



Claiming in-group membership in online communities

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Introduction

- “the electronic age changed our lives as communicating human beings” (Crystal 1995)
- “abundance of data on human behaviour and language use” (Herring 2007)
- language as a **social process**: socio-pragmatic analysis
- **human interaction**: formation of online communities

Asynchronous CMC

- message boards, discussion boards, bulletin boards, (Usenet) newsgroups, discussion lists, mailing lists, conferences, etc.
- **'on-line polylogue'** (Marcoccia 2004) or **'multiparty conversation on-line'** (Crystal 2001)
- participants do not share the same physical space but their environment is shaped around a shared topic instead> mutually shared knowledge> **common ground**

Material analysed

- Authentic, self-compiled corpus; 207,000 words

Corpus	Thread	Message board	Topic
1.	Slimming_world_support	Three Fat Chicks	dieting, special diet
2.	30_Somethings_chat	Three Fat Chicks	dieting, everyday talk- chat
3.	Infertility_forum	Mothering	infertility, trying to conceive
4.	Due_date_October2008	Health & Fitness	pregnancy
5.	Catholic_mammas	Mothering	parenting, religion
6.	Leftist_forum	Mothering	politics, 2004 elections



“Welcome to the 30's. Always fantastic to see a new face. You'll find that you have a hard time staying away from this forum. The people are so great and there isn't anywhere else I know of where you can receive so much support and so many great ideas from so many different people”.

Theoretical background

- Claiming common ground (Brown and Levinson 1978)-
group of positive politeness strategies, social
accelerators
 - solidarity (Leech 1983, 2014)
 - comaraderie (Lakoff 1973)
 - involvement (Urbanová 2003)
- 1. convey that H is admirable, interesting
- 2. **claim in-group membership with H**
- 3. Claim common points of view, opinions, attitudes,
empathy, etc.

In-group markers

- Showing pertinence to a group
- belonging to a “set of persons who share specific wants, including goals and interests” (B&L 1987)
- 6 categories:
 1. topic-related nicknames
 2. jargon
 3. terminology
 4. generic names
 5. diminutives and personalised address forms
 6. inclusive we
- (joking)

1. Topic-oriented nicknames

- **Mask** (Bechar-Israeli 1995, Crystal 2001, Paolillo 2001)
vs. **Face** that the participant wants to present; sign of individuality (not the entire identity)
- Self-chosen, corresponds with the topic of the thread
- Difficult task to find out the motivation behind the nick

Examples of topic-related nicks:

- **diETING**

- Special diet: *SlimmingWorldChick, SlimmingWorldQueen*
- Motivation: *fightinflab, determinedtodiet, Melgetinthin, wannabesize7*

- **motherING**

- Pregnancy: *Hopefully 01, mommydueinjune*
- Children's names and nicks: *Lucymama, MamaFern, lilmiss' mama*
- location: *mountainmom, Aussiemum, Oregonicmama, chicagomom*
- Others: *stayinghome, burritomama, PottyDiva*



Posted message 1

[View Single Post](#)

Thread: [30 Something't Daily Chat: 7/16](#)

07-16-2007, 09:03 AM

[KarenK](#)

Moderator - 30 Somethings



Join Date: Aug 1999

Location: New Jersey

Posts: 2,164

Good morning. It's a slow start here today. There's tons I need to do, I just can't find the motivation! 😊

Sheila: Good luck with the attorney. From now on if your husband wants to know what your children think, tell him to ask them. Being the middleman is probably not a good idea. You know, shoot the messenger and all.

GG: Sorry about the coffee! Thank goodness that's the one obsession I didn't pick up. I hope you got a lovely cup on the way to work.

OK, off to tackle some of these chores!

KarenK

Posts by members, moderators and admins are not considered medical advice and no guarantee is made against accuracy. Please see your physician before taking advice found on the internet.

Good morning all. It looks to be a beautiful day here in NJ. I think we will have some outside time this morning. Every time we go out every mosquito within 5 miles attacks Cassie. I have to spray her down before we go out. One got her in the car yesterday. Poor baby girl.

Aunt Flo is still here whipping my behind but I think it's finally getting better. I'm wiped out energy wise tho. It takes a lot of effort to do anything.

MO: Good to see you back here and so vibrant. Glad that you are enjoying your vacation.

GG: Yay on the loss! Whoohoo. Keep up the good eatin and exercise.

OK, off to play outside!



KarenK

2. In-group jargon

- Belongs to group's shared history
- Acronyms:
 1. general acronyms: BBL, ASAP, DH
 2. topic-related acronyms:
 - dieting: STGW (short term goal weight)
 - infertility: AF (Aunt Flow), BFN (Big Fat Negative)
 - pregnancy: POAS (pee on stick)
 - Mothering: SAH (schooling at home)
 - Politics: ObL (Osama bin Laden)

3. terminology

- Overlap with abbreviations and acronyms
- Infertility- medical terms (insight in medical treatment)

Example 1:

AFM: Had my phone consult with the doctor 2 hours away. We would do estrogen priming before I get my period, then a combo of letrozole (femara) followed by gonal-f injections and an antagonist. Probably also vaginal suppositories of estrogen to thicken the lining after I finish taking the femara.

4. Generic names

- Function as solidarity markers
- Derivations of nicks- *GG* instead of *GatorgalstuckinGA*

1. collective address forms: *(you) ladies, folks, guys, all, everyone, chicks,*

Topic-related: *fellow slimmers, SW girls, mamas*

2. individual address forms: *girl, guurl, sunshine, babe, my dear*

Playful elements: *lovely muffins and studrockets*

5. Diminutives and personalized address forms

- Overlap with generic names
- Gender specific
- *Example 2:*
 - HAPPY BIRTHDAY HANNA NANNERS!
 - How are you my little cinnamon sprinkled deep fried ice cream served on a chocolate dipped waffle cone? How's the house?
 - Lisa: How's it goin' sunshine?

6. Inclusive we

- Shifting responsibility

Example 3:

I think you did really well to only put on 7 pounds on holiday
... We all are entitled to forget our diets on holiday...

I think we are all really in the 'worry wart' stage as you put it
so we're with ya!

I'm positive we all will achieve our goals here...

>> asserting common ground

Presupposing/ asserting common ground

- B&L> small talk, taking the hearer's perspective-manipulation in order to persuade H to do something for S

x promoting solidarity, mutuality

Different contexts:

1. welcoming a newcomer

Example 4:

Newbie here! Hi! I'm so glad I found this forum.

- welcome to the forum ...I think it's a fab place to come along -spill your stuff and get great ideas and support.

2. Expressing thankfulness

just want to say thank you to all of you! You have no idea how much your advice, experiences and support mean to me. Without you I think I would be looney toons by now!

3. “being on the same bandwagon”

This is my first pg, too, so I'm in the same boat.

i love this thread...it's neat to talk to people who are going through the same thing at almost the same time.

4. We x them

We women know our bodies quite well.

Joking

- mutually “shared laughter nurtures solidarity” (Coates 2007)
- shared background knowledge and values ... asserting common ground, enhancing rapport

Example 5:

Excuse me.....is this the Satan-worshipping forum?

Hello, my name is Candice. I am a liberal. I sacrifice animals, drink blood, eat babies and worship the dark lord.

(Everyone: "Hello, Candice!")

I am so happy to have found you all. (Where's the damn pentacle smileie when you need it?:)

Conclusions

- All communities develop certain patterns how to claim in-group membership
- Various in-group markers (topic-related nicks, jargon and terminology, diminutives and personalised address forms, inclusive we)
- Presupposing common ground and joking

Function: promoting mutuality and solidarity without any selfish, ulterior motives as in Brown and Levinson

Selected references

Brown P. and Stephen C. Levinson (2004). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herring, Susan C, Dieter Stein and Tuija VIRTANEN (2013). *Pragmatics of computer-mediated communication*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton

Leech, Geoffrey (2014). *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics.