such 'democracy' will doom to cause a new round of language revolution. This tendency will go irresistibly in a way of linguistic evolution as it used to go in the history of human language development.

All these can be easily observed from the language in a chatroom situation:

Example 1. Alamak Chat #1, Australia

656)[ddwizzard] hello all*
657)[Shakamaker] WZZZZZZZ
658)[Sketchy Unit] FIZZ
660)[fred] hellooooooooooooo!
661)[MAIYA] Hey dd :o)
662)[HSVChick] Hiya ddwizzard!! :p damn must been weeks since i've seen ya *I.*
663)[ddwizzard] arghhhhhh!
666)[ddwizzard] msn in stuffed up i can't keep in there for some shit reason!
667)[MAIYA] Yay for chocolate
668)[ddwizzard] arghhhhhha!
669)[MAIYA] msn is fine
682)[ddwizz] stupid computer is giving me shits damnit!

Example 2. Alamak Chat #SG, Singapore

408)[dennie] AL....sing kao tai tonite??
413)[AndrewLight] huh??? Dennie what u mean
425)[dennie] you dun understand hokkien????AL....kao tai mean sing song lor...
427)[pippi] Cutie.. why you leave us ah??
428)[tiger7] pippi mei ●●
433)[AndrewLight] Ohhhh dennie ...bo lah...sing for fun nia mahboring leh
437)[pippi] tiger jie *hugs*
440)[tiger7] pippi how r u? aven't seen ya for awhile
446)[CGz] makan????!?!?!?
449)[CGz] how come flyaway mei no jio me go makan????/ ●
450)[fly_away] mai poke me.. lolz..mai luan poke..later pain!
453)[pippi] tiger jie.. I am fine :) this weekend busy with play game.. how are you??
459)[tiger7] me fine oso lor pippi mei...me having my one week break now...

Three major trends are highlighted in above examples as Crystal (2004) wrote in the below description. The first trend is English as a genuinely global language; see *Alamak Chat #1, Australia* and *Alamak Chat #SG, Singapore*, users there take English as a communication medium regardless of their native language. The second is that although people in the world are different in language and culture, they are still willing to use English as a general medium, because by which they can easily make friends and exchange ideas with people of various races. And the third is that spoken language as the main role of communication has been changed since the emergence of Internet, where text-based language is the only way for communication, i.e. the communication on the Internet is neither spoken nor written. It is a combination of both. Thus, spoken language is found interspersed among the written language, and different culture and language are merged in the English talk-turn streams.

“what makes the second half of the twentieth century – and the 1990s in particular – a highly significant period in the history of language is that we find a coming together of three major trends, each trend in its implications, first, there has been the emergence of English as a genuinely global language, and the accompanying development of new varieties of English around the world. Second, there is the realisation that huge numbers of languages are endangered or dying, which has resulted in a sense of crisis and fresh initiatives towards preservation and regeneration. And third, there is the arrival of Internet technology, which has supplemented spoken and written language with a linguistically novel medium of communication, and added a further dimension of variety to our linguistic experience.”

Crystal, D. (2001)

1.4 Statement of Problems

With the occurrence of computer technological innovation and CMC text-based language on the Internet, many issues encompassing the language norms and

conventions are heatedly debated in the fields of linguistics and sociology such as language revolution vs. informal language; technological phenomena vs. social phenomena. The typical debates are as follows:

1.4.1 Basic Issues

a) Language Revolution vs. Informal Language

Crystal (2001) believes that there is the 'arrival' of Internet technology, which has supplemented spoken and written language with a linguistically 'novel' medium of communication, and added a further dimension of 'variety' to our linguistic experience. Everyone, not just teacher, is faced with the uncertainties of a rapidly changing linguistic world – 'a language revolution'. While, others think that virtual conversations, which chatrooms may be considered, can have little to no real life significance. In chatrooms, conversations are 'informal', often 'experimental' and often are used for 'entertainment' and 'escape' (Neuage, 2003). All chatroom talk could be considered informal speech (Collins, 1999). IRC, as well as the clear presence of IT knowledge-based power would appear to suggest the formation of an 'antisociety' (Stevenson, 2004) with an 'antilanguage' (Halliday, 1978).

b) Technological Phenomenon vs. Social Phenomenon

Furness (2002) writes about the market for mobile phones in the UK: "this market is responsible for one of the fastest growing 'technological phenomena' in recent history: the text message and the new language that goes with it." And often the same language creeps up in e-mails or in Internet chatrooms where people spend hours finding out age, sex and location, sharing jokes, and discuss the same 'old shit' without ever having to be face to face. However, Reid (1991) points out that IRC is a global

cultural phenomenon, with high potential for citizen-to-citizen communication across national and ideological boundaries. On the surface the Internet seems to be a technological phenomenon, however, it is more social than technological phenomena. Technology is not a determinant of on-line life, but a prerequisite for the occurrence of the virtual community 'social phenomena' (Fletcher, 1995).

Regardless of the results of these debates, language development is still going without the restriction of human will. However, the more important thing in the current research is to envisage, understand, and objectively assess these 'novel' text-based language phenomena in a scientific way in order to decide the positive or negative effect the Internet will influence the expression of our language. And pragmatic analysis is an appropriate method to test such language behaviors in the virtual communities.

1.4.2 Why Analyze Language in a Chatroom Situation?

It is noticed that there are good reasons to choose chatroom for language analysis as chatrooms gather the typical use of text-based language in all CMC forms. To begin with, chatroom is the most popular place for the participants to talk on the Internet, which has the prototypical features - less channel limitation, two-way communication, for public purpose, and the participants using impromptu utterances. Compared to other forms of CMC, it is ideal and of great value to study its data for the interest of text-based utterances. Second, language development will not occur without being used in a particular time and environment, and chatroom on the Internet is the appropriate place to testify this hypothesis. Third, it is scientific and holistic to apply pragmatic criteria to measure online chatroom utterances, as pragmatics is the study of the way language is used. For example, does an online utterance carry speech act with it? And

the users in the chatroom are acquiescent to use careless typing, misspelling, loosing capitalization and punctuation, and simulation of the natural spoken discourse (paralinguistic phenomena), which are almost beyond the analysis of other linguistic theories. Moreover, according to Crystal (2001), 'there has been the emergence of English as a genuinely global language, and the accompanying development of new varieties of English around the world'. Current statistical wisdom suggests that about one in four of the world's population (about 1.5 billion) use English to some degree. This remarkable figure is not of course on account of its mother-tongue speakers, but because of its use by people as a second or foreign language, who outnumber native-speakers in a ratio of some 3:1. The data samples within this study have verified such a phenomenon.

1.4.3 Objectives

The purpose of this study is to assess online chat, a new type of human conversational behavior, to be an 'antilanguage' as defined by Halliday (1978) or a 'speech community' that influences, to some extent, language development. Online chat is generally recognized as a variety of synchronous systems, which allow two or more people to exchange text messages in real time. From pragmatic perspectives, referring this behavior to 'conversation' is a misnomer, as what is currently considered conversation has a history as an interchange through speech: an act requiring physical proximity to permit audibility – and an act therefore precluding written text (Neuhaus, 2003). Crystal (2001) believes that 'Netspeak' (in his term) is neither spoken nor written language: "it has adapted features of speech and of writing to suit the new medium, and added other features that neither speech nor writing could ever convey. It

is a 'language revolution'". However, Halliday terms it as an 'antilanguage'. And many others believe that the text-based chat is 'informal', 'experimental', 'entertaining', and even an 'escape' (Collins, 1999; Neuage, 2003; Stevenson, 2004). Driven under such viewpoints, needs are activated to examine the text-based utterances to match the pragmatic functions used to define them in FTF context; to analyze online language forms and intention of the participants; and to reveal the new trends of language change and diversity in the cyberspace time.

1.4.4 Research Questions

Some questions as a starting point toward analyzing a culture of electronic-talk in the online situation are discussed to ground basic research questions in 'language-in-use' studies on the Internet as 'antilanguage' or 'language revolution'; what CMC is; and Internet a technological phenomenon or social phenomenon. In order to make a clear direction for data collection and interpretation, further questions specific to each study are posed in detail as follows:

- 1) What is the characteristic use of chatroom symbols? Do they produce the same linguistic function as in FTF talks?
- 2) Do chatroom participants 'relexicalize' or 'overlexicalize' to create chatroom conventions?
- 3) Are there 'contextualization cues' as paralinguistic phenomena in chatroom, communications?
- 4) In code switching, do chatters bring with 'self' culture in an English chatroom?
- 5) Are there turn-taking sequences in chatrooms? What do they look like?
- 6) Does dysfunctional incoherence of chatroom turn-taking sequences affect the

communication between participants?

7) Can 'Speech Act Theory' describe what the language in a chatroom is doing?

8) Is speech act theory a measurable tool to assess the speaker's future course of action in the chatroom situation?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Objectively, the language evolution is independent of any interference of man's will. It is the product of many factors as the social reform, psychological change and technological innovations. Language revolution in the cyberspace time, described by David Crystal (2004), is a typical phenomenon of such a product. In this regard, it is necessary to study its change, formation, and trend in the course of such a language change. There are at least three hints as follows:

a) A cue to the language in use

With the development of science and technology, Internet is becoming the main medium of human activities such as doing business, exchanging messages, spreading news, getting information, and producing advertisement. All these have nothing to do without the use of language as communication means. However, people have to face the changing language form compelled either by the purpose of time-saving or by the speech-written language pattern in real time on the Internet. And this trend is influencing the use of language in all aspects of human life. As you walk in the street you can not miss noticing the billboard of a telecom company with 'FYI SMS MSG R XLNT!' (For your information SMS messages are excellent!), and a lady carrying a shopping-bag with the emoticon '😊' meaning 'it's happy to buy!' Even the way ethical issues raised in an increasingly Internet-centered society dominate the morning's

discussion. Sissela Bok (2001), of Harvard's Center for Population and Development Studies, says that "some old moral laws require new perspectives for an 'online-all-the-time' text-based world". "There is a special problem for ethics itself, because the moral guidelines in every religion and every moral tradition are formulated for human beings in face-to-face interactions." These facts are only the few examples among the most Internet language expressions. The occurrence of such changes is endowed with a great significance for linguists and teachers to study the imminent revolution for the sake of future language usage.

b) Relexicalization

Using pragmatic analysis to study chatroom speech behaviours is significant to uncover the novel intention of the signalling and cultural differences between the Internet medium among the people of various races. Internet is a very place for culture 'fusion'. And it is just like the situation in a Shakespeare's work which is composed of about 87% borrowed words as English culture was fused with other European culture then. A chatter can not miss seeing a combined cultural expression in an English chatroom, e.g. 'nihao' (Chinese greeting), 'ciao' (Italian greeting), 'howdy' (Australian greeting). There is a big chance that chatroom language as 'omg' (oh my god!), 'LOL' (laugh out loud), 'u' (you), 'y' (why), 'r' (are), and many other online informal language will become the standard usage in the formal language as we can not deny some of the modern English usage are evolved from the old English. Such a study can, in a sense, help the work of dictionary compilation. For example, the informal American colloquial English, 'wanna' and 'gonna' are accepted by *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED).

c) A nudge to teaching and learning

It goes without saying that the study of language in the online situation is beneficial to set a guideline for education at schools of all levels. It can benefit the education in both micro- and macro-respects. For the micro-respect, the result of the study can help teachers to be well-informed about what is going on in a particular language setting, thus, adjusting their teaching methods and contents to appeal to student needs in the request of necessary knowledge. Take writing an e-mail format for example, can you neglect what is most prevailing practice in the business correspondence where novel linguistic creations are immanent? A research on them would help to collate the irregular linguistic phenomena and then make them in a modeled pattern for a concrete lesson. The process of language changing is also the process of language teaching and learning. A case in point is "E-mail Writing Format", a coursework on the Internet (Sherwood, 2004). And for the macro-respect, analyzing online language phenomenon and trend will help the curriculum audit committee to reconsider the overall categories in a language course design; organizing man power to revise the textbooks existed, canceling what is unnecessary and adding the practical contents to the new curriculum for the interest of the general public. On the whole, online 'talk' as e-mail, chatroom, and SMS is a new cultural trend for the young generation in the cyberspace time. To study the language in such settings is in accordance with the direction of studying the trend of language development. To do research is to learn. An insight from a Chinese proverb goes: 'Teaching and learning bring out the best in each other.'

1.6 Limitations of the Study

There are many ways to study language from linguistic perspectives. Of various methodologies, qualitative and ethnographic approaches are chosen to apply in this chatroom language analysis. Considering the difficulty of subjects' verification and limited means of data collection, some of the most popular approaches, such as quantitative and experimental research, are excluded in the study.

1) The dissertation is involved only in the study of language in online chatroom use from designated pragmatic perspectives. The methodology is qualitative rather than quantitative. And the nature of such a method is analytical and descriptive.

2) Pragmatics is overlapped with other linguistic methods as semiotics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis. But this study is within the analysis from pragmatic perspectives. Three pragmatic approaches are adopted: Ethnographic Analysis (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972), Conversational Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974), and Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle, 1962, 1969, 1975).

3) The analysis is to assess language in chatroom community with its norms and conventions compared to FTF situation, studying text-based words, chatroom turn-taking sequences, speech acts used among the chatroom participants, and exploiting the impact of CMC language on language development.

1.7 Dissertation Overview

There are five chapters involved in the dissertation layout. Here are brief introductions for each chapter as guidelines:

In Chapter one, a general introduction relating to development and emergence of Internet, forms of CMC, language revolution, and statement of problems is presented in

order to introduce chatroom with IRC text-based language as a research platform and give reasons for the thesis argumentation. Chapter two will review the research of latest literature on CMC issues, including online communities, Internet as social phenomena, IRC interpersonal relationship, and chatroom language analysis. It will further the study's focus by analyzing the literature and establish the specific direction for the dissertation development. In addition, the chapter will outline the theoretical framework for this dissertation as *Ethnographic Analysis* (Gumperz & Hames, 1972), *Conversational Analysis* (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974), and *Speech Act Theory* (Austin & Searle, 1962, 1965, 1969, 1975), provide theoretical ground for the thesis argumentation, and produce sample studies for data interpretation. Chapter three will introduce methodologies dealing with the data, which covers qualitative research, ethnographic research, and data collection. Chapter four will interpret the data through pragmatic analysis assessing chatroom language with detailed explanation, including micro- and macro- study of IRC words (symbols, paralinguistic phenomena), chatroom turn-taking sequences, 'chat' speech acts, and specifications for chatroom access. Chapter five will deal with the discussion of the results of the data analysis, and conclude the implication of chatroom language for language being used, education, and global impact on language development.