CHAPTER THREE

DISCOURSE OF BLOGS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is a continuation of the literature review. The chapter begins with an overview of blogs as mediums of virtual communication and the theories describing blog interactive practices. This is followed by a review of the principles of data analysis of computer mediated discourse analysis (CMDA).

3.1 Blogs

A weblog or blog is an online journal that allows an individual to update his/her personal thoughts and ideas (Miller & Shepherd, 2005). Blogs are different from other forms of CMC because they allow personal opinions that can be viewed by all online users. Blog responses are deemed to be thought out and planned and blog entries also reflect the personalities and voices of the participants who blog (Bausch et al., 2002).

Blog entries are instantly published on the internet. In order to blog, bloggers do not require knowledge of HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) - a language to specify the structure of documents for retrieval across the internet using the browser programmmes of the WorldWideWeb (www) in order to take part in a blog activity (Miller & Shepherd, 2005).
Blogs are informal journal entries that can serve as tools for people to exchange opinions (Bausch et al., 2002; Nardi et al., 2004). They are interactive as participants can respond to

any blog entry with a comment that may include hyperlinks to, and reviews comments from other bloggers. When a blog is updated new items go on top and older items move down the page. Over time, the accumulation of responses and other contents create a record of those involved in the interaction (Hendrick & Örnberg, 2004). Nardi et al. (2004) and Bausch et al. (2002) give varying reasons for blogging, ranging from developing writing skills, sharing expertise, building community to having an on-line journal.

3.2 Types of Blogs

Blood (2000) has categorized blogs into 'filter' and 'short-form journal' genres. In addition, blog publishing software has introduced tools that have enabled new forms of blogs to evolved; 'distributed conversation'. These blogs are named according to the purpose they serve e.g. ESL Blog.

3.2.1 Short-form Journal Blogs

Short-form journal blogs are journal-like compositions characterized by personal expressions, the type used in the investigation of writing this thesis (see. Chapter Four). A Short-form Journal Blogs is a collection of record of thoughts, observations and events.

3.2.2 Filter Blogs

A filter blog is constructed around commentary of selected hyperlinks; on a particular topic that the editor draws attention to contrasting articles on other websites, and builds these into a single narrative or discussion. Figure 3.1 is produced as an example of the filter blog.

SportsFilter

07:31 PM
06/20/07

World Cup Confidence Pool. **Join now!** Deadline is 5 pm Friday GMT, 12 Noon EDT.
by **justgary**

Technorati
» Blogs that link here
» View my profile

June 20
Larry Whiteside Died Last Week and his co-workers at the *Boston Globe* have done a nice job eulogizing him. The CHB shares some stories and Bob Ryan uses his new blog to talk about how Whiteside didn't just pave the way for African-Americans in sports departments, he actively cultivated a "Black List".
posted by yerfatma to Culture at 6:18 PM CDT - 1 comments

June 19
IU Football Coach Hoeppner dies 'This is a sad, sad day for Indiana University."......"It was never a rainy day, the sun was always shining for him.".....from IU Basketball Coach Kelvin Sampson.
posted by tommytrump to Football at 11:39 AM CDT - 2 comments

June 18
Former Redskins, Giants LB Arrington hurt in motorcycle crash Initially it looks like there is no outside influences to cause this wreck. The question now: given his recent playing injuries, is this the end of his once promising career?
posted by brainofdtrain to Football at 5:15 PM CDT - 15 comments

June 17
This ain't my first rodeo! But the West Of The Pecos Rodeo, which has its 125th annual gathering this week claims to be the first, and oldest, rodeo. Cowboy Up, y'all!
posted by mjkredliner to Culture at 3:20 AM CDT - 5 comments

June 16
In Praise of 'Soccer' Steven Wells: "... soccer-playing America is massively liberal, loving, caring, socially conscious and nice. While soccer-hating America consists of increasingly isolated gangs of Bush-supporting, bible-bashing, gun-crazed, dungaree wearing, banjo-playing, quasi-fascist chicken-lovers and their twelve fingered, pin-headed, cyclopic, drooling monster children."
posted by Fat Buddha to Soccer at 5:02 AM CDT - 43 comments

Figure 3.1: An example of a Filter Blog (retrieved from www.sportsfilter.com)

3.2.3 Distributed Conversation ('red flag')

Distributed conversation ('red flag') blogs evolve with continuous innovations as the need arises. In particular the blog enables bloggers to response to blog entries and automate the creation of links between different blogs that have a marked impact on the nature of the blogosphere. These features provide space for the 'the reader's voice'. A Distributed Conversation Blog uses an original blog entry as the starting point for an ongoing series of post, either as comments or reciprocal links. As responses are received, they are listed below the blog in the order of postings. The original author is then encouraged to clarify, defend or alter their original post.

When a blog entry goes against the community norms, it can split the readers. Such a post may be thought of as 'a red-flag'; intended to cause controversy to the reputation of the author. As search engine rankings can be based on incoming links, a red-flag blog entry may elevate the author's profile. An example of a red-flag blog is the Mike Davidson's "March to our own standard". Due to its mammoth size, the blog cannot be retrieved as example in the writing of this thesis. However, the blog can be obtained at http://www.mikeindustries.com/blog/archive/2004/06/march-to-your-own-standard.

3.2.4 ESL Blogs

Campbell (2003) has introduced blogs in support of ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom learning such as the tutor blog, learner blog and class blog. The Tutor Blog – It serves the purpose of tailoring language teaching to the individual need and the exploration of verbal exchange and resources of link for self-study.

- The Learner Blog – These blogs are run by individual learners or by small collaborative groups of learners. Learner Blogs may be best suited for reading and writing class and writing classes. For example, a common reading assignment can be followed by blog posting on the thoughts of each learner or groups of learners.

- The Class Blog – This type of blog is the result of the collaborative effort of an entire class and be used as a bulletin board for learners to post messages, images etc. It cal also be used as a virtual space for an international classroom language exchange.

3.3 Characteristics of Blogs

Although there are various types of blogs (Miller & Shepherd, 2005), blogs have several features that set them apart from other types of internet based communication as follows:

- **Presentation Format:** Blogs contain dated entries that start with the most recent, with a list of links to other websites. They are composed of ‘postings’, which include a date, a time stamp, and a link for commentary and the author’s name (Miller & Shepherd, 2005).

- **Comments/ Feedback:** Bloggers have opportunities to respond to messages or issues posted through the feedback link. These comments facilitate the formation of a virtual blog community where people with common interests ‘commune’ (Miller & Shepherd, 2005).

- **Archives:** The front page of blogs consist~~s~~ of a number of postings which an author has made available. Previous posts that exceed the home page limits are stored in an archive which is accessible whenever the author wants to retrieve information on previous interaction. These archives provide the development of identity among the participants in the blog as they can review the history of past interaction (Miller & Shepherd, 2005).

- **Templates:** Bloggers can build their blog pages from pre-existing templates according to their preference of graphical layouts, typography and colour (Huffaker, 2004).

- **Updates:** A blog is regularly updated in reverse chronology. These updates are done fairly frequently and the stream of thoughts that follow are often based on something that is currently happening (Shepherd & Miller 2005).

- **Community Notion in Blogs:** Blogs give the social impression created between the blogger and the readers. Bloggers generally meet in cyberspace and the combination of links and accompanying commentary ‘bind’ bloggers into a community (Miller & Shepherd, 2005).

According to Nilsson (2003), the language used in blog interaction falls on the continuum between the spoken and written language. Using Crystal’s (2001) list of differences between written and spoken language features, Nilsson, (2003) lists the linguistic characteristics of blogs as presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: The Differences between Written and Spoken Language Features

Categories	Speech	Writing
Boundedness and Dynamicity	Speech is bound by time and it is dynamic and transient.	Writing is bound by space and it is static and permanent
Synchronicity	There is no time-lag between production and reception, unless one is deliberately introduced by the recipient. The spontaneity and speed of most speech exchanges make it difficult to engage in complex advance planning.	There is always a time-lag between production and reception. Writing can be read repeatedly and analyzed. It can contain careful organization of complex sentence structure
Paralinguistic Cues	Participants are typically in face to face interaction and can rely on extra linguistic cues.	Participants cannot rely on the context in which writing is made and there is a lag of time between production and feedback.
Construction	Contractions (isn't, won't) nonsense vocabulary (e.g. thingamajig) and slang are some of the informal characteristics of speech.	Multiple dependent clauses in the same sentence and elaborately balanced syntactic pattern constructions are some of the formal characteristics of writing.
Communicative Function	Speech is suitable for socializing, expressing social relationships, and personal opinions and attitudes.	Writing is suitable for recording facts, communication of ideas, and for learning and memory.
Ability to be Revised	There is an opportunity to rethink an utterance while the other person is listening. Interruptions and overlapping in speech are normal.	Errors in writing can be corrected in later drafts without the reader even knowing of the drafts.
Unique Communicative Features	Unique features of speech include prosody such as nuances of intonation which is difficult to be written	Unique features of writing include aspects of punctuation and formats

Source: Nilsson (2003: 32)

Table 3.1 shows the features of written and spoken languages. Nilsson (2003) discusses the above categories in relation to communicative patterns and language found in blogs as listed below.

- **Boundedness and Dynamicity:** Nilsson (2003) claims that the language of blogs is bound by space and time. Blogs are space bound as they are bound to the space they occupy. Although blogs are written, the time span is limited, thus like speech, may be lost after production. The messages produced in blogs are bound by the actual physical size of the medium. This is similar to written text that is bound to the space it is written on. Blogs are said to be time bound because blog postings appear for a certain period of time before they are permanently moved to the archives. Its fluidity as it disappears into the archives is similar to speech.

- **Synchronicity: A** lapse of time between the creation, posting and reading of blog postings often exists in blog postings and this makes blogs less synchronous than chat rooms and online forums. Blogs differ from the traditional written materials because written materials are carefully edited and revised whereas blogs are usually spontaneously written. Therefore, blog posts are made up of written but unedited notes which are elements of conversation.

- **Paralinguistic Cues:** Paralinguistic cues are more prominent in face-to-face interactions but these are becoming more prevalent in blogs where bloggers use non-standard punctuations and emoticons to express the nuances of speech. This creates a more speech like environment among bloggers.

- **Blog Construction:** Blogs are not just mere documentations, they are about what people do, think or discuss and they contain catching thoughts that make them more appealing to bloggers. Therefore, most blogs have the combination of written and spoken language features. The language may sound like a short staccato conversation such as *'so..so..so..sorry'*, to help show the intensity of being remorseful. Blogs permit nonsense words, contractions and abbreviations such as LOL (laughing out loud) to be used.

- **Ability to Revise:** Blog owners are allowed to edit their posts as the need arises and to republish them. In comparison, speech cannot be edited. Further, blog owners can also delete or publish comments posted in their blog at will whenever they feel the need arises. This makes blogs more permanent than spontaneous speech.

- **Unique Communicative Features:** Blogs are constantly updated with new blog issues by blog owners. Therefore bloggers look at the top of the blog page to be updated. In addition when previous blog issues and postings are assigned a permanent place in the archives, the hyperlinks created by bloggers are within the blogging circles.

From the comparison, it can be seen that blogs consist of both written and spoken language features. Therefore, the social networking strategies in blogs can consist of both written and spoken language.

3.4 Past Studies on Blogs

In their study, Tan and Ibrahim (2008) found that 30% of the blog readers in Malaysia visited socio-political blog sites while others preferred non-political blog sites. Their survey also indicated that 44% of the bloggers were female and in terms of ethnicity, 78% of them were Chinese followed by 19% Malays, 2% Indians and 5% Others. Tan and Ibrahim (2008) concludes that blogs have influenced Malaysian civil society.

Studies have also found that blogs are used by both genders. Herring and Paolillo (2006) investigated gender and genre variation in blogs. They found that bloggers employed certain kinds of language, irrespective of gender. Their investigation also documented that blog entries tend to contain more 'female' stylistic features and they are independent of author gender. The researchers thus concluded that gender difference may not be seen in the use of language. Nowson (2005) found that while women wrote more in blogs, men were more formal in their writing. However, in a related study Huffaker (2004) noted there were very few differences in terms of word count and length among male and female bloggers, though males were found to have used more ‘active’ language.

Blogs are also found to be suitable for language teaching and learning. For example, Ngah (2007) studied how blogs could be used as journal entries among ESL learners in Malaysian schools. By using qualitative-quantitative data analytical procedures such as content analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the researcher found that blogs could enhance students’ writing skills. The students reported that they found blogs to be an interesting form of journal writing as compared to writing in log books. In another study, Jones (2006) examined the significance of blogs in the process writing approach. The study examined ESL students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the use of blogs in the ESL writing class. Using the qualitative research and case study methods, data was collected from five participants. The study found that blogging can be an effective tool for process writing approach in the teaching of writing skills. The study found that blogging facilitated the students' critical thinking skills whilst also improving the quality of students' writing. The study further indicates that blog entries served as writing models for students to read and learn from. The study also revealed that blogging motivated the students to write as they can publish their thoughts for an authentic audience. The study also found that blogging helped to solve some critical issues that were related to the students' trust and confidence in peer editing and revising. In that regard, blogging was found to facilitate meaningful learning and purpose for writing among students.

Other studies of blogs and their impact could be traced to Tan (2006) who examined the effect of blogs and how blogs serve as forms of reflection among pre-service teachers. The participants involved were forty-eight pre-service teachers and their course instructors. Data was sourced from a discussion forum, individual blogs, questionnaires and interviews with pre-service teachers and instructors, and observations of classroom and online behavior. The results are used to draw implications on how blogs could promote higher levels of reflection if they are used among pre-service teachers.

In a more recent study, Chuang (2008) explored the use of blogs in the writing of teaching portfolios among student teachers. The study found that blog entries revealed the maturity levels of student teachers and shaped their reflective practices and promoted collaboration among student teachers during their practicum. However, the study found that student teachers had reservations that their work was viewed by others.

The usefulness of blogs in education is also reflected in a study by Theng & Wan (2006) who found there was a relationship between students' perceived usefulness and use of blogs in higher education. Data was collected from sixty-eight students of a local university. The findings of their research suggested that students were likely to view blogs positively if they perceive blogging as a useful activity.

Blogs are also found to support community building. In a related study Prieto et al., (2007) investigated how a blog community evolves and develops. By using the Self Organizing Map Computational maps, the researchers gauged the interaction patterns of blog interaction to show how the social structure in blogs were formed and eventually grew and evolved. The findings highlight how blog communities are formed and it also helps to predict the future paths that blog members will likely take.

Studies have also shown the degree and nature of interconnectedness of blogs. Applying quantitative and statistical network methods drawn from social network analysis (SNA) and a graph theory, Herring, et al. (2005) presented evidence of interconnectedness among members of a blog. They concluded that social network analysis indicated that Catholicism and homeschooling blogs showed strong link clusters because they tend to contain active textual interactions (posting comments). Zhou and Davis (2007) investigated how a blog community are interconnected and linked. They found that the large clustering pattern of a link structure could indicate that a large community is being interconnected. However, they reported that the life span of any blog is dependent on the respective blog authors who post active and intriguing comments at their blog site.

In an article, Moor and Efimova (2004) argued that blogs have a large potential for supporting organizational conversations and their views were shaped by Silva et al. (2006) who found that informal and casual use of language in blog interactions foster social inclusion among the employees working in a corporation. Based on a qualitative analysis, Silva et al. (2006) propose a framework that was grounded in the theory of communities of practice and gives insights on the development of blog interactional practices in communication. The findings also coincide with the study of Nilsson (2003) who found blogging strengthened the sense of group identity because it allowed bloggers to create their own lexicons and taboo words, marking them as members of the blogging community.

Other studies looking at blog communities can be traced to Chau and Xu (2008) who investigated how blog communities share their ideologies, express their views, or recruit new group members. The researchers monitored blog communities for activities that were potentially harmful to society. Based on their findings, the researcher proposed a framework for blog analysis to investigate the characteristic of members of a hate group.

Past studies on blogs show that investigation on language strategies in blogs, especially in the Malaysian context is still sparse.

3.5 Discourse Analysis

The analysis of discourse is fundamentally the analysis of the forms and functions of language in use. The focus in discourse analysis is ‘on what is said or done in the text, a text’s subject matter, and on how something is said, that is, the total of the language mechanisms and strategies that operate in discourse' (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2004:8). In addition, Cook (1989) states that in discourse analysis the focus is on the semiotic of language i.e., on how meaning is constructed and understood with regards to all aspects of an interaction that are integrally intertwined.

Hence, a discourse analyst studies the correlations between the forms (structure) and functions (meaning) of text in a language. Linguists use 'form' to designate the structural aspects of language such as verbs, nouns, phrases and clauses. They use 'function' to sort out the purpose that the 'form' performs.

In discourse analysis, it is important to recognize a stretch of language by employing knowledge – of the world, of the speaker, of social convention, of what is going on around us - to understand that stretch of language (Cook, 1989). Thus discourse analysis overlaps partially with pragmatics, which refers to how language users take the social context into account when producing and understanding speech forms (Maynard & Perakyla, 2003).

Brown and Yule (1983) use the term *reference, presupposition, implicature* and *inference* to describe what participants do in a discourse. *Reference* is used to hold a relationship between words and things. For example, in the following expression Speaker A and B use the expression *'my uncle' and 'he'* to refer to the same individual.

A: My uncle's coming from Canada. He's due to arrive…

B: how long has he been away?

C: he has lived in Canada for the past 10 years; he's married to my mother's sister.

Presupposition, according to Brown and Yule (1983), is the assumption the speaker makes in thinking that the hearer is likely to accept what is said by the speaker without challenge. In the above example, Speaker A treats the information that he has an uncle as presupposed and Speaker B, in her question, indicates that she has accepted this presupposition.

Implicatures refer to the implication, suggestion or meaning as distinct from what the speaker literally says (Brown & Yule, 1983). These are conventional implicatures which are relevant to Grice's (1975) cooperative principle which are the unspoken pact that people will cooperate when they communicate with each other and speakers rely on that cooperation to make conversations efficient. According to Finegan (1999), people in most situations manage to understand utterances as they are intended given the place and time because interlocutors trust that they and their conversational partners are honoring the same interpretive convention. The hearer assumes, simply, that the speaker has honored the conventions of interpretation in constructing his/her utterances. The speaker, on the other hand, makes the assumption that the hearer is guided by the convention and the hearer must trust that the speaker honours those conventions in constructing his/her utterance. Grice's conversational conventions or maxims which support this principle are as follows:

- Maxim of Quantity: Speakers and writers are expected to give as much information as is necessary for their interlocutors/readers to understand them. They are not expected to give more information than is necessary.
- Maxim of Manner: This maxim dictates that speakers and writers avoid ambiguity and obscurity and they are orderly in their utterances.

- Maxim of Quality: Speakers and writers are expected to say only what they believe to be true and to have evidence for what they say.

- Maxim of Relevance: Speakers are to organize their utterances in such a way that they are relevant to the ongoing context.

According to Finegan (1999), Grice's maxims are more often than not violated. Speakers are sometimes forced not to be truthful. They use speech acts not the way they had wanted to in order to be polite or to be ironical (Finegan, 1999), thus violating the cooperative principle. According to the cooperative principle, people are sometimes forced by their cultural norms or external factors to violate the cooperative principle. For example, it is certainly polite to compliment a host on the dinner even though you do not like some of the food. Therefore, the need to adhere to social conventions of politeness sometimes invites people to violate the cooperative principle.

Inference refers to the process of arriving at an interpretation of an utterance or the connections between utterances (Brown & Yule, 1983). This happens because the discourse analyst does not have direct access to the speaker's intended meaning in producing an utterance and therefore, the analyst has to rely on the process of inference. Thus, it would be necessary for the discourse analyst to have knowledge of the context and the speaker and hearer in order to make successful inferences.

Another area of relevance to Discourse Analysis is Lakoff's (1973) "Rules of Politeness" which was later revised to 'Rules of Rapport'. The social functions of the language are listed according to the three principles as follows:

1. Formality (Distance): Do not impose on others

2. Hesitancy (Deference): Give an option to the addressee whether to respond

3. Equality (Camaderie): Act as if you and the addressee are equal

The words in parentheses are alternative labels that could create a particular stylistic effect in an interaction. According to Johnstone (2002) and Mohd Ali (2000), each of the three rules of distance, deference and camaraderie create a particular stylistic effect in an interaction. Therefore, they cannot be maximized at once but must be kept in balance. In this respect, 'more formality, or distance may result in less equality or camaraderie; more equality may result in less hesitancy and so on' (Johnstone, 2002: 125).

Distance: It refers to the separation that exists between speakers which results from Rule No. 1 – Formality (Johnstone, 2002). This happens when speakers choose to be indirect or prefer not to impose their proposition on others (Mohd. Ali, 2000). For example, when one says 'Would you mind opening the door?' rather than 'Open the door' may in one context, seem appropriately formal and polite, in another context may sound suppressive and hence, threatening.

Deference: It refers to the style which results from the application of Rule No.2 – Hesitancy (Johnstone 2002). In Rule No. 2, the speaker may appear polite although the situation may allow him/her not to be so or the speaker may be bound by the situation for the sake of politeness. The use of tag-imperatives, euphemism, please, hedges, and the use of participles are all examples of Rule No. 2. In this regard, Lakoff (1975) points out that women often employ this strategy, thus, giving the impression that they are fuzzy-minded and full of tentativeness. When asked 'Would you like a drink? A person employing a deferent strategy might reply, 'Don't go to any trouble' or 'if you are having one, I don't mind'.

Camaraderie: It refers to the feeling of friendship and equality in an interaction. It is the result of the application of Rule No.3 – Equality (Johnstone, 2002). It is also a rule of informality, the opposite of Rule No. 1. The linguistic choices of participants in the use of Rule No. 3 bring about the feeling of camaraderie. In Rule No. 3 situations, speakers use of informal language and acknowledge people by their nicknames, use language particles and express solidarity between the speaker and the addressee (Mohd. Ali, 2000).

Therefore, in discourse analysis, the investigation is on (i) language use that goes beyond the boundaries of a sentence and utterance; (ii) concerned with the relationship between text and context; (iii) an ongoing dialogical process between text and context in a dynamic and complex relationship.

Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (2004) propose that in analyzing a text, the text-linguistic approach be adopted, because texts can be made up of spoken or written discourse which could either be a monologue or an interaction. In the use of the text-linguistic perspective to discourse analysis it is assumed that:

(i) The basic unit of analysis is text
(ii) The focus of analysis is the language of text
(iii) Text is structured
(iv) Texts are meaningful language units and must be viewed in context

3.6 Social Presence and Speech Act Theories in Blog Communication

Two theories of communication have been identified to be of relevance to the present study. They are social presence theory (Short, et. al 1976) and speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). In this section, the theoretical framework is discussed and linked to the present study on blog communication.

3.6.1 Speech Act Theory

An approach to discourse analysis as suggested by Schiffrin (1994) is speech acts analysis which focuses on the production and interpretation of acts through words. The forms and functions of the interactive strategies of blogs are made up of various speech acts. Speech act theory classifies verbal communication according to their communicative functions (Searle, 1969). Speech acts reflect the cultural awareness of the participants and context in which language is used (David, 2007). Pearce (1994) defines a speech act as the smallest unit of analysis in communication where speech acts are the component parts of a larger communication pattern.

If speech acts are the component parts of larger communication patterns (Pearce, 1994), they must therefore occur within a context of communication to necessitate a communication system – the smallest of which may contain two members. The interrelationships among speech acts in a communication system cannot be recreated by the simple adding together of individual speech acts. Therefore, to observe and study the speech acts of a single communicator in isolation is to arbitrarily discard this person's linkage to or interdependencies with, the other members of the communication system. In other words, the study of speech acts in virtual communication should take into account the context and the people that make up a blog discourse community.

The speech act theory poses language in terms of communication acts. In every linguistic production, one can recognise the expression of content and what the speaker does with that expression. For example, it can be decided whether an utterance is a question or a request according to the function it performs, as Pearce (1994) synthesizes that most speech acts are co-constructed because speech acts do not consist of a single action. The act that we perform is as much given by the response of other people as it is taken by our own acts. In blog communication, speech acts are co-constructed by the people who are interacting in the medium.

Austin (1962) describes three basic kinds of acts that are performed simultaneously in speech acts as:

(i) Locutionary act: An utterance is represented by a sentence with a grammatical structure and linguistic meaning.

(ii) Illocutionary act: Speakers have some intention to accomplish some acts in making an utterance. For example, the making of a statement, an offer, or a promise by virtue of the conventional force associated with it.

(iii) Perlocutionary act: The bringing about of effect of the act on the hearer by means of uttering the sentence.

Therefore, using speech act theory, researchers attempt to classify, systematically, the reasons for the linguistic acts people make. Both Austin and Searle based their theories on the hypothesis that 'speaking a language is engaging in a rule governed form of behaviour'

(Searle, 1969: 11) which results in the accomplishment of some specific social act, function or intention. These linguistic events or speech acts are classifiable, for example, as a promise, a request or giving advice.

3.6.2 Social Presence Theory

The presence of a speaker and a hearer is required in order for speech acts to perform a function. Face-to-face interaction yields the highest level of social presence while some forms of asynchronous virtual communication may result in the lowest level of social presence (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). The social presence theory emphasizes the importance of the feeling of the presence of others within a social context. This is particularly important in virtual communication due to the absence of visual and auditory cues. Short et al. (1976) explain that when the communication mediums become restricted, social presence within the group decreases. This may cause group cohesion to become negatively low and consequently members may feel disconnected. Disconnection can result in poor group dynamics. Therefore, when social presence is high, group members enjoy the feeling of joint involvement. Sheridan (1992) proposes that social presence is depended on:

(i) the degree of sensory information presented to the participant;

(ii) the level of control the participant has over the various sensor mechanisms; and

(iii) the participant’s ability to modify the environment.

These factors are the physical, objective properties of an online medium. Therefore, the objects, players, and environments represented by the medium are essential in keeping online participants interested and involved online. Additionally, the interactive and reactive practices of participants to the views of others signal their existence in virtual communication (IJsselsteijn & Riva, 2003). Ijsselsteijn and Riva (2003) state that social presence is a product of an individual's mind, and therefore, the presence experienced by individuals will vary based on differences in perceptual-motor abilities, mental states, traits, needs, preferences and experience. IJsselsteijn and Riva (2003) summarize the main factors involved in the experience of presence in Figure 3.1.

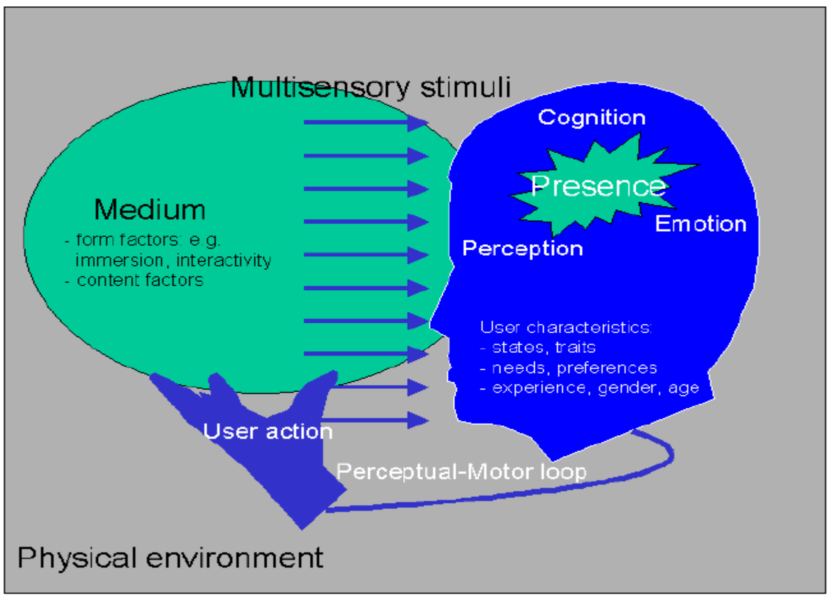

Figure 3.2: The Framework of Social Presence

Source: IJsselsteijn & Riva (2003: 2).

Figure 3.1 summarizes the main factors that are likely to play a role in determining the presence experience. The perceptual-motor loop, in the diagram, reflects the ongoing process of perception that varies according to the medium that participants interacting. However, perception can change over time when we move through and interact with the world in real-time. Multisensory stimulation arises from the physical and the mediated environment of a medium. There is no intrinsic difference in stimuli arising from the medium or from the real world – the fact that presence is felt in either one or the other depends on what becomes the dominant perception at any one time. Both bottom-up and top-down processes will play a significant role in determining social presence which can be enhanced when the environment is immersive and perceptually salient, as well as when attention selection processes are directed towards the mediated environment, thus allowing the formation of a consistent environmental representation.

Rourke et al. (2001) gives a much simpler way to measure what by using three types of communicative responses. They are:

(i) interactive responses;

(ii) affective responses; and

(iii) cohesive responses.

3.6.2.1 Interactive Response

Interactive response provides evidence that people are paying attention and are involved in online interaction. According to Rourke et al. (2001), an interactive response helps not only to sustain relationships but also to maintain and prolong contact. Interactive response includes interpersonal support, encouragement, and acceptance of one another. Interactive responses in CMC occur when participants reply to a message, quote directly from the messages and refer explicitly to the content of the messages that were posted by others. An interactive response can be described according to the speech act it performs.

3.6.2.2 Affective Response

Affective response refers to the expressions of emotions, feelings, and mood. In CMC, the capacity to express this type of socio-emotional communication is reduced because body language, facial expressions, and vocal intonations are eliminated. However, emotions can be expressed in CMC through a number of ways such as through humour, self disclosure, and the use of emoticons (e.g.☺) in the mediated text. Humour, according to Rourke et al. (2001), is like an invitation to start a conversation and it decreases the social distance in CMC. The social bond is further enhanced with self-disclosure when people disclose personal information about themselves. When there is more disclosure it is more likely others will reciprocate to this gesture and it permits individuals to become more open to each other and to establish trust and seek support from each other (Rourke et al., 2001).

3.6.2.3 Cohesive Response

Cohesive response refers to indicators that sustain a sense of group or community in CMC. Rourke et al. (2001) state that phatic salutations, vocatives and pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘our’ or ‘us’ can enhance the sense of community in CMC. Phatics are defined as communication acts that share feelings and establish a sociability mood rather than to communicate information or ideas. Phatics serve to confirm ties of union, and may encompass communicative acts such as inquiries about one’s health and comments about trivial matters. Vocatives refer to the act of addressing participants by names. Vocatives are attempts by addressers to establish closer ties with the addressee. The use of pronouns to address group members as ‘we’, ‘our’ or ‘us’ is an indicator of social presence because these pronouns denote feelings of closeness and association among the participants in CMC (Rourke et al., 2001; Nilsson, 2003).

Social presence is important in any type of CMC environment, and by investigating what creates the sense of presence in CMC, one can draw conclusions on how to enhance the potential of a CMC medium to create an immersive experience in virtual communication.

3.7 Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)

CMDA is an approach to researching online interactive behaviour. It can be a purely qualitative or quantitative data analytical procedure (Herring, 2004). Unlike linguistic discourse analysis, CMDA holds the assumption that computer mediated discourses are shaped by the technological features of computer mediated communications. CMDA at its core is the analysis of logs of verbal interaction (characters, words, utterances, messages, exchanges, threads, archives, etc.).

Herring (2004) coined the term CMDA in an attempt to systematize research methods that describe online discourse as a way to understand the effects of the new medium. CMDA applies methods that are adapted from language focused disciplines such as linguistics, communication and rhetoric to the analysis of computer mediated communication.

Therefore CMDA can be used on linguistic discourse analysis such as text-linguistic analysis to identify structural regularities within and across text (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2004; Herring, 2004). This involves the coding and counting of the language phenomenon to emerge out of the computer-mediated data such as that in grounded theory (Herring, 2004). The proposed domain of analysis in CMDA is listed in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Five Domains of CMDA Analysis

Domain	Phenomena	Issues	Methods
Structure	discourse schemata	genre characteristics	structural analysis
Meaning	meaning of words, utterances (speech acts)	what the speaker intends, what is accomplished through language	pragmatics, semantics
Interaction	turns, sequences, exchanges, threads etc.	interactivity, topic development	conversation analysis
Social Behaviour	face-management, discourse styles	contextual influence	interactional sociolinguistics
Participation	Number of messages, responses, thread length,	Engagement, roles	descriptive statistics

Adapted from: Herring, S. (2004). Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis: An Approach to Researching Online Behaviour

As is seen in Table 3.2, CMDA can be used to examine data at five levels of analysis such as the structural level, meaning level, interaction level, social behavior level, and participation level using different methods of analysis. The structural level of analysis is objective as it entails counting of CMC phenomena such as lexical items, phrases, and syntactic patterns. The meaning level of analysis includes the semantic or the functional level of speech acts analysis which involves interpretive and subjective terms. The interactional level includes topic development and negotiating of interactive exchanges. The participation level of analysis requires the counting of the number of messages and responses and thread length. Participation level of analysis is used to address CMC phenomena such as participant engagement and roles.

Herring (2004) proposes that the CMDA approach can be supplemented with data obtained from interviews, questionnaires and it may involve qualitative or quantitative analysis. CMDA assumes that discourse exhibits recurring patterns which are produced consciously or unconsciously and the basic goal of discourse analysis is to identify patterns in discourse that are inherently present. For example, by using CMDA procedures, Nishimura (2007) analyzed the structural and social behavioral level of two online communities examining the linguistic features and speech acts for the development of an online community.

In another study, Nastri, Peña, and Hancock (2006) investigated the communicative goals of text messages. By using the CMDA framework at the meaning level and structural level, they examined the purpose of instant messages and the use of non-standard orthography. Using speech acts analysis at the meaning level the researchers classified the qualities of individual messages in order to inform about the structural properties of text messages.

Similarly, at the meaning level Mangenot and Nissen (2006) examined the collective activity and tutor involvement in e-learning environments among language teachers and learners. By carrying out a content analysis at the meaning level, they elicited the collective practices of online interactive behavior related to task management.

In another related study, Tan (2006) used the CMDA approach to examine blog reflective practices among pre-service teachers. Using the moves analysis, he quantified data at the participation level, structural level and meaning level. At the participation level, he compared data between groups for the quantity of reflection and at the structural and meaning levels he measured data for pronoun frequencies, formality and types of teacher reflection. He found that blogs promoted higher levels of reflection in the context of the post lesson plan reflection among pre-service teachers.

Zheng (2006) used CMDA to measure the kinds of interaction that occur in the teaching and learning of English in a virtual environment. Using negotiation move analysis, he constructed the moves that participants make (e.g. to request, to confirm, to clarify) to construct online text. Zheng (2006) suggests that online interaction is immersive and dynamic for classroom instruction. At the participation level, Herring, Brown and Koc (2002), used CMDA to analyze how pre-service secondary mathematics teachers, in-service secondary mathematics teachers, mathematicians, and mathematics teacher educators communicated in an online computer mediated communication program. They found evidence of individual and group differences with respect to quantity of participation.

CMDA is an approach that complements linguistic discourse analysis and it can be purely qualitative or quantitative. It can be used to observe linguistic phenomena at the micro-linguistic level such as word-formation and lexical choice and macro-linguistic level such as intended meaning expressed in online interaction.

3.8 Summary

The review of literature suggests that features of blogs facilitate on-line interaction and the forming of an online community of people. The past studies on blogs provide some background information for the present study. For example, since blog falls on the continuum of spoken and written language, the researcher expects to find these features in his data and he hopes to exploit these features in the present study. Herring's (2004) CMDA suggests that data can be analyzed at the various linguistic and participatory levels.