

*"Bye alligator," -*

Mediated discourse as learnable social interaction: a  
study of the language of novice users of  
communication channels.

Angela Goddard and Julia Gillen

Manchester Metropolitan University 2004

This manuscript was not published at the time of writing; posted online in various places in August 2013.

Suggested citation:

Goddard, A. & Gillen, J. (2004) *"Bye alligator," - mediated discourse as learnable social interaction: a study of the language of novice users of communication channels.* Unpublished paper. Online at [wherever you found it and access date]

## Abstract

Polyvocality, according to Bakhtin (1986), is integral to all human communication: our understanding of any text is informed by our knowledge of its history of use. Kristeva's work on intertextuality elaborates this picture by emphasising the relationships between texts at a single point in time (Moi, 1986). Between them, these two influential critics have highlighted the importance both of diachronic and of synchronic textual relationships in understanding language in use.

In the emergent present of any act of communication, the generally unconscious but still shaping memories of history of use are entwined with the configuring effects of the nature of the communication channel. Just as the model of language as a conduit for ideas has been quizzed and found seriously wanting (Reddy, 1993), so 'context' can no longer (if it ever did) work as a container metaphor to identify what lies around the linguistic code. The study of language as social interaction demands examination of attempts at intersubjectivity via texts that can only be approached through active engagement with their spatial and temporal characteristics and, therefore, through active engagement with culturally embedded meanings.

In this paper we take data from two kinds of sources in order to explore the issues raised above. Both sets of data are from novice users of a technology communicating with their peers: (a) three- and four-year old children talking with others on a simplified telephone system; and (b) undergraduate students engaged in Internet Relay Chat. Our investigation points up interlocutors' creative deployment of language resources in their encounters with the constraints (understood here as the affordances and limitations) of the mode of communication, and demonstrates ways in which those language resources are permeated by participants' sociocultural understandings. This is evidenced through three lines of inquiry:

- the acquisition and manipulation of socially constructed routines in openings and closings;
- phonological, graphical and other means of language play;
- pursuit of interpersonal goals through negotiation.

Finally it is proposed, partly through this paper as an enacting exemplar, that the study of young children's discourse need not proceed from an assumption of deficit and need not be shunted into (cognitivist) psycholinguistics. From the viewpoint of linguistic or discourse theory as centre ground, data from children's discourse need not be separated off as at best a specialist area, at worst an irrelevance to mainstream theorizing appertaining to issues of linguistics, language and the real world. Engaging with new communication channels entails learning, language development, and hence modification to social identity for all. Consideration of such changes must be at the heart of theorizing discourse.

## Introduction: key qualities of linguistic communication

The framework with which we approach studying the discourse of new users of communication channels emphasises three key constituents of linguistic communication.

The first of these is *addressivity*. For Bakhtin, " ... addressivity, the quality of turning to someone, is a constitutive feature of the utterance" (Bakhtin, 1986: p.99). Addressivity may appear to be an obvious quality to focus upon in dialogues, but of course Saussurean linguistics has preferred to focus upon the word and sentence rather than utterance and genre. The influence of Bakhtin and related theorists has been to focus upon the dialogic nature of utterances, the space of inter subjectivity that has to exist between interlocutors that necessarily makes processes of interpretation more salient than any 'objective' notion of a fixed lexicon. Let us immediately make clear this crucial notion underpinning our work by means of an example from Rommetveit (1992). In that paper, encapsulating Rommetveit's particular formulation of Bakhtinian theory, he adopts the imaginary 'Mr Smith' conjured by Menzel (1978). Mr. Smith is mowing the lawn on a Saturday morning while his wife answers two telephone calls. The first, her intimate friend Betty, asks, "That lazy husband of yours, is he still in bed?" Mrs Smith responds, "No, Mr Smith is *working* this morning, he is mowing the lawn." The second caller, a friend of Mr Smith's who often calls when he wants to arrange a fishing trip, enquires too whether Mr Smith is at work. To that friend Mrs Smith responds with also an entirely appropriate response "No, Mr Smith is *not working* this morning, he is mowing the lawn." Rommetveit also looks into other possible ways of verbally describing Mr Smith's activities: for example that these might be described as "engaging in physical exercise", as "beautifying the garden" or even "avoiding the company of his wife."

The essential point that Rommetveit is making is that there is no lexical item that might not be employed in a variety of functions, with a diversity of what Kristeva (Moi, 1986: p.III) terms "enunciative and denotative positionality." But the Saussurean depiction of speaker and listener as separate and different has led to an unfortunate model of language (termed by Reddy, 1993, the "conduit model") that nowhere inscribes the idea of participants' co-productive negotiation of meaning in the construction of interactions:

Thus the listener who understands passively, who is depicted as the speaker's partner in the schematic diagrams of general linguistics, does not correspond to the real participant in speech communication (Bakhtin, 1986: p.69).

Current pragmatics-based European linguistic theories, such as Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986, 1987) and Levinson's Presumptive Meanings (2000), draw directly on Speech Act Theory (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1976), in foregrounding the negotiation of meaning in specific contexts by specific interlocutors. Operating within an essentially positivist epistemology, they struggle to build a new language level between truth-conditional semantics and pragmatics understood as implicatures: "a new strange level populated by semantic wraiths - a level of fragmentary structures, underspecification and half-information ... " (Levinson, 2000: p.241).

Language theorists such as Bakhtin and Kristeva have effectively turned away from attempts to delineate separations and relations between language levels and look rather at their connectivity and interplay at the level of utterance. Their focus is not on

decontextualizing utterances, or mapping them to specific, separable features of speaker and/or context - understood as a containing, objectively describable environment. Rather, Bakhtin envisions language as contributing to shaping the environment in which it may be interpreted, interwoven as it were with its own 'context' as the words and phrases - themselves never wholly inextricable from genre - bring their complex histories along with them.

Our description of Bakhtin's position in the previous sentence begins to articulate his concept of heteroglossia, but before we examine this in any detail we must briefly outline another significant quality of addressivity we will be illustrating with our texts.

We are contending, with Bakhtin and related scholars, that addressivity is a key quality of *all* utterances not just those that are most readily seen as interactive. Of course, the interactive quality of written texts has often been pointed out, for example by scholars working in such fields as literary criticism (see Birch, 1989) and critical discourse analysis (for example, Fairclough, 1989). However, with Goffman (1981) we are also interested in the addressive qualities of the practice of talking when alone. As Goffman (1981: p. 81) pointed out, socially this carries a partial but not quite absolute taboo: one may without imputations of insanity address another motorist from behind the safety of one's windscreen, or rehearse arguments with family members not present, so long as one stops verbalising in this way when caught doing so. Cook (2000) points out the continuity in these behaviours from early childhood, where it is far more evident as a practice (Piaget, 1959; Vygotsky 1987; Vygotsky and Luria, 1930).

Volosinov asserted the dialogic quality of all utterances termed monologic, whether spoken or written:

Any monologic utterance, the written monument included, is an inseverable element of verbal communication. Any utterance - the finished, written utterance not excepted - makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances. Each monument carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return. (Volosinov, 1995: p.115)

Addressivity then implies the second of the principles in our framework, the diachronically and synchronically dynamic relationships between utterances themselves: *heteroglossia*. Kristeva describes Bakhtin's model as that of "a mosaic of quotations" (Moi, 1986: p.37). Bakhtin himself used the metaphor of weaving, itself the basis of the English term 'text' and its variant forms (texture, textile), to describe relationships between utterances:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance (Bakhtin, 1981: p. 276).

As with addressivity, the concept of dialogism, or dual-languagedness, is seen by Bakhtin as the property of all language. This is because he sees language itself as not unified but composed of diverse languages or voices - heteroglossia - which interact in any text by dint of the fact that texts are themselves sites where meanings are contested and positions brokered. In terms of applying Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, at least two distinct areas

appear to feature, in the form of *intra-* and *intertextual* relationships (see Vice, 1997). While intra-textual dialogism refers to the ways in which participants anticipate and incorporate the position of the interlocutor - what Rommetveit (1992) terms "a constant attunement to the attunement of the other" inter-textual dialogism refers to the echoes set up between texts across a culture and through time, producing, according to Todorov: 'discourses in relation to which every uttering subject must situate himself or herself' (Todorov, 1984: p.10).

Kristeva's work on intertextuality is, by her own account, very indebted to Bakhtin (Moi, 1986). However, she laments the fact that the term has come to mean a simple tracing of connections, when her intention in her own writings was to stress the notion of transformation in every intertextual event:

The term intertextuality denotes the transposition of one (or several) signsystem(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources', we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of thethetic - of enunciative and denotative positionality (Cited in Moi, 1986: p.III).

The third principle in our framework is then *transposition*. We suggest that analysis of texts can encompass not only intertextuality in the sense of studying earlier sources of a particular linguistic occurrence, but also examine the constraining processes (understood as constituting both affordances and limitations) of the channel of communication itself. In an earlier work (Gillen and Goddard, 2003) we made links in this respect between the work of Bakhtin on speech genres and that of Goffman (1981). Bakhtin's notion of speech genre merits quoting at some length since it presents a clear encapsulation of many features of his position on linguistic study, not least the preference for examining linguistic utterances in concrete interactions that is also of course the driving force (albeit with very different outputs) behind the work of North American Conversation Analysts (Psathas, 1995)

Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects - thematic content, style, and compositional structure - are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres* (Bakhtin, 1986: p.60).

This notion of speech genres encompasses both the creativity that is one of the most striking features of human language as recognised by linguistic and literary scholars alike and yet also pays attention to the constraining influences of "spheres of communication" (Scollon, 1998). Our particular interest here is what Goffman (1981: p.22) referred to as the importance of "system constraints reinforced by ritual constraints"; we suggest this is a useful way of examining the genres of particular communication channels. In his analysis of replies and responses in face to face dialogue Goffman identifies certain communicative patterns that are shaped by the constraints (a word we too take to embrace limitations and affordances) of the characteristics of that particular channel:

We can, then, draw our basic framework for face-to-face talk from what would appear to be the sheer physical requirements and constraints of any communication system, and progress from there to a sort of microfunctional analysis of various interaction signals and practices (Goffman, 1981: p.15).

## The nature of the study

### Participants

Our texts are transcriptions of the language of two groups of novice users of communication channels. The first group were first year undergraduate students in the UK taking an online course as part of their degree programme during 1999, and communicating using the WebCT software synchronous chat tool that was an integral part of the course. This tool is a writing-only environment where the only use of sound is the door chime that lets participants know that a new member has entered the space. The online module involved working with Swedish students on common themes in order to analyse online texts from the different cultural standpoints.

Before the collaborative intercultural work started, the UK students spent some time familiarising themselves with the chat tool. This meant that the project produced data where the UK students were engaged some of the time in chat with their UK peers as well as with their Swedish partners. Data used in this paper will clearly indicate which groups the students are from.

In total, there are 35 interactions of varied duration, from a few seconds to one hour. An interaction has been defined here as beginning with the first user logging on (even if that user is alone) and ending at the point where the last user logs out. Most of the interactions involve multi-party communication.

The second group were three and four-year-old children playing in a nursery attached to a school. This data was gathered during an eight-month longitudinal study (Gillen, 2000). A microphone was placed inside a telephone receiver that was inside a child-sized telephone box. For some weeks this functioned as a toy; later the telephone was connected with the researcher in another location. All speech was spontaneous; the telephone was just one toy among a range of activities available.

### Focus

In this paper, we will be exploring the dialogism of utterances according to our broadly connected themes of addressivity, heteroglossia and transposition. Our texts are also connected through being embedded in playful interactions. The role of play in learning has a long and well attested history (Fein, 1981).

However, play is often conceived as a child-like activity that stops at the threshold to the adult world - indeed, that marks out the adult world as different from the child's.

Our juxtaposition of the discourses of these groups is partly motivated by theories of play that emphasise playfulness as an intrinsic human quality, that may be transformed in some aspects of performance and output in social beings of different societies and age-groups, but that is more continuous a feature of human interaction than is often admitted (Cook, 2000; Crystal, 1996, 1998). In 398 Saint Augustine, thinking back to the early childhood of himself and his fellows wrote:

We lacked neither memory nor intelligence, because by your will, a Lord, we had as much as were sufficient for our years. But we enjoyed playing games and were punished for them by men who played games themselves. However, grown-up games are known as 'business' ... even though boys' games are much the same (quoted in Cook, 2000: p.109).

In following Cook (2000), we seek a view of play which allows us to break free of simple associations with childhood and childish make-believe. We would hope that our joint data illuminates some important aspects of the role of play in the acquisition of new forms of discourse, regardless of the ages or developmental stages of the participants. We are very opposed to the idea of using the adult data as an example of perfect acquisition against which to measure the achievements of the children. Earlier work on children's telephone discourse by developmental psychologists has tended to posit a supposed model of adult competence against which children's deficits are tested by means of artificial tasks set for them (see, for example, Bordeaux and Willbrand, 1987; Holmes, 1981; Warren and Tate, 1992; and reference withheld, for discussion). While 'difference' has often been the driving force behind studies comparing adults and children, this same motivation has driven many studies of speech and writing, leading historically to the notion of 'the great divide' that, according to Street (1988), has been less than helpful in understanding communication channels. We respond to his pleas to resist easy characterisations of difference, and to look with equal energy at notions of *similarity* between oral and written discourses.

There are differences that derive from the fact that the children's telephone is a sound medium and the students' chatrooms are writing-only; however, the two media share the important quality of synchronicity, a factor which in itself has led some commentators to liken IRC writing to spoken language (for example, Werry, 1996). We will, of course, be referring to the speech/writing basis of the channels when we discuss how our groups explore the medium they are using, but we do not take speech and writing as either unproblematic categories in themselves or a starting point from which to work.

## Analysis

In this analysis, we will be discussing the dialogic concepts we have outlined with reference to a series of representative texts drawn from our data. Because the phenomena we have been discussing are so interwoven, it would do them less than justice to separate out features into subheadings as though we were dealing with discrete entities. Our procedure, therefore, will be to use a series of texts as prompts to discussion of the concepts we have outlined so far and as evidence of the importance of these concepts.

Text 1: Mark's pretence call

- 1 Mark: hello mum
- 2 Mark: hello mummy
- 3 Mark: yeh
- 4 Mark: fine fine
- 5 Mark: I'm at school
- 6 yeh yeh yeh fine fine  
((Robert is meanwhile in the doorway; someone is banging on the box side))
- 7 Mark: you can't come in ((not into the handset))
- 8 Mark: yeh yeh fine mum ((back into the handset))  
((Mark puts down phone, stands in doorway, blocking it with his body. Altercation with other children but later returns to phone and continues call))
- 9 Mark: yes yes ((into handset))
- 10 Mark: where's you been down the market today
- 11 Mark: no, no I've been very good
- 12 Mark: ok?
- 13 Mark: bye ((hands over to Robert))

There is evidence to suggest that even from prelinguistic days children are in some sense comprehending that telephone discourse is dialogic (Gillen, 2003). Presumably much of their early experience of telephone calls is gained by witnessing a single side of an exchange, complete with pauses. This call demonstrates the tendency of children's pretence calls to be founded upon salient features of telephone discourse (see Hopper, 1992, for a distillation of earlier Conversation Analysts' work identifying the structures of telephone discourse). An analysis of the pretence calls of 19 children from this study indicated that as pretence calls increase in length and complexity, they are likely to include, in rough order of prevalence, openings, backchannels, closings, mutual identification and preclosings (Gillen & Hall, 2001).

To the extent that Mark is acquiring 'telephone language', he is learning that the world is heteroglossic, and acting on that knowledge. Note how he already shows how different sorts of dialogues, in Bakhtin's terms, brush up against each other: Mark weaves the dialogic threads of face-to-face discourse very skilfully with those demanded by the pretence caller, even bringing into play the polite piece of phone etiquette "wait a second, mum".

The degree to which telephone dialogues entail transposition in Kristeva's sense of a new positionality should not be underestimated. Mark's call shows strongly that he has grasped the quality of telephone talk in that it extends occasions for speaking across distances. There would be little point in describing his current or immediately preceding actions to a physically present interlocutor unless trying to involve them in a relevant way, such as

trying to describe the immediate past in such a way that it might become the foundation for a jointly projected plan. But Mark's intention is otherwise, and a perfectly common function of telephone talk: to reassure one's relations about one's wellbeing while demonstrating thoughtfulness towards the notion they may be concerned about oneself - engaging in a circle of mutual affirmation of support and reassurance.

To account for Mark's new channel awareness as a transposition from a primary site of face-to-face talk to one that is seen as an adaptation is problematic, however.

At the very least, it assumes that there is a stage in infancy and childhood where face to face talk between familiar people about the here and now is descriptive of the sole kind of language that surrounds children in early childhood. This ignores mass media and indeed the telephone - the investigations of one of us have shown some orientation towards the telephone in infants (reference withheld). There are further problems with this model that there is insufficient space to go into here - such as the extent of time now being spent online by many people in their personal and professional lives (see for example Baron 2000); and the fact that for some groups, such as deaf people, online communication may be experienced as a primary site.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Mark's text is the fact that it is technically a monologue and yet it shows such strong dialogism that it would be perfectly possible to supply the imaginary interlocutor's script: we would argue that it is very hard to read the transcript without automatically doing so.

Our IRC data is from actual dialogues, and shows similar strong orientation to the routines of openings, pre-closings and closings, as in Text 2 below:

Text 2: IRC: students - Steven (English student) & Hana (Swedish student)

- 1 Hana: HI!
- 2 Steven: hello
- 3 Steven: where have you been?
- 4 Hana: eating ...
- 5 Steven: figures
- 6 Hana: so how are you?
- 7 Steven: bear with me a minute just logging out of something
- 8 ... ((conversation proceeds with discussion of research topic)) ...
- 9 Hana: We'll be here again on Thursday about 12.40 SWEDISH TIME!
- 10 Steven: okay, if I need to talk before then I'll tell you bye-mail. See you  
later, alligator. Bye bye! Cya!

Besides distinct opening, pre-closing and closing routines, also present in this text is a reference to the way the dialogue exists alongside other activities. Where Mark in Text 1 has

to put 'mum' on hold while he deals with the fracas going on outside the telephone box, in Text 2 (above) Steven puts Hana on hold while he logs out from another activity. Both these texts support Brice Heath's (1982) notion that speaking and writing do not consist of single acts but are, rather, events where various pieces of communication are often intertwined; and that people in different cultures may well configure the combinations in different ways.

In Text 2, Steven's closing demonstrates a feature which merits further consideration here. The two students have logged on at different times because they had not established whether they would be using UK or Swedish time. The opening routine shows Steven being rather brusque but also Hana being cool and unapologetic, suggesting that neither party feels in the wrong. However, towards the end Hana's suggestion that Steven needs a reminder of the time for the next meeting does indicate that she feels he was wrong last time. It could be argued that Steven acknowledges he has taken his chastisement cheerfully when he uses the playful 'see you later, alligator', a shift in what Scollon & Scollon (1995) call "communicative style", a signal here perhaps of no hard feelings. But Steven is assuming that Hana, not a native speaker of English, understands the humorous signing-off routine, generally formulated as an exchange: A: *See you later, alligator*. B: *In a while crocodile*.<sup>1</sup>

Below, a three-year-old, Hayley, called the research a duck, silly ducky, and a penguin, before appearing to be about to end the call. Possibly the amphibious creatures already mentioned evoked in her memory of the same signing off routine:

Text 3: phone call: child – Hayley with researcher

- 1 Hayley: it is. bye. see you alligator  
((almost hangs up then brings the receiver back to her ear))
- 2 Hayley: bye alligator
- 3 researcher: in a while crocodile  
((Hayley hangs up))

"See you later, alligator" is one example of several common sayings in our IRC data where participants appear to be playfully calling up references rich in cultural meanings. Because the IRC data contains interactions among UK students and between UK and Swedish students, a natural question to ask is how such examples of intertextuality relate to the group alignments of the participants. The topic of how participants broker notions of culture deserves a whole paper to itself; some brief comments will have to suffice here.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cassell's Dictionary of Slang (1998) (ed J. Green), lists "see ya later, alligator" as an all-purpose synonym for goodbye, popularised by the 1956 Bill Haley and the Comets pop record of the same name (written by R.C. Guidry). Interestingly, the dictionary characterises the phrase as originally dismissive, partly because of the subsequent lines in the song ("can't you see you're in my way now, don't you know you cramp my style?"), and also because "alligator" was apparently used in the southern USA for white people who claimed to be jazz aficionados while themselves having no musical skill.

Text 4: IRC: UK student (expecting other UK students)

Tiggy:           hello hello hello

Text 5: IRC: UK student (expecting other UK students)

Philip:           morning campers

Text 6: IRC: UK student (expecting Swedish partners)

Dave:            England calling

Text 7: IRC: used by both Swedish & UK students (expecting foreign partners)

is there anybody out there?

Text 8: IRC: UK student (expecting Swedish partners)

Helen:           anybody home?

These examples of heteroglossia are all from the opening stages of interactions: they are all first utterances, in fact. In each case, student writers were alone; but they were hoping to be joined at some point by either their home peers, their foreign partners, or both. Technically, the utterances, then, are lone talk, but they are dialogic in being strongly addressive in their assumptions of shared cultural knowledge and in demonstrating strong adjacency qualities. They could also be seen as dialogic in establishing, for however brief a time, a 'frame' in Goffman's (1974) sense, enacting particular scenes with their attendant relationships and associations.

Our view of these phrases is that they do not simply show embedded cultural meanings but are interestingly apposite to the apprehension of new channels.

For example, "hello hello hello" is a well known phrase supposedly used by the stereotypical English policeman of former times, the implication being that the addressee is getting up to mischief (The full version of this would be "hello hello hello, what's going on here then?") The sentiment here fits notions of invisibility associated with being online: if people cannot be seen, then they could be getting up to no good. The same concept of invisibility, played with in terms of dis/embodiment, seems to be at the core of "is there anybody out there?" and "anybody home?" The term 'any/body' is interesting in itself from this point of view. "Is there anybody out there" could also, of course, be an intertextual reference to the US TV series 'The X Files', also popular in the UK, and its search for extraterrestrial life; or a reference to the Pink Floyd song, 'Dark Side of the Moon'. The theme of disembodiment is a recurrent one in many discussions of the Internet (for example, Stone, 1995).

Two other phrases above - "morning campers" and "England calling" - have, for UK speakers, very strong connotations of broadcast communication, the first with associations of holiday camp pa systems, the second with world war II radio messages or, more recently, the annual Eurovision song contest.

The utterances we have been discussing above are similar to "see you later alligator" in playfully referencing texts that have acquired a kind of mythical status within particular cultural groups, a rather impressive shelf-life associated, perhaps, with their malleability:

each new group of speakers can evolve new reference points within an overall theme. These utterances appear very different to other types of monologic output, either of the extended pretence dialogue like the child's phone call, or 'testing routines' such as "is this working?" And yet, all these occurrences can be seen as dialogic, even the latter type, which, in appearing on the screen, has answered its own question. The same idea can be seen even in monologic pieces of nonsense typing, such as "hgtbghf", "nyoih" and "YBTRE", all examples from our IRC data. Volosinov's comment is timely here:

Utterance, as we know, is constructed between two socially organized persons, and in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is pre-supposed ... there can be no such thing as an abstract addressee (Volosinov, 1995: p.129).

Text 8 - "anybody home?" - is an example of a further range of features that occur throughout exchanges and not just at opening points: metaphorical play with spatial dimensions, what Stone (1995) has referred to as "the architecture of elsewhere". Here, participants metaphorise their shared spaces, not just as physical rooms but as rooms where certain events might occur. For example, below, participants metaphorise a journey to the room in the first example; the second implies a genteel party; the third a club with a bouncer on the door. All these comments occur at points where difficulty in making contact or keeping it has been experienced: nonappearance in the first case, appearing with 'clones' in the second (with WebCT software, if you click more than once to enter a room, you arrive with shadow versions of yourself); in the third case, B's java set up appears to have failed (there is no facility for students to eject each other):

Text 9: IRC: UK student

Anna: Maybe they got lost

Text 10: IRC: UK student

Claire: I thought I would bring a friend

Text 11: IRC: UK student

1 Bella: did you kick me out?

2 Mandy: you just found yourself bounced?

Metaphorising playfully can be seen as a serious exploration of 'where' the interaction is taking place. For scholars exploring figurative tropes from a cognitivescientific perspective (for example, Gibbs, 1994; Lakoff, 1987), metaphors such as those in Texts 9-11 are not a fanciful embellishment of language but a very basic act of mind. Others applying such findings to current thinking about language and literature in education (for example, Carter, 1997; reference withheld) have reminded us of the very culturally specific nature of metaphor. So rather than seeing our IRC participants as using metaphorical expressions with a showy flourish, perhaps we are looking at people who, in trying to understand the medium they are engaging with, are being thrown back on their most basic resources of language and culture.

In the talk below, Harry, aged 4, is also testing effects of invisibility relating to the communication channel.

Text 12: phone call: child - Harry and researcher

Harry is talking about his baby brother's diet.

- 1 Harry: he has bisgetti bolognese as well
- 2 researcher: does he?
- 3 Harry: yeah
- 4 researcher: goodness me
- 5 Harry: he had a lot of things
- 6 researcher: good
- 7 Harry: (7) ((blows)) huh
- 8 Harry: (5) did you thought I'd gone then?
- 9 researcher: pardon?
- 10 Harry: when I (taps phone) when I did that
  
- 11 researcher: no I didn't think you were gone, I thought you were thinking

In both Texts 12 and 13, the children are exploring the nature of the telephone medium, but in slightly different ways. Both are playing with ideas of visibility, just as the students were earlier in their metaphors about space and place and their idiomatic broadcast messages. Harry (above) tests out the fact that, because he can't be seen, the researcher won't know whether he is there or not; Hayley (below) invokes a pantomime routine where, in the staged version, dramatic irony is created by audience knowledge of the visibility of one of the stock characters while he remains 'invisible' to the other characters on the stage. Pantomime is a perfect intertextual vehicle for the exploration of telephone discourse because, not only does it have highly dramatised turn-taking in its "oh no ... oh yes" routines, but it is all about identity, appearance and disguise. It is also interesting here because the point of the yes/no routine is to point out the faux blindness of the character who is in denial on stage: this is the role adopted by the researcher here. Bakhtin included pantomime in his concept of the 'carnavalesque', (1984) where he saw extant realities of power and status as being overturned and subverted.

Text 13: phone call: child – Hayley and researcher

- 1 Hayley: hello
- 2 researcher: hello
- 3 Hayley: your name should be Mrs Farnworth
- 4 researcher: no I'm not Mrs Farnworth
- 5 Hayley: yes you are
- 6 researcher: no I'm not

- 7 Hayley: oh yes you are ((sing-song, pantomime type tone))  
8 researcher: I'm Mrs Gillen  
9 Hayley: oh no you're not ((sing-song)) (4)  
10 Hayley: oh no you're not?  
11 Hayley: oh no you're not ((sing-song))  
12 researcher: yes I am

Examples in the child data of speakers exploring the acoustics of the telephone are too numerous to display, so a brief list of examples must do here: there is play with intonation tunes, with pitch, volume and voice quality, with rhyme, alliteration, speech 'noises' and non-speech sound effects, as in Texts 12 & 13. The written medium of IRC would seem to preclude such forms of play but, interestingly, it doesn't. The use of words and symbols to describe non-verbal behaviour and paralinguistic effects, such as \*laugh\* or © is well known (Werry, 1996), but in our IRC data we also have animal impersonations (such as "WEEEEWo" for a "skweeling piglett") and onomatopoeic terms ("entry clank, clank a lank" to mimic the chatroom door chime). There is also an exhortation to be quiet - an interesting term to use in a writing-only environment - couched in an intertextual reference to wartime propaganda: one UK student warns another: "shshshshshshshshsh ... walls have ears, you never know who is listening!"

There is, in addition, an extraordinary range of interjections that take their expressive force from their history of use in speech. These are termed "response cries" by Goffman and defined as "exclamatory interjections that are not full-fledged words" (1981:99). Examples in our IRC data include "oops" (Goffman describes this as a "spill cry") and "aargh" (a "threat startle"). But there is also dramatised embarrassment ("ahem"), and stupidity ("durr", "nur"). The list goes on. Goffman, in referring to all such interjections as "conventionalised blurtings", highlights two aspects that many of these items share: they dramatise feelings escaping from the control of the speaker; and the spelling of them is often conventionalised. Goffman doesn't use the term intertextuality, but this is clearly what he had in mind when he points to cartoons and comics as the source of the spelling of such items as "aargh" and "eek", and to the comic strip convention of using these items to represent the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters from whom such "blurtings" escape.

Goffman also refers to the fact that, as well as writing taking its cue from sound, the opposite can occur: we may have written "tut-tut" because of the fact that we made that noise, but the fact that we have written "tut-tut" means that we now also *say* "tut-tut" as words (1981: pp.113-4). Something of the complex inter-relationship between speech and writing can be seen in the onomatopoeic example given above: "entry clank, clank a lank". The student writer starts with the conventionalised piece of onomatopoeia, "clank", to name the noise of the door chime, then extends the onomatopoeic base of this item by playing with its form, not just as sound but as a form of graphical representation, too. Like Goffman's example of "pant pant", the student's utterance, along with many others in our data (for example, "burble burble") shows the human ability to play with notions of reality and artifice, this being, according to Goffman, "a route to ritualization unavailable to animal

animals" (1981: p.113). Such examples highlight the nature of human language as dramatic social action and the fact of participants' metalinguistic awareness.

## Conclusion

Although Kristeva predicted that "dialogism may well become the basis of our time's intellectual structure" (cited in Moi, 1986: p.59), Rommetveit (1992) claims that we are still too often presented with "representational-computational models [that are] monologically based and converge in an image of Man as an essentially asocial, but highly complex information-processing device". He sets out a "dialogically based approach to language and mind", as "a much-needed constructive alternative" (Rommetveit, 1992: p.19).

The mono logic view of language that Rommetveit has in his sights is shared by many approaches to linguistics and the cognitive sciences. However, appeals to construct sociocultural or dialogic alternatives come from many sources. For example, Conversation Analysts have attacked traditional pragmatics (Speech Act theory and so on,) as being concerned with the individual utterance, and uncovered patterns in speech of orientation towards others that have something in common with Bakhtin's tenet of addressivity (Hopper, 1992; Psathas, 1990).

At a more profound level of seeking explanations for human behaviours including language, the cultural psychology of Cole (1996) and Bruner (1990) draws upon Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theory in its assertion of the essentially cultural foundation for the mind and hence for language, one of its attributes. The heteroglossia of language is not an optional extra, to be pointed out occasionally as an ornamental, 'literary' device; it is intrinsic to the language we use every day (Goddard, 1996). Significant also to any language analysis is the identification of the influence of the particular mediating channel: for us, Scollon's concept of mediated discourse captures beautifully many of the qualities of language as it is used:

Communication ... must make use of the language, the texts, of others and because of that, those other voices provide both amplification and limitations of our own voices. A text which is appropriated for use in mediated action brings with it the conventionalizations of the social practices of its history of use. We say not only what we want to say but also what the text must inevitably say for us. At the same time, our use of texts in mediated actions changes those texts and in turn alters the discursive practices (Scollon, 1998: p.15).

This perspective returns us to our starting point, and the necessity for studying diachronic and synchronic textual relationships in understanding language in use.

This is a very different approach to studying language as decontextualised, in abstracted levels of the lexicon, semantics, syntax, with pragmatics as a kind of add on (see Barrett, 1999 for just one contemporary example of such a well-attested but ultimately unsatisfying approach to linguistics). Rommetveit (1992) identifies a very different conception of the location of meaning in his development of Bakhtinian theory, as we illustrated at the beginning with our retelling of the 'Mr Smith' story. He suggests that in interacting with language we propose and make use of "culturally transmitted drafts of contracts". These

may become relatively fixed, in for example the discourse of specialists making use of a closely shared vocabulary and set of assumptions - working together in what Kuhn (1970) identified as a shared paradigm. Nevertheless, Rommetweit's notion of "drafts of contracts" captures well the quality that meaning in language has, of possessing associations with past usages and being shaped in turn by current environments of use - and of being ultimately impossible to pin down for certain, for ever.

In approaching our data from a Bakhtinian perspective, we have been able to begin to consider the way those "drafts of contracts" are put into practice by new users of communication channels. A dialogic approach not only allows for the conceptualisation of participants as active and co-productive, but as creatively drawing on their cultural resources, inheriting texts but also renewing and reshaping them according to the needs of the time and the moment.

### **Postscript: A note on transcription:**

In this paper, we have been dealing with two different sorts of transcribed data: data that was originally speech, transformed from sound into visual material for the page; and data that was originally interactive writing, transferred from scrolling screen to static print. Obviously, in neither case can a paper transcription fully capture language in use, so our decisions about transcription codings relate to the nature of our study and its focus upon similarities between speech and writing. The IRC data appears exactly as it was written in terms of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, etc. The telephone data broadly follows salient principles from Jefferson's transcription practice. However evidence strongly suggests that in young children's telephone discourse turntaking practices are not the same as adults' and that, in particular, pauses are both regularly produced and heard as unmarked (Veatch, 1981; Gillen, 2000). Therefore, the only pauses shown are very long ones (4 seconds and over) towards which the children were clearly showing orientation. Relevant information about non-verbal communication and other actions that clearly appeared to impinge upon the child's talk are also shown.

Contact: [j.gillen@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:j.gillen@lancaster.ac.uk)

## References

- Andersen, E. S. (1990) *Speaking with style: the sociolinguistic skills of children*. London: Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M. (ed. M.Holquist) (1981) *The dialogic imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (ed C.Emerson) (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (ed. C.Emerson & M.Holquist) (1986) *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Baron, N. (2000) *Alphabet to email*. London: Routledge.
- Barrett, M. (1999) 'Introduction' in M. Barrett, (ed.) *The development of language*. Psychology Press, Taylor and Francis.
- Birch, D. (1989) *Language, literature and critical practice*. London: Routledge.
- Bordeaux, M.A. and Willbrand, M.L. (1987) Pragmatic development in children's telephone discourse. *Discourse Processes*, 10 (3) 253-266.
- Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press.
- Carter, R. (1997) *Investigating English discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Cole, M. (1996) *Cultural psychology: a once and future discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1996) Language play and linguistic intervention. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 12 (3) 328-344.
- Crystal, D. (1998) *Language play*. London: Penguin.
- Cook, G. (2000) *Language play, language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Edwards, D. and Potter, J. (eds) (1992) *Discursive psychology*. London: Sage.
- Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and power*. Harlow: Longman.
- Fein, G.G. (1981) Pretend play in childhood: an integrative review. *Child Development*, 52 (1095-1118)
- Gibbs, R. (1994) *The poetics of mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gillen, J. (2000) Recontextualization: the shaping of telephone discourse in play by three- and four-year-olds. *Language and Education*, 14 (4) 250-265.
- Gillen, J. (2003) 'Engaged from birth: children under two talking on telephones' in A. Schorr, B. Campbell & M. Schenk (eds) *Communication research and media science in Europe*. Berlin: DeGruyter. pp. 479-97.
- Gillen, J. and Goddard, A. (2003) 'Medium Management for Beginners: the discursive practices of undergraduate and mature novice users of internet relay chat, compared with those of young children using the telephone' in M. Bondi and S. Stati (eds) *Proceedings of the annual conference of the International Association for Dialogue Analysis. Universita degli Studi de Bologna, Italy. 15th-17th June 2000*. Niemeyer: TFC Bingen. pp. 219-230.
- Gillen, J. and Hall, N. (2001) "Hiya, Mum!" An analysis of pretence telephone play in a nursery setting. *Early Years*, 21 (1) 15-24.
- Goddard, A. (1996) Tall stories: the metaphorical nature of everyday talk. *English in Education* 30 (2) 4-12.
- Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms of talk*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame analysis*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Grice, H.P. (1975) 'Logic and conversation' in P. Cole & J.L.Morgan (eds) *Speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.

- Heath, S.B. (1982) 'Protean shapes in literacy events: ever-shifting oral and literate traditions' in D. Tannen, (ed). *Spoken and written language: exploring orality and literacy. Advances in discourse processes, Vol IX*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Holmes, J. (1981) Hello-goodbye: an analysis of children's telephone conversations. *Semiotica*, 37 (1-2) 91-107.
- Hopper, R. (1992) *Telephone conversation*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1970) *The structure of scientific revolutions. 2nd ed.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1987) *Women, fire and dangerous things: what categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levinson, S.C. (2000) *Presumptive meanings*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Menzel, H. (1978) 'Meaning - who needs it?' in M. Brener, P. Marsh, and M. Brenner (eds) *The social contexts of methods*. London: Croom-Helm.
- Mininni, G. (1985) The ontogenesis of telephone interaction, *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata*, 17 (2-3) 187-197.
- Moi, T. (1986) *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: University of Columbia Press.
- Reddy, M. (1993) The conduit metaphor: a case of frame conflict in our language about language' in A. Ortony (ed) *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Rommetveit, R. (1992) 'Outlines of a dialogically based social-cognitive approach to human cognition and communication' in A. H. Wold (ed) *The dialogical alternative: towards a theory of language and mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (& Oslo, Scandinavian Uni. Press)
- Piaget, J. (1959) *The language and thought of the child. 3rd edn*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Psathas, G. (1995) *Conversation analysis: the study of talk-in-interaction*. Mahwah, NJ: Sage.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E., & Jefferson, G. (1974) A simplest systematics for the organisation of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, 50 696-735.
- Schegloff, E. (1968) Sequencing in conversational openings. *American Anthropologist*, 70 (6) 1075-1095.
- Schegloff, E. (1979) 'Identification and recognition in telephone conversation openings' in G. Psathas, (ed) *Everyday language*. New York, Irvington.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A (1986) The Routine as achievement. *Human Studies*, 2 (2-3) 111-151 Dordrecht, Netherlands.
- Schegloff, E. & Sacks, H. (1973) Opening up closings. *Semiotica*, 1289-327.
- Scollon, R. T. (1998) *Mediated discourse as social interaction*. Addison Wesley Longman.
- Scollon, R & Scollon, S.W. (1995) *Intercultural communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Searle, J.R. (1976) A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, 5, 1-23.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1986) *Relevance: communication and cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1987) *Precis of relevance (plus open peer commentary and authors' response)*. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 10697-754.
- Stenstrom, A. - B. (1994) *An introduction to spoken interaction*. London: Longman.
- Stone, A. R. (1995) *The war of desire and technology at the close of the machine age*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Street, B. (1988) 'Literacy practices and literacy myths' in R. Säljö, (ed) *The written word: studies in literate thought and action*. Berlin, London & New York: Springer - Verlag.
- Todorov, T. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin: the dialogical principle*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Vice, S.(1997) *Introducing Bakhtin*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Volosinov, V.N. (1995) 'Language, speech, and utterance' In S. Dentith (ed) *Bakhtinian thought: a reader*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1967) Play and its role in the mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology*, 5 6-18
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1987) 'Thinking and speech' in R. Rieber and A. Canon (eds) *The collected works of LS. Vygotsky. Vol I Problems of general psychology, (including the volume Thinking and speech)*, trans. N. Minick. New York: Plenum Press.
- Vygotsky, L.S. and Luria, AL (1930) 'The function and fate of egocentric speech' in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Psychology, New Haven, 1929*. Princeton: Psychological Review Co.
- Warren, A and Tate, C. (1992) 'Egocentrism in children's telephone conversations' in Diaz, R. and Berk, L. (eds) *Private speech: from social interaction to self-regulation*. Hillsdale, N.J., LEA.
- Werry, C. (1996)'Linguistic and interactional features of Internet Relay Chat' in S.Herring (ed) *Computer-mediated communication*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.