381: Topics in Sociolinguistics and CMC

Lecture 1: Introduction
June 24, 2019
Hey

So our class has started!

Wanna go over the syllabus?

And maybe we’ll do some introduction stuff and the history of CMC ok

Yes let’s do it!
welcome to the class

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THINGS HAVE CHANGED
1993. Something big was happening.

https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2667647842
People started talking about the idea of a large interconnected network of computers in the 1960s.

1974: The word ‘Internet’ (Cerf and Kahn 1974).


1989: Publicly available dial-up connections.


1993: Web browsers (Mosaic).


Thereafter: blogs, social networking, streaming, etc.
If there were 15,000,000 people who had used the Internet in 1993, and about 5.5 billion people in the world in 1993...

...99.5 percent of the human population had never been online.
introductory stuff
And the pace of things has been intense.

Even ten years after 1993, things still didn’t look like the modern Internet. This was true of the hardware...
...and of what you could find online.

Comparing this to now...
### introductory stuff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>15 Years ago</th>
<th>Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching a movie</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacting people</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading the news</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Music</td>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2014. This map has no physical or political borders drawn on it – only Facebook links.
What has changed?

- Prevalence and affordability; speed and sophistication of technology
- Ease of access: less *expertise* necessary now
- “Web 2.0”: the Internet as social networking
- More centralized; fewer static pages
- Normality of meeting people online
- Online games, movies, storage, home security…
- Everything moving onto small connected devices
introductory stuff

Some real advantages!
Though, on the other hand...
introductory stuff

And...

I go for a lot of walks, but I'm not always good at it.

Trees

Clouds

Beautiful view

Me reading my phone

Birds
However, with respect to pros and cons alike, we already have technology that was purely science fiction only a few decades ago.

“2366” in 1989

Reality in 2010
What does this pace of change mean?

• Expectations and norms shift rapidly.

• From the standpoint of the individual adult, there’s lots of learning and keeping up.

• The extent to which the computer is central to socializing has been changing (not always in the same direction!).

• Every time technology advances, a new cohort of children is introduced to it in a new way.

We didn’t all meet the same Internet. We got on at vastly different points!
Dear Santa,

How are you? I'm good.

Here is what I want for Christmas.

http://www.amazon.com

9P/product/B0032HF6G0

http://www.amazon.com

DK1/KXODER & pFErd

s=center-38 & pFe-cle=9XW4

42F#2K03Y 78BWMQNM

8pFErd-t=1018 & pFe_rId_p=12289

01542 & pFe_rId_j=65379
When did you first use email? How old were you?

How about when you first visited a webpage?

When did your house/apartment get connected to the Internet?

How much of a role, if any, did the Internet play in your childhood?

Have you ever made a long-term friend after meeting them only thanks to the Internet? How long ago?

How (if at all) do you separate your online and "real" life?

Do you have multiple online personas?
Did you just meet some who...

met the Internet in the 1980s?

began getting online so young that they don’t remember their first encounters with it?

maintains a clear distinction between ‘offline’ and ‘online’ activities in their lives?

leads multiple kinds of lives online?
“Many people who were born in the 1970s onwards grew up with the World Wide Web. Each generation thereafter has increasingly caught on to new means of communication, beginning with Instant Messaging, which was rapidly followed by Facebook, then Twitter, then Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tinder, and beyond. The generations of the 1980s and 1990s are digital natives.” Tagliamonte (2016:205)
Observation: yes, these cohorts are **Web 1.0** natives – but are they **Web 2.0** natives? What is different about the 2000s and 2010s kids who are growing up with social media and smartphones everywhere?

McCulloch (2019): some kids play with emoji and may be trying to use them to communicate **before** they have learned to read and write.
introductory stuff
But as usual, the present day is not the end of history, and we shouldn’t mistake it for such, especially when things change so quickly.
What are the next 5 steps in this progression?

When will the distinction between ‘computer’ and ‘phone’ in English no longer be at all meaningful?
What is this child’s relationship to the online world going to look like over the course of their life?
When is this no longer going to be contemporary humor, but only the realm of the historian?
Keeping in mind that we may get...mixed results... when it comes to predicting technology.
The Internet is a rather large place with many types of people and communities.

Questions to be kept in mind when we examine a meme or interaction or bit of humor:

1. What conventions/understandings about online communication does this example depend on?
2. Who is the intended audience, if anyone?
3. What’s going on with the modality (image, text, audio, video) and the register of the language?
4. Is there anything about it that would have been difficult or impossible in speech/writing before the Internet?
introductory stuff

Kate Millard Evarts
@kate_evarts

A group of teens I do not know have accidentally invited me to their google doc, where they are ranking their best friends.

74  4:50 PM - Feb 22, 2017
you've heard of alphabet soup now get ready for
times new ramen

squeeful

I sent this to my mom and she got so mad at me she sent me an audio recording of her yelling.
This class is about computer-mediated communication (CMC).

One thing needing to be emphasized is that things change so quickly that CMC research is nowhere close to having gotten caught up.

Methodological standards/guidelines for sociolinguistics and CMC are not standardized (Bolander and Locher 2014:15).

For example, what we call it isn’t even standardized! CMC vs. Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) vs. Digital Discourse (DD)
Many types of CMC; changing fast (Bolander and Locher 2014:15; Tagliamonte 2016b:208).

Some dispute over the term (Georgakopoulou 2006:550). How should we define ‘computer-mediated’ these days? What is a computer?

Most definitions of CMC are more or less restricted to text (Herring 2007:1, Tagliamonte 2016b:208), but newer options can really blur the line.

Consider Twitch – one person streams audiovisual material live (webcam and/or computer screen). Lots of fans watch and interact both with each other and with the streamer, but only via text.
Enjoying the show?
Follow this channel to get notifications when it goes live!

Dignitas Imaqtpie - challenger adc d...
imaqtpie playing League of Legends on Team Dignitas

Chat
imaqtpie

The_crimson_chin: Hello mr imaqtpie, amazing employee here just dropping by to remind you as of september all streamers will require amazing prime to stream on twitch.tv. God bless and stream with discretion 8)

Dooby03: 13heY QT PIE.. Hope your having a good day bud, keep it real

Lefromagetetete: LOL

Flymordecallyf: lol surprisingly

Cokeasian: surprisingly

Skt_t1_k_baker: Paitassocio

B13nd1ngth3r3at: ROFL

Kenziebaby: "surprisingly"

Damnlegit: Surprisingly health

Xayviar: Q T P I E

Iplayhatpt: SOY NUTS BEST NUTS

Banambaca: je

Anctar: LOL

Send a message

Log In Sign Up

Follow Subscribe $ 4.99

Share Bookmark

1 26,915 43,208,400 311,838

Chat
Corpora of CMC are **products of their time**. Tagliamonte (2016b:19):

“A critical caveat is that the [Toronto Internet Corpus] is dated. It comes from a particular time – (2009-2010) – when the three CMC registers [email, instant messaging, and phone texting] had distinct characteristics. The participants in these studies were not using their phones for email or web browsing. […] Of course, this fact also means that the study is circumscribed to a particular phase in the evolution of the Internet and cannot be replicated.”
But there is so much potential. There is so much Internet out there and so much of it is understudied (or not studied at all) from a CMC perspective.

There is a world wide web of potential ;}
introductory stuff

Ten gazillion ways of contacting each other.
Games. Videos. Groups devoted to everything you can think of.
introductory stuff

Access to (some) high-profile personalities.

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Roonil Wazlib
@amymeowz
07 Sep

Had a dream I met @jk_rowling and she quizzed me on Harry Potter trivia and I didn’t know any answers and it was terrifying and mortifying

J.K. Rowling
@jk_rowling

@amymeowz I had a waking nightmare where I met a Harry Potter fan who quizzed me on a sub-plot & I couldn’t remember what I’d written
4:48 PM - 7 Sep 2014
* 1,032
introductory stuff

Shared language play.
Idiosyncratic language play.

Got banned from Wikipedia for making all the verbs on the Ray Romano page hypothetical :(

Raymond Albert "Ray" Romano (hypothetically born December 21, 1957) could be an American actor, stand-up comedian, screenwriter and voice actor. He might have been known for his role on the sitcom Everybody Loves Raymond, for which he could have received an Emmy Award, and as the voice of "Manny" in the Ice Age film series. He may have created and starred in the TNT comedy-drama Men of a Certain Age (2009–11). From 2012 to 2015, Romano could have possibly had a recurring role in Parenthood.
Substitutes for tone/gesture/facial expressions: emoji, emoticons, punctuation, capitalization, text effects.
introductory stuff

Cross-modal humor.

neutralnewt:

iiiarclight:

how to be cool
A) cool sunglasses emoji
B)
is that a god damn pun. in emoticon format
introductory stuff

Casual registers and personified corporations.

Yesterday I broke up with my gf because it would torture that I could be so much in love with KFC, and dream about it at night, and at the same time date my gf. Now I’m all yours KFC, I love you.

Like · Comment

11 people like this.

Kody Go
#ForeverAlone
2 hours ago · Like

KFC Canada
We’re not ready for a serious relationship but you’re welcome to visit whenever you’d like.
2 hours ago · Like · 13
And a lot of meta-commentary.

---

**pervocracy**

Part of the New Internet Grammar: using question marks not to denote questions, but upturns in voice, so that a tentative statement gets a question mark but a flatly delivered question doesn’t.

---

**argumate**

why would you do this

---

**pervocracy**

It just seems right?
That said, while a lot of these examples are funny and amusing and uplifting, we also need to recognize that the Internet has become ubiquitous and powerful in both good and bad ways.

Daz says:
JULY 10, 2018 AT 5:48 PM

Don’t point the internet at people.

The writer was irresponsibly waving the internet around in the direction of those people and it went off.
Cyberbullying: what happens when kids can’t escape mistreatment by going home at the end of the day?

‘Doxxing’: splashing name and address details across the Internet to frighten or endanger someone.

Shaming/smearing: even when intended to draw attention to a problem, can turn massively disproportionate on the Internet.

Conspiracy theories and pseudoscience: all over.

Organizing around bigotry/violence: e.g. hiding from search engines by using punctuation as code.

‘Dark web’: seedy underbelly of hate speech, vilification, illicit behavior, etc.
We’ll take a closer look at online power dynamics in Lecture 4 in two respects:

- what comes across as powerful online
- how the online world mirrors offline inequality

For now, to be kept in mind: is it still valid to assume the null hypothesis that the Internet has no effect on our language, even offline speech?

Manning (2015): a survey of how her college dorm friends use English and how many of the idioms, structures, and inside jokes owe themselves to Internet language play.
HISTORY OF CMC RESEARCH
The term ‘CMC’ was coined in a paper by Kiesler et al. (1984:1123).

The Internet was still a small, closed system developed by the Department of Defense.

A fraction of humanity were computer users. Only a fraction of those were interconnected computer users.

CMC was simply the exchanges of these early specialists, including lots of technical jargon.
1990s: Primarily ethnographic/interactional approaches (Brenda Danet, Susan Herring, Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Jannis Androtsooulous, etc.).

Late 1990s: Early variationist studies of CMC (e.g. Paolillo 1999).


2008: Naomi S. Baron’s *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World.*
CMC has become vastly more popular in sociolinguistics circles.

Georgakopoulou (2006:548) speaks of “the transition from half-empty rooms hosting the odd paper on computer-mediated communication...in the sociolinguistics and discourse conferences of the early 90s to the current full house of dedicated panels that have become a fixture in such fora.”
Dedicated CMC journals:

- Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication
- Mobile Media & Communication
- Language@Internet

CMC papers in general sociolinguistics journals:

- American Speech
- Journal of Sociolinguistics
- Language in Society

+ overlap with publications devoted to corpus linguistics, pragmatics, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, human-computer interaction, media studies, digital humanities, etc.
But CMC is *understudied* from a variationist standpoint in particular (Androtsopoulous 2006:424).

Not for a lack of interest! Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) on teen language online is currently *the most-cited article in the history of American Speech*.
Lots and lots of communities, variables, influences, and research questions to be studied. “Linguistic features that have been quantified and compared across or within online communities include emoticons, unconventional spellings, representations of spoken language features, regional dialect features, obscenity, and code-switching” Androutsopoulos (2006:425).
A small selection of CMC elements worthy of more study...

“the de-localization of interactions, the formation of communities across time and space, the performativity, transience and ephemerality of identities, the networking and interdependence of communities, the mobility and transposition of peoples, languages, and micro-cultures, the unprecedented flow of information and exchange among different groups that transcend the local and the national, the individuals’ heightened processes of reflexivity on their communication” (Georgakopoulou 2006:548).
CLASSIFYING CMC (Herring 2007)
## Table 2. Medium factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M1</th>
<th>Synchronicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Message transmission (1-way vs. 2-way)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Persistence of transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Size of message buffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>Channels of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6</td>
<td>Anonymous messaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M7</td>
<td>Private messaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M8</td>
<td>Filtering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M9</td>
<td>Quoting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M10</td>
<td>Message format</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
introductory stuff

S1 – Participation Structure
S2 – Participant Characteristics
S3 – Purpose
S4 – Topic or Theme
S5 – Tone
S6 – Activity
S7 – Norms
S8 – Code
Next class:
Thursday, June 27

Read D'Arcy & Young (2012) and Bolander & Locher (2014)
Post two discussion questions on Orbund
By Friday evening, complete HW1 (submitted online)