

Instant Internet Messaging as a Linguistic Register

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In the last twenty years, one of the newest forms of communication that has impacted the linguistic community is instant internet messaging. Among the concerns that have been raised regarding this new form of communication are what it is exactly and how it works.

This presentation addresses these concerns based upon independent research conducted using transcripts of three conversations from a common instant internet messaging client, MSN Instant Messenger. With regard to the future direction of research, discussed are the long-term effects of use of this register and other possible avenues of future research.

A register according to Halliday et al is a variation of language depending on use. In the linguistics community, this form of communication has traditionally been viewed as an amalgamation of various registers (Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore, 1991). Based on the features observed, it became apparent that instant internet messaging was in fact a fully functional independent register; however, it is unique in that it is a hybrid register. Although not a spoken register, there are phonetic and phonological features as if to emulate regular speech. These combined with the syntactic and pragmatic features common to all of the analysed conversations led to the belief that instead of being an inferior cipher, instant internet messaging is a fully functional independent hybrid register. Being one of the most widely used methods of communication among younger people, it is important to realise that it has a fully independent set of analysable features for future analysis.