

On-line Chatting with People of Public Importance

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The paper deals with the pragmatics of chat communication. The main focus is on the analysis of a sample of chat conversations that took place within the online version of a Czech newspaper Prvo. A referential corpus of chats was obtained from the Czech statutory television broadcast, in particular from the interactive programme series called Hyde Park. Both sources were analysed with respect to features that signify the level of pragmatic norms observation. The gender of the communicants was regarded as an important variable. The main purpose of the research was to state whether communicants tend to ignore pragmatic norms due to the anonymous environment of chat.

Key words: *chat, disinhibition, gender, politeness norms*

1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives

This paper presents the results of a linguistic analysis focussing on the specific shape of communication taking place on chats. Two different sources are to be analysed with respect to the same set of criteria. This will enable me to make a comparison between the communication behaviour with respect to the format of the media. It is interesting to follow the influence of the communication channel on the form and content of the interaction. The (preliminary) comparison will be based on an interaction of one guest who has participated in both formats. I will follow the form as well as the meaning conveyed in the prompts provided for the guest. The differences on the level of the communication format will be accounted for.

1.2 Terminology used throughout the paper

Throughout the paper, the term *prompt* is used for all kinds of communicative forms addressed to the guests and seeking their reaction either phatic or informative. The decision to use a *prompt* instead of a question was motivated by the fact that the communicants do not always stick to seeking information only, but they mention their own attitude and start a brief polemic, they produce more than a question. Moreover some *prompts* are not formally questions or they are not questions at all and still they seek a reaction of the guest.

2 Theoretical background

Language as used in communication is generally regarded as a type of behaviour such that is cooperative. As Grice (1975, 48) states, the speaker and the hearer observe a common goal. It is true that the common goal may be only too general a notion encompassing contradictory goals of each communicant. Both speaker and hearer

assume that the other party behaves in a cooperative way. The principle of cooperation is further described by means of four maxims, quality, quantity, manner and relation (Grice 1975, 47). These maxims may sometimes collide with the principles of pragmatics, such as the principle that advises communicants to be polite and friendly.

Given that cooperation results in effective communication, it is extremely important for the speaker-hearer-relationship that the Rules of Pragmatic Competence (Lakoff 1973, 296) be observed. The speaker is bound to be clear and polite. Being polite means that the speaker should, firstly, refrain from imposing the hearer, secondly, give the hearer an opportunity to choose his own reaction. Thirdly, the speaker should be contributing to a feel-good atmosphere. The first two rules correspond to negative politeness, since they observe the needs of the hearer's negative face. The third rule reflects the needs of the hearer's positive face as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987, 61). Following Goffman's (1967) concept of face, Brown-Levinson state that each communicant as a rational human being has a face to protect and fight for in communication. A face comprises both a positive face, i.e. how a person wishes to be seen and treated, and a negative face, i.e. referring to what a person wishes not to experience (1987, 59). Normally, due to the fact that communication is a form of cooperation, it is useful for the communicants to protect their partners face as well.

I will mainly focus on violations of formal politeness, i.e. using and misusing the formal conventionalized cues of polite behaviour. These cues as presented in table 1 are used to build up the positive face of the communicant. Specific description of each cue will be given bellow (see part 9).

The definition of impoliteness is a tricky task, Culpeper (2011, 23) defines impoliteness as follows:

Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific context...Situating behaviours are viewed negatively, that is considered impolite, when they conflict with what one expects them to be, wants them to be, or thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, they cause or are presumed to cause offense.

Bellow I will explore whether the anonymity of chat communication changes the subjective and interactional importance of the politeness rules.

3 Specific features of chat communication

Differences in communication habits are mostly caused by specific features of the communication channels used when speaking and writing, respectively. The format of a chat has inspired me to explore the communication norms applied for chatting, since this means of contact maintenance often represents a combination of written and spoken features both on the level of form and content. To elaborate on this, it will be necessary to consider the main possible reasons for people using chat as a means of communication. Within this paper, the term *chat* refers to means of communication in a specific environment called rooms and using internet connection. I regard chat a specific instance of synchronous dialogical communication (Jandová 2010, 361). First, the synchrony of the communication is a very important feature with respect to my sample because the time ascribed to the interaction is fixed institutionally, but even for the regular phatic chats it is inevitable for the communicants to be connected to the internet at the same time to be able to produce fluent interaction.

Second, another, nonetheless important, feature of chats is the social symmetry of the communication, or the symmetry of the communicants' position. The symmetry, however, is not a compulsory trait; it is sometimes rather assumed, due to the anonymity of communication which masks the social distance between communicants. Chats can be used for a symmetrical communication; i.e. communication among partners who are equal in their status, they have equal rights and they are equally protected by the communication environment; their real-life social status is usually alike. This is the case of virtual friends using chat to keep in touch, to kill time in virtual social interaction or to establish new anonymous contacts.

Anonymity of communication plays a crucial role in the interaction. Psychologists speak of *disinhibited environment* (Šmahel 2003, 15) which enables people to forget their social anxiety, set themselves free from their physical bodies and in extreme cases create a new virtual identity tailor-made to the communicant's wishes. However, the material analysed for the purpose of the paper is substantially different.

It is commonly stated that chat users are involved in multiple communication at the same time. I regard this as an important feature of chat communication and at the same time as an important proof that regular chat communication is of a phatic nature.

4 Working hypotheses

There were several hypotheses about the shape of chat communication. First of all, people use chat to communicate anonymously and to express ideas that they would not (always) express face-to-face.

Secondly, people ignore politeness cues because they are not identified with their civic selves.

Thirdly, people will try to get personal information about the guests they question. However, some people try to enhance their own self-importance by using personal information and getting rid of the anonymous masque of the chatters.

5 The material analysed

The above mentioned corpora consisted of 50 chat communications that may be further subdivided into two uneven groups. The main group contained 40 chats that took place within the virtual space provided by an online newspaper *Novinky.cz*. The referential corpus consisted of 10 chats that were broadcasted within the format of *Hyde Park*, an interactive program provided by the news station of the Czech statutory television ČT 24.

There were substantial differences between the corpora as far as their form is concerned. The *Novinky.cz* corpus was solely a written source, providing interaction between the guests and the newspaper followers for a specific time during workdays. Only the length of the contact was fixed for an hour. Both the specific day and the time during the day were variables, which may have influenced the load of the *prompts* sent to the guest.

Hyde Park, as already mentioned, is an interactive source offering various ways for its audience to get into contact with the guest. The audience can either use primarily written or primarily spoken channels. Only the formals were paid attention to. The means of written contact included Facebook discussion page, Twitter discussion page,

SMS, email, and a chat room. As for the frequency of usage of individual means it is important to say that Twitter played a minor part probably due to the fact that Facebook, the competing social network, is far more popular. Chat was used quite often, as it is a free internet means of connection and it offers a chance to create a situation-specific nickname. This might have motivated some communicants to prefer chat to Facebook. The SMS *prompts* are as usually paid for and; in addition to this disadvantage, the extent of the *prompt* is very limited.

The spoken means of contact establishment included Skype video telephone and telephone. I have excluded these from the analysis because the condition of at least half anonymity of the communicants is not fulfilled. These means establish both visual and aural contact for communicants using Skype with a web camera and at least aural contact for those using a telephone. Aural contact reveals a lot about the communicant's gender, age and current state of mind which gives the guest a relevant set of information to adjust his or her reaction to. Another reason for excluding the fully spoken *prompts* is their clearly spoken mode as such because no clash of communication mode and content is present in the spoken *prompts*. Creating both corpora, I have exploited archival instances of the chats that were first published in 2010. I have selected this year because an important format change took place in Hyde Park, the audience was first given an opportunity to vote for questions they liked or were interested in hearing the answers to. I decided to involve this factor in the analysis to determine whether the notion of being monitored and assessed influences the degree of politeness applied by the speakers towards the guests as well as the other way round.

Let us start with the larger and more salient corpus, *Novinky.cz*. The corpus represented a one-year production. In the case of Hyde Park I have decided to choose individual instances by the guests, paying attention to the ratio of men and women which had to be in relative correspondence. In exact numbers the ratio of women to men was stated by the *Novinky.cz* corpus to be 1:4. The correspondence of gender ratio is important from the viewpoint of the gender-bound research question.

The most important feature differentiating the material from chats in the traditional sense was the partial violation of the anonymity condition. The fact that the guests were so called VIP made an important pragmatic difference. As a result there were two main interactional limitations. First, the temporal dimension of communication was not random, on the contrary, the time of contact was appointed as well as its duration which was limited to an hour for *Novinky.cz* and to on average 50 minutes for *Hyde Park*.

Second, the fact that the guest was a generally known person imposes some limits to interactional norms.

6 Pragmatic characteristics of the material analysed

The communication distance is maintained at least as far as addressing is concerned; in most cases the guest is addressed with 2nd person plural i.e. the polite form.

There are cases on both parts when the communicants care to express special reverence to their communication partner. Sometimes this is helped by the communication environment as for example in the case of a female politician who uses introductory greetings and parting greetings for every single prompt she reacts to.

On the part of the prompt providers, there are some cases when the anonymous communicants get rid of their anonymity and sign their prompts. There are several levels of signatures, first name signature (*Jiří; Alena, Šárka*); surname signature (*O. Kovařík, J.*

Čadová) and full name signature (*Jan Klásek, Radim Novák, Radek Složil, Martin Chvátal*). First name signature may co-occur with localization, (*Lubomír P., Orlová Lutyně.*) or the communicant may wish to sign his/her contribution e. g. *čtenář z Brna* ‘a reader from Brno.’ This may follow the tradition of *Readers Letters* in printed magazines and newspapers which were usually published under this type of a (semi-anonymous) signature.

From the viewpoint of the communication content it may be the case especially for the politicians who are ascribed general responsibility for the political and economical development of the state, that the content of the chat may easily be foreseen and that it will reflect current issues. For the other two groups of guests, the experts in some field of science and the celebrities proper, it holds true that the topics are to some extent predictable but the proportion of topical issues depends on individual combinations of communicants.

The fact that chat is used as a means of phatic communication enlarges the distance between chatting and a standardised debate. Nevertheless, the communicants usually come up with real questions and demand real answers. There are of course exceptions to this rule: in several minor cases the prompts had an only one purpose, to express support either directly or indirectly. Example (1) not only expresses thanks and thus support, but also uses several grammatical means showing reverence for the guest.

- (1) *Dobry den pane Sokole, chci Vám poděkovat za Vaši profesionální práci, která pomůže v nekonečném boji této republice. S pozdravem Policista, který byl v Janově 17. 11. 2008*

Good day Mr.-VOC.SG.MASC. Sokol-VOC.SG. MASC. I want to thank you-POLITE.DAT. behind your professional work which will help in the never ending fight to this republic. With greeting A policeman who was in Janov on November 17 2008

‘Good morning, Mr. Sokol, I want to thank you for your professional work which will help this republic in the never ending fight. With best regards, a policeman who was in Janov on November 17 2008.’

Positive face can also be supported indirectly. In the following example the appreciation is implicated by a concern for the guest’s health and good mood; such as in:

- (2) *Jen Vám chci popřát hodně zdraví a hezký den!!! (martin.kentaur)*

Only you-POLITE.DAT want wish a.lot.of health and nice day!!!

‘I only want to wish you good health and a nice day!!!’

It would not be easy to post such contributions at Hyde Park because the program is bound to support content-based discussion and as a result all contributions must be topic relevant. This is why the personal experience of the prompt providers is often mentioned as a reason to ask the question that follows. (*Mám zkušenost s postiženým dítětem a může se to lehce stát.* ‘I have my own experience with a handicapped child, this can happen easily.’) The purpose of such questions is to verify the ideas of the person who provides the prompt.

- (3) *Nebojíte se,* *žě se na vás*
 Be.afraid-NEG.2.POLITE.PRES. that on you-POLITE.ACC
Natálka moc fixuje a pak vy budete jejím otrokem?
 Natalka much fixes and you-NOM.POLITE will.be her slave.
 ‘Aren’t you afraid, that Natalka will get too fixed on you and you will become her slave?’

Strictly speaking, such a prompt does not give the guest the freedom of choice because it presumes that there is a reason to be afraid, but the prompt uses several politeness cues. It is justifiable to conclude that its purpose was to express concern about the future of a little child, rather than provoke fear in Natalia’s mother.

With respect to the environment that should be *disinhibited*, it is surprising that there were only a few purely rude contributions. This may be caused by the activity of the chat moderators as well as by the fact that the media are made responsible for any violations of the law.

7 Pragmatic features of the contact

There is no (direct) aural and/or visual contact between the communicants, they are not physically present. The absence of physical contact and the impossibility to use the (primary) auditory signal makes it necessary to substitute a set of visual cues such as using capital letters for emphasis or even shouting.

- (4) *PANE PAROUBEK TAK CO UDELA TE*
 Mister-VOC.SG Paroubek-NOM.SG so what you do-2.POLITE.FUT
PRO PODNIKATELE (marzipo)
 for businessmen?
 ‘So what are you going to do for businessmen, Mr. Paroubek?’

The combination of vocative and nominative forms in the address formula usually shows lack of respect. The word *tak* (so) is a redundant particle which signifies lessened distance between the speakers. It sounds disrespectful, when used to address a stranger.

A more natural (emotionally neutral) emphasis is substituted by capital letters:

- (5) *Kdy začnete splácet dluh Č.R.? (DLUH, nikoliv úroky dluhu)*
 ‘When are you going to pay off the debt of the Czech Republic? (the DEBT not interests of the debt)’

The capital letters convention does not apply for Hyde Park because all prompts are written in capitals for the sake of their legibility.

Emotions are typically expressed by means of partly conventionalized icons also known as emoticons. The basic emotion symbols for happiness and sadness are generally known and are used conventionally across ages and social groups. This can be proved by the fact that some of the users of *Novinky.cz* chat have openly admitted that they are retired, or at least older than in their teens and twenties. Despite this, emoticons are used and interpreted by both the anonymous users and the guests without any inconvenience. In case emoticons are used by the guests, they signify lessened social distance or an intention to make ones words sound less serious. This is a classical example of a situation

when the guests invited to answer questions step out of their conventionalized role ascribed to them by their social status. The politicians may choose to use emotionally coloured language to indicate that they are aware of the seriousness of the situation discussed. In contrast with politically correct language that is expected, the guests may choose a remarkably colloquial language, to express that their disagreement with the current situation is as real as the disagreement expressed by the prompt provider.

The spontaneity of communication ensures an uncontrolled source of opinions that are presented to the guest in an unamended form. This is true for both analysed sources. However, there is an important difference in the extent of grammatical aid needed for successful interpretation of the prompts of *Hyde Park* in comparison with *Novinky.cz*. The difference may be caused by various factors mostly external to the language system. First, it is a question of the speed of communication which prevents people from proofreading their prompts. Second, the space for a prompt is limited for *Hyde Park* to 230 characters, this seems to force communicants to use condensed structures which are more difficult to correct. Some influence may even be ascribed to the fact that there is a moderator in the studio.¹ An illustrative example of how communication speed clashes with the logical structure of the message, as we would expect it on the basis of extra linguistic knowledge:

- (6) *Pomohlo by odebrání přídaveků rodičům,*
 Help-3.PRES.NEUTR.COND. confiscation of allowances parents-DAT.PL
kteřé neposílají děti do školy?
 who-ACC.PL. send-NEG.3.PL.PRES. children-NOM.PL. to school.
 ‘Would it help if social allowances were confiscated to parents whom the children do not send to school?’

Concerning social norms in the broadest sense, it is necessary to keep in mind the following. The use of vulgarisms is prohibited and the communicants are not allowed to violate the democratic principles of our society, that is to express open support to extremism, to use generalizations expressing depreciation of a group of fellow citizens. There is an example of brief rules posted on the Facebook page of *Hyde Park*:

Vulgar contributions as well as, flaming, spam and off- topic contributions will be erased. They do not respect the terms and conditions that are obligatory for registered users of the services provided by Facebook.com., accepted by all users prior to registration. We care for a critical yet correct debate. Thank you for your kind understanding. (<http://www.facebook.com/hydeparkct24>)

Psychologists argue that the way we communicate changes depending on the environment we are in. It is also true, that people tend to regard the internet as an environment more anonymous than it really is (Šmahel 2003, 18.)

¹ One of the functions of a moderator in any programme is to maintain interaction between communication partners.

However, there is a growing tendency to replace this form by its incongruent counterpart (see example 4.)

Nominative is, in such contexts, generally considered a lower standard or an impolite, careless means. Its high occurrence may be explained by the fact that some proper names contain consonant clusters that make users dubious about appropriate endings for the prescribed vocative case; they may wish to substitute nominative form where no ending is required.

There is yet another issue to be discussed in connection with addressing the difference between 2nd person singular and plural. Singular is expected for situations when the distance between the communicants is comparatively smaller. The distance can be determined by the length of acquaintance or it can be diminished artificially by the notion of small age gaps, this may be the reason why some communicants tend to get on first name terms with guests who are of similar age or perhaps perceived as young for the role they play in politics. The second mentioned option may be illustrated by an interaction with Kristýna Kočí (in her 30s) a program manager of a new born political party. Her youth is explicitly mentioned in the prompt an excerpt of which is presented under (9).

- (9) *zdravím* *vás* *Kristýnko,*
 Greet-1.SG.PRES. You-ACC.POLITE. Christine-VOC.DIM
můžete *mě říct, co vás*
 can-2.POLITE.PRES. I.DAT tell what you-ACC.POLITE
přivedlo *do politiky? (J.u.r.i.n.a.c)*
 lead-3.PAST to politics?
 ‘My greetings to you Kristýnka, can you tell me what brought you into politics?’

10 Politeness cues

The analysis focused on the conventionalized cues of politeness used in dialogical interaction. I decided to include the conventionalized cues because they are easy to follow and interpret within written versions of a dialogue. This gives the speaker the opportunity to be successfully impolite whenever any of the following cues is omitted in face-to face communication. However, none of the guests refuses to engage in communication or applies any sanctions on the grounds that politeness cues were not used.

There are of course other means of impoliteness, for instance irony, but since the interpretation of irony depends on intonation, the meaning can easily be lost in indirect contact either written as it is the case for *Novinky.cz* or in case the contact is reconstructed by some other speaker such as the moderator in *Hyde Park*.

The three politeness cues analysed here work within the frame of positive face. This is especially true of greetings, expressing reverence in case they combine with polite plural forms. Where more informal greetings are used, usually in dialogues of teenagers, the form suggest friendliness, acceptance within the group as well as the wish of the greeting communicant to belong to the group of young VIP.

Addresses are generally used to attract the attention of a person we wish to speak to. From this point of view an address is to a certain extent redundant in contexts where the VIP addressee assumes that s/he is the one to answer all prompts. On the other hand, a greeting reveals important information about the social distance of the

communicants. It can also reveal to what extent the person addressed is revered with respect to his/her social position. As some of the examples show some morphologically deviant forms may be interpreted as either depreciative or over-polite.

Expressing thanks is the most complex of the politeness cues listed here. Brown and Levinson say that by expressing thanks the speaker puts himself into the position of someone who is indebted. S/he also slightly imposes the partner to fulfil the speaker's wish and to do what is asked. However, in the examples analysed the thanks were in a way expressed ex-post. There were generally two types of context where thanks were used.

- i) Conventional thanks for answering a prompt: this instance of giving thanks was deprived of its imposing power by the fact that it never was the speaker who was responsible for the fact that a VIP guest participated in a chat. The guest was invited by an institution to take part in an activity that had a purpose and by accepting the invitation he accepted the purpose of the activity as well as the consequences of the purpose,
- ii) ex-post thanks were used to express appreciation of previous behaviour of the VIP guest. Given that the praised behaviour was usually connected with the profession of the guest, it was partly independent of his/ her free will as it became a part of a professional duty. Moreover, the thanks expressed were made anonymous due to the medium of communication and it can thus be perceived to be somewhat less indebteding.

From the viewpoint of the VIP the thanks may impose him or her to sustain the behaviour praised and may thus be threatening their negative face.

Cue	Hyde Park	VIP chat
Greeting	643	24
Address	321	8
Thanks	295	9
Replicas total	1148	121

Table 1: Total number of politeness cues

As for politeness cues in combination: the survey listed only instances that occurred at least 15 times in the corpus. Combinations that were not salient enough to get listed, but which at the same time occurred at least three times in the corpora included in relative order: address+ support, address + leaving , leaving formula + support + thanks , greeting+support+ leaving formula, thanks + leaving formula."

Cues combination	Absolute frequency
Greeting; thanks	132
Greeting; address; thanks	71
Greeting; support	35
Greeting; support; thanks	32
Greeting; address; support	28
Address; thanks	19

Table 2: Politeness cues in combination

11 Gender clues in the language system

Gender is a systematic category in Czech and it may to some extent be considered a language universal. In languages that use gender, it signifies the classification of the animate referents as man, woman or immature creature. In Czech as used in communication, the gender manifests obligatorily on verbs expressing the participants of communication or objects of reference. For the grammatical system of Czech it is true that masculine gender is grammatically unmarked, although it could be marked pragmatically due to extra linguistic knowledge shared by the communicants. Based on the assumption that masculine is an unmarked gender, some guests dare to assume that those of the prompt providers whose nickname is underspecified with respect to gender are men. The guests themselves were (incidentally) men. Some guests, however, have preferred signalling their uncertainty and observe the pragmatics rather than the grammar.

It is important to note that only language bound markers of the gender were taken into account. This was possible due to the fact that Czech is an inflectional language and it provides various morphological markers for the speakers' gender.

The nicknames used by individual users of chat were at this point excluded from gender-oriented analysis, as they can for the first thing be chosen at random, for another thing their morphological motivation may not be clear, or the nicknames may even be borrowed or stolen from their real owners.

Gender cues were obtained from Czech morphology of autonomous parts of speech, mainly of verbs, nouns and to some extent of adjectives. For nouns it was crucial that there are pairs of lexemes in Czech that specify the gender of their referent. There are many binary oppositions such as:

- (10) a. *Mám* *manžela.*
I have-1.SG.PRES. husband-ACC.SG.MASC.
'I have a husband.'

- b. *Mám manželku.*
 I have-1.SG.PRES. wife-ACC.SG.FEM.
 ‘I have a wife.’

Moreover, some nouns typically connote a specific gender, the semantic relation is usually based extra linguistically, and such set of nouns was attested in the chat with a gynaecologist.

In the case of adjectives, syntax had to help us figure the information out, as gender is manifested through agreement, being visible from the contrast of a zero ending(0) for masculine versus positive ending for feminine (and neuter gender).

- (11) a. *váš volič*
 Your-NOM.SG.MASC.POSS.POLITE supporter-NOM.MASC.
 ‘a supporter of yours’
- b. *Vaše fanynka*
 Your-NOM.SG.FEM.POSS.POLITE fan-NOM.FEM.
 ‘a fan of yours’

The predicate as a representative of verbal morphology also manifests agreement with its subject; this unfortunately does not always signify a cue to gender. Gender can only be stated in past tense forms and/or conditional forms, in copular predicates with adjective or a predicative component. A predicative is a special subclass of adjectives that can no longer express adjectival meaning as an attribute. The most commonly used form of a predicative is *rád/ráda* (‘like’) (cf. Komárek 2006, 46-52).

There is yet another obstacle concerning the usage of verbal morphology as gender determiner. The obstacle is rooted in the pronominalization of the subject which has a reference to the speaker. Indexing the speaker by *já / I* deprives us of the opportunity to determine the gender. This is caused by the above mentioned index nature of *já*. The trap lies in the fact that *já* is often not articulated for modesty reasons; (cf. Leech maxims 1983) *Já/I* is thus moved to the position of a semantic participant expressing “with respect to somebody”. It is normal that people say (literally): ‘With respect to me, it would be interesting whether...’ *Zajímalo by mě, zda ...* There is a formal correspondence between *to me.Acc* and *mě.Acc* which requires that in Czech the verb takes the form of 3rd person singular real conditional (ending in *-lo*). Thus the verb manifests agreement with a formal expletive subject that does not show any gender characteristics.

All this and the fact that communicants do not overuse introductory signals of a coming question, can be regarded a reason why I have found less gender specified material than expected. To present some statistical data, there were 290 gender specified stimuli, out of which 86 were female users. However, due to the limitations mentioned above, gender was determined only in about 25% of the replicas.

12 The nicknames

There were three basic types of nicknames attested in both corpora.

Nickname type	Hyde Park	Novinky.cz	Example
Surname revealing	60	430	liborlor;popelkova.eliska;zdenek.novotny15
Anonymous	20	409	7rd; kuky; tajnyagentkgb
Using surname or name	31	307	cic-jita; podzimj

Table 3: Types of nicknames

Nicknames falling into the anonymous class may have no obvious meaning *7rd* or may have a meaning that is pragmatically decoded as impossible for a personal name such as a general label *tajnyagentkgb* (a secret agent of the Soviet communist intelligence service), which is for the first thing too general to be a proper name. Second, such a “name” is also anchored in pragmatics; i.e. this function is usually disapproved by the society. The third example *kuky* may be an accidental nickname, an original hypocoristic, or an allusion to a recent Czech cultural context, given that *Kuky* refers to a teddy-bear character of a modern children’s film by Jan Svěrák.

The difference between the other two groups lies in the fact that the revealing nicknames were always used with an anonymous prompt, unlike the ones using a name or a surname which were at least once used accompanied by the signature.

Nicknames as a class represent an integral part of many modes of colloquial, especially spoken, communication. Throughout the interaction some nicknames arose to signify how other communicants see the special individual properties of a person who has earned a nickname. The fact that nicknames were ascribed to the people wearing them is an important difference in comparison with how nicknames arise in chat. Real-life nicknames are motivated from outside, they are decided about by perceivers of the person being nicknamed, as a result these nicknames resemble the person they signify at least to a certain extent and at least to certain group of communicants. On the other hand, nicknames used on chat represent an internal self-image of the speaker. Other communicants usually do not know how the nickname was born or what specific property, personality trait or feature it refers to. As a result the nicknames in a traditional sense may signify an outstandingly bad or an outstandingly good feature related to their bearer. Chat nicknames scarcely signify a bad trait of their user, but they may refer to a specific attitude to cultural issues or to some features that constitute the social identity of the group the communicants belong to.

We are getting to the fact that nicknames used on chat usually help build up anonymity of the speaker. This is regarded as the main purpose of a nickname used on the internet; however with adult users of this alternative means of communication the situation proved to be somewhat different. The difference may be caused by two competing factors of variable importance. First, the adult users do not need to experiment with their identities and explore themselves in a way people in their teens and early twenties often do. Second, the people providing prompts may be partly aware of the fact that they communicate with a VIP and as a result they may wish to make an

impression of a reliable communication partner, whose prompts are of importance and who deserves a serious answer or reaction. Surprisingly, many people have used nicknames based on their civic identity. Or to put it the other way round, a surprisingly small group of people has made use of the opportunity to stay anonymous. An even smaller group of people has played with the opportunity to become an anonymous communicant. They usually showed their anonymity awareness by using a special nickname such as *prostemejl* ('justanemail'); *user 021*; *mp2*.

There was a noticeable difference with regard to the internal salience of anonymity for the users with respect to their assumed age group. It is true that we do not have exact data about the age of individual communicants; however, we can make several psychologically anchored assumptions. First, the communicants usually ask question concerning issues that are relevant for them personally. Second, if the VIP guest is extremely young or much younger than the average for the sample analyzed, s/he attracts attention of communicants similar in age. Young communicants confirm the definition of chat as more or less phatic communication. They seek contact rather than information. However, they do not hesitate to express strong disagreement with the doings of the guest. They are the only communicants to seriously violate the language taboo prohibition as an instance of politeness norms. This proves that on chat it is easy to lose control and at the same time that it is not perceived necessary to provide rational arguments for one's opinions. The disagreement, the sole purpose of a prompt, is expressed by a very vulgar remark: *Stydte se vy píce*. ('Feel ashamed, you bastards'). It is important to note that there is a vital correlation between the guests' youth and their falling into the group of proper celebrities, i.e. people made famous by their artistic careers. However and interestingly enough, the importance of lower age applies even to politicians who are somehow less revered than their older colleagues. Communicants show less respect to young women in politics; this is proved by the fact that socially-distanced means of address are not used; instead the guest is addressed with 2nd person singular and her first name diminutive. This sounds patronizing which contrasts with the notion that politicians are to be revered persons.

13 Interaction and the media used

The purpose of this section is to exemplify the difference in interaction depending (leaving aside other possible influences) on the media used. First, there is an indisputable influence of the variety of the means of establishing communication contact. It was impossible to state what motivates the audience to use the means they use, but it is true, that in some relations the written contributions were overwhelmed by the spoken ones. This is the case of the pair presented here. The communication will be presented in a form of a set of schemes. Unless obvious, the individual parts of a scheme will be glossed with respect to the pragmatic function and pragmatic meaning they convey.

- (12) Hyde Park with Jana Bobošíková a female-leader of a small liberal political party²
 - a. Greeting; address, Y/ N question seeking permission to use the address. Explicit reason is mentioned for stating the question. The reason based

² For the sake of brevity only generalized models of prompts are used as examples (12) and (13).

on previous statement of the guest on this issue. An emoticon signalling the question is not really meant (.-)) is used in the end of the prompt.

- b. Greeting, quotation to introduce a question, an Y/N question form is used instead of a wh-question. The Y/ N question suggests a tighter spectrum of possible answers. An unfinished speculative question in negative form is used.
 - c. Address, statement of past doings of the guest as a basis for an alternative question.
 - d. Wh- question with no punctuation signals seeking a personal opinion and at the same time providing an opinion of the prompt provider. A series of five statements describing the situation and expressing a negative view of it follows.
 - e. Address, Y/N question seeking a personal opinion.
 - f. Statement presented as a quote of a crucial document, statement expressing objective impossibility to fulfil what the document promises, alternatively hedged wh-question offering an improbable possibility.
 - g. Address, wh-question expressing a proposal of an action leading to a change of the present state to its contrary.
 - h. Greeting, time specified, polite introduction to a question, wh-question, statement, a request to use specific examples as evidence.
 - i. Greeting, introductory part, two interrelated wh-questions, thanks.
 - j. Address, wh-question concerning two different issues; the difference signaled by numbering them.
- (13) Novinky.cz with Jana Bobošíková
- a. Wh- question, epistemic statement relativized by a hearsay put in contrast to a competing hearsay statement. Y/ N question demanding confirmation of the changed attitude.
 - b. Address, speculative irrealis, thanks, leaving signature revealing identity.
 - c. Performative greeting, expressing personal preferences, expressing assumptions about the future and at the same time supporting the personal preferences, asking for the confirmation of the high probability of the mentioned preferences fulfilment, thanks.
 - d. Greeting, address, wh-question, wh-question logically bound to wh-question one; consequence of the first question, personal support based on personal preferences, first name signature in official form in contrast with hypocoristic form in the nick.
 - e. Greeting, speculative, speculative bound wh-question, thanks.
 - f. Greeting, introduction of a question giving specific information. Wh-question, thanks, signature.
 - g. Greeting, address, statement of personal opinion somewhat negative personally explained and developed by inferred expected behaviour of a politician, personal opinion supported by a general negative statement expressing impossibility to succeed using the above mentioned strategy. As a consequence a demand is verbalised trying to get a specific opinion, thanks, leaving formula.
 - h. Greeting, wh-question based on the change of a situation.

- i. Greeting, introductory section prior to alternative Y/N question, expressing personal preference concerning the matter in question, giving support, thanks.
- j. Address probably meant ironically as over-politeness, statement as a context for a wh-question, assumed answer for the question stated, thanks.
- k. Greeting, introduction to a question, two interrelated wh-questions, a general question is followed by a specialised one, full signature.
 - l. Wh-question seeking personal opinion.
- m. Wh-questions seeking an opinion, thanks, signature.
- n. Greeting, statement describing past doings of the communicant and a change of his attitude accompanied by a reason of this change, stating results of this change and future actions as results square (results of the results), negative question seeking the guest's opinion on the described past doings of the mother organization in the view of the previously mentioned effects on the electorate.
- o. Greeting, negative question, a proposal, reason for stating the question based on personal view of reality, leaving formula, signature may serve in this context as a signal of a borrowed nick.
- p. Y/N question.
- q. Address, negative question presuming an answer, the question is internally argued for, following an openly interpretative negative question seeking a guest's opinion concerning the reaction of the electorate.
- r. Greeting, preconditioned wh-question.
- s. Y/N question seeking a personal opinion.
- t. Alternative question about future intentions.
- u. Address, support, introduction to the question, wh-question, an example of the matter at the heart of the wh-question, thanks, first name signature.

14 Conclusions

Due to the fact that the position of communicants is rather asymmetrical, we observe some specific features of the analysed chats, they are rather informative in comparison with time killing chats of purely phatic functions. In a broader sense, it may be said that this subtype of chat shares some content features with discussion group format. However, the users can only estimate the topics discussed on the basis of extra-linguistic knowledge. The choice of topics reflects current issues, thus they cannot be stated beforehand. The set of communicants who provide their prompts for one VIP guest is too heterogeneous for a discussion group to be established. The degree of formal relations between the communicants also varies on the basis of their mutual social position rather than as a result of a set of rules. The guests try to support their image of a public person, especially if they are older and belong to some influential class of people (for instance, the politicians stick to their role answering questions, they do not express personal opinion, instead they support the institutional opinion of their mother organization)³. The official position of the VIP guest is sometimes ridiculed, see the irony

³ See Svobodová (2011) for details.

in (12f), (13g), (13j). It is also important for the VIP, especially politicians, who rely on their public image, to build their careers, to care for the positive face of their audience. I assume that, for example, a signature and a greeting used in the end of every single response may be a substantial help in this task. The addressees would feel valued by a person of a higher social status.

As far as the media is concerned, the quicker the communication is, the more omitted the language gets and the more serious obstacles arise to mutual understanding. The speed of communication counteracts most tendencies of the speakers to take formulation time using introductory signals for a coming question. Consequently, the informativity is to a certain extent lessened, some time and space are “wasted”. On the other hand, with some people for whom the speed of interaction proves extremely important the logic of language that reflects the real world situations is not observed. Consequently, some of the prompts do not make sense, i.e. do not reflect the reality; some show that the rules of basic grammar get sacrificed to the speed of communication.

As for the gender indices, though in spoken discourse it is mainly at the opening point of communication that gender specific language cues get involved, in chat communication the gender tends to stay hidden because some of the prompts take a form which does not manifest it. The grammatical gender being neutral, the statement gets objectivised. It may not be a merely coincidence that these objectivised introductions to a prompt are usually expressed by verbs of intellectual value (*to interest sb*), on the other hand, introductions that show gender of their authors also show emotional involvement (*like, love, want to know*). As a result there are quite few gender specific replicas to draw general conclusions. It is true that both men and women ignore politeness cues. However, it is not always the case that an omission has a relevant value as information.

It is even the case that communicants participating in *Hyde Park* did not significantly change their habits concerning the usage of politeness cues after the Facebook fans were allowed to vote for prompts to be answered by the VIP.

From the viewpoint of the interaction the chats are specified with respect to turn taking. The prompt providers cannot be sure that they will be given more than one chance to participate in the communication. As a consequence the communicants tend to express multiple prompts. The turn taking mechanism also influences the shape of a debate, as the prompt providers do not wait for the guests expressing their opinion, instead they say as much to the matter discussed as possible, giving the guests important cues which can help them shape the reactions to suit the prompt providers, and consequently build up an appropriate image.

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