ACTIONS THAT EMBODY VIRTUAL SPACE

by

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Many participants in computer-mediated discourse use textually described actions as tools for interaction and the creation and display of identities. In particular, members of online fan communities use textually described actions to embody virtual space in order to construct a shared identity of mutual intimacy. In this study I demonstrate the typical structure of textually described actions, using discourse data collected from three fan communities and responses to an anonymous survey. I then show how these fans use textually described actions to embody virtual space as mimicking the physical world but lacking key barriers and restraints to interaction, such as real-world distance, online communication lag time, and possibility or visibility of the action in the physical world. Using one portion of the discourse data, I illustrate how these fans, who share a high-involvement style of interaction (Tannen, 1984), utilize textually described actions to index emotional stances. These stances and the embodied virtual space are combined to construct a shared identity of a close community in which members interact with great emotional and (virtual) physical intimacy.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

Participants in online interaction may exist in real life thousands of miles apart, but they often interact as if they were in the same room. Beyond just using technology to talk with someone across vast distances, participants in computer-mediated communication have found textual, visual ways to transmit representations of actions across space and even time. Participants use these actions to re-imagine their online space of interaction, transforming it into a unique space used for fascinating purposes.

Consider for a moment the following exchange between two participants in online communication:

A: giggle.
   snort.
   applauds

B: *bows*

Without knowing the context this exchange appears confusing, but already it is clear that these two participants, using only descriptions of actions, have managed to carry out a meaningful and intelligible interaction. Participant A transmits a giggle and a snort, signaling amusement. Participant A then applauds in virtual space by describing it textually. Participant B responds to A's actions with a virtual bow, also described in text. It is obvious that participant B has committed some humorous act, and that participant A enjoyed it and commends it.

And what if I said that the context of this exchange is that B has written a humorous story that A has just read? Our understanding of the exchange, reached through decontextualized analysis, need not really change; all we have added to our understanding is the knowledge that B's humorous act was to write and share the story. This example and many others demonstrate the effectiveness of textually described actions in creating a shared interactional space among participants in online discourse. This virtual interactional space is imagined as a physical space peopled with the virtual bodies of the participants. I therefore use the term *embody* in talking about virtual space to cover both the metaphorical meaning of giving physicality to the virtual space and the way that participants in online interaction populate the virtual space with virtual bodies. The textually described actions examined in this study embody virtual space both by allowing users to imagine it as a physical space and by helping them to interact within the imagined-as-physical virtual space using their imagined-as-real virtual bodies. In the example given previously, writers A and B jointly imagine themselves as physical bodies capable of doing actions such as applauding within a shared, physical interactional space.

1.1   TEXTUALLY DESCRIBED ACTIONS

Textually describing actions is part of a set of interactional practices within online communication; whereas much of the text that appears online exists solely for the purpose of transmitting information from one person to another, textually described actions are part of the textual communication that occurs for the purpose of affecting individuals and objects. Just as

physical actions have physical reactions in the real world, virtual actions receive from their targets virtual reactions.

Participants in text-based computer-mediated interaction can communicate in a number of ways and in various modes (Herring, 2001, p. 616). Modes of text-based communication vary greatly; they include synchronous one-to-one Instant Messaging (IM) programs, synchronous many-to-many IRC channels, asynchronous one-to-one email programs, and asynchronous many-to-many blogs. Written communication via these various modes can differ, with certain linguistic features being more likely to appear in a specific mode (Hård af Segerstad, 2003).

Text-based communication can take many forms, but of interest to this study is a particular feature – the textually described action – found in interactional communication. This feature should not be considered unique among or unrelated to other features common in online interaction. A closely related feature is the emoticon. An emoticon is a pictographic representation of an emotion or mood, usually by means of facial expression. Emoticons allow the reader to more easily interpret the mood or emotions of a 'speaker' than one could from standard text. There is much variation in emoticons, but some common text-based emoticons are :-) or :) for a smile, :-(for a frown, and ;) for a wink. Emoticons could even be considered as variants of textually described actions (henceforth TDAs), as they iconically depict the act of producing an expression, albeit in images rather than words.

Participants in online communication often use features such as nonstandard speech-like spelling and symbols that replace words. Other interactional features common to online communication include the frequent use of acronyms and abbreviations. Three acronyms that can be observed quite commonly in online communication also resemble TDAs. They are LOL (laughing out loud), LMAO (laughing my ass off), and ROTFL (rolling on the floor laughing).

LOL and its variants can be thought of as textually described actions, but they are different from the actions investigated in this paper in that their application is limited; they only describe laughter. The methods for textually describing actions that I investigate have a practically unlimited power of creativity.

Though both emoticons and LOL could be grouped among the TDAs investigated in this study, I do not include them in my analysis because of their overwhelming popularity in usage online. Their overwhelming popularity among participants in online discourse could mean that their norms of usage and interpretation differ sharply from those of prototypical TDAs. Linguists have noted that LOL is increasingly used in online discourse as a phatic filler (a substitute for *yeah* or *cool*) rather than as representative of actual laughter (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008).

TDAs, though used quite frequently by many participants in online discourse, appear to be used only by members of certain communities and groups. TDAs are possibly limited in usage to specific locations or interaction types. One place where one may find TDAs is in the interaction between members of fan communities. By fan communities I mean online spaces (blogs, mailing lists, IRC channels, etc.) that are designated, either explicitly or implicitly, as spaces in which people with shared interests in some form of mass media may go to interact with each other in relation to those shared interests. For the purposes of this research, the term fan is defined rather broadly: a fan is one who engages media by responding to it through discussion with other fans or creating new media based upon or strongly influenced by the original media (Jenkins, 1992).

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

Though it is easy to observe how and where participants in online interaction use TDAs and how they differ, it is more difficult to understand why they do this and what it means socially. It is posited that these TDAs are a way of embodying a shared interactional space between participants, imagining it as physical and populated with the bodies of the participants. Therefore, my primary research questions are as follows:

1. How do participants in online interaction embody virtual space through their use of TDAs?

2. Why do participants embody virtual space in this way? What purpose does it serve socially?

This study investigates exactly how this is accomplished – how the created space is imagined and shared, how the structure of the TDAs contributes to their effectiveness as creative tools, and what purposes the TDAs and the embodied virtual space serve socially.

In order to answer these challenging questions, we need to be able to fully and clearly describe the structures and appearances of TDAs in discourse. Therefore, the first aim is to collect and examine data. Section 1.3 outlines the methodology behind the data collection and describes the collection process. Following in Chapter 2.0 is a description of relevant literature that guides and assists the data analysis.

The second aim of this study is to analyze the data and create a descriptive taxonomy of TDAs. Section 3.1 contains this descriptive taxonomy along with relevant examples taken from the data. Also contained in this section is analysis of the sociolinguistic meaning of variation found within the data.

Thirdly, this study aims to answer the primary research questions listed above. Section 3.2 contains an analysis of TDAs within their discursive context. The processes of embodying

virtual space as well as the nature of that embodied space are investigated. Drawing on the knowledge thus gained, the social roles played by TDAs and the embodied space in the discourse are analyzed. Finally, Chapter 4.0 summarizes the conclusions drawn and outlines limitations to this study and avenues of future research.

1.3   DATA COLLECTION

1.3.1   Methodology

In order to answer the preceding research questions, I use a two-pronged approach of direct analysis of online discourse data and an anonymous survey, distributed to participants online. These two approaches complement each other; the discourse data tells us how users are actually using textually described actions, and the survey tells us why they use these actions and what they believe these actions mean in interaction.

By direct analysis of CMC data, I mean that I have collected discourse data in the form of textually described actions written by various participants online. I analyze the structures of the actions and compare them with the structures of other relevant communication practices. I then attempt to determine how the practice of textually representing actions is used socially to imagine the online interactional space as something unlike the typical conception of it.

I have chosen to extract the discourse data for this thesis from online communities and spaces dedicated to fan practices and communication. I made this choice because interaction is

critical to fan identity (Jenkins, 1992, p. 76); interaction is generally the fans' purpose for being online. I believe, therefore, that communication between fans provides a rich possibility for the occurrence of textually described actions. I have arbitrarily limited my data to communities of fans of the sci-fi (science-fiction) television series Stargate SG-1 (1997-2007) and its spin-off series Stargate: Atlantis (2004-2009). Communities are here defined as particular online spaces centered around particular shared interests and practices. I have selected this arbitrary limit in order to keep sources of data to a manageable number and a coherent overarching topic.

1.3.2 Discourse Data

Sci-fi fandom (fans and their culture) has had a significant presence online since early in the days of popular Internet usage. For instance, Star Trek fans have been online since the days of Usenet; one can locate Usenet archives of Star Trek communities dating back to as early as 1990. Stargate fan communities can only date back to 1997 (or possibly 1994 if one includes the original movie). The communities examined in this study, however, only date back to 2004. SG-1 and Atlantis collectively represent twelve and a half seasons of continuous media output.

The first Stargate series, SG-1, focuses on a team of four people – Col. Jack O'Neill (eventually achieves rank of General), USAF; Dr. Daniel Jackson, archeologist and linguist; Capt. Dr. Samantha Carter (eventually achieves rank of Colonel), astrophysicist and USAF; and Teal'c, high-ranked warrior of the Jaffa (an alien race) – who explore alien planets by means of a wormhole creating device known as a stargate. This stargate was discovered in Egypt and was first used in the original movie, Stargate, which featured the first two members of the SG-1 team. Though membership of the SG-1 team changes somewhat over the seasons (most notably the

replacement of O'Neill as team leader with Col. Cameron Mitchell in season nine), the team remains the series' focus. Over the years the team discovers new peoples and cultures, both good and evil, fights intergalactic wars with several of the evil alien races, and, of course, saves the Earth several times from imminent destruction. This series ran for ten seasons.

The spin-off series Atlantis features a long-term mission to set up a scientific outpost in the lost (and alien built) legendary city of Atlantis, which did not sink into the Earth's oceans but was flown and relocated to a planet in the Pegasus galaxy. The Atlantis crew establish their own first contact team – Maj. (later Lt. Col.) John Sheppard, USAF; Dr. Rodney McKay, astrophysicist; Teyla Emaggan, leader of the Athosian people; and Lt. Aidan Ford, USMC (replaced in the second season by Ronon Dex, warrior from the planet Sateda) – who are again the focus of the series. The team explores the city, searches for allies and supplies among the galaxy's other planets, and fights against enemy alien cultures bent on their destruction. This series' run overlaps the SG-1 series for three seasons and has recently completed its fifth and final season.

Stargate SG-1 fans originally made use of the Internet through newsgroups and mailing lists. Since early in this decade fans have migrated to sites such as LiveJournal, a large and popular community publishing platform that facilitates both blogging and social networking. Stargate: Atlantis is a series with a more recent source media whose fan base is located primarily on LiveJournal and similar sites. Stargate fans have also formed fan websites such as GateWorld[1] in order to share news about and discuss the series. I have chosen to use communities on LiveJournal and the forum-based communities on GateWorld as my primary

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[1] http://www.gateworld.net, accessed March 30, 2009.

sources for data collection, as they are limited to this single sci-fi source media and usually well populated.

I have collected discourse data from three specific communities online. The first is the LiveJournal community McKay/Sheppard Slash (slash refers to portrayals of homosexual relationships in fandom), created in 2004 and currently active, containing nearly 10,000 posts.[2] This site is dedicated to the posting of fanfiction (fan created fiction based on popular media), fanart, discussion, etc. about the Stargate: Atlantis characters Rodney McKay and John Sheppard and the relationship (generally portrayed as romantic/sexual) between them. The second is also a currently active LiveJournal community called Stargate Fic.[3] Created in 2005 and containing just over 1,000 posts, this community is dedicated to Stargate SG: 1 fanfiction of any character, genre, or pairing. The third community is a pair of forum threads – the currently active Sam/Jack ship family discussion thread[4] and its predecessor, created in 2004, the Sam/Jack shipper thread I[5] – from GateWorld's forum. Participants in these forum threads discuss the relationship between Stargate SG-1 characters Jack O'Neill and Samantha Carter and how they would like to see this relationship portrayed onscreen in future episodes.

Each of these three communities contains a large amount of interactional discourse data. Two of the communities – the Sam/Jack community and the McKay/Sheppard community – were formed by fans of specific character pairings. Two of the communities – McKay/Sheppard Slash and Stargate Fic – contain many postings of fanfiction, which gain much reader response. All three of these communities also appear to have a predominantly female membership. These

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[2] http://community.livejournal.com/mckay_sheppard/profile, accessed March 22, 2009
[3] http://community.livejournal.com/stargatefic/profile, accessed March 22, 2009
[4] http://forum.gateworld.net/showthread.php?t=8580, accessed March 30, 2009
[5] http://forum.gateworld.net/showthread.php?t=2419, accessed March 30, 2009

communities were selected because they exhibit a range of interests by Stargate fans and have all been active for a number of years, mostly concurrently.

All three of the communities exist within sites that utilize similar asynchronous modes of communication. The Sam/Jack community exists on bulletin board-style forum threads, in which one user posts discourse for the whole community to read. Posts appear chronologically upon posting; a user may also respond directly to a previous post by quoting text from that post. LiveJournal also features the ability to post one-to-many with the added feature of comments, which respond to a post or another comment using hierarchical threading.

For each year from each community, I have collected twenty-five TDAs. I also collected with each TDA the relevant surrounding discourse in which it is located. I have selected these twenty-five TDAs by searching chronologically through the possible data for the relevant year. From the Sam/Jack and the McKay/Sheppard communities I collected 150 TDAs apiece, twenty-five each from the years 2004 through 2009. From the Stargate Fic community I collected 125 TDAs, twenty-five each from the years 2005 through 2009. As a note on transcription, I have edited the discourse data only in terms of formatting and length. All spelling and punctuation appears as it was produced by the writer.

1.3.3   Survey

In order to ensure that my analysis TDAs and of writers' understanding and intentions in using them is as accurate and representative as possible, I created a survey that was distributed online. I titled the survey Textually Described Actions in Online Conversation. A transcript of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A, and raw data from the survey in Appendix B. Anonymity

of survey respondents was maintained by using Zoomerang[6], an online survey creation and management site. I posted a link to the survey in several high-traffic locations online and received 100 completed surveys within twenty-four hours of posting. Though I received 100 completed surveys, the respondents did not necessarily fill out all questions. Most questions received between 97 and 100 responses.

The survey consists of a series of twenty-one short open-ended or multiple-choice questions about the participant's habits online and his or her feelings and intuitions about those habits. I formulated these questions in simple, clear, and non-technical language; the intention was to receive responses written from an emic perspective. The survey asks how often the participant types textually described actions in CMC and in what context. It asks what form the actions tend to take. The survey asks for the places and situations in which the respondent typically uses these actions. It asks with whom the participants most often use these actions. It asks for how the participant responds to these actions. By soliciting users' thoughts and intuitions on their own practices, I aim to better understand the motivations and thought processes behind the construction of this new virtual space.

According to answers to several demographic questions, the respondents to the survey are 82% female, and their ages range from eighteen to fifty-five, with the majority of respondents being in their 20s. All respondents say they have used TDAs, and just over half say they use them often in conversation online. They also all say they see TDAs used by others online. When asked if they were part of any communities online, 85% responded that they were, and 3% were not sure. Among the online communities responders listed as belonging to are such diverse ones a knitting community, a community dedicated to environmental activism, and a

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[6] http://www.zoomerang.com, accessed March 22, 2009

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teachers' community. Social and gaming communities appear fairly popular, but by far the most popular category of community among these responses is communities for fans of various media. Though it is possible some of the survey respondents are part of the fan communities analyzed in the discourse data, members of those fan communities – or any others related to the Stargate series – were not specifically sought out to answer the survey.

The responses to each question have been aggregated and analyzed for percentages and trends. Each individual completed survey is also valuable autonomously as a source of data, as individual responses can suggest patterns borne out in the discourse data or answer questions raised in the analysis of discourse data. I organize the discourse data and the data from the survey responses according to the features of my descriptive taxonomy. I then analyze the data according to the theoretical framework contained in the following chapter.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This study draws on literature from a number of fields and areas of study. For ease of comprehension the literature reviewed in this chapter is separated into sections and subsections according to topic, but in reality the various theories and perspectives must interact in a dialogic manner, with each informing the other.

Section 2.1 features research into computer-mediated communication. It outlines some of the previous linguistic research done in this area and relates it to the current study. Subsection 2.1.1 notes similarities and differences between spoken and written communication and attempts to classify computer-mediated communication as a medium within our system of understanding. This classification has relevance for deciding what methodologies and frameworks to adopt in the data analysis.

Section 2.2 sets up the discourse analytic framework used in this study. It highlights the interdisciplinary methodology used to analyze the data as well as expanding upon two frameworks – narrative analysis and the community of practice – that will be particularly important for these data. These last two subsections tie in well with the next section on fan studies.

Section 2.3 examines the history of fan studies and details some of the most relevant research, particularly that of Henry Jenkins. This knowledge assists understanding of the social

context in which the fans featured in this study exist. Subsection 2.3.1 examines identity within female-oriented fan communities. Finally, Subsection 2.3.2 looks at a specific fan practice, writing fanfiction, and how it functions within the community.

Section 2.4 contains a number of studies on topics related to social interaction. It first examines a study on interaction among Dungeons and Dragons players, drawing parallels between their creation of an imaginary gaming space and the virtual space created by participants in online interaction. Next is covered a selection of work on frames and their use in interaction, following Goffman's (1974) analysis. Finally we look at deixis and indexicality with an eye towards how they benefit the data analysis.

2.1   COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

> [computer-mediated discourse] study enables us to see interconnections between micro-
> and macro-levels of interaction that might otherwise not emerge by observing spoken or
> written communication, and potentially to forge more comprehensive theories of
> discourse and social interaction as a result.
>
> (Herring, 2001, p. 625)

Linguistic features of text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) can differ in different modes. Hård af Segerstad's dissertation (2003) provides a good breakdown of textual communication by technological mode, with an analysis of what linguistic features are likely to be used in which of the four modes (email, web chat, IM, and SMS (mobile text messaging)). She proposes a taxonomy of linguistic features found in CMC and challenges Crystal's (2001) notion that CMC represents a new medium of communication. Instead, she asserts that CMC's various modes may share certain features with both spoken and written communication (Hård af

Segerstad, 2003, p. 2-3). She demonstrates the ways in which existing norms of both speech and writing are adapted to fit new online contexts.

Hård af Segerstad includes in her data several examples of TDAs, what she calls "actions described explicitly in words" (2003, p. 227). She analyzes them as serving the same discursive purpose as emoticons, which express extralinguistic cues not available in written communication but available in face-to-face, spoken communication (p. 226), thus ameliorating shortcomings of the communication medium (Crystal, 2001). As her work is primarily descriptive, she attempts no analysis of the social meaning behind the TDAs.

While mentions in literature of TDAs (by any name) appear to be rare, other (para)linguistic features of online communication appear often. Emoticons in particular are a common subject of CMC research. Park (2007) examines the ways in which participants in CMC affect various stances. She notes that paralinguistic devices such as emoticons can play a key role in showing involvement with other participants; she says that such features are a creative way of getting around CMC's (when compared to face-to-face communication) limitations (Park, 2007, p. 151-2). In addition, Park (2008) examines politeness and face-work in CMC. She asserts that traditional understandings of face and politeness (e.g. Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987) can indeed be applied to CMC. She asserts that CMC does not lack the interpersonal communication features of more traditional face-to-face speech; text-based signs such as actions and emoticons are one of the means of creating these features. Huffaker (2004) examines, among other features, variation in emoticon usage as it correlates with gender on teen's blogs. He also adopts Crystal's analysis that emoticons are used to fill a void in written communication (Huffaker, 2004, p. 74).

Baron (In-press), on the other hand, challenges the claim that CMC has an impoverished signal. She takes a diachronic view of the development of language use online, including changes in the use and meaning of emoticons since their conception. Drawing on previous study of instant messenger communication among university students, she demonstrates that CMC shares many features with written language. She asserts that emoticons, though they may in fact enhance the signal, are not truly a necessary part of the communication.

2.1.1   Spoken vs. Written Language

When we think of communication, we typically think of it as being divided into two categories – spoken and written – each with its own set of rules and norms. While some of the rules and norms may be shared by both categories, many are not. For example, written utterances in English typically must have overtly stated subjects, while someone speaking casual English may often omit subjects if they can be understood from context. Many other differences between written and spoken language have been noted in various research (see for example Biber, 1988; Chafe & Tannen, 1987).

Text-based CMC, however, is often hard to classify as either speech or writing as it tends to adopt features of both. In his taxonomic analysis of online language features, Crystal calls CMC "a new linguistic medium" (2001, p. 239). While this may seem like a minor issue, it can be important when figuring out what theories and tools to use in analysis as most existing theories were designed outside of the field of CMC. As Baron (In-press) states, there is no easy answer to the question of classification.

Instead of classifying CMC as one or the other, perhaps we can find a way to classify it as both. As Barron notes, "Whether online communication is perceived as writing or speech has important ramifications for the way users formulate their messages" (In-press, p. 8). Perhaps what is important is not how we the researchers perceive and classify the medium, but how the users, the fan community members, perceive it. References to online communication as "speaking" abound in popular culture, and much of the communication among the fan communities studied resembles speech. One respondent to the survey opined that non-TDA discourse equals speech. At the same time, though, these fan communities are very conscious of what is good literate behavior. A large portion of the fans regularly read (and sometimes write) fanfiction that displays strong concern for proper grammar and style. In my analysis, I tend to refer to creators of pieces of the discourse as writers, but references to fans as speakers or hearers also appear.

2.2   DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Because the CMC data analyzed in this paper shows both speech-like and written text-like features, I will draw on theories that have been used to analyze both spoken and written language. I believe that an interdisciplinary theoretical approach will be the best means of fully answering all of the proposed research questions. By approaching the data from a number of different discourse analytical theories and frameworks, it will be possible to illuminate multiple

aspects of the data such as the structure of the exchanges, the social meanings of variations in form, and the writer's intentions behind a specific textually described action.

The interdisciplinary approach I have chosen draws heavily on the frameworks for discourse analysis outlined in Cameron (2001). Cameron herself acknowledges that discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary theory, made up of approaches from a number of different research fields (2001, p. 47). Herring (2001) is also a proponent of a multidisciplinary approach to discourse analysis specifically when analyzing CMC.

An ethnography of speaking makes particular use of participant observation and interviews as methods of understanding speakers' culture and communities. I have been and continue to be a participant observer in several fan communities, including a couple of Stargate fan communities. The anonymous survey, though not a traditional interview, resembles one in that it contains a series of specific questions, which I had respondents answer.

Whereas an ethnography of speaking is concerned more with the form of speech, interactional sociolinguistics deals with variation in those forms that is socially or contextually conditioned. In order to get a clear and accurate picture of what users are doing with textually described actions, it is important to discover both form and variation.

Conversation Analysis (CA) looks at data from a detail-oriented, data-only perspective and is concerned with such things as turn taking and adjacency pairs. Pragmatics, on the other hand, deals with the meanings that may be derived from specific utterances. Together these two approaches will allow us to discover how an embodied virtual space is created in terms of both structure and meaning.

2.2.1 Narrative

Another type of discourse analytic approach that can be applied to the CMC data in this paper is narrative analysis. The fan spaces analyzed in this study revolve around narratives – there is the narrative of the television source media, narratives such as fanfiction that are created by fans in response to the source media, and, though structured less formally, narratives produced through fan interaction. These narratives relate to each other dialogically. Fan created narratives often center on the source media's narrative, but fans actively interpret, re-imagine, and often resist the narratives shown on the television.

A narrative, which can be anything from an epic novel to a casual conversation among fans reacting to something in the latest episode of their show, can be understood as existing in two dimensions: temporality (the temporal order of events in relation to each other) and point of view (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Though the temporal dimension is important for understanding and interpreting a narrative, the point of view dimension is most important in understanding fan narratives. It is these differences in point of view of fans that lead them to re-interpret narratives from within the show and create narratives of their own in response.

Just as a narrative can act as a bridge between different events, it can also act as a bridge between different identities or selves and between the narrator and his or her audience. Members of fan communities use TDAs to narrate their fan selves in discourse. The TDAs also mediate between their real world selves and their virtual identities as part of an online community.

Participants in CMC who textually describe actions, like the participants in Lacy's (2006) D&D games, can be seen as creating a narrative – in these cases a narrative that embodies a virtual space. This narrative is not constructed by one individual and accepted by the rest but is interpreted, added to, modified, and even resisted. By treating the discourse as a jointly

constructed narrative, I am able to reach a better understanding of how participants conceptualize their embodied virtual space.

2.2.2   Community of Practice

Finally, one other important framework for the analysis of these data is the community of practice. As mentioned previously, the practice of using TDAs is one shared by only a subset of participants in CMC. A community of practice (CofP) is defined by Meyerhoff (2002) as a group of people with shared similar speech patterns resulting not necessarily from geographical location but from shared practices and activities and shared goals. This focus on shared practices and activities over shared location is relevant online, where geographical location is no barrier to interaction. Participants also need not be bound by location in an online context; a few clicks of mouse or keyboard and one can navigate among very different areas of interaction.

The fan communities analyzed in the discourse data can be thought of as one large CofP – fans of the Stargate series. They have a shared goal of enjoying and responding to the source media (the two Stargate series). Shared practices among them include discussion and analysis of the television show and its plots and characters, discussion of what they would like to see happen on the show, and creation of media (fanfiction, fan videos, etc.) based on the source media. At the same time, they are all separate communities with specific activities and accompanying perspectives not necessarily shared by the other communities. For instance, members of the Sam/Jack CofP discuss the romantic relationship between Sam and Jack that they see hinted at in the show and the way they would like to see the relationship evolve on screen into something more solid. On the other hand, fans in the McKay/Sheppard CofP direct most of their efforts

towards re-imagining the relationship between Sheppard and McKay and portraying it through created media. Finally, Stargate fans, whether within one of the three communities studied or belonging to other communities of Stargate fans, are all part of a larger CofP of fans of various media. The CofP model, applied to the overarching community of media fans, to Stargate fans in general, and separately to each of the three fan community spaces, illustrates the connections between fan identity, fan practices, and specific uses of textually described actions.

2.3   FAN STUDIES

> …the difference between watching a series and becoming a fan lies in the intensity of their emotional and intellectual involvement. Watching television as a fan involves different levels of attentiveness and evokes different viewing competencies than the more casual viewing of the same material.
>
> (Jenkins, 1992, p. 56)

Fans of media and their practices were brought to academic attention by Henry Jenkins, with his groundbreaking book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Jenkins, 1992). In it, he argues against the mindset of the day that fans are simply passive, uncritical receptors of popular media. Instead, he defines fans as active receptors, responding to media intelligently, critically, and creatively.

Jenkins explores, through interviews and participant observation, the communities that fans form and the practices these communities jointly engage in. He observes that the notions of *community* and *interaction* are critical to fan identity. "Fan reception cannot and does not exist in isolation, but is always shaped through input from other fans and motivated, at least partially, by a desire for further interaction with a larger social and cultural community" (Jenkins, 1992, p.

76). In his 1995 book co-authored with John Tullock, he explores the communities and practices of a particular genre of fan – the sci-fi fan. According to Tullock and Jenkins, sci-fi fans in particular use their interaction with the source text to explore the world as it is and as it might be – to discover and challenge underlying assumptions about society and how members of it interact.

In *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (Jenkins, 2006), Jenkins explores fans in a more current, online context. He revisits fan communities and examines the impact that new technology has had on them and their practices. As he writes in the introduction, "New technologies are enabling average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 1). Though fan communities and interaction existed before and continue to exist outside of the Internet, these new technologies have been used to enhance fan interaction, bringing together more fans and giving rise to more media content than is possible outside this context. The Internet, therefore, is a prime source of large amounts of interactional data.

2.3.1 Fan Identity

Many researchers of media fan culture, Jenkins included, have noted the overwhelmingly female makeup of most fan communities today. Historically female fans tended to be part of communities formed by males and having predominantly male membership, but in the 1960s a split occurred among Star Trek fans due to female slash fans' interest in the Kirk/Spock relationship. These female fans decided to form their own communities in which they could

discuss their shared interests away from the involvement of the male fans who did not share those interests.

Several researchers have focused on female fan communities as spaces for identity construction. In her 2005 book *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online*, Rhiannon Bury studies two all-female mailing lists created by fans of the television shows X-files and Due South. She looks at the ways in which the fans negotiate gender, class, sexuality, and nationality in forming their joint fan identity. She concludes that the fans use their communities to form a space of their own (referencing Virginia Woolf) in which they as females may construct the interactional norms.

The three Stargate fan communities featured in this study have at least a nearly all-female membership. Due to the anonymity that is often part and parcel with interaction online, it may be impossible to know for certain which fans are female and which or not. In the absence of noticeable cues of male gender, linguistic or otherwise, I refer to fans within these communities using female pronouns.

2.3.2   Fanfiction

One of the most popular activities engaged in by female fans online is the writing and sharing of fanfiction. Fanfiction (also colloquially called fanfic or fic; these terms can be count nouns) is fiction created in response to the source media, featuring characters "poached" (Jenkins, 1992) from the source text. Though some fanfiction closely follows the show's plot and characterization, many fans are more creative in response, re-imagining characters and their relationships with each other, placing them in different settings, or introducing imaginative plot

elements. Many fans re-imagine elements of the show in their fanfiction as a way of fixing things they consider problematic or not treated well by the show's writers. Other fans respond creatively in order to bring elements of their own identity or culture into their beloved show. Jenkins explains the reason behind this creativitiy:

> Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the mass media and their own relationship to it.
>
> (Jenkins, 1992, p. 86)

It should be noted that as fandoms develop their own cultures and norms, it is no longer necessary to engage directly with the source media in order to engage with the characters or plot creatively; many fan creations exist in dialogue primarily with other fan creations and ideas. Finally, we must not lose sight of one of the primary reasons for creating fanfiction, which is mutual enjoyment of a good story.

Once a fanfic is created and shared by posting it to the community, fans who read it are expected to comment on it. The feedback is meant to contain praise and/or constructive criticism for the author, motivating her to write more fics. However, a significant amount of the discourse that occurs in comments to a fic post covers topics related tangentially at best to the fic. As much as fans in communities interact with various source or created media, they interact much more with each other.

2.4 INTERACTION

In 2006, Ken Lacy wrote his dissertation on the interactions among groups of friends playing Dungeons and Dragons. Players of D&D create imaginary characters that they, through speech, send on quests through imaginary settings. Lacy therefore devoted part of his study to examining how players used their speech to jointly create and manipulate this shared nonphysical gaming space. He posits as a model a 'base' (the real world) and an 'imagined space' (the game world), with the player as a link between the two (Lacy, 2006, p. 27). He finds in his data that players jointly construct a narrative that describes their imaginary world.

Lacy studies a form of interaction that happens face-to-face without computer mediation, but his findings are relevant for CMC. Just as D&D players create and embody an imaginary space as a physical gaming location, so people who interact with each other online are able to create and embody their virtual, online space as real and physical through their representation of actions. It is interesting to note, however, that the norms of describing actions in D&D differ from those used online in non-gaming contexts. It appears that D&D players prefer to voice their characters in 1st person with the appropriate pronoun and hardly ever use 3rd person forms to describe their own actions (Lacy, 2006, p. 65). As we shall see, this is not the case with TDAs.

2.4.1 Frames

When two or more people jointly interact to create an imaginary or virtual space, they must find a way to understand each other's intentions and meanings. One way to conceptualize this shared understanding is the idea of frames (Goffman, 1974). Frames are knowledge schemas that one

draws on to know how to act in various situations and contexts. Frames are structures inside our own minds, but we must find some way to transmit them if we wish to share them. Frames for interaction can be established and managed through the use of physical spaces and objects (Lebaron & Streeck, 1997), positioning of the body (Lebaron & Streeck, 1997; Kendon, 1999), and gestures (Streeck, 1995). Participants in interaction online typically do not have these physical spaces and objects, body positions, and gestures available to them in a traditional way. However, by textually describing actions, participants can jointly create and manage frames.

The concept of frames is useful to my analysis. Frames allow me to conceptualize and characterize the interactional process between participants in CMC who seek to jointly create and embody virtual space. The textually described actions ought to contain cues, such as deictic expressions, that tell the reader about the writer's frame; miscommunication or misinterpretation of those cues may result in a breakdown in interaction and confusion between participants regarding the shared interactional space.

2.4.2   Deixis and Indexicality

Deictic, sometimes called referential or indexical, expressions are simply those that reference specific people, objects, places, or things, and must be understood in context by the listener/reader (Hanks, 1992). TDAs frequently contain deictic expressions. One example is the TDA ::hugs you::, appearing in a comment to a post in the McKay/Sheppard community. As the comment is threaded directly from the original post, the deictic expression *you* is easily interpreted as referring to the author of the post.

Deictic expressions are also indexical (Hanks, 1994, p. 148). The term indexicality covers more than just deictic expressions; it is defined as the way in which an utterance points in some way to occurrences and facts known by the hearer. Silverstein (2003) proposes levels of indexicality in which occurrences and facts are indexed at different levels of metalinguistic discourse. Understanding how speakers negotiate changes in these levels allows the researcher to move from the micro-social framework in which conversational discourse is situated to the macro-social framework in which linguists tend to present their theories. Many of the textually described actions here studied index specific positions and attitudes within the CofPs.

We now come to the end of the literature review and turn to the data analysis. The various studies and theories presented in this chapter interact in the context of the present study: research into CMC and fan communities acts as background knowledge to the present data, while the work on interaction helps to inform the analytic framework proposed for discourse analysis.

3.0   DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter answers the research questions posed previously in Section 1.2. The questions are answered through the analysis of the discourse and survey data within the interdisciplinary framework of discourse analysis proposed in Chapter 2.0. All data examples given are from the discourse data unless otherwise noted. Following is a brief description of the structure of the data analysis.

The data analysis is divided into two sections. Section 3.1 contains a taxonomy of the structure of TDAs. The 425 TDAs collected in the discourse data are analyzed, together and as three separate sets based on the community in which they appear, for structural patterns and trends. We also consider the responses to the anonymous survey. Descriptions and examples from the discourse data are used to create the taxonomy, with the survey responses providing additional evidence or counterevidence to the claims of the taxonomy. The taxonomy first examines the external structural issues of marking TDAs, how TDAs are positioned relative to the surrounding discourse, and how long (i.e. how many words) a TDA typically is. The taxonomy then examines the internal, grammatical issues regarding the general lack of overt subjects in TDAs and the morphological marking of the verbs. Finally an analysis of what actions are likely to be found in TDAs is made.

Section 3.2 looks at the embodiment of virtual space through the use of TDAs. In Subsection 3.2.1 various TDAs from the discourse data are analyzed in the context of their surrounding discourse. Judgments regarding how participants in online interaction frame and embody virtual space are drawn from the data. It is concluded that participants in CMC frame interactions in virtual space based up interactions in the physical world, but with several key differences. In Subsection 3.2.2 the reasons why participants in CMC embody virtual space this way are then investigated. Drawing on both discourse data and responses to the survey, it is concluded that, as fans communicate in a high-involvement and emotion-laden style, TDAs, which frame virtual space as physical and index emotional stances, allow them to create a joint identity of intimacy.

3.1 TAXONOMY OF STRUCTURE OF TEXTUALLY DESCRIBED ACTIONS

Though there is considerable variation in the TDAs found in the discourse data, they are structured in fairly consistent, patterned ways. We first examine the external structure of the TDAs – how they are marked in the text, where they are positioned within the discourse, and how long they are in terms of number of words. We then examine the grammatical structure of the TDAs, looking specifically at subjects and verbal morphology. Finally we examine the types of actions typically found in TDAs, attempting to classify them by different criteria.

3.1.1 Marking

Writers usually (but not always) separate TDAs out from the ordinary speech-like discourse by marking them with some type of symbol found on the keyboard. One such marking choice is to place the text between two asterisks.

(1)   *nods fervently*

This form was originally used among early computer users as a way of emphasizing speech (e.g. I was *so happy* to see you!) in text interfaces that did not allow for boldface or italics typing. This practice is still in use, even appearing among people who regularly use asterisks to mark TDAs; it is not uncommon for a writer to use asterisks to mark both emphasis and TDAs in the same message. Marking TDAs with asterisks is the most common practice among the three communities studied here, comprising approximately 80% of the 425 TDAs collected. There are only slight differences when one looks at the individual communities – TDAs marked with asterisks make up 77% of the McKay/Sheppard data, 81% of the Sam/Jack data, and 86% of the Stargate Fic data.

Another development in the use of asterisks to represent paralinguistic features is the practice of typing *g* to represent a grin. This likely has developed as a shortening of *grin* or *grins*. There are a few variation on this, such as *vbg* (very big grin) and *eg* (eager grin). For the most part, this shorthanded style of representing actions is only used for grins (instances of *s* for smile have been reported, but none were found in these data). I have chosen not to count *g* and its variants as TDAs because with its limited variability of form and meaning, as well as its popularity in usage, it more closely resembles emoticons or LOL than TDAs. Still it

does serve to demonstrate the acknowledged connection between the use of TDAs and other paralinguistic features such as emoticons in discourse.

An alternative way of marking actions developed through the use of many-to-many synchronous communication platforms such as IRC and MU* (shorthand for referring collectively to multi-user environments, including MUD, MUSH, MOO, etc.). This marking system uses double colons instead of asterisks, but appears to function in quite a comparable manner.

```
(2)    ::beams::
```
In my observation it is less common to find actions bound by double colons than by asterisks in blog-style contexts. The data bears this out with only about 12% of the TDAs being marked with colons. While double colons are most frequently used, it is also fairly common to see variation of this form, such as the use of triple colons or one colon mistakenly appearing as a semi-colon.

A third commonly used method of representing actions online does not show up in the discourse data, but is found often in the survey data. This method seems to be more common in online games and IRC chat than in blog-style modes. This method marks actions by prefacing them with a forward slash; unlike with the asterisks or double colons, no marker is used at the end of the action. The forward slash actually functions in games to make an action or speech come from the online character and not the person playing that character. While in a standard text interface the action would look as in (3), it would not necessarily display so in a gaming context, as the forward slash in games like World of Warcraft actually functions as a command to make the following text appear as attributed to the player's avatar rather than the player (Collister, 2008, p. 28).

Players may often use a forward slash because they want to have their characters perform an action they cannot show through game play. In some games players also use chat to voice themselves apart from their characters; it is possible, then, for the players to describe their own actions as well (Collister, 2008).

(3)   /me jumps and waves hands to express joy.

This example from the survey data includes two verbs and, atypically, a subject pronoun (following gaming convention), though the form of the pronoun is the one that would usually represent an object pronoun. Many users do forego the subject pronoun, as seen in example (4), also taken from the survey data.

(4)   /sighs

This style is likely associated more with non-gaming contexts such as IRC, which also uses forward slash in its commands.

Another TDA marking style that utilizes the forward slash is to mark TDAs with mock HTML end tags. HTML, or HyperText Markup Language, represents a way of describing the structure of text online. HTML is written as tags delimited by angled brackets. In order to have a piece of text appear a particular way online, one must typically bracket the text with a start tag having the structure <tag> and an end tag having the structure </tag> -- the end tag differs structurally from the start tag only in the forward slash. Thus, for instance, text coded with the HTML tags for bold such as Title of the paper would appear as **Title of the paper**. Just as HTML end tags such as mark the end of application of what the tag encodes for, ending a communication with *the reader's* marks that the preceding text should be coded in the reader's mind as being sarcastic. Users seem to differentiate mock HTML tags in communication from

actual HTML tags by leaving off the enclosing markers or using alternative markers such as square brackets, as in the following example.

(5)   [/shameless self pluggage]

This example proclaims that the writer has been plugging or promoting herself – or rather the fic she just wrote – in the preceding discourse. The mock HTML marking is the only marking style that indicates a TDA references a specific part of the surrounding discourse; TDAs marked other ways may reference the discourse, but this is not indicated in their marking. Mock HTML bracketed TDAs also unusually do not typically contain verbs. This is the only example of HTML style marking of a TDA found in the discourse data.

Several of the TDAs in the discourse data are marked with either square or angled brackets with no forward slash, as in example (6).

(6)   <scratches head>

While such an example appears similar to the HTML marking style, it does not automatically reference the preceding discourse. Also, this type of TDA does contain a verb.

There is also one example in the discourse data of a TDA bracketed by tildes. The survey data contains two TDAs, produced by the same respondent, bracketed by tildes. Survey responses also indicate it is possible to find TDAs bracketed by dashes and underscores. All these marking choices, however, are rare.

It is also possible to not mark TDAs with any symbol, as in (7).

(7)   giggle.

Thirteen examples appear in the discourse data, but only one appears in the survey. Though this difference in numbers may not be significant, it is possible that writers of unmarked TDAs are

not consciously, knowingly producing them. This is not to say that these TDAs are being created by mistake, just that their producers are not attuned to the fact that they are creating TDAs and thus do not explicitly mark them.

Among the three communities, the Sam/Jack community displays the most variation in styles of marking TDAs. Its members use styles of marking not used by members of the other two. It is possible that this variation indexes for these fans an identity of belonging to communities in multiple locations online. One fan mentions discovering LiveJournal and setting up an account, and there are several mentions (often by linking to them) of other fan sites, media hosting sites, and blogs. Members of the LiveJournal-based communities, on the other hand, tend to spend most of their time when not in the community in other communities and journals also on LiveJournal. Thus, it is conceivable that LiveJournal-based fans have more developed, site-specific linguistic norms.

We turn now from the discourse data to the survey responses. 90% of respondents say they mark TDA with asterisks. 17% mark them with colons, 28% with a forward slash, 2% do not mark them, and 17% use some other marking, usually brackets of some type. These percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents often use more than one type of marking depending on the mode of communication. For blog-style modes, asterisks are most popularly used, with colons and forward slashes also being fairly common. When asked in what mode they most commonly used TDAs, 55% of respondents said instant messenger programs. Only 9% said blogs, 5% said forums, and 14% said comments to blogs etc. were where they most commonly used TDAs. Aside from the fairly common usage of forward slashes to mark TDAs, these figures corroborate the findings of the discourse data. The difference in usage of forward slashes between contributors to the discourse data and respondents to the survey may be

attributable to the different communities of which they are a part and different norms of usage within those communities.

3.1.2   Placement

We now examine how users place TDAs within the surrounding discourse and why. There is no one distinct trend of where to place TDAs in relation to the rest of the text of a message. Some TDAs appear on separate lines from the text; others appear directly before, after, or even in the middle of the text. Though there may be a slight trend to place TDAs on their own line or directly following the text, the only apparent rule is to place them where they fit logically in the discourse structure. The following example comes from a comment responding to a fic posted to the McKay/Sheppard Slash community.

```
(8)   Squeeeeeeeeeeeeees  loudly!  Just  want  I  needed  first  thing  in  the
      ::looks at clock then blushes:: um, afternoon. Heh.
```

There are two TDAs in this example; the first is unmarked and precedes the main discourse. The second, marked with colons, falls in the middle of an utterance, mimicking the actions of a speaker who suddenly realizes mid-utterance she needs to know what time it is. The *um* and *heh* that follow the second TDA enhance the speech-like effect of the data.

64% of survey respondents say they have no tendency in where they place their TDAs in the discourse; they place them wherever they best fit. 17% claim to place them at the end of the text, 5% at the beginning, and 14% say the action is the whole message. None of the respondents claimed a tendency to place TDAs in the middle of the text. These responses are likely skewed towards a bias for using TDAs in instant messenger, but they are not too inconsistent with the

findings in the discourse data, which also shows a strong tendency to place TDAs in various places depending upon where they fit best discursively.

3.1.3   Length

TDAs can vary quite a bit in length, with examples from the data ranging in length from one word to twenty-seven, but there is a definite tendency to make them short. I have decided based on my observations to count TDAs containing one to three words as short and those containing four or more words as long. From the McKay/Sheppard Slash community, 133 out of 150 TDAs are short, and only 17 are long. 82 of the short TDAs contain only a single word. From the Stargate Fic community, 100 out of 125 TDAs are short and 25 are long; 59 of the short TDAs contain only one word. The Sam/Jack community has only 102 short TDAs out of 150 total. 63 of the short TDAs are composed of a single word and 48 TDAs are comprised of four or more words. It is also among these 48 that we find the longest TDAs, with several containing more than ten words (the longest has twenty-seven). Following is a chart displaying the number of TDAs of the various lengths in each community.
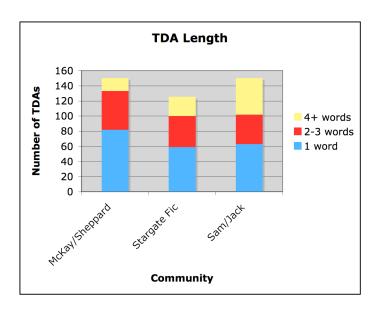
Figure 1. TDA Length

As one can see, all three communities display a clear tendency for shorter TDAs; those of one to three words far outnumber those of four or more. A significant number of the short TDAs in each community contain only a single word. The Sam/Jack community displays the most even distribution among TDAs of each length.

This difference in length between TDAs found in the Sam/Jack community compared to those found in the other two communities may be due to the difference in mode. The TDAs from the other communities are almost always found in comments to blog posts; these comments tend to be fairly short in length, usually about one to ten sentences long. Forum posts in the Sam/Jack community tend to vary quite a bit in length, from only a line or two of greeting to multiple, long paragraphs of discussion. Though not all posts are long, the fairly frequent long posts with sometimes run-on sentences may more easily accommodate longer, more detailed, sometimes rather run-on TDAs.

The shorter messages and TDAs found in the LiveJournal communities display an affinity for conciseness that fits well with their members' identities as producers and consumers of literary fiction – conciseness is a quality often praised in writing. The longer TDAs and

(sometimes) messages of the Sam/Jack fans indexe their identity as members of a community dedicated to perhaps more emotional (versus intellectual) involvement with the shows, at least in comparison to the other two communities.

67% of survey respondents claim they tend to make their TDAs short, as in three words or less, though they say length depends on context. The remaining 33% either claim to have no tendency or tend to use longer TDAs. The survey also asked respondents to give the last two actions that they typed, and the responses definitely bear out a trend towards shorter TDAs.

It is unsurprising to see this trend towards writing short TDAs in the data; according to my observation, brevity of effort is prized in CMC. Participants in communication online frequently use abbreviations, acronyms, sentences with dropped subject, and other space- and time-saving features. When asked why participants in CMC use TDAs instead of simply describing their actions or state of being, a number of survey respondents noted that TDAs are "shorter" or "faster".

3.1.4 Grammatical Subject

TDAs, when not written in the gaming style mentioned previously, nearly always lack a subject pronoun or noun. The subject noun or pronoun can be omitted because it is not necessary for understanding; the action is always that of the writer (or whatever character the writer is voicing). The lack of overt subject may be a way that fans index an intimate, casual stance with each other. Lack of overt subjects is not a feature of standard, formal English, but it is often seen in causal speech or writing. Out of the 425 TDAs in the discourse data, only five of them contain

overt subjects. Interestingly, all five of these are found in the Sam/Jack community data. Of the five, two contain as their subjects the username of the writer of the action.

(9)   Sugarshaker waves to all the shippers

In this example the writer, Sugarshaker, includes a subject noun in the TDA, though she refers to herself in the third person. Fans of heterosexual relationships between characters in the source media call themselves *shippers*, from a shortening of *relationship*; they have turned the shortened noun *ship* into a verb, and often talk about *shipping* a certain pairing.

The other three TDAs containing subjects are instances of the writer voicing someone else. In this next example the writer is talking about rumors she has heard concerning Sam and Jack's relationship. She makes a play on ship as in relationship and ship as in boat.

(10)   …The ship is sailing! :-D I can see it coming in, with Sam and Jack
       waving to their supporters! *jack grabs sam and kisses her
       passionately, while the shippers squee from the shore*

The subject of this TDA is the character Jack, who acts out a scene from the writer's imagination. It is possible (though uncommon) for a writer to be the author (Goffman 1981) of a TDA animated by a created character, but it would be odd to see someone author a TDA animated by another participant in the interaction.

3.1.5   Person, Tense, and Aspect

When examining verbs in TDAs, one must pay attention to the person, tense, and aspect. TDAs appear to most often be written with third person present morphology – a verb stem with a third person present *s* attached, as in (1), *nods fervently*. Third person present verbs account for

65% of the TDAs from the Sam/Jack community data, 70% of the TDAs from the McKay/Sheppard community data, and 74% of the TDAs from the Stargate Fic community data.

TDAs never appear with past or future tense marking, even when the surrounding discourse contains past or present tense verbs. The use of only present tense verbs in TDAs is, like the historical present tense, a way of pulling the reader into the action and making the action immediate (Schiffrin, 1981). When asked why one would use a TDA rather than regular writing/speech, many survey respondents also noted that TDAs are more interactive, drawing the reader in. TDAs do on rare occasion (five instances in the data) appear marked for the progressive aspect, as in (11).

(11)   :::waving:::

The reason TDAs are so frequently represented in the third person may be due to literary influence. The majority of narrative literature is written in the third person. I theorize that the narrative style used in the textually described actions, with its third person verb forms and lacking subjects, represents hybridization between written and spoken norms of communication and the breakdown of traditional genre boundaries. As participants in CMC use third person marked TDAs in their regular discourse, they create a kind of meta-literary genre.

Approximately 30% of the discourse data contains exceptions to the use of third person morphological marking. These exceptions are typically single word or short descriptions of actions such as *snicker* and *grin*. A majority of these exceptions appear to contain words that may either be analyzed as verbs lacking visible morphological marking – such as a first person singular verb, readable as *I snicker* and *I grin* – or as nouns. A number of the exceptions are only analyzable as nouns or noun phrases, such as example (12).

(12)   *Snoopy dance*

Regardless of whether they are analyzed as containing verbs or nouns, these data are classified as TDAs; they still describe actions (real or virtual) on the part of the writer.

The survey did not include any questions about the grammatical structure of TDAs, but three people noted in their responses a tendency towards third person verb forms, and one of those three also noted the tendency for TDAs to lack subject pronouns. "It's interesting that they often take the third-person point of view rather than the first, to suggest a more narrative tone, I suppose." "…the personal pronouns only sound odd at the beginning of the sentence... Full sentences do not seem to me to belong inside *asterisks*."

3.1.6   Types of Actions

It was mentioned previously that TDAs have an almost unlimited capacity for creative use; they can be used to convey any action the writer may think of. Certain actions, such as grinning, sighing, and waving may occur more often than others, but many of the TDAs in the discourse data are creative and unique, appearing nowhere else in the data. A majority of the TDAs performed by users are limited in effects to their own virtual selves; examples include *snicker* and [sighs dreamily]. A fair number of TDAs, however, act upon another participant or object in the virtual space. A prime example of this is *hugs you*, in which the writer of the TDA acts virtually upon a certain participant, indicated by the deictic *you*.

A possible alternative for classification of the actions in TDAs is based on the concept of positive face (positive self-image and the desire to be appreciated and approved of) and negative face (desire not to be imposed upon) put forth by Brown and Levinson (1987). Fans generally act emotionally and exuberantly within their communities; their dramatic reactions to each other's

actions build positive face through acknowledgement, admiration, and affection. Fans are not hesitant to impinge upon each other's (virtual) personal space. Consider this TDA directed towards the writer of a fic featuring Daniel and another character Vala in a relationship.

(13)   *huggles*

The reader praises the fic then uses what appears to be a combination of a hug and a snuggle to show her appreciation of and affection for the writer of the fic. Fans also often use TDAs that impinge upon each other's freedom (negative face). In the following example a reader reacts to a writer's fic that portrays a beloved character in a harsh and angst-filled situation.

(14)   *waits patiently for you to write something happy and porny next*

The reader displays appreciation for the writer in wanting to read more of her fic, which orients towards the writer's positive face. She does not orient towards the writer's negative face as she displays her desire for the writer to write another fic. We can thus characterize the TDAs in the discourse data as typically orienting to the positive face of the participants, often such that they threaten participants' negative face. This orientation towards positive face in fan communities may be due to the nature of the communities and their norms of interaction, but the simple fact that the interaction takes place online in virtual space may be exerting an influence, too. One survey respondent claims that "[p]eople generally assume a different, if not personality, then behaviour in the virtual world. Without face-to-face contact, they can afford to be a bit more expressive and a bit less reticent than they would be in real life."

We have thus far briefly described TDAs in CMC, the patterns and variations in their structure and observations as to which kinds of participants are likely to use them. We now turn to our primary research questions of how TDAs are used socially to jointly imagine virtual space as physical and populated with bodies.

3.2 FRAMING OF VIRTUAL SPACE

3.2.1 How Fans Embody Virtual Space

We acknowledge that participants in CMC interact within a virtual space, but how can we characterize this space? How is virtual space utilized in interactive discourse? An analysis of TDAs sheds light on how participants in interaction conceive of and embody virtual space.

Fan communities such as the three in this study have shared norms of interaction that affect the ways their members use TDAs. Members of each of the three communities, whether they write fanfiction or not, share norms of literacy and creativity. Though much of their interactive discourse utilizes features of casual spoken language, their utterances tend to follow accepted norms of English grammar and spelling. They often engage in creative wordplay and use language for humorous effect. Fans are also literary; those that do not write fanfiction still tend to read it and discuss merits of a fic or the skills of its writer at length. Fans also share norms for what emotions and actions are acceptable in interaction within the community. Fan communities are often explicitly designated as safe and positive spaces, where members are expected help each other and share positive emotions such as excitement and love.

The most significant interactional norm shared by female-oriented fan communities is that of intimacy. For these fans, ideal intimacy is both physical and emotional, and this ideal is

displayed in their discourse. Fans value the close connections they have with each other and use TDAs, among other discourse features, to orient to this shared norm within virtual space.

In order to use virtual space effectively in communication, speakers must share a frame (Goffman, 1974) for its conception. We already know that participants in online communication may use TDAs to transmit (presumably) real life actions through virtual space. We have seen examples of this in the previous section, such as (8), reprinted here.

```
(8)     Squeeeeeeeeeeeeees loudly! Just want I needed first thing in the
        ::looks at clock then blushes:: um, afternoon. Heh.
```

Though it may not be true that she did, one can imagine the writer of (8) emitting a loud noise and later looking at the clock as she types. We can also observe, though, writers using TDAs to transmit actions that happen only in the virtual world. Consider example (15), taken from a post made to the Sam/Jack forum thread, and (16), a comment and response pair made by a reader and the writer of a fanfic.

```
(15)    *waves to all the shippers*
        I thought I could pop my head into the new thread and say hi .
        I just wanted to say; thank you all for posting all your positive
        thoughts. It helps me be more positive too .
        ~Sam and Jack forever~
```

In this example, the writer of this post greets the other members of the thread with a wave. It is obvious that the TDA in the first line is not staged (Goffman, 1959) in the physical, real world realm; it is unlikely the writer is physically waving at her computer screen. The TDA also ignores the physical distance between the writer and her readers that would prevent them from seeing her. This distance does not exist online, though, as she and they share the same virtual space.

Interestingly the second line, *I thought I could pop my head into the new thread and say hi*, resembles a TDA staged in the virtual world as well. She narrates the act of joining the thread

and greeting the other members as if the thread were a physical room and the members of the thread present in it. In keeping with the norm for shared positivity, she thanks them for their postings of *positive thoughts* regarding the Sam and Jack (relation)ship. Finally, she closes with her own positive declaration of *Sam and Jack forever*.

Example (16) similarly contains TDAs not staged in the real world. The first writer, A, responds to a fanfiction she has read, praising the author. The author of the fanfiction, B, then responds.

```
(16)  A:
      Awwww I do so love this story! You write a fantastic John and an
      equally fantastic Rodney and heck, even Teyla was cool. *hugs you*

          B:
          *hugs back*
          Thank you!
          *blows kisses for good measure*
```

Writer A begins her comment with a speech-like *awwww* followed by praise of the fic and its author's skill. She ends her comment with the TDA **hugs you**. The fact that the deictic *you* in the TDA references the author of the story is understood when interpreted in the context of a comment posted directly to the original story post. In her reply to A's comment, writer B responds with two TDAs representing physical interaction staged in virtual space: **hugs back** and **blows kisses for good measure**. Here we see how fans display intimacy through representations of physical actions. These fans may or may not even know each other within this community; simply being members of the shared community is grounds for such actions.

The hugs in particular are interesting examples of TDAs staged within virtual space; they ignore not only the barrier of space but also the barrier of time. Obviously, writer A cannot physically hug writer B, as they are not likely to be in the same physical location. In order for this action to work, the two writers must mutually create a shared virtual space imagined as a

shared physical space. In addition, as these comments occurred in an asynchronous mode of communication, in which the recipient does not necessarily read the action soon after it has been posted, time does not appear to function the same way. Timestamps on the comments indicate a seventeen-hour gap between A hugging B and B hugging back. Both participants are likely to consider time of the other subjectively relative to their own time spent online in that location; they may agree to pretend that lapses in time do not occur between their interactional turns, framing their interaction as a fluid whole. This shared frame of subjective time is not, however, unlimited – a gap of several hours or even days may be expected in this communication mode, but a response following a gap of weeks or months is generally prefaced with an apology and/or an explanation.

Examples (15-16) indicate that participants in CMC frame their virtual space as mimicking physical reality; people in virtual space frequently perform such actions as waving at and hugging each other. Virtual space is framed to ignore the barriers of real-world physical and temporal distance between participants in interaction. This framing allows fans to orient to a shared norm for intimacy. But is virtual space just a mirror of the physical world with some barriers removed? In other words, do TDAs simply mirror how participants would interact if they were face-to-face? Further investigation reveals this not to be the case.

The TDAs that appear in online interaction often mirror actions that are happening or could happen in real life. However, the actions described in TDAs are revealed in the data not to be limited to the realm of the probable, the possible, or the visible. Many writers employ exaggerations or metaphors in their TDAs. Consider example (17), a comment and response to a humorous little fic.

```
(17)   A:
       *dies laughing*
```

```
(and you have no idea how much that hurts right now...but it's worth
it!)

        B:
        I'm sorry it hurts, but I'm glad I made you laugh. :)
```

Writer A, who has apparently found the ficlet very funny, types *dies laughing*. Her

parenthetical assertion following the TDA indicates that she likely was laughing in real life.

However, common sense tells us that her laughter did not actually kill her; rather the TDA is

exaggerated for effect. Writer B, the ficlet's author, responds according to the same common

sense assumption, saying she is sorry for A's pain but glad A laughed.

People use exaggeration in discourse when describing themselves all the time. How often

does someone announce that he or she is starving when he or she is simply hungry? It is probable

that the act of exaggeration has made its way into TDAs as a carryover from speech and writing

habits.

Many of the TDAs found in the data are more metaphorical than real. Example (18), a

comment and response to another humorous ficlet, contains two metaphorical TDAs.


```
(18)  A:*snicker*
      It never fails to make me chuckle.
      *tips hat*
      I look forward to more from you. *snags crack pipe and takes deep hit*
      -----}-@

            B: Re: *snicker*
            Thank you very much :)
            More is always in the works. I can't help it. *wonders if McShep
            would get FDA approval*
```

Writer A titles her comment with a TDA, *snicker*, then writes that the ficlet never fails to

make her chuckle. The original ficlet post notes that A helped edit the ficlet, indicating that she

has read the story previously and explaining her first line. A then produces a metaphorical TDA,

tips hat, to indicate her approbation or respect.

A's second metaphorical TDA, *snags crack pipe and takes a deep hit*, appears in the following line. The ficlet discussed in (18) belongs to a genre of fanfiction know commonly to this community as crackfic. Fics of this genre typically put characters from the show in highly improbable situations and/or have them behave in a highly improbable manner (usually with little to no explanation given for why) for humorous ends. The term crackfic is metaphorical itself; it indicates that the author must have been on crack to have come up with the story idea. A's TDA likely plays on her knowledge of the genre; she likens reading this and similar fics to taking drugs.

Author B's response to A's comment takes note of the last TDA; B responds with *wonders if McShep would get FDA approval*. (McShep is a common shorthand term referring to the McKay/Sheppard slash pairing.) B's TDA, though not really a metaphorical action, makes use of a similar metaphor – she likens the McShep pairing as conceived of by the community to a drug.

Interestingly, this TDA represents an action that would not be visible in a physical setting; it can only be 'seen' in description. While not as common as 'visible' TDAs, TDAs describing mental or emotional actions (a common response to many fics is *loves*) may be found.

Another type of TDA that would be impossible if virtual space simply mirrored reality is when a writer interacts with an imaginary character. In example (19), the writer comments on a fic featuring two SG-1 team members: Jaffa warrior Teal'c and Col. Cameron Mitchell.

```
(19)  This is a *great* look at Teal'c, who I've always found completely
      opaque (in my very sporadic watching of SG1!). The voice sounded right,
      both in the dialog & the narration, and in the overall pacing as well.
      Nice Cameron, too!
      ::hugs Cam and his depths::
```

The writer praises the author's characterization of Teal'c, and then indicates her approval of the characterization of Cameron. She then produces a TDA in which she hugs Cam. Cam is an imaginary character, portrayed onscreen in Stargate SG-1 and re-imagined into the character of this author's fic. His being imaginary, however, is clearly no barrier for interaction within the virtual realm. Such interaction is not an oddity either; several similar examples of writers hugging, snuggling, and patting SG-1 characters can be found within the data just from the Stargate Fic community. Fans apparently orient to shared ideals of intimacy not just with each other, but when interacting with the shared media and its characters as well.

So to summarize our investigation so far, participants in online interaction are able to embody virtual space through their use of TDAs. They frame virtual space as resembling the physical world, but not mimicking it perfectly. Physical barriers of distance and time are ignored in favor of framing the interaction as resembling face-to-face, synchronous conversational interaction in the real world. Bodies of the participants are imagined as populating the virtual space, interacting with each other physically. Virtual space is further framed as a space of exaggeration, metaphor, and imagination; physical limits and boundaries that would impede such creative interaction do not exist in the virtual world.

Participants in online interaction also frame their interaction with the computer itself in terms of the embodied virtual space. Instead of talking about moving a mouse to click links or typing on a keyboard, they frame their actions as physical, bodily movements through space. Take for example (20), in which a moderator of the (at the time new) Stargate Fic community responds to a question by a fic writer regarding posting procedure.

(20) And yes, all fics should be behind cuts. I didn't put that in the
      userinfo, did I? *goes to do that*

When asked if fics should be placed behind a cut (which hides part of a post behind a link so the post does not take over the whole screen), the writer responds yes. She then realizes that she neglected to write that on the userinfo page of the community and writes *goes to do that*. The verb *go* typically indicates physical movement of an individual from one location to another. In this case, all the writer is likely to be moving physically is the location of the hand using the mouse. However, she frames her action of clicking links to reach a different webpage as bodily movement in virtual space; the Stargate Fic community is thus framed as a physical space in which one can move about.

Example (21) contains parts of a comment and response from a longer exchange related to a fic posted to the Stargate Fic community. The fic in question concerns symbiotic aliens who take over humans or humanoid beings as hosts.

(21)   **A:**
        […]
        Btw, if you're interested in the subject, I put together a symbiotes
        and hosts recs list a few months back. You've probably read many of
        them already, but you might find some that are new to you (I admit that
        I am a compulsive fic-pimp).

            B:
            […]
            Oh, thank you! *wanders off to peruse*
            And I'm all for fic-pimping. This fandom is so utterly gigantic
            that I think I'd be lost without good recs!

Writer A points out to B a recommendation list of fics involving symbiotes and hosts; B thanks A and uses a TDA to indicate that she is checking out the rec list. As in (20), writer B frames her action of navigating through various webpages as physical movement within virtual space. Interestingly, B's TDA appears to relate an action that does not actually take place until completion and posting of the comment, unless perhaps she does wander off in the middle of composing her response.

When asked why participants in CMC discourse use TDAs instead of simply describing their actions in more traditional textual norms, respondents to the survey noted many of the characteristics of TDAs discussed previously in this section. As one survey respondent states, the use of TDAs "feels more interactive, more connected to the other person." This interpretation of TDAs as interactive appears again and again in the survey responses; many respondents draw a connection between TDA use in virtual space and real actions in the physical world. A number of respondents also commented that TDAs are "more intimate" or carry a sense of being "less formal, ease, playful." One respondent commented that TDAs represent "[a]nother way to express emotions." Another said that TDAs are "a "safe" way to communicate actions that IRL [in real life] have the potential to be uncomfortable, awkward, or otherwise "unsafe"." Two respondents also noted the in-group nature of TDA use; not all communities have the same usage conventions or even a convention of using them at all. These respondents back up the interactional norms displayed by the fan communities in the discourse data. They orient towards intimacy both physical and emotional; they create communities with in-group norms and practices that are positive and safe. They frame virtual space as mirroring the physical world, allowing interactive communication.

When survey respondents were asked whether or not their TDAs mirrored their real-life actions during online discourse, responses were appropriately mixed. Some responded that "[t]hey tend to mirror what I'm doing in the real world" while others responded that "[u]sually they take place only in the virtual world." Many respondents noted both the way that actual physical actions are often transmitted through TDAs and the way that users often perform imaginary or impossible actions in virtual space; they responded that their TDAs can both mirror or not mirror real world actions, and that it depends on the action used. As one respondent writes,

"interaction with others are always virtual. If I write something like *rolls her eyes* I probably am." Several respondents also state that they often use exaggerated or unreal actions for effect. Though they do not explicitly discuss the manner in which virtual space can be framed, the survey respondents recognize that it tends to be based upon, though not perfectly identical to, physical space.

We have seen that participants in CMC imagine virtual space as resembling physical space, framing it to enhance the interactive nature of the communication. Virtual space is populated with the virtual bodies of the participants, and these bodies interact physically within it. Real world space and time do not impede virtual actions. Participants also frame virtual space as creative and imaginative. Actions not possible or visible in the physical realm are possible and visible in virtual space. The physical-spatial nature of the virtual space is further enhanced in the way participants frame their interaction with their computers. Sites of interaction, such as communities or even individual discourses within a community, are framed as spaces one can wander into or exit as easily as one joins or leaves various face-to-face conversations in the real world. But what causes participants in online interaction to embody virtual space in this manner?

3.2.2 Why Fans Embody Virtual Space

The discourse data is drawn from three online communities dedicated to fan practices and interaction, but we have not yet investigated what that means for the development of discourse. A community of practice (Meyerhoff, 2002) is a way of conceptualizing how a number of people, potentially from different environments in the physical as well as the social world, can interact cooperatively in order to accomplish shared goals. The basic goal of all fan CofPs could

be termed as mutual shared enjoyment of the source media. Individual fan CofPs usually have more specific goals and practices as well. The pursuit of the shared goals is aided by the shared norms of interaction mentioned at the beginning of Subsection 3.2.1.

Members of the Sam/Jack Ship community analyze and discuss the portrayal of their ship pairing in the television series. They hash out what was good or bad about the portrayal from episode to episode and jointly develop ideal concepts of the portrayal of their ship that they would like to see happen on screen. These community members glory in every hint onscreen that Sam and Jack's relationship is more than platonic. They despair each time their hopes for a satisfying resolution to the relationship are crushed by the show's writers.

Members of the McKay/Sheppard Slash community also analyze and discuss the portrayal of their slash pairing onscreen. Though they jointly create ideal portrayals of the pairing, they generally do not expect to see their ideal portrayals occur onscreen, as the show's writers and producers have not indicated any willingness to portray their two leading male characters as gay and in a relationship (onscreen kiss between McKay and Dr. Carson Beckett not withstanding). Instead, community members put much of their energy into developing their ideal relationship for the pairing through their own media productions, most frequently fanfiction. These fan created media are then analyzed and discussed as well.

The Stargate Fic community was, as the name implies, created specifically for the purpose of sharing fanfiction based on the characters of Stargate SG-1 (Atlantis characters occasionally make an appearance as well). Members of the community post fics in which their featured characters may be portrayed as in heterosexual or slash relationships or just as friends and teammates. Many community members have strong personal likes and dislikes for certain relationships, and will not read a story if it features a pairing they do not like. This community's

joint identity differs, therefore, from that of the other two. Where the other two communities base their joint identity primarily on their favored pairing, Stargate Fic community members are jointly identified by their desire to create and discuss fics. It is of course from these discussions that the discourse data is drawn.

When the kind of interaction outlined in the above three paragraphs is displayed through conversation, it translates into a high-involvement conversational style reminiscent of Tannen's (1984) study of conversational style among guests at a Thanksgiving dinner. Not all of the features Tannen discusses as part of her high-involvement style appear in these data; some features, such as overlap, work better in spoken than in CMC discourse. However, certain features such as a tendency towards personal topics and enthusiastic discourse are definitely present; these fans have even found ways to signal expressive intonation in text. Consider the following examples, taken from posts to the Sam/Jack forum thread on February 11, 2008. Fans wait for and then react to a post to Stargate: Atlantis Executive Producer Joe Mallozzi's blog containing the script of a scene cut from the Atlantis episode titled Trio. The fans have been told the scene concerns Sam's love life.

```
(22)  Oh wow, he's approving tons of comments! It must be almost time! *bites
      nails*

(23)  Perhaps it's taking him a while to type out that scene...
      *drums fingers*
```

The writers of (22) comments on the fact that Joe is approving comments on his blog, taking that as a sign that posting of the scene must be imminent. She displays enthusiasm with exclamation marks and tension with the TDA *bites nails*. The writer of (23) provides a possible reason for Joe taking so long to post, then displays her impatience with a TDA of drumming fingers.

In example (24), one fan reacts to another fan's post which claims that Joe has posted, but is followed by a spoiler button that, when clicked, reveals she is just kidding.

```
(24)   TR
       Quote:
       Originally Posted by PJ
       JOE POSTED!!

       Spoiler:
       Just kidding.
       Oh, I am SO getting red jell-o for that hoax!
       And maybe some knuckle sandwiches through the internet!

       MEANIE!!! *sticks tongue out in retaliation* You know, enough of us are
       either in, or close enough to, Texas that we might just decide to come
       after you after that!! And then we could all sit and hit refresh
       together!
```

The original poster, PJ, announces Joe's posting with capslock (the CMC equivalent of shouting) and two exclamation marks. Under the spoiler link she reveals that she is just kidding and jokes that she is getting red jell-o for her hoax – an in-joke among Stargate fans as Sam is known to have a strong preference for blue jell-o. Note the capitalized *SO* in that line, mimicking spoken stress. PJ also jokes about other fans punching her through the Internet. Overall her post is enthusiastic and silly, using speech-like prosodic features and in-group humor, which signals her high level of involvement and her identity as a member of the community.

Responder TR does not punch PJ, but she does stick out her tongue at PJ, utilizing a TDA. She also calls her a meanie, in capslock with multiple exclamation marks, and threatens to physically come after PJ along with other fans. Her vehement response is in line with the high-involvement style of communication favored by the community. She rather spoils her threat, though by saying they could all then sit and wait impatiently for Joe to post. This too, however, is in keeping with the community's norms; fandom is a space of positive and fun interaction, and real anger or threats would be frowned upon.

Finally Joe posts the scene, in which Sam hints that she is in a "complicated" relationship with "an older man" in "Washington" – a description that broadly hints at (though never names) Jack. Almost immediately following Joe's posting of the scene, fans start to react. Three or four people copy and paste the scene into the thread before everyone realizes it has been copied at least once. Once the fans have read the scene, their reactions are suitably dramatic.

```
(25)   *dances around like a fool* SQEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!
       THEY ARE SO TOGETHER!
```

The writer of (25) indicates her extremely happy reaction to a confirmation of her ship with a TDA of dancing and a long, loud squee. (*Squee* appears to be a fan-specific representation of vocalized excitement, possibly created by combining *squeal* and *whee*.) Her dramatic reaction is characteristic of the communication style used by excited fans.

The reaction by the first writer in (26) is possibly too dramatic; another fan makes a joke of her TDA.

```
(26)   BK
       *streaks through the thread*
       SQUEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
       EEEEEEEEEEEE
       EEEEEEEEE
       EEEEEEE
       EEEEEEEEE
       EEEEEEEEE
       EEEEEEEEE
       EEEEEEEEEEEE
       EEEEEEEEEE

           PJ
           Streaks??!
           I thought the nekkid happy dances were reserved for Valenship?
           *dawns halo*
```

Writer BK posts the TDA *streaks through the thread*, followed by an exceptionally long squee. Writer PJ (the same who posted the hoax in (24)) responds in apparent shock, saying she *thought the nekkid happy dances were reserved for Valenship*. (Valenship is a Sam/Jack

Valentines day celebration for which fans create fics, vids and artwork featuring the pairing, and post them for others to read.) PJ then "dawns" [sic] a halo, a TDA indexing the idea of a pure and innocent nature, an idea humorously at odds with the attitude apparent in her previous line of text.

Members of fan communities typically have a high involvement, interactive style of communication. It is characterized by speech-like lexical items, such as *um, oh,* and *squee*, and paralinguistic cues of stress or loudness. It is characterized by rapid, frequent communication. An exciting topic in the Sam/Jack community (like Joe's cut scene post) or a good fic posted to the McKay/Sheppard community can easily draw hundreds of responses within a single day. Fans' communication style is also characterized by strong, often overdramatic, displays of emotion. And, as we know, it is characterized by the frequent use of TDAs. Thus intimacy among fans is created as both emotional and physical.

The decision to use a TDA in conversation is definitely related to the emotional involvement of the writer in the interaction. As one survey respondent states, "[TDAs] use a physical description to demonstrate an emotional reaction or state." One can find many more TDAs in the Sam/Jack community when the fans are discussing an exciting topic than when they have nothing new and exciting to talk about. Fanfics posted in the McKay/Sheppard and Stargate Fic communities are likely to elicit responses containing TDAs if the story very hot, very humorous, or very dramatic and angst-filled. If we look closely at the discourse data, we realize that the majority of the TDAs present display actions that index a particular emotion. Consider the TDAs *bites nails* and *drums fingers* in (22-23) which index tension and impatience, and the TDAs *dances around like a fool* and *streaks through the thread* in (25-26), which index

great excitement. These TDAs thus, according to Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING model, act as a key to the particular interaction, establishing the "tone, manner, or spirit" (p. 57).

By using TDAs that not only frame virtual space as a physical space of bodily interaction but also index emotional stances towards interactions, fans are able to create a joint identity of intimacy - both physical and emotional – within their communities. Their framing of virtual space as lacking barriers present in physical space, enhancing the interactive nature of their communication, only strengthens their identity of intimacy with each other. Indeed, by using TDAs that represent invisible mental actions as in (18), they can read each other's minds!

Answers to the survey question of whether participants prefer to use TDAs only with people they know or also with strangers confirms TDAs' intimacy creating function. A majority of respondents prefer to use TDAs with people they know than with strangers, though use of TDAs depends on context (i.e. no TDAs in more formal conversation, such as an email to one's supervisor). One respondent even says she uses TDAs with "Friends, anyone fannish even if I don't know them". The categories of *friend* and *fan* are here linked as groups with whom one behaves in a physically and emotionally interactive way.

4.0   CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1.0 I posed questions to research regarding TDAs in online discourse: how participants in online discourse embody virtual space through their use of TDAs and why socially they embody virtual space this way. I posed further structural and analytical questions that would need to be addressed in order to answer the primary research questions. I set up my two-pronged methodology for data collection, including my reasoning for choosing these data sources and collection methods for each source. I discussed the fan communities and the source media upon which they are based. I outlined the anonymous survey and gave a demographic overview of the survey respondents.

In Chapter 2.0 I outlined the various studies and theories utilized in analyzing the data. I looked at previous CMC research and demonstrated its relevance to my study's aims. I developed a multi-disciplinary framework for analysis that prominently includes the community of practice model and narrative analysis. In order to provide background for my discourse data, I looked at research done on fans and fan culture. I looked at the history of fan studies and its development as it follows emerging new fan practices. I focused specifically on the identity of fans as primarily female and the creation of fanfiction as a collaborative and interactional process. Finally, I outlined a number of studies and theories relating to interaction and demonstrated their relevance to the current study.

In Chapter 3.0 I analyzed discourse data taken from the three fan communities. I created a taxonomy of structural features based on analysis of the discourse data and analyzed the data for norms of usage. I used results from the survey to back up my findings. I briefly examined some social stances indexed by various structural choices. I then analyzed TDAs within their surrounding discourse, examining the ways in which fans jointly imagine virtual space. I concluded that fans use TDAs to frame their virtual space as mimicking the physical world, but without interactional barriers of space and time, and without limits to the possibility or visibility of potential actions. I additionally showed how computers themselves are used to frame virtual space as a space of physical interaction. I showed that respondents to the survey recognize the interactive and intimacy creating nature of TDAs and that TDAs represent both actions that are staged in the real world and those existing only in virtual space. In the final subsection I questioned the social motivations for embodying virtual space as a space of physical interaction without barriers and limits. I also examined the social implications of fans' use of TDAs in their discourse. I concluded that fans, as members of communities of practice that share a high-involvement style of communication which features strongly expressed emotional reactions, use TDAs to index various emotional stances in their discourse. These stances and the barrier-free virtual interaction engaged in by using TDAs contribute to a jointly constructed identity of fans as sharing strong intimacy. Finally I showed how responses to the survey back up the notion that TDA usage implies intimacy with the reader and also that fans self-identify as being intimately connected to each other through their interaction.

It was mentioned in Section 2.1 that TDAs have not been discussed much in previous CMC literature; they get a brief mention in Hård af Segerstad's (2003) taxonomy of features of CMC, but no in-depth discussion of their function or social meaning in discourse. This study is

therefore unique in its in-depth examination of the function of TDAs in discourse among members of fan communities. Beyond simply investigating TDAs in CMC discourse, though, this study situates their use within previous understanding of interaction and communication both online and off. TDAs may be exclusive to online discourse among only a subset of CMC participants, but their function and meaning is interpretable through many previously established frameworks for understanding discourse. Additionally, TDAs shed new light on the way CofPs embrace and adapt novel linguistic practices to meet their shared interactional goals.

This study has a limited scope in terms of linguistic phenomena analyzed, speaker groups studied, and data collected. The limitations to linguistic phenomena and speaker groups are there intentionally in order to limit the study enough to gain an in-depth perspective of both fan communities and TDAs. While it is probable that the study could benefit from expanded data collection, the currently analyzed data is sufficient to handle the needs of this study.

While claims about specific fan communities and their practices are generalizable, within reason, to similar fan communities and potentially fandom as a whole, it would be beneficial and interesting to study the use of TDAs in different communities from another fandom. It is possible that different communities or different fandoms may have their own specific norms of usage or meanings of TDAs. Another angle would be to compare TDA use in a female-oriented fan community with TDA use in a male-oriented community. Based on observation of some male-oriented threads on the GateWorld forum, I believe that male fans use TDAs much less frequently in their discourse than their female counterparts. This lower usage rate may be tied to gendered ideas and norms of interaction and intimacy; women seem more likely to emphasize a connection between physical and emotional intimacy in their interaction.

It would also be interesting to look at TDA use outside of fan community spaces, though availability of sufficient data has not been established. If fans use TDAs to construct an identity of intimacy within their communities, what sort of work do fans (or even non-fans) do when they use TDAs outside of their communities? Are TDAs used outside of fan spaces? I would speculate that TDA are used outside of fan communities and by non-fans, but fairly infrequently and in a limited manner. It is also possible that these TDAs tend to be less creative and composed of more commonly used actions, such as *grins*, *hug*, *sigh*, or *pokes you*. I do not believe that TDAs were necessarily first used in fan communities, but they do seem to be a communication feature of casual, intimate communication. Therefore, outside of a fan context I would expect TDAs to be used among CofPs whose members value connection and intimacy. Additionally, individuals may choose to use TDAs outside of specific CofPs with others with whom they consider themselves close; one survey respondent spoke of frequently using TDAs with her fiancé and credits TDAs with helping them maintain their long-distance relationship.

It was mentioned briefly in Subsection 3.1.5 that fans' use of TDAs, with their hybrid grammatical norms, breaks down traditional genre boundaries between spoken and written communication and forms a kind of meta-literary genre. It seems very possible that some interesting conclusions could be drawn from investigating this new genre's effects on virtual space. Sadly, all of these things fall outside of the scope of the current study. They do, however, make prime avenues of future possible research.

CMC represents an area of linguistic study that still has much to be done. In this study I have examined what I call textually described actions, a feature of online communication that has barely received a mention in previous studies of CMC; there are still more features and practices of CMC that ought to be studied in future research. There is also a need to connect

previous descriptive work in CMC with theoretical perspectives of social uses of language. In this study I have not only described the structure of TDAs, I have also examined their social usage and meaning in context, utilizing previously established theories and frameworks. Perhaps the most significant understanding to be gained from this study is that CMC, while new and constantly evolving and full of features and practices unique to the medium, is just as orderly and intelligible as more commonly studied forms of discourse. Participants in CMC share information, create and display identities, and interact socially in ways that are similar, if not identical, to participants in more traditional forms of spoken or written discourse. We must not let our fascination with the newness of the medium blind us to the previously identified structures existing within the data. At the same time, however, we must open our eyes to possibilities for new ways of conducting and understanding interaction.

Survey of Textually Described Actions Online

1. Age:

2. Gender:

People online often describe actions in text. Examples of these actions are:
      types frantically
      ::is overcome with joyfulness and glee::
      /rushes off to join the party
      :blinks

3. Have you typed textually described actions like this?

4. Do you type them often?

5. Give the last two actions you typed.

6. Do you see others online use them?

7. Do you write your actions as short phrases (1-3 words) or long phrases (4 or more words)?

8. How do you mark your actions? You may choose more than one.
      a. With asterisks
      b. With colons
      c. With a forward slash
      d. No marking
      e. Other (please specify)

9. For each answer given to the previous question, in what mode(s) (i.e. blog, instant messenger, etc.) do you use each marking?

10. Where in your message do you tend to put the actions?
   a. At the beginning
   b. In the middle
   c. At the end
   d. The action is the whole message
   e. No tendency/wherever they best fit

11. In what mode do you most often type textually described actions?
   a. Email
   b. Blog
   c. Forum
   d. Comments (to a blog post etc.)
   e. Instant messenger
   f. IRC
   g. Other (please specify)

12. Do you prefer to type them only to people you feel you know, or do you type them to strangers or anonymous people as well?

13. Which emotion(s) do you most often feel when typing these actions? (You may choose more than one)
   a. Excitement
   b. Anger/distress
   c. Happiness
   d. Sadness
   e. Other (please specify)

14. If someone typed these actions at you, how would you respond? Would your response also contain a textually described action?
   a. *pokes you*
   b. ::hugs::

15. What reason(s) do you think you (or others) have for using textually described actions instead of simply typing "I am typing frantically" or "I am overcome with joyfulness and glee" etc?

16. Do the actions you type tend to mirror what you are doing in the real world, or do they tend to take place only in the virtual world?

17. Are you part of any communities online? (For example fans of a TV show, players in an RPG, political activists, etc.)

18. If so, which ones? (You may provide specific names or just vague categories)

19. Do you use textually described actions differently with members of this community than with outsiders?

20. Where and when do you think the practice of writing textually described actions originated?

21. Tell me something interesting (a fact, a story, whatever) about textually described actions.

APPENDIX B

RAW SURVEY DATA

1. 100 short answer responses

2. Male: 18; Female: 80; Total: 98

3. 100 short answer responses

4. 100 short answer responses

5. 99 short answer responses

6. 100 short answer responses

7. 100 short answer responses

8. With asterisks: 89; With colons: 16; With a forward slash: 24; No marking: 2; Other, please specify: 22

9. 97 short answer responses

10. At the beginning: 5; In the middle: 0; At the end: 17; The action is the whole message: 14; No tendency/wherever they best fit: 63; Total responses: 99

11. Email: 2; Blog: 9; Forum: 5; Comments (to a blog post etc.): 14; Instant messenger: 53; IRC: 6; Other, please specify: 8; Total responses: 97

12. 100 short answer responses

13. Excitement: 53; Anger/distress: 25; Happiness: 53; Sadness: 15; Other, please specify: 44

14. 99 short answer responses

15. 99 short answer responses

16. 99 short answer responses

17. Yes: 85; No: 12; Not sure: 3; Total responses: 100

18. 88 short answer responses

19. 92 short answer responses

20. 95 short answer responses

21. 79 short answer responses

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