Language and technology overview

Language and Technology

General Concepts

Rapid change

- No homogeneous speech community: access 'gated' by affluence, power, education, age and gender.
- Communication practices
- Technical aspects
- New technical possibilities = new types of text / communication = new social possibilities.
- Languages of technology are emerging: terms not always codified to reflect usage but understanding remains widespread amongst users.

New communications technology stores data in different ways

- **Question:** What is meant by 'language' in this context? How fixed is the boundary between language and communication?
- Technologise language: information becomes **commodified.**
- Electronic texts can be endlessly and seamlessly linked to one another and to other types of information and processes.
- Vertical / hierarchical organisation of texts encourages new types of reading.
- Tendency towards *'futuristic speculation and popular stereotyping'* (Susan Herring)

Development in technology and development in communication organic

- Technology makes different methods of communication possible: we are learning to read, write, speak and listen in different ways.
- Academic focus on the language of ICT relatively new but expanding. Focus on linguistic, sociological and cross-cultural points of view.

Framework for analysis

Pragmatics

- ICT texts have properties of: plasticity, links, tagging, searches, templates, footprints, virtuality: materially different from more traditional writing and recording.

Semantics

- ICT provides multi-modal methods of presentation. Verbal complimented by graphical, auditory, kinaesthetic and organisational.
- Specialised reference
- Pseudo-prosodic features create semantic nuances… indicate how a text should be read.

Graphology

- Computer use mediated via language, imagery and metaphors of the interface. What do these reveal?
- Icons; emoticons; reflection of modern corporate offices; simulation of social space / user interface; imagery / value.

Lexis

- Texts not necessarily read in the same linear fashion as traditionally. E.g. Internet page; footprints left through texts, possible to recreate individual reading.
- Diverse, highly 'professional' texts can be created with access to PC.
- Jargon / technical / specialist
- New words; Etymology in action, producer initiated vs. sub-cultural groups.
- Recycling words: language fossils: different collocations: may create new connotations.
- Loan words: metaphorical extension: semantic widening: Revelation of underlying powers in culture?

See word formation diagram and lexical change flowchart

See Glossary

Technology and Identity

Psycholinguistic approaches

- Traditional constraints of time, space and boundaries challenged / overcome.
- Virtual identities / audiences
- 'new' language / texts echo previous genres / technologies.

Digital records

- Data reserves created: access for those with control over them.
- **Privacy**

Sociolinguistic approaches

- Jargon can act like a **shibboleth**; showing membership of a group. Likewise this leads to exclusion.
- **Jargon and exclusion**
- Categorise exclusive language e.g. Hacker Slang (mainstream); Hacker Jargon (specialised slang); Techspeak (textbook/ manual).
- Internet: open forum, few controls on access and postings. Is this a good thing?
- Popular derisive stereotyping of technophiles: *'nerds, geeks, anoraks'* = dysfunctional / de-socialised. **Note:** social attitudes so PC elsewhere yet little critical comment here.
- **Consider**: are these terms undergoing a process of amelioration?
- **People / users are represented: note underlying ideology associated with this**
- **Covert prestige and subcultures**
- Creation of specialist vocabulary as much to do with social purposes as specialised references, tendency to **re-lexicalise** words, **over-lexicalisation**.
- Patterns of humour, metaphor, insider reference, specific activity, systems and logic.
- Features of anti-language: taboo breaking; oppositional, sub-cultural values; elaborate overstatement (ROTFLOL). Male identity??

Representations and technology

Marketing/commercialism vs. functional role

- Distortion in presentation of technologies: communication shaped by function to sell.
- **Advermation**: tension between neutral descriptive and dramatic persuasive (use of evaluative verbs, comparative / superlative forms, metaphorical language).
- English preferred language of global market.
- **Anthropomorphism** of technology; features heavily in advertising, literary treatments and in software interactions with humans.
- **Informalisation**: second-person pronouns, 'public-colloquial'.

Google, Microsoft, iPod

- Linguists have had difficulty identifying initiation for language change. In ICT individuals, social groups and economic groups have had an usual degree of power.

Technology and language change

How new words come into the language

- Potential – Implementation - diffusion- codification.
- Shifts often metaphoric: helps audiences to understand processes that can be complicated and technically abstract.

Word structure and formation

- **Loans; shifts; creations; composites; shortenings; blends.**

Linguistic recycling

- 'Reboot' only completely new word created by technology. Even then the word is recognisable; only the referent is different.
- Common for metaphorical images and idiomatic expressions to fuel language of technology.
- Word origins can reveal significant underlying powers in culture.
- Language surrounding technology reflects influence of USA, where most technology originated.
- **Concern**: Some linguistics have raised concerns suggesting that new technology is leading towards cultural imperialism that privileges English (especially American English) over other languages).
- Blur between traditional loan words and **semantic widening**.

New technologies have always had an impact in language and communication e.g. printing expanded importance of written word.

Power and limitations of ICT text lie in the interface between machine-readable and human-readable: distinctly different reading processes despite computers programmed impersonations.

Text types

Telephone

- Landlines
- SMS
- Mobile
- Success of coined terms reveals importance of commercial development. Market driven, economic influence.
- Traditional distinctions between generic terms, hyponym categories and product names replaced by competing discourses.
- Semi-permanent text; reflective of broader social change towards informalisation; cuts across rules of literacy; spam.

Television

- Important features of media production to consider = we cannot interact with it (or can we?); monological (mass communication); Ownership needs to be taken into account (technically 'free' media??); texts reflective of culture that has produced them. How powerful? 'Effects modal' vs. 'uses and gratifications model'.

Radio

- One too many; combination of live and recorded; phone-ins; presenter directed; producer roles; sports commentary; diversity; range enormous with advent of digital & streaming via internet; level of control? Planned discourse?

Internet

- email
- Space-bound; asynchronous; hybrid of speech and writing; emoticons; excessive use of exclamation; unconventional punctuation; keyboard shortcuts.
- IWD / VGE / MUD
- L337 spk
- Elitist synchronous speak; pushes boundaries of language use, combining keyboard strokes in unique ways to reflect spoken language; usage identifies participants as part of same sub-cultural online community; choices not always for ease of communication but often dictated by inclusion vs. exclusion.
- Occurs in real time; lacks contextual anchorage; creation of virtual identities.
- Short turns; abbreviation; deletion; letter / number homophones; reduplicated letters; periods / hyphens; colloquial / phonetic spelling; capitalisation; emoticons.
- websites
- No one single language: huge diversity; personal (secret diary vs. public revelation); institutional; fansites etc.
- Enforced narrative paths (via pop-ups/ spam); multi-media; universal access; filter-style weblogs = discourse gatekeeper that filter according to subtext author wishes to embody; personal sites reveal constructed versions of an individual involved in dialogue with an imaginary individual.
- Pyscho-social dimensions: lack of social cues (Herring 1996), personal information shared without thought for consequences; aggressive behaviour due to lack of embarrassing constraints; exploration of gender identities; anonymity; disinhibition; exaggeration of stereotyping.
- Virtual communities; co-operation, regulation; codes of conduct.

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