

Language and the Internet

Susan C. Herring

Indiana University

herring@indiana.edu

Language and (or “on”) the → Internet (also: computer-mediated discourse, electronic discourse, → Technologically Mediated Discourse) refers to human language produced and displayed through computer-mediated communication (CMC) systems that are mostly text based, such as email, chat, text messaging, web forums, blogs, microblogs, and wikis. Increasingly, “Internet” language is mediated by mobile technologies.

Research on language and the Internet may be grouped into five major areas.

1) *Classification* research characterizes computer-mediated language in relation to the traditional modalities of writing and speech; as modes or genres (→ Genre); or in terms of features, such as synchronicity, that cut across modes.

2) Research on the *structural features* of Internet language focuses mainly on typography, orthography, and new word formations. The use of abbreviations (e.g., *msg* ‘message’), acronyms (e.g., *LOL* ‘laughing out loud’), number homophones (e.g., *l8r* ‘later’), and emoticons (combinations of keyboard symbols that represent facial expressions) have been claimed to characterize Internet language.

3) Research on *discourse patterns* addresses pragmatic phenomena such as politeness (and rudeness, including “flaming”; → Verbal Aggressiveness), relevance, and speech acts (→ Linguistic Pragmatics); interactional phenomena such as turn-taking, repairs, topic establishment, maintenance, and drift (→ Conversation Analysis); and register phenomena such as gender styles, regional dialects, and ingroup language practices (→ Language Varieties).

4) Some scholars study Internet language as a *lens through which to understand human behavior* more generally, rather than to describe language for its own sake. Concepts that have been addressed include collaboration, community, identity, influence, power, and reputation, all of which are instantiated online through typed discourse.

5) *Languages and language ecologies* have increasingly attracted attention as the Internet expands its global scope. The Internet has been claimed to accelerate the spread of English and other large regional languages such as Spanish and Chinese, although scholars disagree on whether this is occurring at the expense of smaller languages.

SEE ALSO: ◦ Conversation Analysis ◦ Discourse ◦ Electronic Mail ◦ Gender and Discourse ◦ Genre ◦ Internet ◦ Language Varieties ◦ Linguistic Pragmatics ◦ Linguistics ◦ Personal Communication by CMC ◦ Technologically Mediated Discourse ◦ Verbal Aggressiveness ◦ Virtual Communities

Suggested Readings

Androutsopoulos, J. (2006). Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 10(4), 419–438.

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