

# The Third Medium:

Sociolinguistics and Chat Rooms

Julia Kathleen Balfour  
Parsons School of Design  
Design and Technology: 2002-2004  
Professors: Mark Stafford & Sheridan Hay  
Concentration: Multi-media  
Website: [a.parsons.edu/~julia](http://a.parsons.edu/~julia)

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**Abstract:**

For my thesis, I would like to develop an online chat room that allows the users the ability to define and develop their community language. This project will have an equal emphasis on the social interactions of the chat room and the development and destruction of the community's language. User's will work within what David Crystal calls the "third medium"<sup>1</sup>, computer mediated communications; a linguistic hybrid of writing and speaking which is popularly referred to as Netspeak. In the spirit of the Algonquin Round Table, the target audience will be writers, playwrights, artists, comedians, and poets who are interested in exploring this experimental language landscape and competing for accolades. It is important that the audience possess the same competitive spirit, in regards to wordplay and one-upmanship that members of the Algonquin Round Table enjoyed. The composers would be encouraged to archive and rate the discoveries that they have made in working within their own personal vocabulary, as well as the community's vocabulary.

**Overview:**

Instead of meeting F2F, millions of PPL now meet OL. For a newbie the chat environ can B overwhelming and inarticulate. OTOH an expert has as much power over their AV as they would in RL. An experienced chatter can &-( :-< :-> ;-P and even ;-)-~~~~~. Things that YWT would require a F2F environ to do. TPTB try 2 monitor language and content, as well as age and gender. Although, experienced users would and do whisper TS, FU, US or YBS. AFAIK teenagers ATW manage to chat, swear, and damn their parents w/o getting caught. Of course there is P911 or POS, YAA. For those PCMCIA here is something you may hear, "PEBCAK, use the POTS, ." ITC, study hard, ADN RL conversation will be peppered with chat room slang. EOT.

"Of the 107 million people who use the Internet worldwide, at least 40 million to 50 million of them use chat," Michel Marriot states in a 1998 New York Times article titled "The Blossoming of Internet Chat".<sup>2</sup> As this article describes, chat rooms are no longer places for the dregs of society, they have become socially acceptable avenues to meet and interact with others. Within these chat rooms a new system of language conveyance has developed. Sherry Turkle, in her book Life on Screen, describes it as, "Onomatopoeic expletives and a relaxed attitude toward sentence fragments and typographic errors suggest that the new writing is somewhere between traditional written and oral communication."<sup>3</sup> This new language has evolved so far from speech and writing that the linguistic David Crystal, in his book Language and the Internet, calls this new language conveyance system the "third medium", which will be explained further in the context section of this paper.

Chat room linguistics have developed into a world-wide pidgin. Users around the globe chat twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, mixing and inventing within this new medium, Netspeak. Turkle states, "As players participate, they become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction."<sup>4</sup> I would take that one step further and say not only do they author their text and themselves, but also their community. A chat room community is based in communication, a communication system which is rapidly become a hybrid of proper English, slang and short-cuts. Each individual chat room creates a system for language conveyance that the community alters and adopts. Acronyms, word shortening, and dropped vowels all become part of the chat room colloquial.

The user's knowledge of that colloquial defines if they are an insider or an outsider. As an outsider there is no dictionary or trace of the origins of the language. The outsider must interact with the active members, in order to gain access into the particular chat room's dialect. If they fail at charming the chat room's members, they may remain as a lurker or inactive participant, until they begin to pick up the language or the topic of conversation. Outsiders must spend an adequate amount of time to become part of the chat room's clique. The chat room user must be a devoted participant in order for them to have the opportunity to affect the chat room's language. There is an acronym in chat rooms, "FISH", which stands for First In Still Here. The meaning of this tag is that the offender is a constant presence in the chat room. This user is the first one in and seems to never leave. The twist in this accusation is that those who are addicted are the ones that define what the community discusses and how they discuss it. The more time spent in a particular chat room, the more power you have in the given community.

**Context:**

"Because IRC (Internet Relay Chat) is text-based, yet interaction is synchronous, a new genre of communication has developed. This genre combines written and oral features, as well as uniquely digital ones, blends different linguistic registers, and disregards the conventional rules of the language."

- Haya-Bechar Israeli<sup>5</sup>

In Language and the Internet, David Crystal defines Netspeak as a "third medium"; essentially a third means, other than spoken and written word, in which one can articulate oneself. Crystal's description reads as follows, "Electronic texts, of whatever kind, are simply not the

same as other kinds of texts...they transcend the traditional limitations on textual dissemination...Several properties have consequences for language, and these combine with those associated with speech and writing to make Netspeak a genuine ‘third medium’.”<sup>6</sup> Crystal, who is a leading authority on linguistics, investigates the way in which language has been affected by the Internet and not surprisingly has discovered that this technology has demanded a new method in which to express language. The “third medium” has been defined as being more related to speech than writing, though it remains as a written form of language. Although Netspeak is considered a “third medium”, it is important to point out that it is not considered a new language. Naomi Baron states eloquently, in her book Alphabet to Email: How written English Evolved and Where It’s Heading, “In our analogy between email and contact languages, we’ll speak of email as a system of language conveyance (cut from the same cloth as speech, writing, or sign as systems of language conveyance), rather than an actual language.”<sup>7</sup> It should be made clear that Netspeak is not a new language, rather a new process in which to convey that language. In adopting the term “third medium” as a title I intend to position my project within the parameters of this new system of language conveyance.

In exploring the chat room, the investigation must start with its ancestral roots; the telegraph, the telephone, and the typewriter. The first actual telegraphic systems were not electric systems but were based on more primitive tools, such as the use of smoke, fire, drums, and sun reflection signals. The electric telegraph was first invented in the mid-19th century. The foundation for the word comes from two greek roots; *tele* which meant “distant” and *graphein* which meant “to write”.<sup>8</sup>

Although Samuel F.B. Morse was not the first to invent an electric telegraphic system, he was the first to obtain financial sponsorship from the United States government. Because of this sponsorship he was able to build a telegraph system that stretched from Baltimore, MD to Washington D.C.. His first transmission as legend has it was, “What hath God wrought!”<sup>9</sup> Though the telegraph was later replaced almost completely by the telephone, after one hundred years, the telegraph managed to restructure the United States news industry. Because of the nature of the telegraph, the Associated Press was formed so that news companies could pool the costs of the telegraphs and insure that the news was received correctly and without a regional slant. Not only did the telegraph alter the news industry, but it also changed the way in which business was completed. Instead of face-to-face communication, men were doing business with people they had never laid eyes on. In this way, chat room communications, are not dissimilar to the way in which businessmen were communicating over one hundred and fifty years ago, via the telegram.

In 1877, the Social Telegraph Association was formed in Bridgeport, Connecticut.<sup>10</sup> The members of the Social Telegraph Association had telegraph systems installed in their home, which were connected to a central switch board, which in turn, was connected to all other members of the Association. Each member was taught how to translate Morse Code. As Naomi Baron puts it this use of the telegraph becomes “the ancestor of computer listservs”.<sup>11</sup> The technological problems of the telegraph, the lack of synchronous conversation and faulty reception, prohibited this particular use from becoming accepted.

Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone, patented in 1876, managed to circumvent these problems, through both technological breakthroughs and marketing schemes. The word telephone, like telegraph, comes from two greek roots; *tele* which we know means “distant” and *phone* which means “sound”.<sup>12</sup> The first marketing schemes for the telephone were aimed at broadcasting public performances, such as lectures and performances. Alexander Graham Bell described the telephone in these words, “The telephone may be briefly described as an electrical contrivance for reproducing, in distant places, the tones and articulations of a speaker’s voice, so that conversation can be carried on by word of mouth between persons in different rooms, in different streets, or in different towns.”<sup>13</sup> The telephone became a tool for communicating aurally over long distances.

The telephone in many ways became the prelude to computer-mediated conversation. Like computer-mediated communications, telecommunications eradicated paralinguistic cues, such as facial expression and the physical distance between orators, because a user could only hear its telephone partner, but could not see she or he. The telephone also allowed its users to feel connected over long distances, even though they were in not in a face-to-face environment. The telephone like the Internet allowed real-time synchronous conversation. Though, unlike computer-mediated speaking patterns, speech on a telephone remains similar to our natural speaking patterns.

The “social telephone” was designed in the late 19th century, essentially for group chat.<sup>14</sup> It was designed so that a community could be connected and communicate instantaneously through a group switchboard. Similar to the Social Telegraph Association, technological and financial problems, kept this technology from becoming popular. Though, features of the telephone included party lines, community phones (usually located at the pharmacist), and pay phones, did become and remain popular. In these ways the telephone and its predecessor, the telegraph, began to build a teletechnological community, that began the groundwork for today’s virtual community.

Other groundwork that prepared society for today's computer-mediated world, was performed by the typewriter. Christopher Latham Sholes, in 1868, patented a machine which became known as a typewriter.<sup>15</sup> The motivation to build a typewriter was mainly the desire for speed in writing. Sholes was not the first to build a typewriter, he was the first to build a typewriter machine that was faster than hand-writing. Mark Twain convinced of the typewriter's speed became the first author to submit a typewritten manuscript to a publisher.<sup>16</sup> The typewriter also became, in the 1950s a mobile machine.<sup>17</sup> Every typewriter company on the market, produced a portable typewriter. Today, we see the impact of the typewriter, which became an integral stepping stone in the evolution of the computer. It is clear that typewriters had a profound effect on our society when considering the fact that, nowadays, many have a harder time hand-writing an essay, than typing on a computer's word-processor.

Linguistically, the typewriter also helped bring shorthand to the general public. Shorthand, which in many ways is similar to Netspeak, is a system that was developed for speed writing. It consists of symbols and abbreviations for phrases, words and letters. Also known as stenography, shorthand was not invented in the 18th century, but became popular during the Industrial Revolution. Xenophon, a greek historian, is attributed with the first use of a shorthand, which he used to write the memoirs of Socrates.<sup>18</sup> Isaac Pitman's adaptation of shorthand, is the most widely-used and acknowledged method of shorthand. This version consists of 25 single consonants, 24 double consonants, and 16 vowel sounds.<sup>19</sup> Each sound is represented by a sign, length determining the length of the sound. Like Netspeak, shorthand notations drops vowels and abbreviates words. Unlike Netspeak, shorthand has a definitive syntax and logical structure, born out of prescriptivism and standardization. Nonetheless, shorthand is a good example of the need for word-shortening, abbreviation, and sign symbols to facilitate speed in communication.

Before moving on to chat room specific research, it is important to look at two other language classification; pidgin and creole. Pidgin is a form of communication, not a mother-tongue, that has limited syntax and vocabulary. There is no standard order of words and the order of words may vary between speakers. The earliest documentation of pidgin is the Lingua Franca that was developed in the Middle Ages between merchants and traders in the Mediterranean. The word pidgin actually comes from the Cantonese version of the English word for *business*. The majority of words in pidgin are from English origins. Creole is a pidgin that has become a mother-tongue. Once a pidgin has been passed from mother to child, it then becomes a creole, not a pidgin. Examples of a Creole would be the Gullah of South Carolina and Georgia, which is based on English, and Haitian, which is based on French. Pidgins and Creoles are important to discuss in this project because chat room communications at times becomes a pidgin. Users

from all over the world create a new hybrid of languages, in order to communicate, in today's chat rooms. Though there is not yet a Creole devised to communicate online, it is not so far-fetched that a "universal online language" could develop, in order to assist the nature of the multi-lingual chat room.

In speaking of "universals", in language, it is essential to include a short paragraph on Chomsky's work on the Language Acquisition Device. Chomsky believes that as humans we are born with a "universal grammar" in our heads. "Universal Grammar" is what a person instinctively knows about language.<sup>20</sup> Chomsky believes that there are specific language skills that are innate in a person's education. Therefore, there is no need for a child to learn from its parents or teachers, language development is natural and needs no guidance. Chomsky believes that the child is autonomous in the creation of language. These theories are related to this project because this project seeks to hypothesize that language conveyance can be developed and altered within a community, using community experts as guides. Chomsky's theories state that there is a universal way in which to adopt and adapt to language. If this is true, the community in which the "third medium" will build, will innately define their own syntax and vocabulary without the aid of the "devoted" to define things for them. Although Chomsky may be correct on some primordial level, inevitably the community will assign language experts that define the rules of the communication in the online social network.

"The structural process that is associated with community is communication. Without communication there can be no action to organize social relations."

- Jan Fernback and Brad Thompson<sup>21</sup>

The acknowledged characteristic of all chat rooms are that they are communities dedicated to twenty-four hour, seven days a week communication. Whether the communication is worthwhile is a matter of taste. Yet, nonetheless, chat rooms are dedicated to communicating within the "third medium" at any hour of the day or night.

In the following paragraphs the key elements of the generic chat room will be discussed, along with the social, political, and economic implications of the chat room. There are several instrumental features of a chat room that are important to address. The fact that each member is identified only by her or his nickname is one elemental feature. A user must choose their nickname, which usually consists of no more than nine characters or letters. The nickname will then become the only representation that the user has to offer the community. Any other characteristics the community will receive from the user will be conversational.

It is important to note that a chat room personality is only that in which a user creates. There are no pre-ordained qualities or communications that establish who or what the user is, other than that which the user offers. For instance, if the user states that they are six foot blonde woman, there is nothing that provides that this is true; they may in fact be a four foot boy. In this way there are no physical, social, or racial demarcations. At the beginnings of a chat room, the only indication of class structure has to do with a user's proficiency in computer-mediated communications, not real-life experience, position, or status.

Although the user's nickname becomes the foundations for their online persona, much of their character attribution comes from user-to-user communications. In this way Weiss has defined this attribute as the "brain-in-a-jar".<sup>22</sup> All that the chat room user has to offer is their mind; they are not offering their clothes, their good-looks, their car, their bank account, and the list goes on. The chat room user is essentially defined by its expertise in communicating in the chat room environment. Because of the complexity of change that the "third medium" has had on traditional writing, it is very easy to spot a chat room novice, or "newbie".

In a chat room there exists an "interactive writing discourse",<sup>23</sup> meaning that a conversation can not be interrupted. There is always a continuous stream of conversations and conversation branches. Christopher Werry points out the intricacies of multiple conversation streams in chat rooms. It is not unusual for several conversations to be taking place simultaneously with multiple users participating in multiple streams. There is also a distinct turn-taking style. One speaker always speaks at a time. The length and number of the responses varies from user to user. Turns are not assigned in advance, as they would be in a debate, but are chronologically displayed. In this way chat rooms may skip responses only to come back to them two or three responses later, depending on the user's typing skill and speed. The nature of the chat room is therefore, non-dyadic, unlike traditional speech. Chat room communications are not merely conversations between two participants, but conversations within a larger community.

It is also important to note that a chat room users must be clear in their communications, because like the telephone and telegram there is a lack of paralinguistic cues. Naomi Baron explains, "When people speak face-to-face, they convey far more information than the words and phrases making up their sentences. Facial expressions, body posture, gestures, physical distance from the interlocutor, intonation patterns, and volume all contribute to how listeners interpret messages."<sup>24</sup> Because computer-mediated communications lacks the signs of face-to-face communication, the user must be careful not to insight an argument or, as it is referred to in the chat circles, "flame". The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language describes a

flame as, “An insulting criticism or remark meant to incite anger, as on a computer network.”<sup>25</sup> Emoticons and smileys have been integrated into online conversation, as temporary solutions, so that many of the breakdowns in communication can be disregarded. Though there are many inadequacies in online communication, they are not dissimilar to the inadequacies that were accepted from the telephone and the telegraph. In the future technological discoveries may solve these weaknesses in communication, which may or may not include wireless, global broadband and wide-spread video communications.

Finally, it is important to recognize that although there have been numerous publications in the past ten years that are advertised as being a “guide to online conversation”, there is no dogma for chat room writings. There is no standardization or prescriptivism that has been taught and enforced in schools or by the government. The “third medium” is a fluid and evolving method of language conveyance. Unlike traditional writing or formal speech, it is not governed by a set of academic laws. Netspeak can become whatever the community wishes to develop.

Howard Rheingold, in his text The Virtual Community, discusses the strength and commitment of the online community the Well (Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link). Rheingold quotes, J. C. R. Licklider and Robert Taylor, researchers for the Department of Defense, who built the structure in which online communities now flourish. Licklider and Taylor predict what online communities will be in these words, “In most fields they will consist of geographically separated members, sometimes grouped in small clusters and sometimes working individually. They will be communities not of common location, but of common interest. . . .”<sup>26</sup> In reading The Virtual Community, the audience gets the sense that this is exactly what online communities have become. They are tight-knit societies with intensely active members, who care about their fellow community members and the fate of their community. Rheingold says of the virtual community’s critics this, “Those who critique CMC because some people use it obsessively hit an important target, but miss a great deal more when they don’t take into consideration people who use the medium for genuine human interaction.”<sup>27</sup> When Rheingold originally published this text in 1993 the Internet community was a small pocket of academics and techies, now it is difficult to find someone that the Internet has not influenced. Like Licklider and Taylor, Rheingold effectively predicted the main-stream’s affection towards the virtual community.

Another study of online communities that is relative to this project, in that it addresses online communication, is Sherry Turkle’s Life on Screen. Although Turkle does not investigate a chat room, but the MUD (Multi-User Domain) ElseMOO, it is still relevant to the subject of virtual communities. The definition of a MUD that Turkle gives is a “text-based, social virtual

reality”.<sup>28</sup> Turkle’s focus is not on the community itself yet on the affect that the online community has on the perception of self, especially issues of intimacy and gender. It is important to note that although user’s become excessively involved in online communities, they are not necessarily acting as themselves, they are frequently playing another self. Turkle frequently refers to the difference between RL (real-life) and virtual life. In reference to these studies, it is important to reflect in my own community the issues of duplicity and authenticity.

### **Methodology:**

The methodology for building this site will follow loosely the procedures defined in the Sociable Media Group at the MIT Media Laboratory, more specifically focusing on *Chat Circles* and *Conductive Chat*. Both chat sites will serve to inform me on the how-to’s of building a chat room. I have also contacted Dana Spiegel, the president and founder of sociable design. Spiegel has worked on several chat applications at the MIT Media Laboratory, including *sociableChAT*. *Moock*, a Flash based chat application for hire, will be a guide to building this type of application in Flash. I will also be researching the avatar-based chat rooms, *The Palace* and *The Habbo Hotel*. The above approaches will help me to further define and investigate the technological methodology of this particular project.

The structure of the site will be built both top-down and bottom-up, simultaneously. The first step will be building a functional chat site (front-end) and structuring the database tables (back-end). Once this has been completed, it will be important to begin coding in ColdFusion. Because Flash MX merely serves as an interface tool, most of the work will take place on the back-end of the site, this semester. While the back-end development of the site is being built, the ColdFusion scripts will be running through the Flash MX front-end interface. The decision to develop in Flash this semester, instead of developing a prototype in HTML, comes from the advice of my database advisor, Igor Pusenjak. He has advised that to test maximum functionality the scripts should run directly to the intended front-end application. It is important that the process of coding begins as soon as possible, because of the time-consuming nature of database scripting. It is also important to ensure that the Flash Communication Server MX has been installed on the A-Server and is fully operational.

The Flash Communication Server MX is a server side technology, released this year. Macromedia’s server application allows connections between Flash MX, .NET, and J2EE application servers. In this way the Flash Communication Server allows any Flash site to host an integrated communications application, with multiple synchronous streams, like the chat room I

intend to build. Because this technology is so fresh, Macromedia is offering intensive support and advertisement to any developer that has used the server to build a communication experience. Kevin Towes states, in the foreword of the introductory text, Macromedia Flash Communication Server MX , “This book is about building technology to help us communicate with each other in a more human way...The Flash Communication Server is a technology framework that abstracts connectivity and platform concerns to a level where developers don’t have to be concerned about them any more...It take(s) care of some of the technical plumbing so that you can focus on *how* people will communicate.”<sup>29</sup> In essence, this product release is perfectly timed with the development of my interface. I intend to use Macromedia’s site support and product feedback, as well as Towes’s writings, to help to build this project.

As for the aesthetic methodology, the focus will be on an experimental design solution. The structure and implementation will involve an in-depth investigation in information and experimental design. I do not wish to build a tool for Linguists. The site will not become a monitor for internet-based language conveyance, but an experimental space and community. It should be stressed that the focus of this project is on community, not language conveyance. Though internet-based language conveyance is the object in which the community will be built around, the “third medium” is intended to be a community-based experience. It is my intention to build an experience that both educates and entertains, through community dialogue and interaction. Although, I feel that this project should have a social conscience. I believe that in offering the data that the site collects, to the general audience, the site will allow users to investigate personally the way in which language conveyance is developing. I would feel amiss if I could not offer the statistical data that this chat room has an opportunity to provide.

In the spirit of *The Apartment* I would like to continue the tradition of clearly defining the semantics of the community language. *The Apartment* clearly defines and places words into various rooms of an apartment based on the database’s connotation of the word. This site is interesting because it has created a community of creative and inventive users, that continuously and happily participate in the evolution of the community. It is also relevant to me because they are using language and semantics to form new relationships within the community. Although the creators have defined the denotations of the community’s language, each apartment still becomes a personal investigation into the connotation of the community’s language. I would also like to adopt the scope of the macro versus micro that *the Apartment* implements. My interface, like *the Apartment* will function on two levels; the macro being the whole community view and the micro being each individual chat room.

In building this chat room I will be referencing and investigating popular, chat rooms, MUDs and MOOs in which I will act as an active and inactive participant in. The important point here is that I do not wish to create another basic MUD, MOO, or chat room. I would like to create a user experience that allows the participant the opportunity to discover that they are the creator of a new form of language. My goal is to develop a platform for my users to both entertain and educate one another on the breadth and depth of the language they are implementing. In order to do this, the interface must be a blend of information design and narrative. It is imperative that the point of entry to the interface is transparent. Although, I would prefer that the more involved in the community you become the more capable you are in reading the iconography of the site. In that way it would mirror how the site rewards those users that are most involved. It is very important to stress that continued involvement is crucial to becoming a power force in developing of the community's language conveyance system. In borrowing from the traditional chat rooms, the longer a user spends in a particular community the more influential he or she becomes.

Every ten minutes spent in the chat room will allow the user the opportunity to contribute, destroy, reattribute, or redefine a word in the community's language database. When a user contributes a word to the database, it then becomes a piece of their own vocabulary. The user does not have the right to use the entire community's language database. Though a user will be allowed to examine all of the words and definitions in the language database, including both the origins and the development of any word in the language database. The user must interact with other users in order to gain permission to use those other users' words. If an in-experienced user has the chance to engage an experienced user in conversation, the in-experienced user will automatically adopt the experienced user's words that were shared within that particular conversation. In this way experienced users have both a larger vocabulary and a certain clout in the community. If a user desires a particular word in their vocabulary that is part of the language database and cannot manage to engage the word's creator in a dialogue, they may reattribute that word as their own word. This same practice will stand for re-defining a word in the database. In this way the interface will allow for, encourage, and expect duplicity in the community.

There will also be the possibility of becoming a "devoted" user, a member of the chat room who has logged over 10 hours or has a vocabulary of over 1000 words. If a non-devoted user comes into contact with a devoted and can convince the devoted to whisper to she or he, the non-devoted user will then be able to adopt all of the devoted's vocabulary and in effect become a devoted themselves. If a user comes into contact with myself, the creator, and can interest me in whispering they will then adopt all of the words in the language database, at that time.

In essence, the devotees and the creator of the site will reap the benefits of the time spent on and in the chat room.

The structure in the chat room will be loosely defined by three pre-defined rooms. The rooms subjects will be defined by the highest used community words, which will change on a weekly basis. For instance, if the three most popular community words are newbie, OTOH, and LOL, there will be a room that is loosely defined as the “LOL Room”. Although, it should be acknowledged that a user may choose to enter the “LOL” room and talk about “newbies”, not LOL (Laughing Out Loud). Though other users may reject she/he, the interface will not punish the user for their desire to speak off topic. The three subjects will merely be the foundation to insight interesting and creative dialogue.

At the birth of the chat room, the community will have no vocabulary. The community vocabulary will expand at the same rate of the community of user’s involvement. The system of language conveyance will grow, shrink, and morph, all of which will be recorded in the language database.

It is my intention that the site will be operational by December and the winter break will be dedicated to usability testing. Although completion of the back-end of the site is slated for December, I expect that the schedule will remain flexible to make room for any technical difficulties. With that said, I feel that the major obstacles in completing this project are technical. I must be capable of connecting three different applications; Flash MX, ColdFusion, and the Flash Communication Server. The two advisors who will help me in overcoming these difficulties will be Igor Pusenjak (ColdFusion) and Sastry Appajosyula (Flash MX Server and Actionscript).

### **Production: Materials**

This interface will have a Flash MX front end, a ColdFusion back end, and will run on the Macromedia Flash Communication Server MX. The site will be designed for Internet Explorer 5 at 800 x 600 pixels. The interface and database should run successfully on both a mac and pc computer. The Flash MX plug-in is required to run this piece.

Typically, chat rooms are developed as Java applets. I have chosen to use Flash, because of the added control I will have in dealing with the interface, as opposed to html. It is also important for me, professionally speaking, to learn how to integrate Flash’s actionscripting with a ColdFusion database.

## **Timeline**

### **September 1 - September 8 || Overview**

Research and Writing. Continue foundation research. Solidify in writing the essence of the chat room experience. What is the most important information needed for each stage of the project? Begin work on first presentation. Build rough prototype. Investigate ColdFusion and Flash technology and the possibility of building the site within that environment.

### **September 8 - September 15 || Presentation**

Design wireframes and flowcharts for the site. Develop a rudimentary visual language until the site's back-end has been implemented. Revise and edit writing so that it may serve as the basis for my 20 page paper. Read and comment on the peer feedback from my presentation on the 8th. Revise presentation based on the necessary categories: abstract, context, methodology, production, and prototype. Re-think and re-build the working prototype. Continue reading Cherny, Bosah, Poster, and Crystal. Investigate the database. What is it going to take to build the site? Is Flash the right choice or is Java more applicable?

### **September 15 - September 22 || Research**

Research and write a five page paper on the abstract, overview, context, methodology, and production of the project. Organize a 20 minute presentation on the research that is necessary to understand the "third medium". Work on convincing people that within the research there is a good sense of the sociological framework for the project. Continue revision work for the 20 page paper. Investigate the Macromedia Flash Communication Server MX.

### **September 22 - October 6 || Methodology**

Focus on the methodology; how will the "third medium" be built? Confirm the technologies and tools. Revise schedule and materials. Write a five page paper on the methodology. Continue work on 20 page paper, which is due at your review. Submit draft to Sheridan on October 6th. Prepare presentation for departmental reviews.

### **October 6 - October 13 || Departmental Reviews**

Prepare for departmental reviews. Establish a clear and concise presentation, with both a basic front and back-end prototype. It is important to establish a thoughtful and appropriate plan as to how the site will be built. Finish 20 page paper; deliver on October 13th, at the departmental reviews.

**October 13 - October 20 || Modifications**

Revise research, concept, and strategy based on the guest critics' feedback. Begin production; build database tables and basic site structure, including both the macro and micro view of the site. The database should track at the user level: userID, user's name, user's vocabulary, and their rank in the community. The database should track at the word level: wordID, word, definition, rank in popularity, history (including date of conception), owner, and those who have access to the word. Decide what other information is necessary to keep track of in the database. Make sure that the Flash Communication Server is installed and running on the A server.

**October 20 - October 27 || Birth of a Chat Room**

Begin building a chat room. This chat room should have the typical chat room functionality, including present guests, synchronous text feeds, and topic conversations. It is not important to implement any restrictions on language or track the rank of both users and words, at this point. The process of building the basic chat room should take no more than three weeks.

**October 27 - November 3 || Member Login**

Code member login, word storage, and word retrieval. Make sure that each word has an id number and empty column for the words definition that correlates to the time/date object. Test member login.

**November 3 - November 10 || Timed Word Event**

Implement the timed word addition function, so that every 10 minutes a user is prompted to add a word to their vocabulary. Design and connect prompt pop-up in flash to this feature. All words in the database should appear in bold other than not appearing at all, for testing purposes.

**November 10 - November 17 || Rank in the Community**

Begin to track the rank in relation to both the users and the words, at the macro and micro level. Complete the basic chat room functionality from October 27.

**November 17 - November 24 || Word Swapping**

Implement the ability to share words when and if a user is addressed. Make sure that those words are added to the user's word table.

**October 13 - December 5 || Goals**

The goal of my first semester is to have a working database that has the ability to store and organize the community language. I would also like this database to be able to record and

update user interactions with others, by updating each user's personal vocabulary. It is not important for me to have a designed piece by the end of the first semester.

**November 24 - December 1 || Prototype Presentation**

Prepare the first working prototype for the departmental review.

**December 1 - December 8 || Troubleshooting**

Ensure that the database tables, basic chat room, member login, rank in the community and timed word event are functional. Troubleshoot any and all technical problems.

**December 1 - December 8 || User Testing**

During our winter break I will begin user testing on the interface and database. I will allow user feedback to lead the design decisions that I will be making in the second semester. I will also spend time doing any necessary technical adjustments or updates to the back-end of the site.

**January 26 - April 16 || Plans for the Future**

My second semester will be devoted to the front-end implementation; using a combination of information design and experimental graphics.

**key to chat room colloquial as it appears**

F2F	face to face
PPL	people
OL	online
newbie	new to the chat room
environ	environment
B	be
OTOH	on the other hand
AV	avatar
RL	real life
&-(	cry
:-<	pout
:->	smile mischievously
;-P	stick out your tongue
;-)~~~~~	give a raspberry
YWT	you would think
F2F	face to face
TPTB	the powers that be
2	to
TS	tough shit
FU	fuck you
US	you suck
YBS	you'll be sorry
AFAIK	as far as I know
ATW	around the world
P911	parent emergency
POS	parents over shoulder
YAA	yet another acronym
PCMCIA	people can't master computer industry acronyms
PEBCAK	problem exists between chair and keyboard
POTS	plain old telephone service
ITC	in that case
ADN	any day now
RL	real life
EOT	end of thread

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> David Crystal, Language and the Internet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 48.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Marriott, “The Blossoming of Internet Chat” New York Times 2 June 1998, late ed.: Section G, Page 1, Column 1.

<sup>3</sup> Sherry Turkle, Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) 183.

<sup>4</sup> Sherry Turkle, Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) 12.

<sup>5</sup> Haya-Bechar Israeli, “FROM <Bonehead> TO <cLoNehead>: NICKNAMES, PLAY, AND IDENTITY ON INTERNET RELAY CHAT <1>” diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 26.

<sup>6</sup> David Crystal, Language and the Internet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 48.

<sup>7</sup> Naomi S. Baron, Alphabet to Email: How written English Evolved and Where It’s Heading. (London: Routledge, 2000) 257.

<sup>8</sup> “Telegraph.” Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. 29 Sep, 2003 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=119000>>.

<sup>9</sup> “Telegraph.” Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. 29 Sep, 2003 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=119000>>.

<sup>10</sup> Naomi S. Baron, Alphabet to Email: How written English Evolved and Where It’s Heading. (London: Routledge, 2000) 219.

<sup>11</sup> Naomi S. Baron, Alphabet to Email: How written English Evolved and Where It’s Heading. (London: Routledge, 2000) 219.

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<sup>14</sup> Naomi S. Baron, Alphabet to Email: How written English Evolved and Where It’s Heading. (London: Routledge, 2000) 230.

<sup>15</sup> “Typewriter.” Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. 29 Sep, 2003 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=75938>>.

<sup>16</sup> Naomi S. Baron, Alphabet to Email: How written English Evolved and Where It’s Heading. (London: Routledge, 2000) 202.

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<sup>27</sup> Howard Rheingold, The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier. (Boston: MIT Press, 2000) 2.

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<sup>29</sup> Kevin Towes, Macromedia Flash Communication Server MX. (New York: New Riders Publishing, 2003) xxiii.