

Internet Chatting Inside Out

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This paper contributes to studies on computer-mediated communication, with a particular focus on synchronous chat, the communicative situation that resembles conversation in which each turn is a reaction to the written message. The focal points are the style and structure of a number of already archived chat sessions (accessible in the archives of www.lycos.com [chat transcripts], downloaded April 2003). Firstly, the discussions demonstrate that such communication bears features of both writing and speech and hence appears to be hybrid communication; secondly, through the application of Halliday's sociosemiotic interpretation of language, synchronous chatting is defined within a socio-cultural context.

1. Introduction

Recent years have provided evidence that the communications system progressively changes the possibilities of verbal interaction and greatly affects the way people communicate. Written and spoken discourses have traditionally been referred to as two basic forms of communication. The last decade or so, however, has made us question such a two-pole (in its extreme) approach. The traditional perception of a two-way exchange of information is strongly undermined owing to the emergence of computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC is becoming increasingly popular in establishing interpersonal contact; it has the potential of a new linguistic medium alongside speech and writing. Crystal (2001: 238) argues for its autonomy by saying: "It is neither 'spoken writing', nor 'written speech'," and this is a distinctive feature of the communication that takes place between people via computer.

The differentiation between speech and writing is already blurred enough, but it becomes even more indistinct when CMC is taken into consideration. The discourse of the Internet represents a novel interaction, for the most part on the boundary between speech and writing; hence, it deserves the most perceptive approach. Computer-mediated communication, or conversation, if chatting is the case, is potentially worthy of closer examination. Accordingly, the language of synchronous chatrooms serves as a target source for the purposes of a study of the discourse of Internet chatting. The objective of this paper is to classify computer-mediated chat as a genre through close attention to the style of chatgroup discourse; prior to that, it addresses key notions relevant to a better understanding of CM communication, of CM chat, and of Synchronous CM chat. The paper starts with the general characteristics of computer-mediated communication (section 2). In section 3, the discussion is more focused on computer-mediated chat, one of the situation types of computer-mediated communication. Halliday's framework of 'language as a sociosemiotic structure' provides the grounds for the analysis of a synchronous chat session in section 4. Finally,

concluding remarks and implications relevant to the present study sum up the discussion.

2. What is Computer-Mediated Communication?

Progress, in the most general sense, brings about changes in the way people communicate. The possibilities of interpersonal interaction are increasingly expanding in scope, and new options are being made available; amongst these the Internet (“... an association of computer networks with common standards which enable messages to be sent from any central computer (or host) on one network to any host on any other...”; Crystal, 2001: 2-3) is winning everybody’s attention. The efficacy of computer-mediated communication is obvious as it enables vast numbers of people to communicate across temporal, spatial, etc. barriers. Non-vocal communication via computer, since this is what CMC is for the most part like, provides access to global issues and makes interaction between people continuous and unbiased. Crystal (2001: 3) points out that

[t]he extra significance is even reflected in the spelling in languages which use capital letters... this is the first such technology to be conventionally identified with an initial capital. We do not give typographical enhancement to such developments as ‘Printing’, ‘Broadcasting’, ‘Radio’ or ‘Television’ but we do write ‘Internet’ or ‘Net’.

The new mode of interaction is necessarily typified by certain linguistic properties; hence, it bears distinctive features that are in one way or another reflected in different communicative situations.

The understanding of the Internet as a communication tool necessitates addressing its **linguistic properties**. Crystal (2001: 24) defines the Internet as “... an electronic, global and interactive medium, and each of these properties has consequences for the kind of language found there.” The three attributes ‘electronic’, ‘global’ and ‘interactive’ carry the information on the electronic character of the channel, on the closeness of countries, and on the anticipation of a receiver’s reaction to the information projected. The implication is that firstly, one’s verbal production is dependent on their computer literacy and capability of exploiting the character options on the keyboard so that the proposition of the message is sustained despite the absence of body movement or vocal paralinguistic cues. Secondly, the language used has the potential to connect people in a mindset as to the unanimity in transmitting (also) feelings and emotions; ‘supply means’ are becoming conventionalized among Net users worldwide. Thirdly, the interactivity of the medium often causes Netspeak to resemble a spoken mode while making people believe that they are exposed to ‘written speech’ [on Netspeak and ‘written speech’ cf. Crystal 2001]. Hence, any attempt to describe such discourse should consider in what way the linguistic behavior on the Net is different from the traditional one.

Certain **distinctive features** define Netspeak, an emerging genre. For the time being, the CMC is operating as a written medium. A stylistic approach to the written mode of communication is concerned with graphic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical, and discourse features (Crystal, 2001; Ferenčík, 2003; Hoffmanová, 1997). The layout and organization of written language, the application of the writing system of language,

a distinctive use of sentence structure, specific wording, and preference for particular discourse markers altogether reinforce the image of the computer-mediated discourse. However, it would be a strenuous task and eventually a vain attempt to characterize Netspeak *en bloc* without further specification of situation types.

The Internet provides a variety of ways of engaging in virtual reality. All of the different **CMC situations** fall under the headings of e-mail, synchronous chatgroups, asynchronous chatgroups, Web, and virtual worlds, as outlined by Crystal (2001). Although he delimits the five situation types, he admits to a possible, and sometimes even unavoidable, overlap; for instance, we need to log on to a particular Web site to become a member of a discussion group. Each of the situation types exploits a distinctive set of language means, which is determined by its user/s. A user engraves a particular Net situation with a specific layout, grammar, lexis, font, or punctuation. However, the mere situation type may determine how much impact a Net user will have. Exclusively their creators shape some CMC situations, leaving a user in the position of a passive consumer; some allow those online to contribute their language freely; and some occupy the in-between position in that they impose some restrictions on the language variety presented. The situation types that offer opportunities for speaker's involvement and allow for the language variety observable in the traditional mode of communication are e-mail and chat.

The Internet being inherently interactive is an ideal venue for the realization of personal aspirations as well as interpersonal goals. More specifically, email and chat enable the development of rapport among the online Net users, giving them a chance to converse in a most unbiased and unprecedented way. The latter of the two CM situations brings together different speaker styles and as such is a rich source of subjectively marked interaction.

3. What is Computer-Mediated Chat About?

'Chat' has two connotations, out of which the one referring to the Internet exchange of messages seems to overshadow the traditional meaning. The term 'chat' in a lexical sense means a friendly conversation, the situation in which people sharing time and place talk in a friendly way. The same term has been adopted to refer to conversation via computer. Either way 'talk' in real time is the case. However, despite different spatial characteristics the two senses of 'chat' can be paralleled. (Hereinafter the term 'chat' will be used in the sense of Internet chatting.) The parallel is, however, only relative since computer-mediated chat displays far more diversity than the traditional one, whether with regard for purpose-related, situational, or linguistic **determinants**. These determinants respectively imply such factors as a function that the interaction fulfils, temporal and spatial characteristics of the computer-mediated situation, and linguistic classification of the discourse concerned; each of them can be approached through the attributes paired up to form defining dichotomies.

PURPOSE-RELATED, and/or functional in a broad sense, DETERMINANTS are reified in two realizations of chat, **private** and **public**, that provide space for respectively person-to-person and multi-participant interaction. In the former, the exchange of messages typically occurs in real time, and is under the control and sole observance of two participants. In a situation of the kind (termed as 'query'), confidentiality is at the heart

of interaction, thus the third party, an active or passive participant, is denied access (unless the interactant lets the third party watch the screen). (Palkovičová 2003: 44) The latter can be tagged as a chatgroup or chatroom communication; i.e. "... continuous discussions on a particular topic, organized in 'rooms' at particular Internet sites, in which computer users interested in the topic can participate." (Crystal 2001: 11) As it can be derived from the tag, such a situation allows for a multi-participant interaction that, conventionally, has the form of a discussion, which is why the number of participants is not limited. They join in and quit the ongoing debates at their convenience. What draws them together is the shared interest and willingness to articulate their views or needs, whether in real time or within a particular time span. The anecdotal evidence is that visitors to chatrooms hold the floor on a single topic, and in the discussion directly address the topic rather than an individual; in one-to-one chat, the reverse is common for the most part.

The computer-mediated chat, in terms of SITUATIONAL DETERMINANTS of a communicative situation, offers the possibilities that chat in a traditional sense cannot. The attributes **synchronous** and **asynchronous** are uttered with reference to chatrooms, for it is the public computer-mediated chat that does not necessarily inflict the immediacy of response on the addressee. The two attributes define the temporal setting in terms of respectively real time and postponed time of interaction. Crystal (2001: 11) defines synchronous and asynchronous chatgroups in the following way:

In a synchronous situation, a user enters a chat room and joins an ongoing conversation in real time, sending named contributions which are inserted into a permanently scrolling screen along with the contributions from other participants.

In an asynchronous situation, the interactions are stored in some format, and made available to users upon demand, so that they can catch up with the discussion, or add to it, at any time – even after an appreciable period has passed.

One of the main systems available to those interested in synchronous chat is Internet Relay Chat (IRC) – it consists of numbers of rooms dealing with a great variety of topics. Bulletin boards, Usenet, or mailing lists exemplify asynchronous chat. A spatial characteristic implies the aspect of location of the server and the area it covers, which calls for another dichotomy, specifically that of a **global** – **local** chatgroup. Some servers may receive contributions from locations in the adjoining neighborhood; others may operate worldwide. (ibid: 11-12) Irrespective of what area is covered, both provide the users with the choice between partaking in a real-time event and a delayed reaction to the message, which makes electronic chat different from the traditional one.

The apparent discrepancy might be reported when we attempt to describe CMC in terms of LINGUISTIC DETERMINANTS; that is to say, when we identify CMC as essentially a written medium but at the same time admit to its being conversation, chat or talk in such conditions, all primarily attributed to the spoken mode of communication. Hence, the specifying of CM chat as a genre is bound to be a challenging task. The two facets of CMC, writing and speaking, form the fundamental dichotomy that at once befores the description of the style of CM communication and serves as a springboard for its closer examination. The concept of style "... has a wide currency since it is applied to various spheres of human activity characteristic of an individual..." (Ferenčík 2003: 238) In verbal communication, style is understood as "a situationally distinctive use of

language” (ibid); hence, it encompasses all the discourse features recurrently present in a particular context and under certain conditions. In the following lines, it is my ambition to classify CM chat as a genre through attending to the style of chat sessions.

Mistrík (1997: 422) presents the hitherto advocated classification of styles based on dichotic pairs.¹ In accord with this classification, it is possible to label CM chat as a genre of an inter-individual, fact/non-fiction **style** used privately and publicly. Mistrík (1997: 423), however, ultimately abandons such positions and speaks of the inappropriateness of viewing private and public communication in dichotic terms since it is impossible to draw a strict line between the two; and this is significantly obvious in CM chat. Consequently, he gives prominence to subjective and objective elements present in the verbal production and proposes the typology of styles based on such an approach. Inter-individual communicative situations can be characterized as such, in which the speaker contributes to the subject matter. Taking into consideration to what extent the speaker is involved he (ibid) classifies the communicative situations as subjective, objective, and subjective-objective.² The style of computer-mediated chat can be hence labeled as subjective and informal/colloquial.

The criterion employed for tagging a particular style subjective, objective or subjective-objective draws on typical **subjective** and **objective determinants** of a communicative situation. I will persist with Mistrík’s approach and in doing so pinpoint other dichotic pairs of relevant features. In his view (ibid: 407), subjective determinants are represented by an author (his/her intellectual maturity, personality traits, temperament, social status, attitude towards the addressee and proposition of the utterance, etc); objective determinants include an addressee, social environment (public – private, noisy – quiet, etc), the purpose or aim of the communicative situation, and a mode of communication (spoken – written). Altogether, they precondition the choice of language means that the language variety typically rests upon. By virtue of its register and communication strategy chat is rightfully referred to as subjective and informal (and/or the choice is made on a continuum neutral-informal-colloquial); what is at issue here is whether Netspeak is to be labeled written or spoken language, as both employ neutral-informal-colloquial discourse.

A mass of stylistics literature provides information on how the relationship between **speech** and **writing** has been treated. Lakoff (cf. Hoffmanová 1997: 76) favors the idea of their being social products, or cultural-social technologies. The views on modes of communication, the objective determinant of the communicative situation, range from the black-and-white approach, i.e. as either spoken or written, to the denial of such autonomy. Language varieties have traditionally been ascribed to either speech or writing, with some allowance for overlap; most ordinary examples are respectively /telephone/ conversation, letters, literary essay, or unscripted commentary. It has to be borne in mind, however, that “[s]peaking and writing is ... a continuum rather than a simple dichotomy: certain written discourse may be more oral-like and vice-versa.” (Ferenčík 2003: 228) It is worth considering which position chat discourse occupies on the continuum, and what features determine that particular position.

The boundary between the two modes seems to be in most cases illusive since both have their share in the make-up of the discourse if the situational factors allow that. Chat discourse is relatively loud in exhibiting **features** of both speech and writing. Crystal finds it purposeful to attest to the commonality of speech vs. writing features. He (2001: 42-43) classifies speech as time-bound, spontaneous, typified by face-to-face

interaction, loosely structured, socially interactive, immediately revisable and prosodically rich; writing is characterized as space-bound, contrived, visually decontextualized, elaborately structured, factually communicative, repeatedly revisable, and graphically rich. Crystal proposes (ibid) the characteristics of Netspeak based on the application of these features. His proposal covers the discourse of all of the five computer-mediated situations; I will focus on chatgroup ‘talk’. In the table below, if the characteristic applies to chatgroup discourse, the cell concerned is tinted.

| | SPEECH | WRITING | NOTE |
|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| | time-bound | space-bound | |
| | spontaneous | contrived | |
| | typified by face-to-face interaction | visually decontextualized | |
| | loosely structured | elaborately structured | |
| | socially interactive | factually communicative* | * variable |
| | immediately revisable | repeatedly revisable | |
| | prosodically rich | graphically rich | |

As indicated, the **discourse of chatgroups** is time-bound, space-bound, spontaneous, visually decontextualized, loosely structured, socially interactive, and to a certain degree factually communicative. Overall, the discourse concerned seems to be more speech-like and its characteristics can be interpreted as follows.

(1) time-bound – space-bound

The time-bound character of the discourse means the actual presence of both participants, i.e. “... the speaker has a particular addressee (or several addressees) in mind” (Crystal 2001: 26). The interactants communicate in real time and most commonly, the instant response is a rule. A relative delay or procrastination may occur whether due to the technical deficiency of the channel or a lapse on the part of an interactant.

The space-bound characteristic of traditional writing implies the fact that a piece of writing is permanent on the page. With chat, the message may stay on the screen for a period until it is replaced by a newly arrived message; if the system provides the possibilities of archiving, the period of its ‘being on a page’ is greatly prolonged. (ibid: 44-45) In addition, the physical distance between the interactants has a role to play. The piece of writing, in the strict understanding, is often intended for an unknown recipient. In chat, the interactants are authentic, yet their identity is often unrevealed due to the distance between them.

(2) spontaneous – contrived

What is going on between the interactants communicating via computer is justly labeled chat. The discourse bears traces of spontaneity, no planning in advance, and thinking while ‘talking’, that is to say while striking the keyboard characters, as well as anticipation of the reaction (which is a prerequisite for a dialogic pattern of

conversation). In general, the communication is natural; it may well take a leisurely pace, though often the pressure to communicate rapidly is felt. Crystal, however, notices a certain degree of contrivance (fixed apparatus) in the use of smileys and other graphic conventions that have been devised (ibid).

(3) typified by face-to-face interaction – visually decontextualized

The chatgroup discourse is robbed of non-verbal channels capable of relevant participation in communicating the meaning. Lack of eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and deictic expressions may delay the feedback or slow down the interaction. For this reason, the interactants make every effort to compensate for the absence of extra-linguistic cues.

(4) loosely structured – elaborately structured

The discourse of rigidly spoken and written language varieties is distinctly specific as to both lexis and structure. Speech is frequented by deictic expressions, looser structure, repetition, rephrasing, filler phrases, hesitations, aposiopesis, generalized vocabulary, qualifying expressions, expletives, interjections, address terms, etc. For writing, it is customary to employ elaborate organization, complex syntactic structures, frequent pre- and post-modification especially within noun phrases, elaborate grammatical and lexical cohesion, rich and varied vocabulary. (Ferenčík 2003: 260-261) In this respect, the chat discourse bears a strong resemblance to speech.

(5) socially interactive – factually communicative

Chat is inherently socially interactive; accordingly, it provides opportunities for building and maintaining relationships. This is reflected in the casual discourse, often fulfilling the phatic function. With chatgroups the variety of topics is extensive which might mean a chance to record a certain degree of contributing factual information.

(6) immediately revisable – repeatedly revisable

Rethinking the utterance is feasible in both speech and writing, though with completely different consequences. Revision of what has been said is possible but this does not erase the error made; the speaker has to endure the consequences. The errors made in the process of writing are corrected as they occur and are never identified in the final product. (Crystal 2001: 27) The promptness of chatgroup conversation might cause the participant to hit the send button before revising the content or form of the message. The editing of the form generally is not felt viable while not revising the content is prone to sustain consequences of a different kind. None of the features is significantly associated with the chat discourse.

(7) prosodically rich – graphically rich

Prosody and graphics are unique features of, respectively, speech and writing. These include intonation, tempo, rhythm, stress, etc.; pages, lines, capitalization, spatial organization, the aspects of punctuation. (ibid: 28) Understandably, chat as computer-mediated interaction is devoid of prosody. The chatgroup discourse relies on certain graphic conventions; however, they do not amount to those frequent in traditional

writing. Hence, the chat discourse cannot be characterized as graphically rich, let alone prosodically rich.

The extracts below exemplify the presence and/or absence of the features addressed above. The indexed information refers to the transcript of a chat session, as numbered in the Bibliography, and the turn within the particular chat session. The bracketed information indicates the feature as numbered above.

- [1/1] **Events_Moderator:** Good evening folks! Hello & [7] Welcome to Lycos Live Events! Tonight [1] we are chatting with YM's beauty editor Abby Gardner about Prom hairstyles and makeup. Prom season is right around the corner [4]. Are you ready to look your best? Abby [4] knows what's hot and what's not [4]. She is here to share the season's hottest looks! [7] It's [4] time to get started! Let's [4] welcome Abby Gardner to the chat! Hi Abby, welcome to Lycos! How's it going? [1/a]
- [1/2] **YM_Prom_Beauty_and_Hair:** It's going really well, thanks for having me! [1/b]
- [1/3] **lynds20:** I was wondering what makeup to wear if my eyes are kinda [7] small.
- [1/9] **darkness376:** Hi... [1/2] i [6] have a question my hair is like straw [4/7] and i [6] dont [6/7] know how to fix that can u [7] help me?
- [2/9] **jillibean821:** Lucy, [5/4] I'm in your mom's chorus class! [7]
- [2/10] **Lucy_Woodward:** Aww [4] ...that's [3/4] so cute! Thank you! :) [2/3] I'm in my mom's house right now! I'm with my brother, Davey, and we're laughing. :) [2/3] Hi - I'll meet you soon! [7]
- [5/2] **O-TOWN_Chat -Trevor:** Absolutely [6] Fabulous!
- [7/10] **wilmer_valderrama:** Actually, the 70's Show and bascially [6] any sitcom has probably the best schedule in the industry.
- [7/38] **kris_20020:** HEY WILMER! [5/4/7] im [6/7] a big fan from tiny New Zealand, i [6] just wanna [7] let you know i [6] LURVE! [6/7] your show and Fez cracks me up! [7]
- [8/32] **lebimar:** ... EXPRESSIONS OF, "LAURA I LOVE YOUUUUUUU". [3/7]
- [10/66] **Leigh_Nash:** We are *really* [3/7] thankful for you...

Ever since the new tool for communication appeared, language professionals have been striving to provide a clear-cut description of electronic discourse. Its complexity derives from the fact that it appears to be a hybrid communication bearing the features of both speech and writing, consistent with the functional and situational determinants of the discourse. The relationship between the determinants shaping the communicative situation is that of complementarity and they altogether make the computer-mediated discourse unique. The analyzed chat can be characterized as public, synchronic and more speech-like. Nevertheless, we have to admit, "Netspeak is identical to neither speech nor writing but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both." (Crystal 2001: 46) The following section more closely reflects on 'why' and 'what/how', i.e. the function and structure of **synchronous chat**.

4. Focused on Synchronous Chat

4.1 *Functions of Synchronous Chat*

Each communicative act takes place with the aim of fulfilling a particular **function**. The salient triad of functions, communicative/informative, expressive and performative (Černý 1996: 152) traditionally linked with verbal communication has a realization in the very situation type. The social function of any chat communication lies in its being a new type of social interaction beyond space barriers. Synchronous chat can be characterized as “... written language ... made to carry the burden of speech.” (Crystal 2001: 39) Understandably, the parallel with speech makes it a multi-function discourse. This section, firstly, provides brief characteristics of synchronous chat; secondly, addresses the basic language functions realized in such discourse; and thirdly, discusses other roles that synchronous chat plays.

Both **synchronous chat** and asynchronous chat resemble conversation in which each turn is a reaction to the written message. The juxtaposition of the two ways of computer-mediated conversing discloses the features that are on the one hand shared and on the other distinct. Both types of chat are time-governed, response-dependent, transient, displaying energetic force (Crystal 2001: 29), which is to say they exhibit the features characteristic of face-to-face conversation. What distinguishes them is the promptness of response, and this is what governs their functional orientation. Crystal (ibid: 130) claims,

In a synchronous setting, a user enters a chat ‘room’ and joins an ongoing conversation in real time. Named contributions are sent to a central computer address and are inserted into a permanently refreshing screen along with the contributions from other participants. The online members of the group see their contributions appear on screen soon after they make them ... and hope for a prompt response. In an asynchronous setting, the interactions also go to a central address, but they are then stored in some format, and made available to members of the group only upon demand, so that people can catch up with the discussion, or add to it, at any time – even after an appreciable period has passed. It is not important for members to see their contributions arrive, and prompt reactions are welcomed but not assumed.” [my emphasis]

From what Crystal highlights, it is clear that the synchronous chat bears the load of conversationality and puts on display language functions realized in face-to-face conversation. Both types of chat are fundamentally speech-like, yet they occupy a different position on a virtual scale of chattiness and conventions featuring in speech.

Synchronous chat, in opposition to asynchronous, epitomizes not only the three aforementioned **language functions** but also provides space for phatic function. A communicative function is granted by mere verbal act through which the communicative aim is achieved; expressive language function implies expressing the speaker’s attitude towards the communicated idea; a performative function refers to the interactive character of communication and bestows social meaning on the interaction. Face-to-face conversation takes place in the social environment that, if the conversation comes to a halt, takes control of its successful continuation by means of situational context. In synchronous chat, language is at once a means and the only crutch available.

Being visually decontextualized, deprived of extra-linguistic impulses, still awaiting the immediate response, synchronous chat is apt to now and then to fulfill the phatic function; and this is what dissociates the two types of chat.

Synchronous chat also has **other roles** to play, attractive enough to ensure its popularity. Primarily, a chat discussion develops friendship over the computer, helps sustain the relationships despite the physical absence of the parties, as well as encourages active participation in the discussion on a hot issue, an unmanageable state of affairs, or a recent experience related to a specific topic. Face-to-face communication, a comparative kin of synchronous chat, is occasionally laden with improper or slurred pronunciation, or feelings of apprehension to speak one's mind whether due to low self-esteem or such a social status of a speaker. Chat conversation offers space and means that give the participant chance to talk freely, act in a coercion-free atmosphere, put in other words depart from inhibitions that face-to-face interaction might hold. Moreover, as, for instance, the case study on Burundinet in the Diaspora (Kadende-Kaiser 1999) shows, the interaction via computer proves laudable inasmuch as it can be utilized for smoothing the progress of communication that would otherwise be impossible due to the violence hindering direct and peaceful interaction. Chatgroups enable a participant to express their authentic self, and hence facilitate engagement in the unbiased communication.

From what a chatroom offers, it is more than evident that it successfully plays the role of a socializing agency. Chat offers opportunities for efficient interaction across vast distances, for seeking information or help, for sharing knowledge or feelings, for simply passing the time, but also, disapprovingly, for spamming or flaming. Visitors to the chatroom making an exhibition of themselves, presenting foul language, are not uncommon; such verbal behavior is out of the scope of my linguistic inquiry and, in effect, is not present in the analyzed material. The studied material comprises a collection of chat transcripts as stored in the archive of the Lycos website. The chat under scrutiny is not a regular chat giving participants a chance to mingle. It is an event akin to an interview with a celebrity in which the role of the interviewer is taken by a number of partakers aspiring to contribute their support, express gratitude, or require information about the interviewed VIP or showbiz person.

4.2 A Structure of Synchronous Chat

4.2.1 An Introductory Comment

After supplying some answers to the question 'Why chat?', we can proceed to commenting on '**what** contributes to the actual appearance of chat' and/or search for the answer to '**how** is chat structured'. Such a comment or search can be built upon Halliday's sociosemiotic interpretation of language and viewing a situation as an exchange of meanings.

What Halliday (1978: 2) means by '**language as a semiotic structure**' is "... interpreting language within a sociocultural context, in which the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms... "; he uses culture synonymously with a social reality. The notion of structure presupposes considering the interrelation of some components. The triangle composed of 'field of discourse', 'tenor of discourse', and 'mode of discourse' manifests such an interrelation in that the three components of the situation altogether carry the information on the context and predict the linguistic features

delineating the discourse concerned (ibid: 33). Halliday (ibid) presents Pearce's summary of what the three headings encompass:

Field refers to the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs, and embraces not only the subject-matter in hand but the whole activity of the speaker or participant in a setting...

Tenor ... refers to the relationship between participants ... not merely variation in formality ... but ... such questions as the permanence or otherwise of the relationship and the degree of emotional charge in it. ...

Mode refers to the channel of communication adopted: not only the choice between spoken and written medium, but much more detailed choices...

Furthermore, Halliday (ibid: 143, 113, 112) claims that each of them has a corresponding component within the functional organization of meaning. 'Field' is associated with an experiential (being understood within ideational), 'tenor' with interpersonal, and 'mode' with textual metafunction;

The ideational function represents the speaker's meaning potential as an observer. ... The interpersonal component represents the speaker's meaning potential as an intruder. ... The textual component represents the speaker's text-forming potential; it is that which makes language relevant...

The three situational factors mediate the information necessary for delineation/prediction of linguistic features of a particular situation and in doing so justify their status of determinants of the text.

Accordingly, Halliday's semiotic structure of a situation will serve as a pattern for the discussion on the structure of the target chatgroup discourse. The following subsections deal with the three components piecemeal. **Field** will be tackled in terms of a social activity, **tenor** in terms of role relationship (participants), and **mode** in terms of symbolic organization (a channel and a rhetorical mode).

4.2.2 *Field*

Everything we say relates to a particular situation; words are not uttered independently of the context or situation. One of the determinants of the discourse is a **social activity**, already referred to as 'field of discourse'. At the heart of defining the term is the issue of how general a concept this is, and what part the language is assigned within that particular social activity. This implies that there is more to the field of discourse than just the subject matter. Hence, a broader concept should be kept in mind – the one that is equally attentive to the affair being talked over and factors forming the communicative situation. That is to say "... 'what we are talking about' has to be seen as a special case of a more general concept, that of 'what we are doing', or 'what is going on, within which that language is playing a part'. (Halliday 1978: 221-2) In the following lines, attention will be paid to the principle of internal ordering of 'field', its instantiation, and what-we-are-doing aspect.

The actual term 'field of discourse' is referred to and explained by Halliday in several ways, out of which three are presented below. It is defined as:

- ... the whole setting of relevant actions and events within which the language is functioning... (ibid: 33)
- ... the social action, in which the text is embedded. (ibid: 110)
- the social action: that which is 'going on', and has recognizable meaning in the social system; typically a complex of acts in some ordered configuration, and in which the text is playing some part, and including 'subject-matter' as one special aspect; (ibid: 142-3)

The first and second definitions imply what the third one explicitly says; and that is the specification of field in terms of ascribing the **order** to a particular social activity. Social activities differ in the ratio of the actual language use. Some utilize language as a supportive means to achieve a certain goal; others are primarily language-oriented, with language being the goal; an exemplification might be the juxtaposition of a game of football and a discussion on this sports event, as illustrated by Halliday.

In a game of football, the social action is the game itself, and any instructions or other verbal interaction among the players are *part of* this social action. In a discussion about a game of football, the social action is the discussion and the verbal interaction among the participants is *the whole* of this social action. Here the game constitutes a second order of 'field', one that is brought into being by that of the first order, the discussion, owing to its special nature as a type of social action that is itself defined by language. *It is to this second-order field of discourse that we give the name of 'subject-matter'.* (Halliday 1978: 144)

If an analogy is made with the discourse under study, 'what we are talking about' is the subject matter that the actual chatgroup focuses on. 'What we are doing' or 'what is going on within which that language is playing a part' is hitting the keys on the keyboard; the language, however, is not of secondary importance here, as in the game of football. In the focal social activity (typing) the language is a goal in itself, the only difference is the medium used for projecting the language. Hence, in the focal discourse the activity in which the participants are involved is talking, that is to say typing, about e.g. beauty tips, music, books, or acting. The second-order field of discourse is, for instance, getting ready for the prom night (Transcript 1, 39, etc.), performing music (5, 27, etc.), writing books (6, 108, etc.), or acting (7, 44, etc.) [as numbered in the Bibliography]. Accordingly, these are, one at a time, the subject matter of the focal chat, while the chat itself is the first-order field. The following extracts serve as an **exemplification** of engagement in talking about a particular subject matter.

^[39/1]**Events_Moderator:** Welcome to Lycos Live Events! Tonight we are chatting with Elizabeth Kiester, a style editor at ym magazine. Elizabeth knows what's hot and what's not and wants to help you **prep for the prom**. Get your fashion questions ready.

^[27/1]**Events_Moderator:** Welcome to Lycos Live Events! Tonight we are chatting with Skinny DeVille of Nappy Roots. In a world of pre-fab hip hop, this Kentucky-bred group **is winning fans with tracks** that have been called "soul food for thought."

The range of second-order fields of the chat sessions (accessible on www.lycos.com [chat transcripts], April 2003; for the list, see Bibliography) is provided in the table below.

| FIRST -O F | SECOND-ORDER FIELD | CHAT TRANSCRIPT No. |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| C H A T | acting/performing | 7,12,13,14,15,22,24,30,31,34,38,40,41,42,44,53,62-65,74,75,76,79,80,82,90,94,96,98,102,113,115,119,120,121,127,128,130,135,136,137,146, 147,149,152,153,154,155 156,161,163,164,165 |
| | approaching people | 54,84,99,108,158 |
| | competing in an event | 17,131 |
| | directing a movie | 19,24,43,110,138 |
| | drawing cartoons | 93 |
| | dreaming | 46,55,57 |
| | editing books | 123 |
| | experiencing psychic phenomena | 21,25,48,104 |
| | getting ready for the (prom) night | 1,3,37,39,56 |
| | modeling | 132 |
| | money laundering investigations | 117 |
| | preparing movie line-up | 109 |
| | preparing/partaking in reality show | 52,60,61,81,107,111,145,148 |
| | producing movies/shows | 45,80,97,100 |
| | reviewing movies | 59 |
| | shooting (a movie) | 118, 129 |
| | using 'inappropriate' language | 47 |
| | working in the Internet industry | 85 |
| | writing (books) | 4,6,49,54,58,66,68,73,77,86,87,91,99,103,105, 108, 116, 125,139,158 |
| | writing/performing music | 2,5,8,9,10,11,16,18,20,23,26,27,28,29,32,33,35,36,50,51,67,69,70,71,72,78,83,89,92,95,101,106 112,114,122,124,126,133,140,141,142,143,144, 150,151,157,160,162 |

‘What we are doing’, being the part of a broadened concept of field of discourse, is likely to have further implications in terms of reference to the extra-linguistic and paralinguistic factors, hence delineating the situational context. As to the activities accompanying ‘talking’, the course of each of the chats is, in a way, alike. The uniting factor here is the requirement to utilize the keyboard and type the message, all of which is happening in relative solitude. This necessarily limits the scope and controls the effect of other activities that can be otherwise influential, i.e. in the conditions of a traditional conversation.

Situational factors in terms of environment might well have an impact on one’s input, but as such do not hinder communication. The course of chat is not obstructed for instance by noise or by abrupt butting in of the other interactant, as the system does not allow that. The author lets the addressee see the message by striking the send button, i.e.

when they submit the idea that they have in mind and want to communicate; there is no way for the other party to interrupt their interactant's typing. The user reads the message as it appears on the screen. "[T]he order in which messages arrive is governed by factors completely outside the control of the participants, such as the speed of their computers and the processing capacities of the service providers" (Crystal 2001: 155). Therefore, the only difficulty that may occur is that the course of synchronous chat is retarded due to a technical failure of the system, or blurred owing to the overlap of incoming messages, which is caused by the different speeds of the servers used by the interactants.

On the other hand, the communication concerned lacks extra-linguistic cues that could be helpful in delivering meaning. Accordingly, the medium concerned imposes certain characteristics on the communication and restricts the non-linguistic behavior of interactants during 'chatting'. 'What we are doing while talking', that is to say, 'what we are doing while typing', also points to paralinguistic behavior. In conditions of CM chat such behavior has to be represented by means of emoticons or other graphic devices.

In summary, 'talking while doing something', (as for instance giving instructions during the game of football), 'talking about something' and 'doing something while talking' (e.g. discussing football and weeding the garden at the same time) are significant in different ways. Both are social actions and instances of verbal communication; the position and/or function of the language, however, differ. The latter is language-oriented and conversing is the primary concern of the interactants. The former is else-oriented and utilizes language only for the purposes of successful pursuance of the social activity. The present concern is a language-oriented activity, i.e. conversing about the particular subject matter via computer, which presupposes specific linguistic characteristics of the discourse.

4.2.3 *Tenor*

Tenor, the second of the three situational determinants, carries the information on "who are taking part" (Halliday 1978: 189) and tends to be influential in regulating **interpersonal options**, for example those in the systems of modality, person, intensity, evaluation, comment etc (ibid: 144). The selection on the lexico-grammatical level is subject to the role structure in the very situation. In Halliday's understanding (ibid: 143) 'tenor of discourse' is

... the role structure: the cluster of socially meaningful participant relationships, both permanent attributes of the participants and role relationships that are specific to the situation, including the speech roles, those that come into being through the exchange of verbal meanings...

Understandably, what lies behind the notion of 'tenor' is speech roles inherently empowered to direct the exchange of meanings. To begin with, I will comment on the internal ordering of tenor (similar to that in 'field'); then I will devote attention to the interactants' characteristics peculiar to the discourse in question.

The first and second **order principle** also operates within 'tenor of discourse'. This can be interpreted in such a way that the first-order roles are applied to all social roles in the most general sense. Second-order social roles, implying the restrictions imposed by

the language, relate to the discourse roles of an informer, questioner, responder, etc; that is to say, in the context of the focal chat, they can be broadly assigned to a moderator of the event, visitors to the chatroom and a guest. In essence, the second-order roles are specifications of first-order roles. The very embodiment of such a role distribution is the following extract.

- [2/5] **Events Moderator** Hi Lucy! Welcome to Lycos! How's it going?
- [2/6] **Lucy_Woodward**: Good, thank you!
- [2/7] **shoutinrichnice**: Any tour plans or performances coming up?
- [2/8] **Lucy_Woodward**: I'm going to be singing - recording the AOL sessions on Thursday, and in the next week or so you'll see me live on the AOL session. I did it in November, and I'm doing it again now. And on March 31st, it's the night before my album release, I'm going to be singing on Jay Leno - so definitely watch it!...
- [2/9] **jillibean821**: Lucy, I'm in your mom's chorus class!
- [2/10] **Lucy_Woodward**: Aww...that's so cute! Thank you! :) I'm in my mom's house right now! I'm with my brother, Davey, and we're laughing.:) Hi - I'll meet you soon!
- [2/11] **lostdreamer614**: once you go on tour is there anyone you would want to perform with?
- [2/12] **Lucy_Woodward**: I would love to open up for Lenny Kravitz, and Ok Go, it's my new favorite band!
- [2/13] **faithtrustpixiedust**: Have your performances on the Early show, etc, been rescheduled yet?
- [2/14] **Lucy_Woodward**: Yes. This CBS Morning Show will be on April 5th, which is a Saturday morning. ...

The linkage between synchronous chat and face-to-face conversation provides the foundation for successful identification of **participants**; essentially written communication is established between/among those wishing to converse. What is at the very base here is either two-party or multiparty interaction, which takes place in effect between speaker/s – hearer/s, though technically speaking between writer/s – reader/s. The former is the case of private chat; the latter has a realization in public chatrooms/chatgroups. In the subsequent discussion, I will focus on the interaction in chatgroups, in which the three underlying roles define the layout and the course of the event. The aim is to provide answers to the following questions: Who are the participants? What is their status? How is their interaction organized?

Who are the participants? The studied corpus is chat sessions taking place in real time and to a certain extent having the form of an interview. These are moderated events, in which the moderator (the term ‘moderator’ is used as a generic term to refer to the person who manages and controls the operation of a group; cf. Crystal 2001: 133) serves as a mediator between the person interviewed and those submitting questions and comments. The **moderator** is the Lycos website staff member assigned particular power to control the course of ‘conversation’. The person interviewed is a **celebrity** pursuing a career in arts and entertainment (to name some, W. Valderama [That 70’s Show], A. Davoli [The Sopranos], R.D.Anderson [Stargate SG-1], J. Gray [Men are from Mars...]). **People** having computer access to the site, desperately hoping to have the interviewee answer their questions, or merely wishing to contribute their view, moral support or expression of affection, represent the third party. The access to the Internet from anywhere in the world and the phenomenon of anonymity (see below) might raise a

question of who the participants are in terms of nationality. The interviewers, in a way, form a virtual community. What connects them is a shared interest in pursuing a discussion on shared issues; hence, mutual knowledge is a prerequisite for an engagement. Moreover, what binds them together and makes them members of such a community is the awareness of the comparative distinctiveness and the ability to abide by the stereotypes of the generated text.

What is their status? In the triadic participant structure of the focal chat, an uneven balance can be noticed among the three parties in that their status is not equally identifiable. The discourse concerned is a paragon of discrepancy in self-identification on the parts of an interviewee and interviewers. The latter form the in-group audience (on term 'in-group audience' *cf.* Douglas & McGarty 2001: 401) whose real identity cannot be traced, as opposed to the former whose presence is the very impetus for the chat to take place; and this envisages general familiarity with the interviewee's background. The events moderator has in this respect a special position originating in his/her relative anonymity and compliance with the linguistic or other behavior in accordance with the assigned role. The issue of **anonymity** vs. **identifiability** (for more on the identifiability issue, see Douglas & McGarty 2001) is one of the features peculiar to the public synchronous chat. CMC is a situation where people choose to make themselves either anonymous or identifiable to others. The participants' social status is typically kept unrevealed unless one chooses to expose this information. The revelation can be done during the exchange of messages, or some nicks might serve as prompts ("... which may be an assumed first-name, a fantasy description ..., or a mythical character or role"; Crystal 2001: 50); yet, the information cannot be taken for granted. Such disclosure, as exemplified below, might make available the information on the participant's name, geographical location, age, or preference in entertainment options.

- [150/57] **anna_miles**: Do you miss anything when you are on tour (or anyone :)
- [151/76] **ellena88**: May God continually bless you both.
- [152/42] **Sblover**: Do you know anything about **Sweden**? Have you been there? **It's a nice country!** [152/43] **Susan Ward**: I don't know much about it, nor have I been there.
- [152/71] **Pamela0**: Susan, **we** still have **SB in Ireland** and I think you did such a great job. Can you tell me what TPTB had planned for your character had the show not been cancelled?
- [150/47] **Minneapolis_Mighty**: Can you talk about your new song 'Safe' a little? I love it. Keep chillin'.
- [155/38] **billabong101**: What did your parents think of the movie [NOTE: **Aus word**]
- [153/9] **Events Moderator**: **I have a 14-year-old daughter.** Do you think this film's appropriate for that age level?
- [148/1] **Events Moderator**: Welcome! For those of you just joining us, tonight we are chatting with Dirk Been from the hit TV show **Survivor**. He was on the island with the other 16 contestants. Get those questions ready ...
- [148/17] **survivorlover**: Who was your favorite teammate?
- [151/1] **Events_Moderator**: Welcome! For those of you just joining us, tonight we are chatting with Erica & Tina of **Mary Mary**. ... [NOTE: a **gospel** band]
- [151/38] **RobertluvtheLORD**: How many interviews have you done since you released your album?

Public chat provides participants with a chance to be unidentified, thus endowing them with space for an equitable communication and allowing for a lesser conformity to the norms and expectations. The participants do not feel intimidated, as, every now and then, might be the case in face-to-face conversation, and they engage in an enthusiastic fashion, irrespective of possible cultural differences.

How is their interaction organized? As already mentioned, the focal chat is a **moderated** event bearing close resemblance to a conversation or an interview. The person to be interviewed is announced in advance in the calendar of events provided by the Lycos website. Those who wish to be members of a chatgroup submit their contributions; these come to the moderator before they are passed on to the guest. Conceivably, control over the conversation is undertaken by the moderator whose role Crystal (2001: 133) particularizes in the following way: "Moderators exercise varying amounts of power – for example, deciding whether a message to appear or not. Other groups allow their moderator to have editing as well as filtering powers..." The conversational nature of the interaction within the chatgroup calls for its dialogic structure. The three parties are engaged in the exchange of meanings in a turn-taking pattern. "Turn-taking is determined through a dynamic collaboration between the participants" (Freiermuth 2001: 170). In computer-mediated chats, however, turn taking is fixed by the channel, not handled by speakers. What is natural, hence realized unconsciously in the face-to-face conversation, in the communication via computer is administered by the system and controlled by the moderator, if a moderated event is the case. In both domains, the logical organization counts on adjacency pairs, i.e. questions are followed by answers, comments by appreciation or refusal, etc.; "... adjacency pairs are seen as sequentially implicative because this is how they are treated in talk." (Schiffrin 1988: 268-9) The ways of how speakers indicate a turn exchange in the traditional communication can range from eye contact through remaining silent to directly addressing the addressee. In the focal chat, turn-taking cues are in the hands of the moderator who receives the contribution, has the guest reply, and relays that to all logged in.

In the discourse under study, for most part it is difficult to specify any of the personal characteristics of participants. The objective of the focal chatgroup makes us believe that if any hint is given (whether being the part of the text or nick) it is liable to provide valid information. Even so, this does not allow for singling out particular status-defining characteristics of interactants so that it can be focused on one social factor while at the same time neglecting others. Although Crystal (2001: 55) points to the fact that "[c]ultural differences intervene, especially when messages are being exchanged internationally...", the studied corpus proves the smooth course of the interaction, the participants' respect for the cultural norms of the target language as well as sociolinguistic competence. Accordingly, the approach undertaken is that of foregrounding what binds the interactants, and that is the availability of the Internet access, the mutual knowledge of the topic discussed, and the knowledge of and adherence to conversation rules operating in the target language.

4.2.4 Mode

A mode of a **symbolic organization** (cf. Halliday 1978: 143) of the text is the third situational determinant of the discourse. In linguistic terms, ‘mode’ refers to either a medium of communication (spoken/written) or a rhetorical channel (cf. *ibid*: 222) that one decides to use. They form a special relationship in that the former predetermines the latter and the latter is an indicator of the former. Halliday’s semiotic structure of the situation stresses that it is only through mode that field and tenor become operational. The other way around, both field and tenor are strongly influential in the choice of vocabulary and grammatical patterns and perforce reflect the mode. As to the mode in terms of the distinction of the medium, the chat discourse occupies a special position, which has been already dealt with; ‘mode’ as a rhetorical channel is to be discussed in the following lines. This section briefly comments on what the mode embodies, addresses its lexicogrammatical manifestation, and remarks on the paralinguistic means exercised in the conditions of the focal discourse.

‘Mode’ in the sense of a **rhetorical channel** is a reflection of how we behave in a particular situation and/or what roles we undertake in the social environment. The verbal performance with hints of a didactic, commercial, or imperative mode is associated with the roles of teacher, advertiser or a commanding officer (Halliday 1978: 222). Understandably, the mode of discourse is dependent on the function that the actual discourse is meant to serve, “... To persuade? to soothe? to sell? to control? to explain or just to oil the works ... which merely helps the situation along?” (*ibid*: 223) The discourse concerned can be paralleled with the impromptu speech, “i.e. spontaneous and unplanned, or only roughly planned renderings of personal views” (Urbanová 2003: 20) with contributions smoothly alternating between inquiries and replies. For this reason, computer-mediated chatgroups can be assigned an informative mode of a casual conversation despite being intended for the general public rather than private parties.

The **language means** of the chat concerned are influenced by and derived from oral forms of communication that as such is delineated by certain characteristics. As Halliday (1978: 64) points out, the mere manifestation of the mode is by “... forms of cohesion, e.g. question-and-answer with the associated type of ellipsis..., the patterns of voice and theme ..., the forms of deixis, e.g. exophoric [situation-referring] *the*; and the lexical continuity...” These are associated with vocality, conversationality, familiarity, contextuality and expressiveness [my translation], the five features proposed by Mistrík (1997: 502-7). A brief commentary on each of them, supplemented with examples, is provided below.

- Vocality is a defining feature of oral communication; yet, as Mistrík admits, its manifestation through the written mode is also possible. Vocality is linked with prosodic features that have a significant share in communicating meaning. The vocality projected in the written form automatically brings about wordiness, capitalization, or successive recurrent usage of graphemes or punctuation marks in order to substitute for indication of prominent units or emotion-laden intonation patterns.

[150/7] **The Band Travis:** I'm absolutely, definitely psyched!

[10/45] **shoter350:** Leigh Nash, I am a HUGE fan of the song you sing INNOCENTE.

^[143/133]**GoOdChArLoTtE_826:** OK PEACE OUT.....I LOVE YOU GUYS!!!!!! SOOOOOO MUCH!

- Conversationality implies the dialogic mode of a conversation which is inherently associated with contact-establishing means, such as address (hypocoristic addressing the guest being very common) [1], evaluation comments [2], politeness formulae [3], discourse markers [4], as well as those providing feed-back [5].

^[62/41]**Events_Moderator:** David [1], Is there an address where people can write to you?

^[66/16]**ukkev5:** Peter [1], do you appear on British television?

^[66/42]**Events_Moderator:** I hate to say it [3], but we have to wrap this up in a few minutes We'll take just a few more questions and comments.

^[64/28]**Events_Moderator:** Well [4], folks, it's time to wrap up the chat! Thanks, J.C., we had a really good time chatting with you! We'll have to do this again sometime [3].

^[67/16]**left_philly:** Will you do a promotion tour in Germany? ^[67/17]**Lisa_Lopes:** Absolutely! [2/5] As soon as time permits.

- Familiarity is linked with the private setting that tolerates lexical and grammatical slips. However, with the focal chat this is not the case, its discourse supplies instances of such imprecision in bulk. Crystal (2001: 165) provides the following observation:

Grammar is chiefly characterized by highly colloquial constructions and non-standard usage, often following patterns known in other dialects or genres ... Nonce formations are common – running words together into a compound, or linking several words by hyphens. Word play is ubiquitous. New jargon emerges.

^[89/52]**Sherrie_Austin:** I've managed to have a career doing what I love to do. Get up everyday and sing and write songs. I can't think of anything I love to do more. [missing 'that']

^[90/26]**Corbin_Bernsen:** ... I had different role models. My mother on a professional level, Walt Disney on a creative level, and the Beatles on a musical level [missing a copular verb]

^[93/35]**Evan_Dorkin:** ... I thought the book would be more well received by them than the Harvey's, but you never know about these things. ['better']

^[101/28]**AJs_sis_69:** ... I have this one big question that's been eating me since the day ... [slang]

^[101/20]**lilshiningangel:** Its Jamie! Wassup? ... You totally tore it up on stage in Toronto. [symbols standing for sounds]

- Contextuality of the discourse entails the participants' awareness of the situation and the issues talked over, and is clearly exhibited by their relevant contributions. A single utterance like ^[123/5]**exgoose2:** And then some into the '80s! does not say much about the topic and/or standpoint discussed. Involvement of the speaker and the shared knowledge allows for successful interpreting elliptical structures, or deixis.

^[93/32] **ilGouki:** How many episodes of Batman Beyond did you do? ^[93/33] **Evan_Dorkin:**
 Just one. And Sarah and co-wrote Splicers. ... **[ellipsis]**
^[24/73] **bananaman838:** What is your favorite part in the movie? **[deixis]**
^[29/31] **Brandy:** Thank you! Well, being a new mommy, I don't know anything to expect.
 I just can't wait to hold **her** in my arms. **[deixis]**

- Expressiveness mirrors the speaker's stance to the communicated idea. The possibility to act without any feelings of apprehension and inhibition frees the interactants in the expression of their attitude or emotions. Diminutives, augmentatives, interjections, emphatic expressions, multiple use of a grapheme within a lexical unit are some of the language devices falling into the inventory of expressive means.

^[18/14] **con-artistry:** I would love to see you in concert! You are **absolutely fantastic**.
 Love, Helen.
^[57/40] **Karri_Ann_Allrich:** **Wow!** I love that symbol! You must feel stuck.
^[63/6] **Jennifer_Blanc:** Never give up! Perseverance is ***the*** most important.
^[74/32] **Eartha_Kitt:** ... But yes, we should do this, call me back sometime, so all I can say now is . . . **RRRRRROWWWWWW!**

The five features capturing the essence of a private, spontaneous conversation prove to be, with some adaptation, comparatively relevant in the chat discourse. This is becoming more of an issue nowadays since the arrival of new communications technology casts doubts upon traditional approaches to the language-in-use description. The rhetorical mode of the focal discourse echoes the verbal performance that is traceable to oral communication.

The mode of chat discourse due to the lack of vocality has to count on the **paralanguage** that the writing system provides for. Rheingold (In: Noblia: <http://www.sosig.ac.uk/iriss/papers/paper22.htm>) states, "... people in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind." In this respect, speaking and writing systems are in imbalance; "... writing provides only a poor system of means for expressing emotional or volitional aspects of a message. The system of conventional *punctuation* marks ... is used to represent suprasegmental features ... and to signal the pragmatic meaning of utterances..." (Ferenčík 2003: 258). Thus, the creators of chat discourse search for alternatives carrying the pragmatic force and expressiveness. What typifies such verbal performance is exploiting all the options provided by the keyboard. Spelling and punctuation in the exaggerated form, capitals, a single grapheme standing for a lexical unit, character spacing, or use of special symbols are the examples of emphatic conventions employed to disclose the very attitude, mood, and emotional state of an interactant. Crystal (2001: 35) notices the following use: "... all capitals for 'shouting': I SAID NO; letter spacing for 'loud and clear': WHY NOT, why not; word/phrase emphasis by asterisks: the ***real*** answer." The users of the Netspeak have become very inventive in introducing combinations of punctuation marks and characters as bearers of expressiveness; the examples include ☺ (a basic smiley), :) (happy), :((very sad), :-|| (angry), {}{} (sending a hug); LOL (laughing out loud), ASAP (as soon as possible), BTW (by the way), *g* (grin) etc.

[29/7] **Brandy:** ... if you have any suggestions, let me hear them! :)
 [30/6] **Kerbox:** ... what is your definition of an event horizon? Just curious ..:)
 [31/35] **Ronnie_Marmo:** My mother. But she's in heaven now. :(...
 [34/47] **foxy_laday:** Are we likely to see you in the next season of Angel? :D
 [65/62] **Greg_Proops:** ... And yes, you may hug symbolically. {{{{{{}}}}}
 [27/13] **chloe2797:** ... By the way, the album is tight as all hell! :})
 [31/18] **Events_Moderator:** Now you've got to tell us what you're looking for ... LOL
 [23/48] **kissmeikaika:** I absolutely **ADORE** you guys and your exceptional music!
 [148/49] **PUCKA:** Who do u think will be the last "survivor"?
 [155/13] **DJ_Qualls:** It was a mess and smelled ***really*** bad!

These novel devices are becoming conventionalized paralinguistic means used for the purpose of either signaling the tone of the message or articulating the extra emphasis. All the typographic variations, alterations in smileys or other emoticons (icons expressing emotions read sideways), acronyms etc. have become part of 'vocabulary' of regular visitors to the chatroom, fulfilling thus the slot that the absence of prosody and kinesics created.

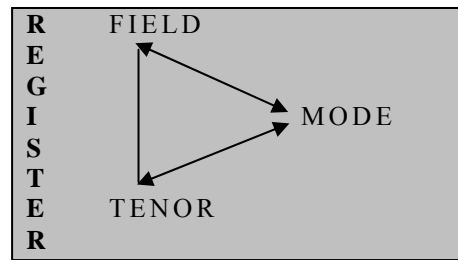
The synchronous chat is a proving ground for considering a parallel between computer-mediated chat and face-to-face conversation in terms of 'mode' as a rhetorical channel. 'Field' involves the subject matter and setting of the 'talk'; 'tenor' holds the speaker's involvement in the interaction; 'mode' takes control over 'how meanings are exchanged'. The chat discourse, being in essence written language, is likely to be marked with ambiguity, and that might befog the control. In such setting, the choice of lexis is made on the neutral-informal-colloquial scale; grammar precision ranges from standard to slightly careless. Vocality, facial expressions, gestures, body posture, or proxemics is substituted by a vast array of symbols, acronyms, or other graphic conventions that aim to disambiguate the transmitted meaning and help the chat discourse approximate oral communication.

4.2.5 A Final Comment

Synchronous chatgroups available on the Net offer a multiparty interaction and connect people of different ages, interests, or intentions, which together with the medium used predetermines the choice of language means. I approached the chat discourse with Halliday's socio-semiotic theory in mind and with the aim to find out more about the interactivity feature of the medium while attending to the concepts of field, tenor and mode. The three situational factors of discourse can serve as a **pattern** for describing a situation (type). I treated them one at a time, devoting a separate subsection to each of them. Even so, I am aware,

“... there is some tendency for the field of discourse to determine the content of what is said or written, for the tenor to determine the tone of it, and for the mode to determine the texture. But this is only an approximation. In the first place, we cannot really separate what is said from how it is said ...” (Halliday, 1978: 225)

Altogether, they make the register of the language variety. They reflect the language behavior, that is to say they control the selection of meanings and lexicogrammatical realization of those meanings. Hence, their relationship can be interpreted in the following way:



As a summary, I present the specific **application** of the field–tenor–mode pattern to the discourse concerned. Following Halliday’s illustration (ibid: 64) of the semiotic structure of a situation (type), the focal chat discourse can be interpreted as follows.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Field | <i>first-order:</i> chat, the course of which is controlled by the events moderator <i>second-order:</i> varies according to the tenor specification; the field of arts and entertainment |
| Tenor | <i>moderator – guest – visitors to the chatroom interaction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • moderator determining the course of action • visitors to the chatroom pursuing their own interests, seeking information • guest granting their quest for information |
| Mode | computer-mediated; speech-like dialogue; cooperative, without conflict of goals |

5. Concluding Remarks and Implications

The paper focuses on computer-mediated communication that is considered a novelty not only in the communications systems but also in the linguistics field. It can be a relevant summary to spot the differences between generally described synchronous chatgroups and the one under focus (that deserves a label of an “interviewing synchronous chatgroup”). Based on observation, such behavior, when compared to other synchronous chatgroups, is special in terms of **topic, relations, identity, order** and **clarity**. David Crystal’s *Language and the Internet* (2001) provides the most comprehensive survey of the Internet interaction and Netspeak to date. Therefore, it will serve as a primal reference source and some of Crystal’s observations will be related to the discourse studied. [The bold font style in the quotes is my addition and it is used to highlight the words central to the counter-argument that follows; the bracketed information indicates page reference.]

THE CONCEPT OF TOPIC

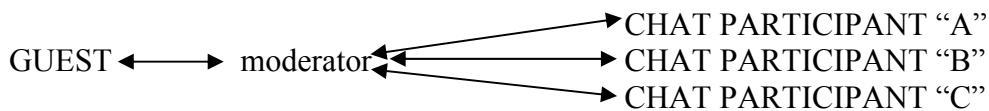
- o “Unlike asynchronous conversations, **topics decay** very quickly.”...Not only do other people’s remarks get in the way, some of those remarks actually act as distractions, pulling the conversation in unpredictable directions” (162).
- o “... The extreme situation is found in many chatgroups, where from the amount of **topic-shifting** we might well conclude that no subject-matter could even be irrelevant” (58).

In principle, the interviewing synchronous chat is a controlled event in which those with the managerial power choose the topic or duration. Each chat is pre-planned in that it takes place at a specific time that together with the topic is announced in advance by means of the events calendar available on the Lycos website. The topic is predetermined by the choice of a guest speaker. In this event, the moderator takes care that the contributions are not beside the point. Both the clearly defined purpose of the event and the control over the running time do not allow for passing-the-time discussions or red herring comments. Hence, not only is the thread of the subject matter readily identified but also it is easily maintained.

THE CONCEPT OF RELATIONS

- o "... The type of community has been described as '**hyperpersonal**' rather than 'interpersonal'..." (169)

The chat sessions under focus, in actuality, are not hyperpersonal. The author has his/her language read and interpreted by many recipients but the participants do not interact among themselves. Principally, we are concerned with a dialogic mode, i.e. the moderator-participant, and participant-guest interaction that in essence means participant-moderator interaction. A participant addresses the guest/s but technically 'communicates' with the moderator:



THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY

- o "With multiparty interaction ... You enter a chatgroup **at a random point**, not knowing how many other people are involved, who they are, or what they have been talking about" (153).
- o "You can find out a little about who the **participants** are..." "... the only way to find out what is going on is to sit back and watch for a while" (154).
- o "Multiple and often conflicting **notions of truth** therefore coexist in Internet situations, ranging from lying through mutually aware pretence to playful trickery" (51).

In regular chat aimed at social mixing, communication with no focus in mind is a norm. The target chatgroup is different not only in terms of a purpose, central topic or interactivity, but also in terms of the exposure of one's identity. In the interviewing synchronous chat it is not equally important to know one another. The primary reason for entering the chatgroup is conversing with the guest, not making friends with the participants. If a chat is to take place, it is essential that the guest's identity be fully revealed; those in the in-group audience contribute the revelation of who they are to a varying extent and in various ways. It is very common that interactants communicate more freely if they act in disguise; it is also very probable that they consciously allow for leaks of information if they feel safe within the particular community. Another feature that stands out in the chat encounter concerned is trustworthiness of the proposition. It is highly probable that the focal contributions are true since what is an underlying feature of the ongoing conversations is the genuine interest in the topic.

THE CONCEPT OF ORDER

- o “In synchronous chatgroups ... there is an extraordinary degree of **disorder**, chiefly due to the number of participants all speaking at once; which makes a transcript of an interaction extremely difficult to follow” (57).
- o “Each exchange is interrupted by messages from the other, destroying any conventional understanding of adjacency pairing ... Herring ... concludes: ‘Violations of **sequential coherence** are the rule rather than the exception in CMC’” (158-9).

The issue of (dis)order is related to CM chat by virtue of the properties of the technology systems. Messages do not always appear on one’s screen in the sequence they were sent from the sender’s computer, especially if several senders are involved. This might influence forming adjacency pairs and eventually cause confusion. The transcripts show that sequencing is under the control of the moderator, who, in fact, generates that sequencing. There is no way finding out the order in which the messages reached the moderator’s computer, moreover, it is not important. The moderator has the authority to grant the minimal adjacency pairing, i.e. question–response, hence, construct a successful conversation.

THE CONCEPT OF CLARITY

- o “Internal sentence **punctuation** and final periods are usually missing, but question-marks and exclamation marks tend to be present. The apostrophe is commonly absent from contracted forms ... Perverse spellings and typographical errors are frequent. Capitalization is regularly ignored, even for I, but is scrupulously recognized in nicks” (164).
- o “**Emoticons** have been called ‘the paralanguage of the Internet’ (Dery, 1993), but they are not the same, in that they have to be consciously added to a text...” (34).

What lies behind the concept of clarity here is the performer’s responsibility to the audience. While clear speech is perceived as a maxim of successful communication, in chatting via computer the standard use of spelling and punctuation is assigned less importance. Though the mere message and nicknames differ in this respect, the tendency is to neglect the regularities of the writing system to the level that does not impede comprehension. The chat sessions studied are not an exception as far as such simplification, for the sake of rapidity, is concerned. The emotions revealed by facial expressions have a different realization in CM chat. Generally, the way to signal the emotion felt is that of employing exaggerated punctuation and emoticons. In the focal chat, a specific situation can be observed, and that is when the moderator literally types for the guest and supplements the information with a comment on the accompanying facial reaction, e.g. ^[34/57]**rain_sprite**: -=grins=- What are your plans for the future?
^[38/39]**Kane_Hodder**: As long as I can walk and HACK AND STALK AND KILL! {laughs}. Such usage evidences the responsibility to deliver a message that can be appropriately interpreted in the absence of vocal communication, kinesics, proxemics and other factors assisting in the understanding of a message.

The focal discourse, “an interviewing synchronous chat”, exhibits features of both speech and writing and can be characterized as subjective and informal/colloquial. The choice of lexis is made on the neutral-informal-colloquial scale; grammar precision ranges from standard to slightly careless. Vocality, facial expressions, gestures, body

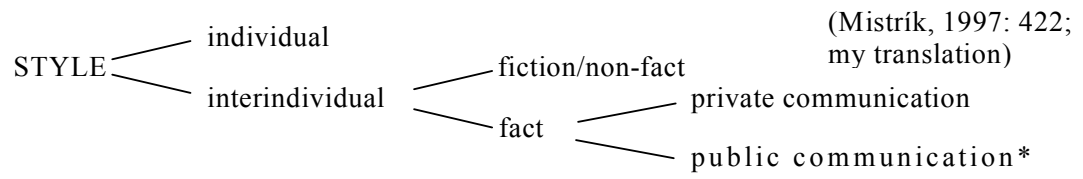
posture, or proxemics is substituted by a vast array of symbols, acronyms, or other graphic conventions that help understand the communicated message. Public, synchronous chatgroups on the Net offer a multiparty interaction and connect people of different ages, interests or intentions. The computer-mediated communication by virtue of its distinctiveness has established a noteworthy position in the communications system. The possibilities it offers merit linguistic contemplation, and the language material that is in its possession forms an invaluable evidence of language dynamics and consequently triggers research interests.

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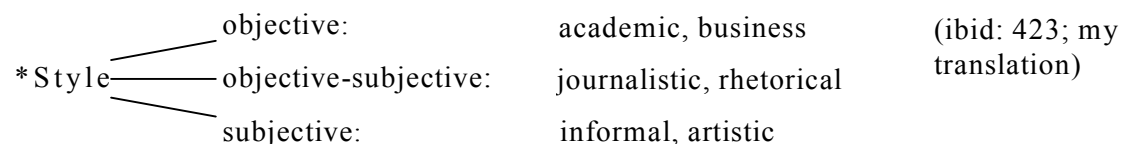
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Notes

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The following list presents the chat sessions as they appeared in the Archives of the Lycos website. They are ordered according to the date of issue; the period concerned is from Jan 14, 2000 to March 26, 2003. The numbering is my addition for the purposes of reference.

Arts and Entertainment

- 1/ Prom Hair and Beauty Tips - Is it the year of the updo? Check it out here - from YM magazine! (3/26/2003)
- 2/ Lucy Woodward - Catch a rising star! Check out what this new singer is ready for! (3/25/2003)
- 3/ Prom Fashion Tips - Once again, prepping for the biggest night of the year with YM magazine! (3/19/2003)
- 4/ James Patterson - Meet best-selling author, James Patterson! (03/20/2003)
- 5/ O-TOWN - Chat with the HOT band, O-TOWN (01/15/2003)
- 6/ Daniel Quinn - Chat with the author of THE HOLY (12/17/2002)
- 7/ Wilmer Valderrama - Meet Fez, off-the-wall star of That 70's Show! (11/18/2002)
- 8/ Laura Pausini - International singing sensation debuts first english album! (10/29/2002)
- 9/ Fat Joe - Rapper and Hip Hop star chat about his newest release! (10/29/2002)
- 10/ Leigh Nash - Meet the lead singer for Sixpence None the Richer! (10/28/2002)
- 11/ Chevelle - Meet Sam, Pete, and Joe, the Loeffler brothers and band, Chevelle! (10/22/2002)
- 12/ Andrew Davoli - Does he have the scoop about his role on the Soprano's? (10/09/2002)
- 13/ Hunks of The WB - Chris Pratt, Pablo Santos, Steve Howey, and Wesley Jonathan! (10/09/2002)
- 14/ Barry Pepper - What does this 'Knockaround Guy' have to say? Check it out! (10/08/2002)
- 15/ Amanda Bynes - What's up with Amanda? Follow the star of What I Like About You. (10/02/2002)
- 16/ Kevin Welch - Singer, songwriter and a country music classic! (09/24/2002)
- 17/ American Idol - Who deserved to win? Fans face off during the exciting AI finale. (09/04/2002)
- 18/ Duncan Sheik - On the path to enlightenment, from Phantom Moon to Daylight. (08/29/2002)
- 19/ William Gazecki - Explore the mystery of crop circles with an expert in the field. (08/23/2002)
- 20/ Sasha - What's next for the superstar DJ? Hear about his new album and more! (08/20/2002)
- 21/ Suzane Northrop - Get afterlife advice from an expert on psychic phenomena! (08/16/2002)
- 22/ Tom Lenk - "Andrew" from Buffy the Vampire Slayer reveals his "obsession." (08/12/2002)
- 23/ LMNT - You have the CD. Now find out how to bid on the band's pants. (07/24/2002)
- 24/ Halloween Resurrection - Rick Rosenthal & Thomas Nicholes battle Michael Myers! (07/15/2002)
- 25/ Wayne Dyer - Learn how to find the spiritual path to success and inner peace. (07/10/2002)
- 26/ Silverchair - Live from down under, the latest on Diorama and Daniel's recovery. (06/18/2002)
- 27/ Nappy Roots - Kentucky-based rappers serve up Watermelon, Chicken & Gritz. (06/05/2002)
- 28/ LMNT - Bryan, Mike, Jonas, and Ikaika, have the word on their debut CD. (05/29/2002)
- 29/ Brandy - Staying true to the music & passion that made her new album possible. (05/23/2002)
- 30/ Stargate SG-1 - Explore season 6 with Richard D. Anderson & Amanda Tapping. (05/22/2002)
- 31/ Ronnie Marmo - A big screen bad boy from Brooklyn reveals his idea of fun. (05/17/2002)
- 32/ Course of Nature - Hear the inspiration for the SUPERKALA hit Caught in the Sun. (05/15/2002)
- 33/ Michelle Williams - A Destiny's Child "Survivor" goes back to her gospel roots. (05/15/2002)
- 34/ Vincent Kartheiser - "Connor" tells us what it's like joining the Angel cast. (05/13/2002)
- 35/ Mushroomhead - The masked rockers check in before joining the Ozzfest tour. (05/09/2002)
- 36/ Flaw - The band chats about their major label debut Through the Eyes. (5/01/2002)
- 37/ Prom Fashion 2 - More prom do's and don'ts from YM magazine! (4/30/2002)
- 38/ Kane Hodder - Cutting remarks from the legendary horror icon "Jason Voorhees"! (4/24/2002)
- 39/ Prom Fashion Tips - Prepping for the biggest night of the year with YM magazine. (4/24/2002)
- 40/ Chuck Campbell - Starring in Jason X and living to tell the story. (4/22/2002)
- 41/ Tara Reid - Is she a party girl? What about doing nude scenes? Tara tells all. (4/3/2002)
- 42/ Luke Goss - "Nomak" from Blade II tells us what it's like to get "re-vamped." (3/28/2002)

- 43/ Guillermo del Toro - The master of gothic horror talks about directing Blade II. (3/27/2002)
- 44/ Ron Perlman - From starring in Beauty and the Beast to Blade II. Is Hellboy next? (3/22/2002)
- 45/ Brad Wright - Will Michael Shanks return to Stargate SG-1? Brad has the answer. (2/28/2002)
- 46/ Pam Spurr - The key to unlocking the meaning behind your craziest dreams. (2/27/2002)
- 47/ Boston Public - See what the experts had to say about a controversial episode of BP. (2/25/2002)
- 48/ Craig Hamilton-Parker - Is there an afterlife? Will your ATM card still work? (2/13/2002)
- 49/ Kabbalah - What is Kabbalah & why do Madonna, JayZ, and Deepak Chopra follow it? (2/5/2002)
- 50/ Nickel Creek - A special acoustic session with Sara, Cris, and Sean. (1/29/2002)
- 51/ Dokken - Hard rock heroes reveal what really happens on the tour bus. (1/28/2002)
- 52/ Kelly Goldsmith - She survived Africa, but will she take on Playboy? (1/23/2002)
- 53/ Stephanie Romanov - Angel's "Lilah Morgan" on love, vampires, lingerie shopping. (1/23/2002)
- 54/ John Gray - The "Men are from Mars" author has tips for the workplace. (1/8/2002)
- 55/ Dream Analyst - Stephanie talks about nightmares and other odd dreams. (12/20/2001)
- 56/ Francesco Galasso - Party like a star! YM presents a hairstylist to the stars! (12/19/2001)
- 57/ Dream Analyst - What do your dreams mean? You will be shocked. Come Find out! (11/30/2001)
- 58/ Daniel Quinn - The author of "Ishmael" has new theories on human evolution. (11/21/2001)
- 59/ Leonard Maltin - Famous movie critic talks about Harry Potter, LOTR, and more. (11/21/2001)
- 60/ Ellen Ladowsky - The co-host of the new dating show Rendez-View speaks out. (11/19/2001)
- 61/ Todd Newton - Former Coming Attractions host has a new gig called Hot Ticket. (11/15/2001)
- 62/ David Lascher - Actor from Sabrina, The Teenage Witch talks about the show. (11/15/2001)
- 63/ Jennifer Blanc - "Kendra" from TV's Dark Angel tells us stories from the set. (11/13/2001)
- 64/ J.C. MacKenzie - "Normal" from TV's Dark Angel talks about the 2nd season. (11/12/2001)
- 65/ Greg Proops - Comedian from Whose Line Is It Anyway? makes us laugh. (10/31/2001)
- 66/ Peter Straub - The master horror storyteller talks about his new book Black House. (10/25/2001)
- 67/ Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes - Lisa talks about life in TLC and her first solo CD, Supernova. (10/17/2001)
- 68/ Nicholas Evans - The best selling author chats about The Horse Whisperer. (10/2/2001)
- 69/ Carnie Wilson - Carnie chats about her new book and dealing with obesity. (9/26/2001)
- 70/ Tyrone Edmond - Male super model talks about life in front of the camera. (9/20/2001)
- 71/ Ben Folds - Ben chats about his new solo CD, Rockin' the Suburbs. (9/18/2001)
- 72/ Toby Keith - Toby chats about his new CD, Pull My Chain. (9/4/2001)
- 73/ Cathryn Michon - Chats about her best-selling book, The Grrl Genius Guide to Life. (8/27/2001)
- 74/ Eartha Kitt - Chat with the International star of theater, music and film. (8/21/2001)
- 75/ Dominic Chianese - Actor from The Sopranos chats about the show and his debut CD, Hits (8/27/2001)
- 76/ Jeremy Piven - Actor from Rush Hour II chats about his several TV and movie roles. (8/9/2001)
- 77/ Peter Guralnick - Acclaimed Elvis biographer celebrates Elvis: Live in Las Vegas. (7/19/2001)
- 78/ Warren Cuccurullo - Duran Duran guitarist tells about Zappa, Missing Persons. (7/16/2001)
- 79/ Michael DeLorenzo - Star of Resurrection Boulevard & New York Undercover. (6/20/2001)
- 80/ The Saturn Awards - Live from the award ceremony honoring science fiction, fantasy, and horror! Celebrity chatters include Julie Benz (Angel), Michelle Trachtenberg (Buffy the Vampire Slayer), Jennifer Blanc (Dark Angel), Bryan Singer (X-Men), and many more! (6/12/2001)
- 81/ Colleen Haskell - The Survivor castaway chats about her film debut in The Animal. (6/12/2001)
- 82/ Rob Schneider - Former SNL funnyman chats up his latest movie, The Animal. (5/31/2001)
- 83/ Don McLean - Singer-songwriter of "American Pie" fame. (5/29/2001)
- 84/ Rob Brezsny - Author of The Televisionary Oracle on meeting women the PC way. (5/24/2001)
- 85/ Shawn McCarthy - Author of e-business guide, The Art of .COMbat. (5/24/2001)
- 86/ R.A. Salvatore - Author of Star Wars®: New Jedi Order series, Vector Prime. (5/23/2001)
- 87/ Terry Brooks - Author of the The Phantom Menace book. (5/23/2001)
- 88/ Greg Bear - Author of the novel Star Wars: Rogue Planet. (5/23/2001)
- 89/ Sherrie Austin - The country star chats about her new CD, Followin a Feelin'. (5/22/2001)
- 90/ Corbin Bernsen - Actor from L.A. Law and Major League. (5/21/2001)
- 91/ Michael Reaves - Author of the Star Wars novel, Darth Maul: Shadow Hunter. (5/15/2001)
- 92/ Dean Haglund - Member of the conspiracy-tracking trio, The Lone Gunmen. (5/10/2001)
- 93/ Evan Dorkin - Creator of Milk & Cheese, and writer for Space Ghost: Coast to Coast. (5/9/2001)
- 94/ Kel Gleason - Meet Kel from Survivor II! (5/4/2001)
- 95/ Angel Sheridan - A drag queen diva celebrates her fabulous new CD, Dancing Queens. (5/3/2001)

- 96/ Gigi Eldgley - Actress in the Sci-Fi series Farscape. (5/3/2001)
- 97/ Ricky Manning - Writer/Producer for the Sci-Fi series Farscape. (5/1/2001)
- 98/ Anthony Simcoe - Actor in the Sci-Fi series Farscape. (5/1/2001)
- 99/ School Crisis - Stephen E. Brock, author of Preparing for Crises in the Schools. (4/27/2001)
- 100/ The Outer Limits - Pen Densham and Mark Stern, executive producers of the award-winning anthology series. (4/25/2001)
- 101/ Krystal - The pop diva chimes in to chat about her new CD. (4/24/2001)
- 102/ Peter Lohmeyer - The actor talks about his role in Hacerse el Sueco. (4/17/2001)
- 103/ Tracy Hogg - Author of Secrets of the Baby Whisperer. (4/16/2001)
- 104/ Michael Shermer - Author of Why People Believe Weird Things. (4/13/2001)
- 105/ Sean Gibbon - Author of Run Like an Antelope: On the Road with Phish. (4/3/2001)
- 106/ The Pierces - Epic Record's hot musical duet. (4/3/2001)
- 107/ Reality TV - Andy Dehnart has the latest news and gossip. (3/29/2001)
- 108/ John Gray - Author of Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus. (3/27/2001)
- 109/ Movie Madness - Thomas Chau has movie news and gossip. (3/22/2001)
- 110/ Robert Rodriguez - The filmmaker chats about his new movie, Spy Kids. (3/22/2001)
- 111/ Reality TV - Andy Dehnart has the latest news and gossip. (3/21/2001)
- 112/ Blessid Union of Souls - The band celebrates its new release, The Singles. (3/14/2001)
- 113/ The Pierces - Epic Record's hot musical duet (3/7/2001)
- 114/ Mudvayne - Musical "shock therapists" discuss debut release L.D. 50 (3/2/2001)
- 115/ Glenn Close - Award-winning actress, live from Mardi Gras (2/23/2001)
- 116/ Anne Rice - Author of best-selling "Vampire Chronicles" series (2/23/2001)
- 117/ Tom Loreto - Chief Investigator & Special Agent on crime (2/8/2001)
- 118/ Rob Harris - Go behind the scenes of the movie Hannibal (2/6/2001)
- 119/ Melissa George - Australian actress from The Limey and Sugar & Spice (1/25/2001)
- 120/ Alexandra Holden - Actress from Drop Dead Gorgeous and Sugar & Spice (1/25/2001)
- 121/ Rachel Blanchard - Actress from Road Trip and Sugar & Spice (1/22/2001)
- 122/ Alabama - Country music's original superstar band (1/15/2001)
- 123/ Eric Levin - Celebrate the '70s! - Tacky trivia with People magazine editor Eric Levin (1/8/2001)
- 124/ Leigh Nash - Lead singer of Grammy-nominated Sixpence None The Richer (12/19/2000)
- 125/ Sin City - Three authors discuss lust, gluttony, and greed (12/19/2000)
- 126/ Christina Aguilera - Grammy Award winning recording artist (12/12/2000)
- 127/ Sex Wars - Jennifer Cole & JD Roth, hosts of the hot new quiz show (12/6/2000)
- 128/ Justin Whalin - TV's Jimmy Olsen, star of movie Dungeon & Dragons (12/4/2000)
- 129/ Darva Conger - Bride from FOX's Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire (11/28/2000)
- 130/ Thora Birch - Star of American Beauty and Dungeons & Dragons (11/28/2000)
- 131/ Model Search - Chat with winner Lycos Model Search 2000 contest (11/27/2000)
- 132/ Valeria Mazza - Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue covergirl (11/27/2000)
- 133/ 3 Doors Down - The band chats about their new release The Better Life (11/20/2000)
- 134/ Fuel - Chats up their hit CD "Something Like Human." (10/26/2000)
- 135/ Richard Dean Anderson - Producer/Star of Showtime's "Stargate SG-1" (10/23/2000)
- 136/ Stan Lee - Comic book mastermind behind Spiderman, X-Men and more (10/23/2000)
- 137/ Michael Rapaport - Chats about his new movie "Bamboozled" (10/17/2000)
- 138/ Janusz Kaminski - Academy Award winner Director of "Lost Souls" (10/16/2000)
- 139/ Morty Lefkoe - Author of "Re-create Your Life" (10/9/2000)
- 140/ Mandy Moore - Chats about her newest album "Walk Me Home" (10/5/2000)
- 141/ Nine Days - Chats about their new CD "The Madding Crowd" (9/27/2000)
- 142/ Ruff Endz - Chats about their new CD "Love Crimes" (9/26/2000)
- 143/ Good Charlotte - Chats about their new CD (9/25/2000)
- 144/ Incubus - The band chatted about their new CD "When Incubus Attacks" (8/29/2000)
- 145/ Ed McMahon - Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon 2000 (8/29/2000)
- 146/ Traci Bingham - Actress, model - Lifeguard "Jordan Tate" from TV's Baywatch (8/16/2000)
- 147/ Anna Faris - Star of "Scary Movie" (8/14/2000)
- 148/ Dirk Been - Contestant/castaway from TV's Survivorseries (8/10/2000)
- 149/ Vanessa Angel - British-born actress, star of TV's Weird Science (8/3/2000)
- 150/ Travis - British rock band (7/18/2000)

- 151/ Mary Mary - Chat about their gospel CD, THANKFUL (7/12/2000)
- 152/ Susan Ward - Star of the movie THE IN-CROWD (7/12/2000)
- 153/ Lori Heuring - Star of the movie THE IN-CROWD (7/10/2000)
- 154/ Matthew Settle - Star of the movie THE IN-CROWD (7/10/2000)
- 155/ DJ Qualls - Star of movie ROAD TRIP (6/29/2000)
- 156/ Michael Madsen - Actor in RESERVOIR DOGS (6/21/2000)
- 157/ Blink 182 - Punk Revival Band (6/16/2000)
- 158/ John Gray - Author of "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" (6/13/2000)
- 159/ Kyle MacLachlan - Agent Cooper of Twin Peaks fame, star of Hamlet (6/1/2000)
- 160/ The Bacon Brothers - Actor Kevin Bacon and his brother Michael (5/25/2000)
- 161/ Jon Abrahams - Chats about his new role in SCARY MOVIE (5/24/2000)
- 162/ Pearl Jam - Popular rock band (5/15/2000)
- 163/ China Jesusita Shavers - Actress on Sabrina the Teenage Witch (1/26/2000)
- 164/ Kerr Smith - Actor who plays Jack in Dawson's Creek (1/19/2000)
- 165/ Soap Opera Celebration - Various stars from daytime soaps (1/14/2000)