

THESES

GENRES OF INTERNET BASED COMMUNICATION

(WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO THE INTERACTIVE PRIVATE GENRES)

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I. Introduction

In the computer age, the examination of the different forms of electronic communication is indispensable. New forms of communication (e. g. email, sms, chat, blog) became widespread in the last 15 years, and the beginning of their scientific examination dates back to 1990. So far, there were only few linguistic works in Hungarian, based on Hungarian corpus. In my dissertation, I endeavour to make up for this lack.

In the German and English scientific literature communication forms basically independent from time and space, where the forwarding of information is done by computers connected to each other in a network, is being referred to as electronic communication or communication transmitted by computers (elektronische Kommunikation, computervermittelte Kommunikation, computer-mediated communication, CMC) (Wenz 1998, Herring 2001).

In general, it is true for these types of communication, that they are realized by using written (graphical, visual) signs, although functionally they are often very close to spoken language. Physically, the 2 communicating parties don't perceive each other. Communication is characterized by distances of space and time (depending on the type of the text). For certain types the distance of time is fairly small, so can be regarded as negligible. Whereas distance of space never can. The degree of synchronicity and interactivity can be varying for the different forms of communication. The new thing regarding the above mentioned forms is, that they create the possibility of the (almost) synchron written communication. There has always been the chance for writing based direct communication, but the economic advantage of talking over writing limited its use to certain extreme and special cases.

II. The structure of the thesis

1. Introduction

Outline of the examined areas and the starting thesis.

2. Written and spoken language

The system of the written and spoken language in connection with internet-based communications, the continuation of the dichotomic division with the introduction of conceptional and medial indicators, presentation of the gradual scale.

3. Genres of direct written communication

Outline of the linguistic and formal characteristics of the new types of internet-based communication genres (email, sms, newsgroup, mailing list, chat, instant messaging, blog) using the examined corpus (more than 2500 emails, around 5000 sms and 160.000 chat comments plus online texts) and scientific literature.

4. Communication via chat

Outline of the linguistic characteristics of the communication via chat through logfiles from IRC:

- The effect of technological conditions on the organization of the interaction;
- Differences between chat and face to face communication;
- The unique structure of chat texts and their unique production-perception processes;
- Compensation strategies and tools helping communication via chat;
- Morphological, lexical and syntactic characteristics of chat texts.

5. Classification of the new forms of communication

The classification of medially written computer-mediated communication forms by their characteristics.

6. Summary

Summarizing the characteristics of the net language through the examined types.

Consequences, summary of results, outline of possible further research and the practical use of the results.

III. Main startup theses

1. Given the special communication situation, communication via chat has certain characteristics of the written and spoken language as well. The loose tone, the free choice of topic and the colloquial word usage puts it a bit closer to the spoken language in functionality, but at the same time it becomes reality through writing. Thanks to the internet the direct written interaction becomes possible.
2. Given the above mentioned characteristics of the chat communication it cannot be unanimously classified neither as written nor as just spoken. The dichotomic system needs to be rethought.
3. Direct written language causes new communication strategies and tools.
4. In the language used while chatting – besides the characteristics of the communication situation – phenomena of today's spoken language can be found. Therefore, communication via chat is a good way to trace and analyze ongoing changes in the language.
5. The transmitting channel has an effect on the language usage, communicating habits, so the special communication situation, technological conditions influence the organization of the discourse.
6. The language examination of the chat can call the attention for further development of currently used softwares and can give directives.

IV. Relation of written and spoken language in the chat

Although at first glance the language used in creating internet based communication types tends to remind us of the spoken language, after examinations several differences can be shown between face to face communication and the net language even in those situations that seem very colloquial. (In the first place it's turn taking and feedback that differ.)

The communication technology at our disposal plays a huge part in the process of interaction. Even with using most interactive electronic communicational forms we have to take the lack of simultaneity into consideration, because messages – after their creation – are being forwarded as a whole. Therefore there is no feedback while production about the success of the process. There is no possibility of overlapping or same time talking.

The rhythm of internet interaction is slower than that of face to face communication (although faster, than traditional written language, be it press releases, private letter or announcement).

Chat communication has several spoken language characteristics. This was proved by the corpus examination for word class, vocabulary and sentence structure. At the same time compensational signs (emoticons, asterisk expressions) and the newly equipped punctuation marks (e. g. when addressing) enable the chat communication to take the place of the spoken language. There is only a short time available for both the production and the perception process.

One shall not ignore that chat communication can only be achieved by writing. Users type and read the comments. While production, the users take into account that the communicating partner will process the message with the help of visually perceivable signs.

On the chat, dialogues take a new shape. It's not single dialogues anymore, but rather simultaneously running conversations with numerous participants, more like polilogues. The connected chat messages does not show up on the screen in a coherent way, but the lines connect to one another more like marquetterie. Moreover, one message can be put together of separate, divided lines from different conversations. It's obvious that the text of the chat requires special reading and text handling skills of the reader's part (and the speaker), because the traditional linear method of reading is not applicable when reading a chat message.

The spoken aspect, the synchronicity, the dialoguety (polilogicality) and the written realization makes it more difficult, to classify chat into the prototypical categories of written

or spoken language. This statement is backed by the terms used for characterizing chat communications.

According to chat, *Ádám Kis* writes about written dialogues, *Zoltán Bódi* about written spoken language and written form of spontaneous spoken language (Kis 1999; Bódi 2004). In foreign scientific literature one can find different names that suggest its temporary nature: new writing, oralized writing, typed talking, hybrid language form, mixed form of speaking and writing (Rosenau 2001; Storrer 2001; Beisswenger 2001; Wenz 1998; Bader 2002). These labels underline the spoken language characteristics and suggest that we're dealing with a form of communication, where the spoken manifestations' written types come to life. We shall not be satisfied with these suggestions as a solution, because they exclude parts of written communication of the concept.

Therefore it seems more appropriate not to exclude any form of communication from our research. Because during communication via chat written and spoken parts are present at the same time. Continuity of time makes an approach to face to face communication easier but this does not exclude written communication patterns.

Koch and *Oesterreicher* modify the traditional dichotomic partition by using medial and conceptional indicators as indicators for spoken and written language. Medial spoken/written language applies to the medium, with which the text appears. In this case, there are only two possibilities: spoken language via phonetical realization or the written language via graphical realization. Whereas under conceptional written/spoken language we understand the type of writing, the modality of manifestations that we match with the above mentioned opposite pairs in an intuitive way. For spoken language, proximity of time and space, emotional and social closeness and trust are important. According to this the characteristics of spoken language are dialogicalness, free choice of topic, furthermore emotionality and spontaneity. On the other written language is characterized by great social, emotional distances together with distance of time and space. Production and perception are separated. Organization of the topic is more monological and there is less possibility for cooperation. The difference lies mainly in the degree of closeness and distance. (*Koch/Oesterreicher* 1996; *Storrer* 2001).

With this terminological difference the previous dichotomic system can be refined. According to this, chat communication is characterized by both the conceptual spoken and the medial written language at the same time

V. Classification of the new communication forms

Taking the outlined viewpoints into consideration the possible categorization of the most widespread communication forms is shown in the following chart. Asynchronicity, the limited interactivity of the conversation is marked with \rightleftarrows . The synchron characteristic and the high level of interactivity is marked with \leftrightarrow . 1:1 stands for private communication, where only two parties are involved. 1:n means that the forms (and their subtypes) grant the possibility for one person to talk to numerous others at the same time. The completely public forms of communication are marked with n:n. The medially written types (gray fields) are realized through visual, the medially spoken ones through acoustic parts (Runkehl et al 1998).

		1:1	1:n	n:n
\rightarrow \leftarrow medially written (asynchron)	PRIVATE	email sms e-card	email sms e-card	– – –
	PUBLIC	newsgroup (sms, email)	blog newsgroup email mailing list	newsgroup mailing list
\leftrightarrow medially written (synchron)	PUBLIC	chat	chat	chat
	PRIVATE	instant messaging chat („in private room“)	instant messaging	instant messaging
\leftrightarrow medially spoken (synchron)		I-conference	I-conference	I-conference

The general characteristics of medially written genres of communication on the Internet

Depending on the interpretation of the definition of synchrony, electronic communication can be broken down to 2-3 types. If synchrony means the simultaneous presence of the communicating parties, we can talk about synchron (chat) and asynchron (email) forms of communication. If on the other hand synchrony means same-time production and perception, we can talk about synchron (talk), almost-synchron (chat) and asynchron types. Both synchron and asynchrony types are real time that means the partners take part in the communication at the same time, although in the case of chat the process of production and perception can not be sensed by the recipient and the sender (Spitzmüller 2005).

VI. Conclusion

Referring back to the startup theses, the following results can be shown:

1. Technological development made same time written communication possible: with appropriate technical conditions we can get almost immediate feedback on our written manifestation thanks to the forms of email, sms, chat, instant messaging or the newsgroup. According to the linguistic characteristics of the examined forms we can point out that the language of the net has the characteristics mostly of written than the spoken language. That is to say, neither is it talking nor writing but partly and adapted signs of both can be found. Proportions can vary according to the different forms examined.
2. One question especially came to limelight when examining the language of the chat, namely; should the language of the electronic communication be valued as written or spoken language. The ranges of the dichotomic partition (spoken vs. written) were already questioned in the case of other communication forms. The examination of chat communication strengthened that this ambiguity needs to be finetuned. Referring to the work of Koch and Oesterreicher we differentiated the medial and conceptual characteristics of these forms: it is to say that we separated the form of realization from function and intention. We ordered the medially written chat communication to the conceptional spoken language.
3. In the conceptionally and medially non spoken forms the grammatical tools for expression (visually and acoustically perceivable) are completed by non grammaticals. The users of medially written electronic communication felt the lack of these already at the appearance of these forms. So together with text types compensation marks and linguistic softeners are basically having the same age. Latter are intended to remind of parts of the spoken communication: emoticons, abbreviation and starred lines. The use of compensational marks is generally widespread in the medially written and conceptionally spoken forms, but – probably due to analogic effects – becomes more and more frequent in the conceptually written ones as well.

4. Examining the internet language usage one can trace not just the unique characteristics of online vocabulary but the changes in the Hungarian language, because the vocabulary and grammar of the interactive forms are based on the currently spoken language. The most spectacular results can be achieved by examining the vocabulary, because it is the vocabulary that reacts fastest to changes of outer language reality, but the 4th chapter proves that morphologic examinations also produce results. In the 3rd chapter we referred that blog research – due to the high level of intimacy – fosters the stylistic driven research of private types, barely examined up to now.

5. The effect on communication by the transmission channel is proven by the addressing habits of the chat users together with the fact that chatters have to use unique reading strategies for the sake of successful communication. At the same time thanks to technology user can take part in several simultaneously running conversations, that wouldn't be possible outside a computerized environment. That the communication by chat is only nearly synchron has an effect on language structure and solutions. Due to technological characteristics (in contrast to talk) the production process can not be followed by the participants. This means that the basic rules of spoken discourse do not or only (modified) in a limited way apply to the chat. The system of backchannel-signals, turn taking, and floor holding is changed. The change of speaker is software driven, so it doesn't matter who started creating his comment earlier, but who finished it sooner, namely who sent it faster by pressing the ENTER button. Previous messages in most of the cases can be searched for, saved, quoted or edited. Comments appear on the screen without overlap, they are not written above one another, but other messages can come in-between adjacency pairs. In contrast to spoken discourse the chat is not structured in time but in space on the screen. Users tend to use this spatiality. Longer manifestation units are usually broken down into shorter sections. During spoken communication this would not be reasonable, because there the speaker's goal is to keep the word until finishing what he had to say. Meanwhile with chat it's the complete opposite, the talker has to control space to maintain the attention of the recipients.

6. Regarding the further development of chat softwares it should be emphasized that communicating partners have more feedback of the production process.

7. The main interest of creating electronic communication forms lies in striving towards cognitive cost-effectiveness, maintenance of energies and the decrease of cognitive burden.

VII. Summary

Communication on the internet called new text types to life. It's not enough to examine the saved form of these text types be it chat, website or a blog because the main characteristic of these types is dynamics, variety and interactivity.

It is hard to predict, judge whether written internet communication is going to influence the outer net written language. There is no reason to assume that the types of texts where planning and language exposition play a huge part would be pushed back or that they would absorb parts of chat language usage. Choosing the appropriate communication form and style remains basic principle.

Contrary to concerns chat communication can not be regarded as the end of spoken and written culture at all. It should rather be valued as an extension of written function that was introduced by substituting paper with computers, and perfected by the internet: digital writing can be sent great distances in a matter of seconds and can be archived at low cost. That's why at the same time writing can – besides its traditional function – take up another function in connection with distances that up to now was only a privilege of spoken media: the direct dialogically organized communication. This way new traditions of writing evolve that are suitable for dialogically organized medially written long distance communication. To examine and evaluate this process is an interesting and exciting task for linguistics and communication science.

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