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First Things First: Internet Relay Chat Openings

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Article first published online: 23 JUN 2006

DOI: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2001.tb00125.x

Issue

Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication

Volume 6, Issue 3, (/doi/10.1111/jcmc.2001.6.issue-3/issuetoc) page 0, April 2001

Additional Information

How to Cite

Rintel, E. S., Mulholland, J. and Pittam, J. (2001), First Things First: Internet Relay Chat Openings. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 6: 0. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2001.tb00125.x

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Publication History

1. Issue published online: 23 JUN 2006
2. Article first published online: 23 JUN 2006

- Abstract (/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2001.tb00125.x/abstract)
- Article
- References (/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2001.tb00125.x/references)
- Cited By (/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2001.tb00125.x/citedby)

Abstract

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) was the Internet's first widely popular quasi-synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) system. While research has consistently demonstrated the interpersonal nature of IRC, and is now turning to more structurally-oriented topics, it is argued that IRC research now needs to systematically address links between interaction structures, technological mediation and the instantiation and development of interpersonal relationships within a framework that privileges IRC interaction and social explanations. This exploration of the openings of IRC interactions is positioned as a step in that direction. The openings investigated in the study are those that occur directly following user's entries into public IRC channels, termed the newly-joined users' Channel Entry Phase (CEP). It is found that turn coordination in the CEP is often ambiguous, has the potential to disrupt relationship development, and leads to considerable emphasis on interactive strategies for the clear ordering of opening phases.

Introduction

This study explores how users open dyadic interpersonal interactions on Internet Relay Chat (IRC), one of the oldest, most popular and most-researched of the Internet computer-mediated communication (ICMC) (December 1996) systems. IRC's popularity, for both users and researchers, stems primarily from the fact that although it is a written medium, the real-time, quasi-synchronous (Garcia & Jacobs 1999) transmission of utterances between users gives IRC a very face-to-face (FTF) conversational feel (Reid 1991; Werry 1996; Newhagen and Rafaeli 1996). In ten years of IRC research, it has become virtually axiomatic to link IRC's conversational feel to findings of interpersonal artifacts on the medium, and thus characterize the interaction on the medium as interpersonal (Reid 1991; Werry 1996; Bechar-Israeli 1996; Rodino 1998; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1998). Given the consistency of these findings, it is not surprising that recent IRC research has moved away from the question of how IRC is used as an interpersonal medium, turning instead to investigations of the modification of FTF interaction structures such as turn-taking (Herring 1999; Garcia & Jacobs 1999) or linguistic variation (Paolillo 1999). However, while research up to this point has successfully demonstrated how the highly mediated interaction environment of IRC effects either interpersonal artifacts or interaction structures, we still do not have comprehensive knowledge of how interpersonal relationships are developed in IRC - how the relationships of users progress from nothing to something through mediated typography. If we are to develop such theories, IRC research needs to more systematically address the links between technological mediation, artifacts of interpersonal relationships and interaction structures, and do so within a framework that privileges IRC interaction and social explanations. This study, focusing on the openings of IRC interactions, is positioned as a step in that direction.

As befits their nature, openings are an excellent starting point for investigating how interaction on IRC functions to instantiate and develop interpersonal relationships. Every interaction must have an opening, and if, as Tannen argues, relationships may be conceived of as a series of interactions (Tannen 1990 from Buttny 1998, 48), what happens first as an interactive move in both initial and subsequent meetings will be critical to the establishment and maintenance of any given relationship. It thus follows that the investigation of interaction structures in IRC openings - particularly the interplay of phatic tokens (Laver 1975; 1981) and progression mechanisms (Schegloff 1968; 1986) - should provide useful clues as to how users begin to develop interpersonal relationships. Although openings may occur throughout an IRC session, this study

concentrates on the most prevalent site of IRC openings, when users enter the interaction territory of a public IRC channel and are first able to engage in initiatory behavior. We term this the Channel Entry Phase (CEP). Turn coordination in the CEP is found to be ambiguous, potentially disruptive to relationship development, leading users to emphasize strategies for the clear ordering of opening phatic communion.

Previous research on IRC openings

Since the first interpersonal IRC research was published in 1991 (Reid), openings have received sparse attention, and are usually dealt with as incidental to interpersonal strategies in the medial phase of interaction. The few accounts that exist are usually limited to the descriptive; for example, there is no explanatory development of the uses of the IRC-specific abbreviation ‘re’, short for ‘hello again’, in the six years separating Vincent (1992) and Doell (1998). Similarly, although both Werry (1996) and Doell (1998) found evidence of the opening routine of users joining a public channel and collectively greeting the existing channel members, only Werry goes on to argue that this is an exception to fiercely competitive medial phase attention-getting strategies such as the high degree of addressivity (1996, 53) - and Werry does not explain how this exception may occur or why it is a viable opening strategy.

Dealt with more thoroughly in the IRC research are the effects of the self-determined user names (called ‘nicks’) on interaction. The research is quite consistent in finding users to be very sensitive to the nick choices of others as impression-making devices, an implication critical to the opening phases of IRC (Bechar-Israeli 1996; Rodino 1998; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1998). While drawing attention to some of the details of opening behaviors, the IRC literature lacks detailed investigation of the links between the critical processes of turn-progression (and coordination) and linguistic tokens of phatic communion. Specifically, there has been little examination of the formal and functional distinctions of greeting behaviors (including nick choices and responses to them) and their place in early interaction coordination. One exception is Rintel and Pittam's (1997) account of the basic IRC opening phase stages and choices, based on research into prototypical FTF and telephone opening phases (Laver 1975 & 1981; Kendon & Ferber 1973; Schiffrin 1977; Schegloff 1979; McLaughlin 1987; Åström 1994). The account is as follows (modified layout of Rintel & Pittam 1997, 527–528):

1 Server announces presence of newly-joined user to all public channel participants;

2 Exchange of Exploratory/Initiatory Linguistic Tokens - repeat as necessary: a) ‘Blind’, traditional mass greeting token to all users, OR traditional token to individual users (Followed by other phatic communion OR the use of another strategy) OR b) Statements OR Questions (Interaction may follow with or without overt phatic tokens);

3 Textualized exchange of conventional nonverbal contact gestures of greeting (as appropriate to relationship) - (may not occur);

4 Transition signals for moving to the medial phase.

Rintel and Pittam's qualitative analysis of IRC openings demonstrated that sequence is important to users, and emphasized the fluidity of stages, intra-stage choice (Stage 2) and the choice to leave out stages (Stages 3 and 4). The account is a useful starting point, but its breadth and fluidity - signaled particularly by the numerous branching points in Stage 2 - demonstrates a need for closer examination of the progression from entry to at least one coordinated opening exchange. The unit defined and explored in this study, the Channel Entry Phase (CEP) is a detailed redefinition of Stages 1 and 2 of Rintel and Pittam's account, with considerable power for both exploring how opening phatic elements are negotiated to initiate ongoing interaction and explaining the fluidity of the earlier account.

Data and Methodology

In common with most IRC research, this study examined logs of IRC interactions using qualitative Conversation Analysis-informed Discourse Analysis. The approaches to data-collection and analysis used in this study are outlined below.

The raw data consisted of ten logs of IRC interactions in public IRC channels (public and private interaction are discussed shortly). Two IRC clients (programs) were used during the logging process, the ircII (the original UNIX IRC client) and mIRC (perhaps the most popular Windows IRC client). Recent IRC clients such as mIRC and pIRCh display user interaction somewhat differently to ircII client, the main difference being that mIRC and pIRCh redirect server output to a separate window, hiding much of the very technical aspects of IRC. However, server announcements of entrances and exits occur in the primary interaction display of all IRC clients, differing only slightly in form. Thus the results of this study are reasonably generalizable for users of IRC clients.

Two public channels (#australia and #penpals) were each logged for a one and a half hour period five out of seven days per week for two weeks. At the time of logging, both channels supported substantial levels of interaction and were as permanent as IRC channels can be. Neither channel had any apparent fixed agenda/s or topic/s, nor any explicit policy of inclusion or exclusion except for a loosely implied (and only aperiodically

enforced) English language requirement. All nicks have been changed with researcher-invented analogies close to the 'spirit' of the original nick and preserving capitalization and punctuation. All addresses in [SERVER] lines and other identifying concepts in the content of utterances have been anonymized.

The logs for this study were taken from a single computer, which we term 'single point' logs. Single point logs are at present the only practical way of capturing public channel IRC interactions in the field. Common to most IRC research, public channel single point logs show the interaction processes in a way that closely resembles the interactions in which the users themselves are engaged. Indeed, by analogy with Reed and Ashmore's (2000) support for the CA of Internet newsgroup interaction, it is arguable that in a written medium such as IRC, the representations on screen provide largely the same representations of 'relationships' to researchers as they do to users. However, Garcia and Jacobs (1999) disagree with the use of single point logs, instead preferring to set up experimental quasi-synchronous CMC systems in a video-and-audio recording-equipped laboratory. In so doing, they are able to capture the interaction processes of all interactants in their system, and include video and audio evidence of behaviors which are not transmitted by the CMC system (1999, 341–42). There is a case for their more detailed, multi-part logs because they capture a great deal more of the message production, editing and transmission information than single point logs, but there are some important counter-arguments. Apart from the fact that single point logs are at present the only practical way of capturing field IRC data, Garcia and Jacobs' data is confined to the interactions which can occur in a laboratory and this data is very removed from the usual interactional experience of users themselves. Walther, Anderson and Park (1994) indicate in their overview of CMC research that one of the reasons for the initial findings of CMC systems as asocial was the result of the laboratory setting (which affected the time for and the inclination of users to develop interpersonal relationships). IRC research needs to examine precisely how interpersonal interaction can and does occur despite heavy mediation, so the contextual interest provided by the laboratory is somewhat offset by the possibility for reading-in knowledge to which normal users simply do not have access. Garcia and Jacobs' system has merit for a strict CA-based description of interaction structures, but when the goal of research is to determine the outcome of mediation on interpersonal relationship development, single point logs of field data provide both adequate and naturalistic transcripts.

That being said, single point logs do have a drawback which should be addressed. IRC allows users to hold multiple public and private interactions, with users potentially switching between public and private modes for anything between one word and an entire interaction. Thus logging public IRC channels does not guarantee a complete record of all of the interactions that might be occurring. How then, are researchers to get hold of representative data, and how generalizable are analyses of public channel data? Let us deal with each of these questions in turn.

Gathering representative data presents major problems, both ethical and technical. It is not ethically defensible to collect private channel data without participant consent, but to collect private channel data of informed participants violates the principle of studying naturally occurring data. Furthermore, as ethical concerns in research become increasingly important, it should be noted that ethical consent for this project was obtained only (a) for public channel logging and (b) on the basis that the participants would be anonymized. However, even if the ethical problems could be solved, gathering a 'complete' record of all the interactions undertaken by IRC users would be virtually impossible. Assuming that one is using a public IRC network (rather than a limited experimental network) and taking as a base speech community those users who logged on to a public

channel, the researcher would have to collect time-stamped logs of every interaction that appeared on every user's client. That is, every user would have to voluntarily log all interactions and provide them to the researcher, as the distributed nature of the IRC system means that there is no centralized server to provide a complete record of every user. The researcher would then have to temporally and spatially collate every log, private and public. Finding a reasonable solution to the problems of data scale will be an ongoing project of CMC research. For the current project it was decided that since there is little information about naturally occurring IRC openings, a detailed description of openings in public channels provides a good starting point for coming to grips with both the phenomena in question and the methodological processes required.

The public/private channel logging issue is a very problematic one for researchers of naturally occurring data, as there is no way to conclusively prove that users do not switch back and forth between public and private modes. For this study we concentrated on openings that were obviously or explicitly 'successful' (in the sense of leading to ongoing public interactions that made sense) or 'unsuccessful' (users who disappeared from the public channel very quickly, or complained about a lack of interaction). Private interactions were not and could not be part of this study, and as such could have openings different from those in the public channels. Future research will need to address more subtle events, private interactions, and the links between public and private interactions. This study is reasonably generalizable for openings that occur in public channel interaction in channels without particular agendas.

Most analysis of IRC interaction is qualitative and ethnomethodological, and this study follows in that tradition. Rather than attempting rigorous sampling or statistical analysis of patterns in scale (although we do make some basic generalizations about user orientations and how common we found strategies to be in these particular channels), this type of analysis focuses on the detailed explanation of social processes. Indeed, since IRC socialization takes places completely within a textual realm, most IRC research uses variations on Conversation Analysis (Sacks 1992; Psathas 1995; Edwards 1997) to provide in-depth explication of textual structures and strategies. The aim of qualitative analysis is not to measure for the sake of defining scale or predicting success or failure, but to describe the links between language and social interaction. Crucial to this analysis is a twin focus on what structures make up openings, and then the interpersonal ramifications of discursive choices within those structures. These are not factors that are easily quantified, nor are they factors that are better represented by a large sample of repeated observations, rather it is the richness of the individual cases which is most interesting. As such, ten logs of two public IRC channels provides more than enough material to be covered in detail and a reasonable sample of strategies.

The method used to analyze the IRC logs in this study is perhaps best described as Conversation Analysis-informed Discourse Analysis, as it differs somewhat from what might be termed 'classical' Conversation Analysis. While classical Conversation Analysis concentrates on the investigation of talk-in-interaction (eg. Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), this study focuses on producing descriptions of social action through investigating the interrelation of interaction and technology. Thus there is a broadening of analytical scope that manifests itself in two ways. First, we emphasize explanations that are more explicitly social than structural, akin to approaches discussed by Fairclough (1995), Tracy (1995), and Wood and Kroger (2000). Synthesizing Schegloff's (1968; 1986) talk-in-interaction structural approach with Laver's (1975; 1981) relationship-oriented approach to phatic communion, we take the position that the textual signs of prosocial connection in interactions may be discussed as representations of the state of interpersonal relationships.

Second, we emphasize the interrelationship between technology and interaction, privileging description of the ways in which social actions are instantiated on IRC. This is not to eliminate a tradition in IRC research of comparison and contrast with FTF interaction, rather to emphasize that any analysis of interaction in CMC systems must completely take into account the technology of the system, explaining not just how mediation effects but in fact affects the interaction, since the 'interaction' consists of the combination of human and computer-produced utterance and transmission. While the latter idea is not new to CMC researchers, it is stressed that good description of CMC interaction should avoid description that posits FTF interaction as a 'gold standard', and, equally, technological determinism that de-emphasizes the description of humans solving human problems.

Analysis

Public IRC channels contain massive numbers of opening utterances. In the 69 lines of Example 1 there are 22 potential opening dyads, recognizable through 25 lines containing greeting tokens and a further 14 lines containing recognizable opening artifacts. The logged channels ran 24 hours/day, seven days/week, so this example does not represent the 'beginning' of an interaction period in which large numbers of openings would be expected, rather it is 'medial' in the log and in the channel.

Example 1

Event	Order	Interaction
	B1	1. [StinGer] vp: to whom?
	B2	2. [bourbon] wizz i here
	B3	3. [CestLV] mayhem : oh it is….it is….but i wouldn't open it… it just might explode
T	A4	4. [lion] hi everyone?
T	A5	5. [Stinger] hey angie

	A6	6. [AJ] strawb: My computer is hanging wait
T	(B5)/A7	7. [Angie] Hey everyone!
T	A8	8. [cookie] hi lion
		9. [SERVER] AJ has quit IRC Leaving
T	B7/A9	10. [WiseOne] Angie is back!
T	B10	11. [ACTION] mayhem kneels and says hi back to vp_man
		12. [SERVER] vp_man has quit IRC Leaving
T	A11	13. [walker] Hey Jfonda!!!
T	B4/A12	14. [strawb] hello lion
	(A8)	15. [ACTION] cookie thins the cafeteria food is getting worse
T	B5	16. [Angie] Stinger hello
		17. [Zool-MODE] Has changed Cinche's mode to +o
*	B8/A8	18. [lion] how goes it cookie?
T	B12	19. [Lion] hello strawb
		20. [SERVER] kwest!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		21. [SERVER] ruby!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		22. [SERVER] Fleet!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
T	A13	23. [kwest] evening all
T	B7/A14	24. [strawb] hello Angie
T	B9	25. [Angie] wise hello
*	A5	26. [Stinger] angie: where ya from?
		27. [Cinche] Down nope …
		28. [SERVER] christian! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
*	B8	29. [cookie] lion: pretty well except for th fact that uni starged

		30. [SERVER] IP_! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
*	A12	31. [strawb] where are u lion?
T	B14/A14	32. [Angie] strawb hello how are you?
		33. [SERVER] kwest has left this channel
		34. [SERVER] walker has left this channel
T	A15	35. [ACTION] Christian hi!! ALL
T	A16	36. [IP_] hi all
T	B16/A17	37. [strawb] hello Yo
*	B5/A5	38. [Angie] Stinger [PlaceName1] you?
		39. [SERVER] Nord!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		40. [SERVER] cowboy!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
*	(B8)/A8	41. [Lion] cookie: what?
T	B16/A18	42. [OuchIe] re IP_
		43. [bourbon] this is bad!!!!
		44. [SERVER] kwest!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
*	B14/(A14)	45. [strawb] Angie: I'm fine
T	A19	46. [Angie] Cowboy hello
*	B12	47. [Lion] I'm in [PlaceName2]
		48. [ACTION] Down giggles at Cinche…
T	B17	49. [IP_] strawb hi!
*	B8/A8	50. [Cookie] lion: nothing.forget what i just said.how are u?
*	A14	51. [strawb] Angie: where are u from?
*	B5/A5	52. [Stinger] angie: I'm from [PlaceName3]…you a student?
*	(B14)	53. [Angie] strawb that's good
		54. [OuchIe] Bourbon: did you get my msg?

		54. [OuchIe] Bourbon: did you get my msg?
*	B8	55. [lion] I'm doing just fine
T	B18(?)	56. [IP_] OuchIe: nice nick!
		57. [SERVER] bourbon has left this channel
		58. [SERVER] cult!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		59. [SERVER] walker!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		60. [SERVER] danny!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
T	A19	61. [cowboy] hello hitbox!
T	A20	62. [Cowboy] hello everybody!
		63. [SERVER] Nord has left this channel
		64. [SERVER] puter!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
*	B14	65. [Angie] strawb [PlaceName4]
		66. [ScaNNer-MODE] Has changed Cinche's mode to -o
		67. [kwest] ruby: thought everyone had gone to sleep
T	B20/A21	68. [Fleet] cowboy:hello
T	A22	69. [Cowboy] hello hobo….

Perhaps more important than the sheer number of openings in the example above is the prevalence of alternating sequences (marked as ABAB). The need for entry coordination stems from the empirical observations of talk-in-interaction that find that speakers alternate turns (Schegloff 1968; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). As Schegloff argues, "conversational sequence can be described by the formula ababab, where 'a' and 'b' are the parties to the interaction" (emphasis as published 1968, 1076). Schegloff goes on to point out that while the ABAB formula describes two party conversation that is already underway, it does not provide for the allocation of the A and B roles. The first speaker of the convention is not readily determined. Thus while the ABAB formula "makes each successive turn sequentially dependent on the previous one; it provides no resources when who the first speaker might be is treated problematically" (Schegloff 1968, 1986). Telephone openings are processes of negotiating alternation when turn-taking roles are unclear due to narrow bandwidth and potentially unclear intimacy status. This is very similar to the context of IRC use, thus it is worthwhile re-presenting Schegloff's argument using IRC data. Let us start with the alternation of speakers.

To demonstrate the alternation of speakers in telephone openings, Schegloff presents four representative interactions comprised of several nearly identical turns (1968, 115). We can see related levels of similarity between dyadic openings in IRC by extracting three interactions from Example 1 as Examples 2, 3, and 4. Interactant alternation is marked as A and B; collective address is marked as C; and individual address as I. Also marked are question (Q) and answer (Ans) pairs, and statement (S) and response (R) pairs. Examples 2, 3, and 4 each contain a collectively addressed greeting and the exchange of individually addressed greeting tokens, and it is in these latter exchanges that dyadic interaction is being initiated. Collective greeting displays orientation to the group nature of the medium but it is not itself a dyadic initiator unless taken up - as in a B response to an A initiation - by an existing public channel member. Examples 2 and 3 also show that to ratify a dyad, greetings generally follow the matching convention for adjacency-pair greetings found in FTF interaction (Edmondson 1981, 83; Braun 1998, 23–25), so, for Example, strawb's “hello” is matched by lion in Example 3. The serial nature of IRC's display leads to minor discrepancies in order (Reid 1991; Herring 1999), but this does not appear to cause interactional problems as long as the individual greeting is returned at some nearby point. This occurs in Example 4 when Angie appears to produce a collective greeting (7) after an individual greeting from Stinger (5). While the individual greeting response (16) is not ‘adjacent’, the interaction - and alternation - continues without reference or repair.

Example 2

Event	Order	Interaction
C	A	7. [Angie] Hey everyone!
I	B/A	24. [strawb] hello Angie
C/Q	B/A	32. [Angie] strawb hello how are you?
Ans(S)	B/(A)	45. [strawb] Angie: I'm fine
Q	A	51. [strawb] Angie: where are u from?
(R)	(B)	53. [Angie] strawb that's good
Ans	B	65. [Angie] strawb [PlaceName4]

Example 3

Event	Order	Interaction
C	A	4. [lion] hi everyone?
I	B/A	14. [strawb] hello lion
I	B	19. [Lion] hello strawb

Q	A	31. [strawb] where are u lion?
Ans	B	47. [Lion] I'm in [PlaceName2]

Example 4

Event	Order	Interaction
I	A	5. [Stinger] hey angie
C	(B)/(A)	7. [Angie] Hey everyone!
I	B	16. [Angie] Stinger hello
Q	A	26. [Stinger] angie: where ya from?
Ans/Q	B/A	38. [Angie] Stinger [PlaceName1] you?
Ans/Q	B/A	52. [Stinger] angie: I'm from [PlaceName3]You a student?

In telephone openings Schegloff found a ritualized progression of core opening sequences after the initial summons-answer sequences, usually individual greeting through identification-recognition followed by 'how-are-you' exchanges. IRC openings display similar sequences. Assuming that ratification of individual greeting occurred, one of two types of question exchanges regularly follow: 'how-are-you' exchanges (Examples 2 and 3) or 'where-are-you-from' exchanges (Example 4). In longer openings both might occur (Example 2), in which case 'how-are-you' exchanges usually precede 'where-are-you-from' exchanges. Like 'how-are-you' exchanges, 'where-are-you-from' exchanges are question-answer patterns establishing at least one alternation of turns. While 'where-are-you-from' exchanges are not often found in fixed telephone interactions (though they occur increasingly in mobile telephone situations), they are not surprising on IRC given that most openings occur between strangers in an environment potentially encompassing global connection. The function of 'where-are-you-from' exchanges, then, may be quite directly relational - possibly as an uncertainty reduction strategy (Douglas 1994). If so, it may follow that unlike routine 'how-are-you' exchanges, in which answerers may be (more or less) unconcerned about detailed or even 'truthful' content (Sacks 1975, 70), 'where-are-you-from' exchanges may require both detail and truth, while also acting to establish the first topic.

So, in terms of openings that function to begin an interaction, Examples 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate a partial orientation to normative telephone opening behavior and ABAB sequencing. However, Example 1, from which Examples 2, 3, and 4 were drawn, shows that most of the 22 initiations failed to produce responses in the public channel. Situations such as those of kwest (joins in 20, collectively greets the channel in 23 but receives no responses) and Fleet (joins in 22, does not greet the channel and is not greeted) are more common in Example 1 than the longer and apparently successful openings of Angie and strawb, Angie and stinger and

lion and strawb. Further, each of those examples involved a common person in the dyad, reducing their general applicability. Assuming that initiations that do not appear to receive responses are not examples of users switching private interaction - which undoubtedly occurs at times - the multiple failed initiations in Example 1 indicate that there may be ambiguity in recognizing that an initiation is required/being attempted by a newly-joined user, or that there is scope for existing channel members to ignore an initiation attempt. The processes occurring directly at the point of joining a public channel thus bear closer analysis.

Structure of IRC openings: Channel Entry Phase (CEP) Progressions

Openings that occur directly after joining a public channel follow a similar pattern, dictated partly by the transmission system of the medium and partly by the choices of interactants. We have termed this pattern the Channel Entry Phase (CEP). In the abstract, a CEP consists of an ordered progression of three potential stages:

1. First, an Automated Joining Event (AJE) is produced by the server. The AJE of a user consists of twin mirrored messages from the server: The newly-joined user receives a Joining Confirmation (JC) notice, while the existing channel members receive a Joining Announcement (JA) about the newly-joined user.

2 Second, after receiving a JC, the newly-joined user may produce a collectively or individually addressed Joining Initial Behavior (JIB). At the same time, as a result of seeing a newly-joined user's JA, an existing channel member may direct a Joining Initial Reaction (JIR) at the newly-joined user.

3 Finally, following a JIB, an existing channel member may produce a JIB-Response, ratifying interaction. Alternatively, in response to a JIR, the newly-joined user may ratify interaction with a JIR-Response.

The data show these stages giving rise to six possible CEP Progressions for attempting initiation of dyadic interaction. The Progressions are based on who produces the first behavior, whether this behavior is collectively or individually addressed and who, if anyone, responds. Examples 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 are brief illustrations of the six Progressions. Discussion of the links between Progressions and the instantiation and development of interpersonal relationships will occur throughout the remainder of the article.

Table Progression 1: . AJE >>> JIB (Collective address) [STOP] (No JIB-Response).

Example 5

Event	Interaction
AJE	734. [SERVER] woody!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIB	737. [woody] hey all
STOP	758. [SERVER] woody has left this channel

Table Progression 2: . AJE >>> JIB (Individual address) [STOP] (No JIB-Response).

Example 6

Event	Interaction
AJE	254. [SERVER] SaHaRa!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIB	255. [Sahara] sup FAR!
STOP	312. [SERVER] FAR!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
STOP	313. [benny] FAR thank god you are back…. I MISSED YOU.
STOP	319. [FAR] benny: =) thanks!
STOP	321. [FAR] **B0100000027fed4
I (Fails)	341. [Sahara] FAR!!!!!!!!
STOP	397. [SERVER] Sahara has left this channel

Table Progression 3: . AJE >>> JIB [STOP] (No JIB-Response).

Table Progression 3: . AJE >>> JIR [STOP] (No JIR-Response).

Example 7

Event	Interaction
AJE	454. [SERVER] jsmith! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIR	489. [cutebabe] Hi jsmith
STOP	548. [jsmith] hello everyone
STOP	599. [jsmith] so are there just random conversations or what?
STOP	636. [SERVER] jsmith has left this channel

Table Progression 4: . AJE >>> JIB (Collective address) >>> JIB-Response.

Example 8

Event	Interaction
AJE	30. [SERVER] IP_!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIB (C)	36. [IP_] hi all
JIB-Response	37. [strawb] hello Yo

Table Progression 5: . AJE >>> JIB (Individual address) >>> JIB-Response.

Example 9

Event	Interaction
AJE	384. [SERVER] erf! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIB (I)	390. [IP_] hey erf!
JIB-Response	407. [erf] hey YO

Table Progression 6: . AJE >>> JIR >>> JIR-Response.

Example 10

Event	Interaction
AJE	2059. [SERVER] Dripp!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIR	2064. [MoosE] hi dripp
JIR-Response	2065. [Dripp] moose: hi

The data also shows that CEPs do not occur in either chronological or spatial isolation. Since IRC is a group medium, the CEP of a single user often involves multiple opening Progressions (a situation that does not occur in (most) FTF or telephone interactions). A newly-joined user may produce/experience any one or a combination of the CEP Progressions above, as the following Examples demonstrate. Again, these are brief illustrations, and discussion of the interpersonal ramifications will follow in later sections.

Table 7. Multiple Progression AJE >>> JIR-1 [STOP] (No JIR-Response). Example 1 AJE >>> JIR-2 >>> JIR-2-Response.

Example 11

Event	Interaction
AJE	850. [SERVER] TOMAR!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIR-1	852. [iron] TOMARRRRRRR!
JIR-2	855. [Acus] TOMAR!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
JIR-2-Response	864. [TOMAR] acus!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Table 8. Multiple Progression AJE >>> JIB-1 [STOP] (No JIB-Response). Example 2 AJE >>> JIB-2 [STOP] (No JIB-Response).AJE >>> JIB-3 [STOP] (No JIB-Response).AJE >>> JIR-1 [STOP] (No JIR-Response).

Example 12

Event	Interaction
AJE	318. [SERVER] noway!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
JIR-1	319. [noway] piemannnnnnnnnnnn

JIB 1	319. [noway] [illegible]
JIB 2	320. [noway] clare_________
JIB 3	322. [noway] bubbllllllllllll
JIR 1	323. [Lakerboy] NOWAY!!!!!!!
X	324. [SERVER] noway has left this channel

Like telephone interactions, all CEP openings on IRC begin with an automated component, but as the Progressions above demonstrate, there is significant sequential variability. There is no clear logic to who takes the A and B positions in alternation, so both newly-joined users and existing public channel members may initiate interaction, and newly-joined users may attempt both collective and individually addressed initiations. The obvious problem with sequential ambiguity is the possibility that one may not be addressed or answered. The problem of IRC openings on public channels, then, appears to be linked to the fact that IRC's automated component does not provide the same useful structural resource for openings that the ring does for telephone interactions.

The Automated Joining Event (AJE)

That the first moment in user's CEP is **automated** is not in and of itself the necessary cause of the sequential ambiguity in IRC openings. People are quite used to the automated ring of the telephone. Then again, mere automation is not, in and of itself, an indicator of functional similarity, so more detailed comparison is necessary.

The AJE has several similarities to the telephone ring. Both are produced as a result of a conscious action of one interactant, and their structure and ‘content’ are dictated and produced by the medium. Further, both consist of twin, mirrored, components. The ring heard by the caller and the JC of a newly-joined user both provide feedback about the attempted connection, but the feedback is not evidence of connection to another person. The ring heard by the answerer and the JA to the existing public channel members both signal only that interaction is possible not that it has begun. However, while both automated events function as notification devices about potential interaction, the similarities between the AJE and telephone ring are outweighed by their differences. Both components of the AJE are verbal, while the telephone rings are mechanized alarms. The upshot is that the name of a newly-joined user is known, while the name of a phone caller is unknown (this is the general situation at present, though the advances in phone technology since Schegloff's research now enable the caller's number, and sometimes name, to be available to the recipient). As it turns out, that difference significantly changes the role of the automated components in initiation and direction.

As discussed above, the telephone ring is a crucial coordination feature in telephone openings; it acts as a summons which has an answer as a conditionally relevant response, and has the condition of non-terminality (1968; 1972; 1986). That is, the ring sets up ABAB sequencing in two stages. It acts as an initiatory cue, an

A, which requires a response B. However, the automated A is not itself communicative beyond its summoning power, and it does not provide identity or goal information about the caller for the receiver. Thus the B response is also an A in the sense of being the first human step in the dyadic interaction. Several AB pairs may then follow to negotiate 'greeting' and 'identification'. Importantly, the A summons also implies that the producer of the A has a reason for summoning the B respondent. It is this implication that causes the ring to require a response, and thereafter requires that the caller carry on producing turns related to the reason for calling and that the receiver respond. As a summons, therefore, the ring sets up a condition of non-terminality at least until the reason for the call has been dealt with in some way.

An AJE, on the other hand, is a broadcast, nonspecific notification of the possibility of interaction. Further, it is broadcast to a transient population composed of known (sometimes) and unknown people. The telephone ring heard by a caller is the result of a conscious decision to call a particular known person or institution, i.e. is a summons directed at a specific target defined by an assigned phone number. In both public channels the caller receives (verbal or mechanical) feedback of the success (or otherwise) of the attempted connection. Thus the key difference is that telephone callers (in general) have more information about the likely identity of the recipient and the success of the connection, and the upshot of these differences is that an answer is conditionally relevant to the summons of a telephone ring but is not conditionally relevant to the broadcast AJE.

The slight differences in the JC and JA components of the AJE mean that newly-joined users and existing public channel members also begin with very different perceptions of potential interaction structure.

The Joining Confirmation (JC) and newly-joined users

For a newly-joined user, the verbal nature of the JC is significant primarily because the collective reference implicit in the reference to the interaction environment immediately orients the newly-joined user to the group setting.

Example 13

Event	Interaction
AJE-JC	[SERVER] You have joined #Australia

Critically, although the JC signals that interaction is possible and thus, in Laver's (1975, 221) terms, performs part of the initiatory function of an opening, it does not in and of itself ratify either the attention levels, the availability, or the desire of others to interact with the newly-joined user. Unlike a telephone ring, the JC is not directed at a particular class of interactant, nor can it indicate whether others are busy or potentially available as can be determined from differing telephone ring tones. The JC also provides few clues as to what should be done after its conclusion - unlike the phone it does not provide the clear indication of 'answered', 'busy' or 'not answered'. "You have joined #[channel-name]" is not the feedback of a directed summons that would normatively require an answer by a specific individual (or category of individual), it does not require the user

to produce a greeting on the basis that the class of interactant that they chose to call is now available and are expecting to be greeted to begin identification-recognition. The JC thus provides no “conditional relevance” (Schegloff 1968, 1083) for the newly-joined user to address any individual existing public channel member. Similarly, the newly-joined user knows that the JC is automated and self-directed, not a human-produced and interlocutor-directed token of initiation, propitiation, or exploration, so it signals that human interaction can now occur, but does not conclusively produce an expectation of action.

Those points being made, the JC notifies newly-joined users that they have intruded upon the interaction territory of a group of others. While the ‘territory’ here is spatially tenuous, in an environment where verbal interaction is all that is possible, it is reasonable to assume that there are boundary conditions for the production of new verbal behaviors. For Example, the JC may provide a weak ‘necessity’ for newly-joined users to produce an propitiatory utterance to allay the problems of territorial intrusion (Laver 1975, 226). The JC, as a user-directed notice, is not itself propitiatory, but it may alert the user to the need for propitiation. Newly-joined users know they are operating in a medium geared primarily towards interaction and that joining a public channel is an implicit statement of public presence and, possibly, a request for an invitation to interact. The closest the JC comes to having ‘conditional relevance’, then, is an implicit invitation for the newly-joined user to address the group. Following a JC with any form of address, however, is not a summons-answer sequence, since both moves are produced by the newly-joined user (AA).

The lack of directionality from the JC allows both woody (in Example 5) and jsmith (in Example 7) to deploy collectively addressed greetings, produced perhaps to allay feelings of territorial invasion. However in the same situation, Sahara (Example 6), erf (Example 9) and noway (Example 12) produce individually addressed greetings. Further, as Examples 7, 11 and 12 demonstrate, even when newly-joined users received responses to a greeting, the lack of ongoing response indicates that the JC does not clearly set up non-terminality (Schegloff 1968, 1081) - a precondition to an ongoing interaction, and hence the potential for an ongoing relationship.

From this variability we may argue that while newly-joined users with high expectations of interaction may expect their signaled entry to provoke a response, the AJE itself does not provide a clear indication of what is expected from whom. The most common response to this ambiguity is a lack of response, which may in turn lead to significant frustration of the relational process. Interestingly, users may be somewhat aware of the problems of ambiguity, as indicated by jsmith's “so are there just random conversations or what?” (Example 7, 599). jsmith's comment is interesting in its recognition of the problem of randomness of interactional moves and perhaps indicates a questioning of what counts as a ‘first thing’ in IRC openings.

The Joining Announcement (JA) and existing channel members

Like the JC, the JA provides few clear indicators for either the production of JIRs by existing public channel members or the expectation of JIBs from newly-joined users.

Example 14

Event	Interaction
AJE-JA	734. [SERVER] woody!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

Arguably the lack of a directed individual address in a JA implicitly sets up, or perhaps does not explicitly exclude, the possibility that all or any of existing public channel members may address the newly-joined user, as occurred in Examples 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12. However, unlike an answer to a summons, production of a JIR is a matter of choice. The JA provides only the knowledge that someone has joined a public forum of their own free will, and not at the behest of any one or a group of existing channel member/s. It follows, then, that the JA is not the first half of a to-be-finished summons-answer exchange and thus does not normatively require a response. If this were the case, the data set would have been ludicrously unbalanced with greetings, as every JA would have to have been followed by a greeting from every channel member, leaving little room for any further interaction! Such a rigid summons-answer situation is clearly an untenable option in a group medium. It should also be noted that because the JA is an automated notification, it is significantly different from the FTF introduction of a third party who is present by one person present to a group. Here the introduction carries some answer obligation on the basis that the introduced person has been deliberately brought into interactional proximity by another human for social purposes.

Even without a response to every JA, the data show a high level of initiation attempts in contrast with ongoing interactions, suggesting a 'machine-gun' approach to openings - greet enough people and someone will eventually respond. Without clear indications for the need to respond at all or continue to respond after an initial greeting, chance, then, is an active constraint of the medium on the possibility of forming interpersonal relationships. That being said, IRC is clearly a popular medium, indicating that users may positively regard the chance involved as 'serendipity' rather than as 'risk'.

Not only does the JA lack answer-obligation for existing public channel members, but Examples 7, 11 and 12 also reveal that a JA is not necessarily indicative of a newly-joined user's desire to move past greeting with any existing channel members, as there are many instances of users exiting the channel at the end of greeting exchange. It may be weakly indicative of the general contextual expectations that users who are on a public channel are primarily geared to chat, and perhaps that a newly-joined user is 'ready now', but this is quite tenuous. The JA is, then, initiatory in the sense of a basic signal of presence, but it does not ratify the beginning of dyadic interaction.

Despite the quite comprehensive weaknesses in terms of response provision, the JA, unlike a phone ring, provides existing public channel members with two pieces of identity information about a newly-joined user: a nick and a server address. This information provision makes JAs into direct interactional resources if, as Examples 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12 illustrate, existing channel members so choose. Telephone users, on the other hand, must go through an explicit verbal identification/recognition phase after the ring to gain similar information (Schegloff 1986, 125–129; Hopper & Drummond 1992, 190). Existing IRC channel members, while not necessarily expected to do anything or expecting anything to occur, may immediately make judgments about whether they will produce JIRs or respond to JIBs even without having seen utterances from

newly-joined users. Newly-joined users cannot make the same judgments based on their JC, although once in the channel they will see a list of existing channel members which then gives them similar options. Nevertheless, as JAs appear on screen, existing channel members have an advantage over newly-joined users in that they are immediately made aware of new users one at a time rather than having to read through a list.

Naturally, if one cannot raise the attention of an interlocutor, relationship development will simply be impossible. Initiation/propitiation must be ratified by an interlocutor, but in the crowded and transient interaction environments of IRC this can be very difficult. In the data, fully one-third of the users in the logs joined and left without producing any utterances, and the majority of that one-third were not addressed by existing public channel members. Even those users that succeeded appeared to find the task difficult, particularly when unknown to one another. Take the case of Nasa and Clown in Example 15. Judging by their questions, NASA and Clown are both inexperienced, non-regular users, who appear to know neither each other nor anyone else on the channel.

Example 15

Interaction

1987. [SERVER] NASA!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

1988. [ACTION] NASA - hi to everyone

2040. [SERVER] Clown!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

2044. [ACTION] NASA - is here anyone who would like to talk with me?

2089. [Clown] hello there everyone

2099. [Clown] Hello?

2107. [Clown] Be sociable!

2111. [ACTION] NASA - talk to me too?

2120. [Clown] NASA: hello.

2131. [NASA] Clown-at least one who… umm, hi… :)

2145. [SERVER] NASA has left this channel

2148. [Clown] NASA: hi what's going down?

Apart from the fact that NASA uses an action command format (1988), their greetings are very similar, both using the collective address element “everyone” (1988 and 2089). Neither user receives responses and both resort to metalingual strategies and connection checking when this becomes clear (NASA 2044, 2111; Clown

2099, 2107). The pair eventually find each other (2120, 2131) and have a chance at beginning an interaction. Interestingly, neither party directly relies on the AJE or even the collective greeting of the other as a coordinating device, both producing more utterances after receiving no responses. The opening essentially begins with the pair of individually addressed greetings which follow Nasa's “Clown - at least one who… umm, hi… :)” (2131), which starts as an attempt to get Clown's attention (A), but having unexpectedly received a greeting while typing, changes to a greeting response (B) (conveniently setting up ABAB sequencing). When Clown takes the next turn, a third greeting is produced (2148). This third greeting is (strictly) unnecessary now that two individual greetings have been exchanged and that NASA leaves the channel (2145) without receiving it.

However, had NASA remained on the channel, there is an argument to be made that, due to the difficulties both users have been experiencing, the AB pair ending with NASA's individual greeting response still does not signify that interaction has been ratified. The third greeting makes sense if Clown is unclear about NASA's attention - a justifiable strategy considering that NASA leaves ‘during’ the opening. A small amount of redundancy might aid ratification on IRC. Certainly, redundant greeting tokens occur frequently in the identification-recognition phases of Schegloff's telephone data (1986). Since IRC users already ‘recognize’ each other in the sense that they have known each other's nicks from the outset, there may be a case for arguing that in some IRC interactions a ratification phase might substitute for an identification-recognition phase. Confusion appears to occur primarily because the AJE does not provide clear indication of what is expected from whom. The work of coordination thus appears to begin with the verbal greeting exchange, making choice of greeting behavior critical.

Salutation choice: Ramifications for coordination and relationships

Token-based “verbal salutes” (Krivonos and Knapp 1977, 193) such as ‘hi’ are generally held to be important not for their semantic content but for their exploratory function (Laver 1975, 221; 1981, 298–300) and/or the potential social information encoded in token choice and phonetic behavior. These tokens are common signals that perform the critical functions of attention-getting and availability-establishment (McLaughlin 1987, 170–176; Schegloff 1968, 1090; 1986, 117–118). Salutation by nick, particularly the form in which a nick is used, is more semantically rich but performs the same function. Perhaps not surprisingly then, the choice of token or nick in IRC openings has similar ramifications to those proposed by Laver, although the choice emphasizes relational development more than social class.

In individual greetings, the use of a greeting token rather than a nick salutation usually indicates that the greeted user is unknown. This is illustrated in Example 16, in which SWAMI attempts openings with wendy (1517) and blotto (1413), both presumably unknown to SWAMI given that geographical location questions are asked (1536, 1850).

Example 16

Interaction

1409. [Blotto] G'Day SWAMI!

1413. [SWAMI] hiya blotto

1493. [SERVER] Wendy!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

1495. [Wendy] hello 1515. [Wendy] hello?

1517. [SWAMI] hiya wendy

1522. [Wendy] hi SWAMI

1536. [SWAMI] wendy where r u?

1541. [SERVER] Wendy has left this channel

1850. [Blotto] SWAMI: Where you from?

1855. [SWAMI] Blotto [PlaceName]!

Users known to one another most often deploy nick-based or nick-only greetings, as illustrated by Devil and babe in Example 17.

Example 17

Interaction

44 [Devil] “Oh, I got the blues. Yeah, I've got the blues. I've got the ‘my girl ripped out my heart, and stomped on in and threw it in the fire’ blues.”

169 [Devil] :~~~~~~(

461. [babe] Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil Devil!!!!!!!!

465. [Devil] babe!!!!

468. [Babe] Devil: wassup?

478. [Devil] babe: I'm singing the blues. Wazup wit u?

We can argue that Devil and babe know each other based on babe's highly effusive, repetitive and multiple-exclamation-marked greeting of Devil. While this is not definitive evidence, it is very rare, and threatening, for a complete stranger to 'flood' another user in such a manner (Rintel & Pittam 1997, 519). We will come back to the other strategies in Example 17 shortly, but to continue the discussion of salutation choice, Examples 16 and 17 demonstrate that in an environment in which friends exchange nicks, traditional greeting tokens such as "hello" appear to act as social distance signals. Token use might indicate a recognition of the fact that **seeing** another's nick from the very first meeting does not equate to **knowing** the other user. Indeed, given that nicks are almost the total embodiment of a user on IRC, their use without a token in the interaction-initial slot is potentially very threatening, strongly invoking an intimacy which may not exist. In Example 18, Table's greeting of TwoFlour below displays strong orientation to the possible conventions of nick-based greetings for known users and token-based greetings for unknown users.

Example 18

Interaction

197. [SERVER] TwoFlower!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

199. [TwoFlour] HELLO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

202. [Table] Twoflower!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!11

204. [Table] i don't know you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

205. [Table] hahahahahahaha !!!!!!!!!!!!

207. [ACTION] Table is silly

212. [TwoFlower] Hi table

TwoFlower produces a token-based greeting (199). Table responds with a nick-only greeting but then reveals that TwoFlower is unknown (204). Table's laughter (205) and comment ("Table is silly" (207)) indicate that Table considers the response to be a trick based on false intimacy (evidence of a convention that nick-only greetings are intimate salutation devices). TwoFlower's reply, the token-plus-nick "hi table" (212), is also revealing. Whether TwoFlower is amused by Table's joke or not, it is interesting to note that after Table's jokes, TwoFlower, like Clown in Example 15, may be unsure as to the ratification of the interaction. Like many of the examples above there has been a collective-individual-individual greeting sequence, but Table's extra turns break the sequence somewhat. TwoFlower's final individually addressed greeting (212) functions as a new initiation with Table, requiring more conventional ABAB sequencing responses to lead to an ongoing interaction.

It should be noted that in Examples 17 and 18, the interactants 'adorn' their greetings with multiple exclamation marks. 'Adornment' is our term for the well-documented use of typographic extension (extra exclamation marks, letter extension, full upper-case, etc.) as somewhat analogous to phonetic indications of excitement in verbal interaction (Reid 1991; Bechar-Israeli 1996; Werry 1996; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1998; Doell 1998). Adornment is usually discussed in terms of positive excitement (eg. the glee inherent in multiple exclamation marks, sometimes also associated with relational intimacy, or at least knowledge) or negative excitement (eg. that use of all upper-case is the written analogy to shouting), but the logs show little evidence that the lack of adornment might indicate the subtle negativity sometimes presented in phonetic information, such as the trouble-premonitions implicit in a teary voice (Jefferson 1980; Schegloff 1986, 133–143). Example 17 does, however, demonstrate one interesting ramification of the links between adornment and negativity. Before babe's opening, Devil was clearly in a negative, upset mood (44, 169). Having seen babe's effusive greeting, Devil returns a greeting almost as positive, through the use of adornment. Devil's adornment appears to be a strategic orientation to positivity designed to consolidate the opening. Not only is this demonstrative of the 'opening lie' strategy similar to that pointed out by Sacks (that in certain 'how are you?' situations "everyone has to lie" rather than immediately burden interlocutors with negative knowledge and potentially stifle the interaction (1975, 69–74)), but also that adornment does not have constant and specific representational force. Rather, it is better to argue that adornment can be used for strategic purposes.

Adornment is not just an individualistic greeting strategy - greetings must, after all, function to coordinate interaction. In Examples 17 and 18, the interactants come close to matching each other's greetings, using almost the same number of exclamation marks. Matching can be a powerful demonstration of alignment to the dyad, establishing both intimacy and ABAB sequencing. Example 19 is a particularly good illustration of orthographic and adornment matching.

Example 19

Interaction

289. [Hidee] FlatStrapeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

302. [FlatStra] HideeeeePeeeeeeeee !!!! :)

Hidee is careful to use the capitalization that FlatStra uses in his nick (the 'F' and the 'S'), and adds the letter 'p', converting the name into "FlatStrap", a somewhat semantically meaningful addition. Hidee also adds a repeated string of the letter 'e' after the 'p', mimicking two common English phonetic intimacy devices: adding an 'ee''ii' or 'y' sound to the end of a name to signal intimacy and jokingly extending the vowel in the name to represent calling from a distance. FlatStra replies also adding a 'p' and repeated string of the letter 'e', mimicking not only the phonetic devices of the 'e' above but also the combined 'pe' unit. The addition of an ultimate 'p' also gives "HiDeeP" an orthographic matching of "FlatStrap". FlatStra adds several 'e's' above the two at the end of the "Dee" unit, in keeping with Hidee's convention of 'e' extension, and capitalizes the

‘P’ of “HIdeeeeePeeeeeeeeee” to produce a mid-name capitalization similar to his own. The exclamation marks and smiling emoticon in FlatStra's salutation do not occur in Hidee's salutation but, in the context of matching, such small additions are probably not as detrimental as omissions might have been.

The exchange above is remarkable in its multilevel matching, but is even more remarkable given IRC's written nature. Matching on IRC requires users to work out the orthographic and adornment conventions of a salutation, then type and send their matched reply - stretching the already extended chronology of the medium. The data presented so far demonstrate that users in general display a distinct orientation to the opening behaviors in other interaction media, but this instance seems extreme. On the other hand, it is not so extreme when considered from the standpoint of function rather than the oddities of production. Coordination and intimacy establishment by matching are factors in keeping with the findings about matched token exchange (Edmondson 1981, 83) and address forms (Braun 1998, 23–25), and the communication accommodation strategy of convergence for representing liking and ingrouping (Gallois & Callan 1991; Giles et al. 1999).

The conventions of salutation choice and adornment are complicated by the fact that just as on the telephone (or FTF) people may have “signature hellos” (Jefferson's term in Schegloff 1986, 123), so too some IRC users have signature nick/token choices and adornment level features. Example 20 is a complex excerpt in which iron displays two forms of signature greeting. iron's greetings are marked in the first column: [S] marks a signature greeting element from iron, a second [S] and/or an [E] marks an additional element, [D] represents a minor deviation from standard signature style, and [C] represents a complete deviation from signature style. For the other users, [O] marks an element similar to iron's signature greeting.

Example 20

iron	Others	Interaction
S		43. [Iron] BLINDD!
S		55. [Iron] FLATSTRA!
S,S,E		58. [Iron] FLAtSTRAAAAAAAAAA!
		74. [SERVER] Wsxedc!xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		89. [BLIND2] iron!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
		92. [SERVER] Wsxedc has left this channel
S		93. [Iron] WSXEDC!
S		95. [Iron] BLIND! RE DUDE!
		100. [BLIND2] iron!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
		250. [SERVER] SNOT! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
S,D		252. [Iron] SNOT?

260. [SNOT] hi iron, what kind of iron are we talking about??

S,S 274. [Iron] BLINDDDDDDD!

280. [BLIND2] iron!!!!!!

C 308. [Iron] Kirsty, hello

314. [Kirsty] hi iron!

372. [SERVER] floppy! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

S 378. [Iron] FLOPPY!

S,E 385. [Iron] FLOP-PY! FLOPPY!

401. [floppy] hi iron

S 496. [Iron] FLATSTRA!

540. [SERVER] FlatStra! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

S,E 575. [Iron] EARTH TO FLATSTRA, EARTH TO FLATSTRAA!

582. [FlatStra] iron: what ?

613. [SERVER] Flasher! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

635. [SERVER] Flasher's nickname is now bigDduk

648. [SERVER] bigDduk's nickname is now Flasher

S 659. [Iron] BIGDDUK!!!!

S,E 660. [Iron] BIGD!! DUK!!!

662. [Flasher] hiya iron!

O 675. [Wsxedc] BIGD FUK

O 693. [Bubbl_] BIGDFart

O 698. [Bubbl_] BIGDFart

735. [SERVER] Banker! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel

S 753. [Iron] BANKER!!!

756. [Banker] hey iron

		736. [Banker] hey iron
		850. [SERVER] TOMAR! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
S,S		852. [Iron] TOMARRRRRRR!
		931. [TOMAR] iron!!!!!!!!
		1020. [SERVER] Enemy! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
S,D		1028. [Iron] ENEMY???
		1038. [Enemy] Iron Yes?
S		1376. [Iron] ACUS!!!
S,S		1394. [Iron] LADYYYYYBUGGGGGGGG!
		1416. [SERVER] Blowhard! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		1417. [Blowhard] Heyt Hey Hey!!
S		1421. [Iron] BLOWHARD!@!!!!
	O	1427. [BLIND2] blow!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
	O	1430. [Blowhard] BLIND!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
		1431. [Blowhard] errr…2
	O	1432. [BLIND2] hardblow!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
	O	1436. [Blowhard] DNILB!!!!!!!! :P
S,E	O	1438. [iron] BLINDBLOW!
		1455. [SERVER] ORC_BOY! xx@xx.xx.xx.xx has joined this channel
		1461. [ORC_BOY] HELLO ALL
S,S		1465. [Iron] ORCBOYYY!

Except in the case of Kirsty (308) and SNOT (252), iron's 16 greetings have identical formal elements: a nick-only exclamation written completely in upper-case. In 13 of the 16 greetings iron also uses at least one exclamation mark (Enemy (1028), SNOT and Kirsty are the exceptions). This basic signature greeting is

extended in five instances with a repetition of the ultimate letter of the other user's nick (58, 274, 852, 1394 and 1465). When greeting FlatStra, Floppy, and BigDduk (AKA Flasher) iron displays a more exotic form of signature greeting, performing the salutation twice and, in the second salutation, extending the nick (FlatStra, 55 and 58) repeating the other user's nick (FlatStra, 496 and 575) or repeating the nick and splitting the syllables (Floppy's greeting 378 and 385; BigDduk 659 and 660). Syllable-splitting has an analogue in barracking or cheering, where the split increases vocal power and emphasis for each syllable. The repetition of syllables stands out against the other utterances, so this works well as an attention getting device. Iron may equate this 'cheering' style with positivity but it does not seem to result in an increased level of interaction nor a closely matched level of addressee positivity.

The one major exception to iron's use of his signature greeting - basic or exotic - is when he greets Kirsty ("Kirsty, hello" (308)). In so doing, iron may be following the convention for greeting unknown users discussed above, but iron does not do so in 15 other greetings, so why should this be the case here? Drawing on some contextual evidence, we know that iron appeared in three logs and was frequently granted chanop status (Reid 1991). iron was therefore probably a regular and experienced IRC user and would know both that typing completely in upper-case equates to shouting, which is generally discouraged on IRC. Further, in an earlier part of this log, iron stated that "iron needs a girlfriend badly". In the context of this evidence and iron's signature greeting, it is possible that iron employs self-reflexive social logic for this greeting, based on orientation to greeting and general IRC conventions. The following causal chain appears reasonable to the researchers, although it is not claimed that iron was cognizant of it:

1 Kirsty is the only user that iron can see explicitly presenting as female;

2 Greeting leads to ongoing interaction;

3 Ongoing interactions are the basis of ongoing relationships;

4 Assuming no-one writes to Kirsty about iron, Kirsty will have no social context cues to make decisions about iron except those which iron produces, and the first of these will be in the greeting;

5 iron's own signature greeting uses full capitalization;

6 Full capitalization is often used to signify shouting on IRC;

7 iron's signature greeting may appear to signify shouting to Kirsty;

8 Shouting is threatening;

9 By switching from shouting to using a greeting token, iron orients to general IRC greeting conventions and minimizes threat;

10 By orienting to general IRC greeting conventions and minimizing threat iron may be more likely to achieve ongoing interaction, and hence an ongoing relationship, with Kirsty;

11 Since Kirsty is presenting as female, by achieving an ongoing relationship with Kirsty there is the potential to fulfill the goal of beginning a romantic relationship.

Thus while iron appears to know nothing of Kirsty beyond the fact that Kirsty explicitly presents as female "Kirsty, hello" is arguably a strategy designed to give iron the best possible chance to interact further. This is in explicit opposition to iron's more face-threatening greeting of Enemy. This Example, then, provides some evidence that IRC users may have some self-reflexive understanding of openings, perhaps facilitated by the slower, written nature of the medium (cf. Rodino 1998).

Responses to iron's greetings, when they occur, do not completely match iron's signature greeting style (89, 100, 280, 314, 582, 662, 756, and 931). All responses are nick-only but use lower-case and multiple exclamation marks - the general convention for greeting known users. Iron's signature shout would be unwelcome in many public channels, but it may be acceptable if iron is greeting known users. Certainly no user questions it in the log, but the taboo nature of iron's signature greeting may result in a weakening of the matching convention for regulars - iron receives primarily lower- or mixed-case responses.

That being said, on some occasions iron's exotic signature greeting results in some interesting take-ups by third parties. Wsxedc seems to parody iron in the separated and capitalized "BIGD FUK" (675). Bubbl_'s similar repeated utterance "BIGDFart" (693 and 698) is interesting in that Bubbl_ is actually a bot ('robot' - a computer program that can function like a user), and thus an unidentifiable user is satirizing by remote control. BLIND2's greeting of Blowhard ("blow!!" (1427); "hardblow!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" 1432) appears inspired by iron's exotic signature greeting, although BLIND2 does not open with iron in such a fashion, nor does BLIND2 display any proclivity to such exotic greetings throughout the rest of the log. Blowhard, though, returns similar - almost matched - greetings to BLIND2, first producing a split nick greeting (1430 and 1431) and then, in the absence of syllables to rearrange, reversing the letters of BLIND2's name "DNILB!!!!!!!!" (1436)). Oddly enough, iron also produces an utterance that has a degree of reversal and syllable splitting, but it addresses both BLIND2 and Blowhard: "BLINDBLOW!" (1438). It is somewhat unclear whether iron's utterance is a greeting or not, for while it is similar to iron's exotic signature greetings, the reversal system is BLIND2 and Blowhard's. It appears that iron's exotic signature greeting has affected other users, has been transformed by them, and the transformation has been re-assimilated by iron.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate openings in public IRC channels and argue that openings are fundamental to understanding the development of relationships on IRC. Although openings may occur throughout an IRC session, the openings focussed on in this study were those that occurred when a newly-joined user entered a public channel. This was termed the Channel Entry Phase (CEP). A CEP was defined as starting with the mirrored components of an Automated Joining event (AJE), the Joining Confirmation (JC) and the Joining Announcement (JA). The AJE is the first indicator of presence and connection for both newly-joined users and existing channel members. Following the AJE, both newly-joined users and existing channel members were found to produce initiating actions, termed Joining Initial Behaviors (JIBs) and Joining Initial Reactions (JIRs) respectively.

The automated nature of the AJE was found to be critical to openings occurring in a user's CEP. Schegloff (1968; 1986) places great importance on the summoning abilities of the automated component of telephone interaction. Unlike a telephone ring, the AJE was found to have few, if any, inclusionary or exclusionary conditional relevance factors for determining who could initiate and what they could produce. For users this was both a blessing and a curse: certainly it allowed freedom to initiate with any other user, but since the AJE did not transmit the coordination cues of FTF interaction or telephone summonses, it was difficult to know that one was seen and/or that others cared. This appeared to be why users had to work so hard at ratifying openings.

One of the difficulties of ratification is that public IRC channels are forums more conducive to collectivity than dyadicy, in terms of both joinability and interwoven homogenous typography. Users who do not know others are required to meet in public channels, while friends may move immediately to private interaction. As such, relationship development may well be harder than relationship maintenance. IRC has the surface ability to transmit phatic information but creates problems for the actual social bonding that is at the heart of Laver's (1975; 1981) notion of positive phaticity, which seems to run contrary to the over-determining and over-accommodating strategies found in openings that do progress to ongoing interactions. This was reflected in the finding that many openings consist of failed one-way initiation attempts or greeting exchanges, neither of which were followed up. Although users may leave the public channels to interact privately, we might ask why so many existing channel members continually greet newly-joined users. Perhaps the time it takes to have real-time written interaction facilitates constant ‘fishing’ for new interlocutors and parallel interactions. Future research could investigate how many interactions may be ‘juggled’ in this fashion, and how successful multitasking users accomplish their parallel interactions.

Greetings and salutations common to FTF and telephone interaction were also found to be common to IRC, as was the normative orientation to ABAB sequencing. As has been demonstrated consistently in IRC research (Reid 1991; Werry 1996; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1998), the technology of IRC does not preclude the adaptation of enough normativity for users to develop relationships, although the common conflict between initiation and propitiation, which results in the failure of so many interactions to get started, does lead to speculation as to why more obvious adaptations were not found. It is unlikely that humans will change from using ABAB sequencing - even if in parallel interactions - so new norms are likely to involve transmutations of phatic functions and content. Future research might investigate how long it takes to develop new norms and what factors are involved in their development. IRC is a discursive arena that could almost have been designed for testing new rules, which makes the general conservatism of users particularly

interesting. Considering the transience found in the logs, it may be that IRC is too fragmented a community to develop anything more than very localized norms. Perhaps, though, future research will find not prescriptive routines, but new tactics for negotiation from positions of little information.

The ambiguity of IRC openings is indicative of the need for communication researchers to be involved with the production of new media. As Newhagen notes, "A colleague of mine likened the role of communication research to that of judges at a gymnastics competition, where the engineers roll out a new technology, and we hold up numbers from 1 to 10, rating it. I think we are compelled to take a more active role in the development of technology itself… ." (Newhagen & Rafaeli 1996). The AJE is precisely the form of technological component for which communications researchers might provide developmental advice. That being said, there are divides to be bridged: although communication researchers problematize simple transmission or computational models for explaining interaction (Edwards 1997; Mey & Talbot 1989), engineers might argue that these are useful for building interaction media.

In summary, users who manage to ratify dyadic interaction on a public IRC channel have accomplished quite a difficult interactional and relational task. IRC openings are highly complex and significantly ordered sites of the manifest discursive features linking interaction to dyadic interpersonal relationships. Opening dyadic interaction on IRC requires a highly negotiated three-step process of presence recognition, initiation and opening ratification. In this process, verbal phatic token exchange must play the dual role of coordination and the representation of relationship status. Interaction management of these linkages is considerably affected by the technological structures of interaction, but within this framework users can be demonstrably creative in finding, recognizing and using opening strategies, and occasionally taking up and modifying the opening strategies of others. In dyadic interpersonal relationship development, then, IRC users may be said to orient to a principle or desire for clearly ordered phaticity, the gloss alluded to in our title as 'first things first'.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Margaret McLaughlin and the two reviewers for their help in revising this paper

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