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TOWARD A UNIFYING PRAGMATIC THEORY OF VIRTUAL SPEECH COMMUNITY  
BUILDING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

The Interdepartmental Program in Linguistics

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2. COMMUNITY.....	7
2.1. <i>Netspeak</i> Genres.....	7
2.2. The Pen Virtual Community.....	14
2.3. Principles of Practice.....	16
2.3.1. Medium-Enabled Principle (MP).....	17
2.3.2. Community Principle (CP).....	19
2.3.3. Interactive Principle (IP).....	23
CHAPTER 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	30
3.1. Frames of Analysis.....	30
3.1.1. Individual/Cognitive Framework – Relevance Theory.....	32
3.1.2. Pragmatic Framework– (Im)Politeness Theory.....	36
3.1.3. Intersubjective Framework - Stance Analysis.....	40
3.2. Analytic Theory and Method.....	42
3.2.1. Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis.....	43
3.2.2. Anthropological Linguistics.....	46
3.3. Speech Communities.....	50
3.3.1. Ethnography of Community.....	57
CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY.....	60
4.1. Social Sciences – Ethical Considerations.....	60
4.1.1. Protection of The Pen Community.....	61
4.2. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis.....	63
CHAPTER 5. DATA ANALYSIS IN TERMS OF RELEVANCE.....	67
5.1. The Cognitive Work of Awareness.....	67
5.2. <i>Leetness</i> Assertion as Relevance.....	76
5.3. Topic Shifting and <i>Flaming</i> as Relevance.....	79
CHAPTER 6. DATA ANALYSIS IN TERMS OF (IM)POLITENESS.....	84
6.1. (Im)politeness as Social, Interactional Pragmatics.....	84
6.2. Community Membership Regulation Through (Im)politeness.....	91
6.3. <i>Flaming</i> as (Im)politeness.....	94
CHAPTER 7. DATA ANALYSIS IN TERMS OF STANCE.....	101
7.1. Stance as Interactional Pragmatics.....	101
7.2. A Stance Approach to Pen Discourse.....	101
7.3. Limitations of Stance Analysis.....	112

CHAPTER 8. THE ETHNOPRAGMATIC METHOD.....	114
8.1. Previous Analyses.....	114
8.2. Holism and Inclusion – The Ethnoprismatic Method.....	117
8.3. Conclusion.....	120
REFERENCES.....	123
APPENDIX A: GLOSSES OF ITALICIZED TERMS.....	130
APPENDIX B: THREADS OF DISCOURSE.....	131
VITA.....	148

## ABSTRACT

Building a speech community requires building a shared history of communicative interaction. Within a virtual medium, speech community members employ accommodations for the lack of shared physical space that face-to-face interactions provide. These accommodations, amassing through extended discourse, bring to light the communicative strategies that virtual interlocutors employ in order to build community. Drawing from a corpus of unscripted, naturally occurring discourse of a particular virtual speech community, I engage three frames of linguistic analysis in order to recognize the communicative strategies that constitute speech community building. Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) accounts for the individual cognitive work involved in asserting membership in a speech community. (Im)politeness Theory (Culpeper 1996) accounts for the negotiation of membership in a speech community via impolite interactions. Stance Theory (Du Bois 2007) accounts for the intersubjectivity of said negotiation, where members situate themselves within the community through their discourse.

Each of the three models serve to highlight particular aspects of speech community building but fall short of accounting for the intricate endeavors of entering, maintaining membership in, and negotiating place in a speech community that exists with other speech communities within a larger culture. I propose the ethnopragmatic method, or EPM, which emphasizes the importance of each level of the discourse world (the EP world) – the individual, interlocutors, speech communities, and the larger culture. Each level of the EP world contains histories of interaction, which ultimately inform discourse meaning. While the EPM is too cumbersome for utility as a discourse analytic model, it nonetheless serves to showcase the multi-faceted and interdependent phenomena involved in communicative interaction.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“The medium is the message” (McLuhan 1964). To understand language in use is to also acknowledge the medium through which it is created, used, and understood or misunderstood. Discourse analysis of an online speech community investigates the way in which virtual speech communities come together through language. Every speech community utilizes an inventory of communicative norms, built on and re-established through continued interaction. When someone behaves in a way that violates the acceptable or normative forms of interaction, community responses to her encode in various ways the message that her behavior is inappropriate. In this way, norms serve the very important role of maintaining a speech community.

The goal of this dissertation is to explore what linguistic and cultural processes are involved in building and maintaining a speech community via linguistic interaction, specifically the normative pragmatic interactions of a particular virtual speech community (henceforth referred to as the Pen community; participating in this community are members). By engaging three linguistic theories – Relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995), (Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996), and Stance (Du Bois 2007) – I show how they each reveal certain aspects of speech community building through discourse. I go on to propose a more holistic method, which I call the ethnopragmatic method (henceforth referred to as the EPM). The EPM connects the individual, the interlocutors, the speech community, and the larger culture while acknowledging the medium through which communicative interaction occurs. The EPM accounts for the cognitive work engaged by individuals via Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) and the interactive phenomena of turn-taking and politeness via Stance (Du Bois 2007) and (Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996). Analysis of human linguistic interaction within these linguistic

models partially explicates communicative behavior. The more comprehensive EPM takes into consideration the individual's cognitive work, the culturally contextualized and mediated interactive discourse of interlocutors, and the normative practices engaged by the speech community. The EPM values all of these components as equally necessary and integral to understanding communicative interaction. The EPM makes it possible to acknowledge that any communicative interaction is profoundly complex and cannot be fully accounted for without such a holistic model.

My construction of the EPM is informed by anthropological approaches to language and culture and linguistic approaches of Relevance Theory, discourse analysis, and Stance Theory. Earlier work with this speech community (LeBlanc 2005) employed the rigorous methodologies of linguistic ethnography, including the verbatim principle (Spradley 1980), consideration of the verbal exchange in context, and ethnographically informed discourse analysis (Hymes 1974; Moerman 1988; Sherzer 1987) to document practices of the Pen speech community such as in-group language use and community-specific behaviors such as *flaming*. My previous work also established important ethical research protocols for investigating communication of an online community, specifically for cases like mine where the investigator is also a member of that community; I continue to adhere to these norms. This initial project provided preliminary results on how virtual communities coalesce and establish norms. Here I expand and deepen my earlier work by analyzing linguistic strategies employed by the members of the Pen community to identify patterns of normative behavior, with the aim of approaching a unifying theory of pragmatics to account for the interdependence of the community, its members, its strategies, and the media within which all of these interact.



Participants in speech communities engage multiple strategies, including accommodation, in-group language, and “covert categories” (Whorf 1956). My goal is to empirically bridge the existing individualistic, cognitive, and interactive discourse theories about interaction in speech communities to arrive at a holistic methodological practice that is rigorously based in linguistic and anthropological theory. The proposed EPM provides both method and theory in order to account for the discourse engaged to create community and establish membership and identity within a community, including those that thrive solely online.

I analyze here a set of communicative strategies characteristically employed by the Pen speech community: breaking into and attaining membership in a community, topic shifting behavior in discourse, *flaming* behavior, and socialization. Methodologies include (but are not limited to) participant observation, discourse analysis, and operationalizing Relevance, (Im)politeness, and Stance theories to permit qualitative analysis of virtual speech community building. My analysis demonstrates that members of the Pen community strategically employ these communicative strategies in order to contribute to fostering solidarity in their online speech community as well as exhibiting hierarchical status.

In order to demonstrate the necessity of a more holistic method, like the EPM, I review the scholarly work of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995), (Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996), and Stance (DuBois 2007). I then analyze threads of Pen community discourse (see Appendix B) within each of these three frameworks, concluding with an explication of the EPM to show its broader, more inclusive scope to handle discourse of any length, topic, or medium.

Relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) provides an entry point into an individual’s understanding of the construction of a shared or collective context, constantly re-negotiated as discourse evolves. Individuals are doing cognitive work, amassing both an individual and a

shared body of contextual and communicative knowledge. Stance may serve to provide the bridge between an individual's cognitive processes and a community's interactive pragmatic competence building. Stance calibrates the articulated relationship of interlocutors with each other towards the content of their speech. By positioning oneself as a member of a community, one engages in a dynamic process of aligning herself in relation to her interlocutors and evaluating said position through linguistic interaction. Every utterance made by any speaker positions that speaker as a member of a community in a particular role, signals the alignment of that speaker to the content of utterances as well as to the speaker's relationship with interlocutors, and posits the speaker's evaluation of content, context, and relationships. Stance therefore provides a broad account of the intersubjective reality of communication within a speech community. Application of Stance in discourse (Du Bois 2007) allows the investigator to approach a unifying theory (the EPM) for interactive discursive practices.

While (im)politeness in face-to-face conversation is usually viewed as the exception rather than the norm, in some virtual spaces including that of the Pen community, specific impolite language use strategies such as *flaming* and the strategic use of genres of *netspeak* (see Appendix C for glosses of italicized words), most particularly that of *leet speak* in this case, serve as exemplars of the speech community's in-group interaction and function as a vehicle for socialization into appropriate or acceptable linguistic behavior. Because impolite speech is a norm within the Pen community, (Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996) is the most appropriate framework within pragmatics for approaching Pen discourse.

The act of violating a norm provokes a response that allows the participant who commits the error to realize that the norm has been violated. Although the online normative protocol seems to mirror what occurs in face-to-face interaction, because virtual communication is

constrained by the absence of a familiar, shared physical collectivity upon which to build, it relies upon specialized linguistic strategies with which to foster in-group associations and create identities within the virtual community. By operationalizing the EPM based on systematic analysis of Pen discourse, one can approach a full account of normative interaction among and between individuals in an online collective, where linguistic strategies are the sole vehicle for cultural transmission.

My analysis of the Pen discourse threads highlights three strategies: attempting to break into a community, topic-shifting behavior, and *flaming* behavior. For a more thorough investigation and understanding of virtual speech community building, I provide an empirical argument for the use of a unified pragmatic approach. As any change occurs, for example when a new member arrives or enters a discourse thread, all other elements of the community are affected. This occurs each time any new discourse entity is introduced or taken away. None of the theories I have mentioned so far can alone or in combination completely account for the interconnected and intertextual Pen community online discourse. I offer here the EPM model, which shows the intersection of the individual (through Relevance Theory), interaction (through (Im)politeness and Stance) and community (through a holistic, ethnographically based approach), demonstrating how each element of discourse is connected to the individual participant, to the interlocutors, to the members of the speech community as individuals, to the collective Pen community, and to the subculture within which the community resides: mostly male, mostly white, educated, and technologically savvy. The Pen community-specific language use displays adherence to in-group norms of communication, admonitions against violations of these norms, and the creative production of new communicative interactional norms.

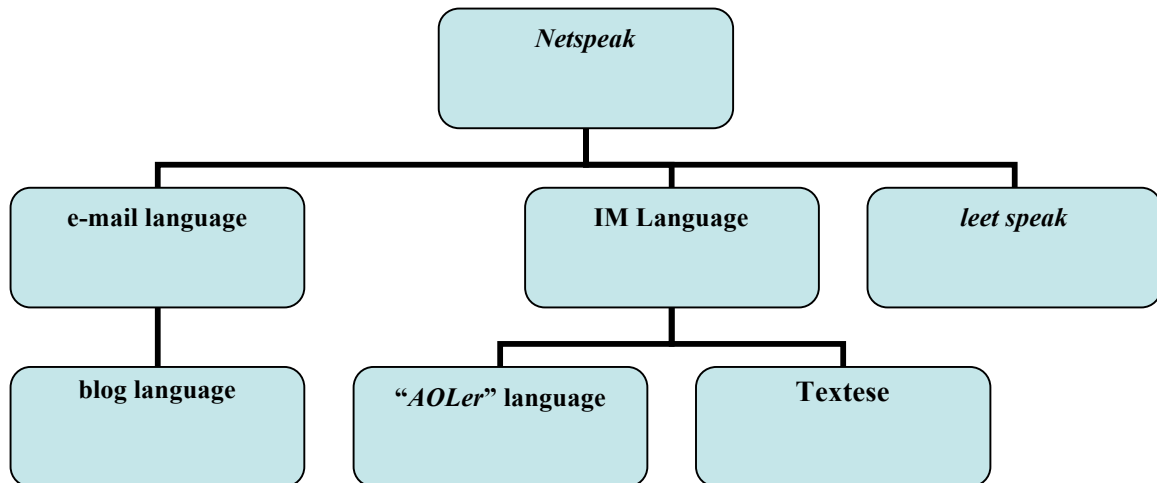
The data I have collected and analyze in this project is asynchronous, technologically mediated conversational interaction. In my treatment of literature, I will consider how the anthropology of online communities, as well as linguistic treatments of CMC have highlighted differences from and similarities to face-to-face conversation arising from the lack of shared physical context and the technological mediation with resulting accommodation strategies of the interlocutors. However different from face-to-face conversational behavior, the Pen community's discourse provides an unscripted, unedited sample of interaction that I engage through the three frameworks mentioned in order to empirically demonstrate the intricate interplay of language and culture and how the everyday conversations we engage in - online or offline - are so complex that they must be approached in different ways. I claim that a full understanding can only be accomplished by specifically combining the cognitive and social pragmatic approaches with a reflexive and holistic approach.

## CHAPTER 2. COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

### 2.1. *Netspeak* Genres

*Netspeak* is a commonly used term referring to all internet communication, computer-mediated communication, or CMC (Crystal 2006; Thurlow et al. 2003). Just as spoken American English contains many dialects, CMC is divided into several genres which fall under the general category of *netspeak* (Danet and Herring 2007; Herring 1996; Thurlow et al. 2003). These categories are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: *Netspeak* Genres



The first and most common genre of *netspeak* is e-mail language. This includes all communication via electronic mail sent from one end user to another. The messages may include some of the other genre’s features, but most orthography in email language resembles conventionally written language. Lee points out that “email stands midway between the telephone call and the letter” as an email is written, but in a conversational tone (Lee in Strate et al. 1996: 277). Although email language potentially affords less contextualization than face-to-face conversation, the lack of contextualization is replenished by subject headings, reply format

templates, and other devices which approximate the context where the conversation is taking place (Lee in Strate et al. 1996: 285).

Personal internet journals, or *blogs*, exhibit characteristics too similar to *email language* to merit a separate genre, therefore *blogs* are included in a sub-genre of email language<sup>1</sup>. *Blog* language can vary greatly, depending on the subject matter and the blogger. *Blogs* are journal-style submissions electronically mediated which result in the form of a public diary. The language is less informal than other genres of *netspeak*. One possible reason for this is that the *blog* writer has no time or space constraints. Others may read and even post to the *blog*, but *blogs* are generally understood and used as journals and are thus self-talk and not positioned in a frame of conversation as are the following genres. With the recent popularity of blogs, especially those of politics and current affairs, what initially functioned as self-talk, *blogs* have become venues of conversation-like discourse. This interaction occurs in a medium where time is not constrained, dialogue is not necessarily synchronic, and replies can be directed to an immediately preceding post or to a particularly chosen post to re-start or continue a conversation. The language found in many blogs resembles that of conventionally written language and is more similar to letter-writing than other *netspeak* genres. The medium changed, but the exchange or the interaction was adapted for the medium and no other major linguistic features changed.

The second genre, Instant Messaging language, or IM language, includes acronyms, emoticons, and abbreviations commonly found in instant messaging programs such as America

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<sup>1</sup> Crystal (2006) may disagree with this categorization, as he points out that blogs and email language are very different in scope and purpose, but for the interests of this dissertation, which discusses the orthographic and interactive conventions of each category, it seems appropriate to situate blog language in a sub-genre of email language.

Online Instant Messenger Service, Pidgin<sup>2</sup>, Google Talk, or chat rooms. Here, the medium itself plays a role in transforming the communication therein. Letter-writing is not simply adapted for a technological frame, rather the interaction shifts from formal to informal, personal to intimate, and language is manipulated for brevity by choice.

Table 2 (on the following page) contains data examples from the genre of IM language, including “*AOLer*” language and textese, or Text Messaging language found in the medium of Short Message Service (SMS) communication, followed by a brief discussion of the guiding principles of linguistic choices or language play. The distinction between these two is in medium, *AOLer* being in online chat contexts, and Instant Messaging being in online or in cell phone (SMS) contexts. Any of the items in the following table could overlap, but the medium distinction functions for the Pen community’s discriminatory labeling of online chat conventions. Non-Pen members would label all of these conventions as “*AOLer*” language.

One of the most obvious characteristics of IM language is the orthographic convention of acronyms. Whether the acronym reads as letters in a series or as a new word, BFF and LOL, /lol/, respectively, depends on phonetic constraints of the language at hand. If an acronym contains no vowels, the letters are pronounced separately. If the acronym resembles a Consonant-Vowel-Consonant syllable, the acronym is often read as if it were a word, thus the acronym is not spelled out. The second convention is the emoticon, or the smiley. In IM language, advanced programs can convert conventions like the keyboarded semi-colon and close parenthesis to a smiley face. If the program is not advanced and does not auto-correct or auto-replace keyboard characters with a presumption of what the user would like to appear on the screen, the result is what resembles a sideways wink. When using the America Online instant

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<sup>2</sup> The name of this Instant Messaging Program is fitting, as the fusion of two forms of language - spoken and written - is the basis of interaction. As most CMC researchers regard online communication as a hybrid system, the name of this particular program is a reflection of the mainstream population’s linguistic meta-awareness.

messaging program (AIM), a user keyboards a colon and a close parenthesis and a program auto-replaces these characters with a smiley face.

Table 2: IM Language Genre and Sub-genres with Examples

<b>Instant Messaging Language</b>			
<i>AOLer Language</i>		<b>Text Messaging Language (SMS)</b>	
<b>CONVENTION</b>	<b>GLOSS</b>	<b>CONVENTION</b>	<b>GLOSS</b>
BRB	Be Right Back	IDK	I Don't Know
CU L8r	See You Later	IMHO	In My Honest/Humble Opinion
LOL	Laughing Out Loud	BFF	Best Friend Forever
;)	Wink	U 2?	You too?
☺	Smile		
TTYL	Talk To You Later	OMG	Oh My God
AFK	Away From Keyboard	WTF	What The Fuck
g2g	Gotta Go (Got To Go)	RU Thr?	Are You There

Many social network sites and email programs for general users make available collections, or banks, of smileys with several different facial expressions to color or enhance a conversation. Users do not have to know the code to create the smiley; they simply select the desired emoticon, choosing from a smiley bank with a click of the mouse. Some sites have an even more complicated store of moving, or action emoticons, for example the crying face depicted as a smiley with tears streaming down its face, mouth open, eyes closed. This image plays for a number of seconds before resetting and replaying. Many short message services for



cellular phones (SMS) are equipped to complete a word or auto-replace a commonly used character, such as the smiley face. If a user chooses to text in typical *textese* language with abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, etc. s/he can turn off the auto-replace feature. In the medium of computer-to-computer communication, IM language is widespread, whereas text messaging language, or *textese*, is typical for the medium of cell phone-to-cell phone communication via a mobile messaging system. The emoticon itself creates a bridge to face-to-face interaction. “The emoticon contributes to written communication as a sign system usually limited to oral communication: facial expression” (Lee in Strate et al. 1996: 289).

In Table 2 the *AOLer* convention CU L8r, the number 8 occupies the space of the nucleus of the syllable /leyt/, where the r occupies the space for the second syllable of the word, syllabic r. If *leet speak* merits a separate *netspeak* category, a convention such as this one would have to diverge either for rules of use or for the convention itself. In this case, *leet speak* diverges; numbers may not always replace syllables or parts of syllables and may simply stand in for a letter that visually resembles the number, as in “1337” for *leet*.

*Leet speak* is a comparatively less frequently used register of *netspeak*, as it is specialized and reveals cultural information of those particular participants engaging in *techie* arenas – those who work with computers and generally do not interact online with the mainstream population. Techies refer to the general population of end users, those who may be familiar with IM language and habitus but lack sophisticated or creative use of it, as “*AOLers*,” which is used as the label for one of the above mentioned categories of *netspeak*.

My ethnographic research of the Pen community revealed several salient mechanisms supporting the existence of the sub-genre of *leet speak*, and in particular the Pen dialect of *leet speak*, Pen *leet*. The Pen community exhibits language play within virtual space, which includes

code-switching, pragmatic awareness, and fusing spoken and written linguistic elements into what members and other *techie* groups refer to as *leet speak*. The term *leet* stems from the reduction of the word ‘elite.’ To further separate themselves as *leet speakers*, they replace letters on the keyboard with numbers, resulting in examples like *l337*. The keyboarded number 1 resembles the letter L, 3 resembles the letter E, and 7 resembles the letter T. See Table 3 (on the following page).

*Techies*, those work in technology-based industries, computer programming and online gaming language call upon and borrow from keyboard conventions used in those realms, and innovate manipulation of keyboard characters to form *leet* orthography. That is not to say that IM language does not contain the phenomenon of number-for-letter or number-for-syllable orthography, nor is it the case that *leet speak* does not contain elements found in IM language such as acronyms, abbreviations, and the CMC convention of blurring spoken and written language. *Leet speak* merits a position as a distinct register of *netspeak* because the guiding principles and motivation for choice of orthography and the speech community’s linguistic innovations involving language play are driven by the motivation for creating and claiming the identity of *leetness*. This identity marking through distinctive language use builds a *leet* community. Contextualizing this interaction is important, as with any virtual community, “computer media and cyberspace technologies allow us to form virtual relationships, join virtual groups and organizations, and build virtual communities” (Strate et al. 1996: 317). Through examining language use in building this *leet* community, we can begin to understand what it means to build a virtual speech community like this one, and whether this *leetness* identity creation presents challenges for the theories I will engage for analysis of Pen data.

Table 3: Pen *Leet Speak*

TECHNIQUES	LEET CONVENTIONS	GLOSS
Alternative spellings	teh pr0n 0wn3d Pwnt	the porn Owned Powned
Acronyms	DYJGTIT!?!?!@!@!@?!?@!  <i>AOLer speak</i>	Did You Just Get The Internet Today?  Non-leet CMC
Font change, intentional misspelling (emphatic), and metathesis	Yu0 4r3 teh w1nn3r sar!	You are “teh” winner, sir (meaning the opposite)
Color change (emphatic)	<b>0wn3d!</b>	Owned (you lose)
<i>Techie</i> terminology	Modded box	Upgraded computer
Repetition	Troll(ing)  ?!?!?!?!@?!?!@?!@!@1@?!?	ubiquitously posting the same words, image, or sound file  Emphasis

As mentioned, Pen *leet* is a dialect of *leet speak*, so *leet speak* is not unique to members of the Pen speech community, but their linguistic behavior may serve as a model for what I propose are the fundamental bases of *leetness* for the general population of virtual speech communities engaging in this particular dialect of *netspeak*. In the past few years, only a handful of scholars have brought *leet speak* into academic forums (Blashki and Nichol 2005; LeBlanc

2005; Ross 2006). Popular engagement with *leet speak* on the internet include sites featuring translators from conventional orthography to *leet speak*, such that true *leet speakers* could recognize the difference between a *leet speaker* and another end user who simply employed a translation device instead of naturally code-switching as a native “speaker” does. *Leet speakers* do not replace every word with *leet* orthographic conventions, as the translators are programmed to do. Only specific words are typed in the *leet* format, and my research shows that these words are linked to technology. In the case of Pen community, *leet speak* is employed to assert *leetness* or to mock someone else’s lack of *leetness*.

## **2.2. The Pen Virtual Community**

I will provide background here in order to first familiarize the reader with the workings and features of the message board, the mechanism for Pen interaction (other virtual communities use message boards as well), and then to contextualize the Pen community constructs through their interactions. Unlike chat rooms, the message board discourse is asynchronous. To allow users access to past posts, a running tally of all current threads appears on the home page of the forum, listed in order of most recent activity. Upon entering the message board forum, a participant sees a list of threads by title provided by the initiator of the thread and then has the option to click on the title to read the thread. Pen members usually title threads according to topic, but this is not always the case. If one is not registered as a member, she can neither initiate nor post a reply. The process of registration requires new participants to choose an avatar, or a name, for themselves. The appearance of a new avatar informs the community of established members that someone new has arrived. The administrator has programmed an application into the website that automatically attaches a caption to new avatars: “neophyte Pen.” This label serves to place the new member as low status in the community but still recognizes her entry.

Once the new member posts a number of times deemed sufficient by the administrator, usually at least 100, the caption then changes to “member with a member,” announcing to both the user and the community that this person has engaged with the community sufficiently to be considered a full member. This grants her a higher status as member in the community (in the Pen case, having a metaphorical penis). Over time, the member’s avatar becomes more detailed, usually with the administrator adding images or animated image files along with a more personal caption describing her Pen personality. Another important note is that once a participant becomes a member, her avatar appears at the top of the thread title page if she is online and visiting the site at the time. Lurkers are impossible to count or describe, as they are not registered on the site, but evidence exists to their presence, as most members admit to lurking for some time before posting to the board (LeBlanc 2005). Using Goffman’s (1981) participation framework, lurkers can be classified as unratified eavesdroppers, “neophyte Pens” are semi-ratified, and members are fully ratified participants.

The archived message boards accessible from the homepage of the Pen website are vital for retaining a collective memory of its members. The archive provides a complete and accurate shared history of interaction. Access to all past interactions is continually available to members in real time, and represents a living memory that is important to maintaining community norms (see Chapters 2 and 8). A virtual community like Pen has constructed a community with a history, shared knowledge, and norms of interaction, which strengthen the fact that the Pen community, although I call it an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983), is as real as face-to-face communities. They share the history of its creation in their memories, both collective and individual whether or not they were present at the inception of the website.

The discourse threads I analyze in this project are reproduced in Appendix B, with a list of threads organized by order of treatment in this project. Each time a member posts to a thread, I designate that post by a number, a letter, and sometimes a second number (for example, 3.1.2.). The number represents the sequential order of the post (third post of the thread), while the letter represents the Pen member who created that post (first member to post to the thread). If the same member posts twice within the thread, the second number represents each time that particular member posts within the thread (second post of the first member to post). The only data shown are the prose content of the posts as they appear in the archive.

### **2.3. Principles of Practice**

The Pen virtual speech community uses a dialect of *leet speak*, and exhibits linguistic behaviors similar to those found in face-to-face speech communities whose members share common interests. They mark membership linguistically. Pen community members code-switch to the Pen dialect of *leet speak* when asserting their *leet* identity. Being *leet* in the Pen community entails many principles, including but not limited to particular topic shifting behavior, adherence to anti-Gricean maxims of communicative order, framing talk centered on a set of normative topics and shirking or overtly rejecting those topics which do not fit within this set, use of the specialized orthography of Pen *leet* dialect (see Table 3), valuing novelty, *flaming*, and exploitation of the internet's opportunities to incorporate sound clips, image files, and links to other websites.

Communication within the Pen community adheres to the set of principles detailed below. However, lists are never complete, as language use changes. These principles govern not only conventions but the proper use of conventions (communicative competence). Pen members enact *leet* competence by their language use and interactive norms that are constantly judged by

community members. The Pen community also engages in meta-communication beyond simple framing of talk or play within anti-Gricean communicative interactions. More experienced members with higher status judge discourse and engage strategies of (Im)politeness and Stance to reinforce appropriate Pen *leet* behavior. I now turn to a sketch of some of the normative principles of practice that, through my discourse-centered research approach (Sherzer 1987), I have discovered to operate within the Pen community.

Pen members mark their membership using various strategies that I classify as: Medium-enabled Principle (MP), Community Principle (CP), and Interactive Principle (IP). Each of these principles entail particular Pen strategies I will discuss. The first of these three, the MP, entails code-switching to *leet speak* when appropriate, specialized orthography, and intertextuality via the virtual medium.

### **2.3.1. Medium-Enabled Principle (MP)**

The Pen community members utilize the intertextuality (Briggs and Bauman 1992; Briggs 1996; Fairclough 1992) of the message boards in the following ways:

1. Pen members use non-linguistic conventions interspersed with *leet speak*, such as posting image files or sound clips in a thread. The motivation includes enhancement of a message, assertion of dominance in the group, and demonstrating status through their technological abilities of posting files online.

2. Repetitive posting of image and sound files.

The repeated, named images included in posts are usually what would be considered in the mainstream to be vulgar or distasteful, such as “boobies,” (an animated image file of a woman shaking her bared breasts from side to side), “goatse,” (an enlarged image of a manually-opened anus), or the image referred to as “stingray ho,” (simply a picture of a very large stingray). The

sound clips attached to a thread include excerpts from songs that automatically play when a thread's page is opened on the user's internet browser.

### 3. The use of multi-modal conventions.

Insertions of the above images (or threats to insert the above images) are usually provoked by members who have violated one or more of the principles, e.g. topic shifting when deemed by the community to be inappropriate, not topic shifting frequently enough, or introducing a topic that is deemed by a member to be of little interest. In the Pen community, discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987, 1994) serve the purpose of topic shifting, marking a thread derailment, intending thread derailment, or thread "hijacking." The Pen markers are not the conventional topic-shifting discourse markers "well, so, anyway" but the insertion of "boobies" or a disturbing image. The example below is an excerpt from a thread of discourse referenced in subsequent chapters and illustrates the use of this convention.

Thread (1):

16.O: so...should i design a webpage with java or flash or should I try to mix and match both. I don't have a real reason to pick one or the other, but I heard that they're both cutting edge technology and I want to appear "hip".

oh, AMD vs Intel: which to pick?

17.I.2: \*\*\*\* < pie < [animated image file with a woman shaking her breasts side to side]

Words to live by.

18.P: king george peed bright purple.

Gloss:

16.O: no translation needed (O is asking a question about which website design program to use. He begins the post with a mainstream discourse marker to shift the topic to website design, "so" in order to behave as if he were not a member of the community)



17.I.2: cake is less than pie is less than breasts

words to live by

18.P: no translation needed (no discourse markers used, but topic still shifted)

### **2.3.2. Community Principle (CP)**

The second principle involves those Pen strategies engaged in order to create and maintain community membership and identity. One in-group marker is the use of *leet speak*, which uses non-mainstream orthographic conventions, some of which I describe below. Some of these conventions are not unique to *leet speak* or to the Pen *leet* register, but their use marks membership in a *leet* community, if not the Pen community specifically. When members engage in these practices, the motivation is to assert one's *leetness*.

1. The clipping or suppletion of words, such as *leet* (for 'elite'), *puter* (for 'computer'), *mod* (for 'modify'), or *box* (for 'computer').
2. The metathesis of letters, such as *pr0n* (for 'porn'), *teh* (for 'the'), and *pr0tland* (for 'portland'); these examples may have originated in common typographical errors, which then became enshrined as Pen *leet* with the substitution of the number 0 for the letter o (see 4. below). "Teh" is more widespread, as many non-leet registers employ this orthography with the expansion of *netspeak*.
3. The use of acronyms such as *DYJGTIT* (for 'did you just get the internet today') and *AITOOJOTT* (for 'am I the only one jerking off to this').
4. The strategic use of systematic replacement of some letters with numbers, such as *1337* (for '*leet*'), *h4xx0r* (for 'hacker'), *n00b* (for 'noob' or new person), and *ph34r* (for 'fear'); this may have originated in calculator games of spelling words with numbers. I call these

conventions morphophonological because many of these conventions have transferred to face-to-face talk and are vocalized, for example *teh* (pronounced /t<sup>h</sup>ə/) and *pwnt* (pronounced /poʊnd/).

5. Orthographically altered productive morphemes, such as *-x0r* instead of *-er* as in *h4xx0r* (for *hacker*), which can be affixed to most technology-related words to describe a person who is not technologically savvy, for example of when someone loses an argument related to technology or shows her lack of skills, a member will employ this morpheme *-z0r* or *-z0r3d* as in *0wnz0r* or *0wnz0r3d* (for ‘own’ or ‘owned’), which originated online for computer gaming, where defeat of another member is highlighted. The term ‘pwnd’ is now interchangeable with ‘owned,’ as in “you have been pwnd.” Alternate spellings include “pwnt” as well. Like many *netspeak* lexical items, a misspelling can become a convention as “teh” for “the” and now “pwnd” for “ownd.”

#### 6. The role of the “nazi.”

There are various productive instantiations of “nazis,” evoked by norm violations, such as posts having grammatical errors, or community-defined inappropriate topic shifting behavior. Any member can elect to take on the role of “nazi” at different times and for different purposes – there is no one designated “nazi.” A member may post or act as a “grammar nazi” when the topic is somehow related to a literary field, or someone is posting something considered to be “highbrow” (see Appendix B for Pen use of this term). If this poster introduces a topic in an elevated register, and in the post misspells a word or uses grammar improperly, a “grammar nazi” may surface to chastise that member. Although one of the norms in the Pen community is to topic shift frequently and in a seemingly random fashion, the “topic nazi” appears in instances where a topic was shifted improperly, too soon, not soon enough, or to an unacceptable topic. Both the “grammar nazi” and the “topic nazi” enforce the norms of interaction through virtually

coercive means, such as threats to insert disturbing images, random audio files, or actually posting some marker of disdain. For example, a post such as, “don’t make me unleash the goatse on you!” is often used by a “topic nazi” in situations where a member is violating a Pen norm.

The “nazis” serve the role of maintaining order and reinforcing the norms of the Pen community. I purposely avoid referring to this activity as censorship, as this is not the “nazi” purpose. In fact, there is no censorship on the message board, the sole exception being the word – cake – which outside of the Pen community is not considered taboo in any other forum, physical or virtual. The administrator has built into the site an application which finds any instance of the word “cake” and replaces it with four asterisks. Several layers of meaning underlie the Pen use of cake taboo. At one level, it constitutes a commentary on censorship and how the Pen community does not participate in it, as there is no taboo language, and it is also a reminder to Pen members and newcomers that the word “cake” is never to be mentioned. There are of course orthographic means of avoiding the automatic censorship of the word “cake,” which bypasses the asterisk auto-replacement, and members use these in playful near-violation – typing ‘c4k3’ or ‘c\_a\_k\_e’ or ‘kek’ (4 and 3 are the conventional *leet* substitutions for the letters ‘a’ and ‘e’ respectively). This language play is also a Pen meta-commentary on their language that reveals members’ *techie* abilities and general creativity in keyboarding techniques and solving problems, characteristics that are highly valued in the community.

#### 7. “Novelty” as an overtly labeled category.

Novelty in the Pen community is primarily regarding current technology, current affairs, and current technological developments. Members actively compete to display the most up-to-date phenomena. If a member posts a link to an article or to some current affairs news item that they thought would interest others, they may be met with responses of varying degrees of severity,

depending on how old the news item is. Pen members pride themselves on being the first to know, especially when the news pertains to items of a technological nature. For the Pen community, *leetness* involves more than visiting websites like [www.newegg.com](http://www.newegg.com), which announces the latest technological product launches or sales of technological equipment, but also very specialized community-based sites like [www.slashdot.org](http://www.slashdot.org), where *techies* (or *leet geeks*) who are members of other *leet* communities engage in dialogue about the newest technology. The Pen threads are thus built on the *leet* value of novelty of where to find the newest items of interest and being the first to bring it to Pen attention. So, if a member purports to post something “new” that has actually been mentioned on the message board or has already been featured in techie news forums outside of the Pen community, she has violated the novelty principle and therefore provokes responses such as “gg n00b,” meaning ‘good game newb’ or ‘good going you new person,’ or “DYJGTIT?” meaning, ‘Did You Just Get The Internet Today?’ signaling that what one had thought was news was actually not new enough to merit mention. The severity of possible responses increases in relation to the age of the news that is posted, especially if the item was previously posted on the Pen message board.

Even though the posts are asynchronous, Pen members are nevertheless expected to adhere to the principle of novelty, and one of the responsibilities entailed in that principle is that members read all the posts in the forum before posting something that is “new.” The administrator of the website facilitates access to “new” information by providing a digital tool for users to know when something new appears on the board: a light will flash next to any thread title if that particular computer’s user has not opened it or read all the posts within it. There are two types of “new” on the Pen message board: 1. the first mention of an event, and 2. a new

topic. Novelty in the Pen community deals with the first “new,” marked in importance by the flashing light application in order to help members meet their responsibility.

Novelty is valued in other ways as well. When new technological products are launched, Pen members pride themselves on being in the know about these products, if not having been beta testers for them, and will discuss at length the advantages and failures of said products. On the message board, members can elect to post about such news in a separately designated forum specifically for techie issues. Although the *techie* forum is available and since topics shift so frequently, news concerning technological products usually appears in the general forum, giving one access to discourse including admonitions for old news.

### **2.3.3. Interactive Principle (IP)**

Although the Pen community seems as though they are blatantly hostile or uncooperative, they create an environment and foster this environment through anti-Gricean interactions.

#### **1. Topic shifting.**

An expectation or norm of the Pen community involves the careful orchestration of changing topics with frequency and flair. This also invokes evaluations on which topics are acceptable and which are deemed inappropriate. Members learn the difference and how to correctly topic shift through the observance of topic shifting behavior. When members decide either individually or collectively that they are bored, uninspired, or do not approve of the topic at hand, a member may post one of the set of topic shifters at this point. The Pen community’s seemingly gratuitous topic shifting flouts relevance in the Gricean sense (see 3.A.1), but is cooperative in nature – displaying their communicative competence while showing newcomers the appropriate topic behavior. Conversely, if a thread remains on topic for too long, someone

may post something off topic or invoke one of the accepted topic shifters to signal to members that it is time to change topics. The frequency of topic change, and the relevance of each post add to the complexity of the Pen principles of interaction.

## 2. *Flaming*.

In these exchanges, the observer-participant becomes aware of the norms that are not codified anywhere on the website. Instead, just as they accommodate for lack of a shared physical space with enhanced orthographic conventions, members provide a wealth of understanding through interaction as a teaching or socializing tool. The community replicates appropriate behaviors through continued interaction, as newcomers learn and established members continue to make innovations; through this process, members come to terms with defining how to be *leet* together.

*Flaming* in Pen discourse fulfills Sherzer's (1987) characterization of a heightened speech event. Heightened discourse is special in that it points to significant meaning beyond the literal content of the discourse. The heightened speech event of *flaming* is particularly important as a socialization tool, as well as a venue for display of linguistic virtuosity in Pen discourse. While *flaming* occurs in other online discourse communities (O'Sullivan and Flanagin 2003), Pen *flames* are distinctive. *Flames* inform members of a speech community (or the Pen community) of their norms while revealing what consequences a member can suffer if she violates them, such as being ignored, mocked, or insulted. I agree with Sherzer's description of language as highly social "in that it reflects and expresses groups memberships and relationships" and that discourse produced in culture is an "interface between language and culture" (Sherzer 1987: 296). Thus Sherzer's approach to these special events is of great value to the analysis of how Pen members incite, engage in, and learn norms from *flames* and *flame wars*. *Flames* can vary in intensity, ranging from sparks to mini-*flames* to *flame wars*. The

following Pen thread exhibits the spectrum of *flaming* intensity (glossed for the reader beneath each instantiation of a *flame*). The first post of the thread (1.A.1) quotes an article that another member wrote on the main page of the Pen website. Each time a quote is used in a thread, it is marked as such in bold. Note also that each letter represents a new participant in the thread.

These letters are relative to each thread; A is not the same person across threads.

1.A.1: **quote:**  
**all of this is well and good, and helps me to focus my energy on projects which are likely to better the collective self portrait all of us dorian gays paint of humanity; instead of focusing it on bellyaching about having not even a prospect for a girlfriend**

Okay, I'm less than enlightened here. Does that sentence mean what it looks like it means? 'Cause it looks like you're saying you, and all of us, are "dorian gays" - whatever a "dorian gay" is.

And considering one of the links in those words was to someplace called "gaystation", I'm pretty sure I get enough of the idea to know VERY well I'm not one.

I have a sneaking suspicion this wasn't quite what you meant to say, but fuck if I could manage to parse that sentence any other way. Clue me in here, willya?

2.B: "I'm not gay. I didn't ... gay."

3.C.1: wang  
can wang

4.C.2: wangismightier.com

5.D.1: it is a play on words of the title of a novel by oscar wilde: the picture of dorian gray.  
i was saying that people's unwillingness to internalize the ugliness, to love the beauty as well as the ugliness of humanity while earnestly trying to better humanity is, in short, gay. and that we all collectively paint the ugly picture of humanity we see before us.  
thus, we are all dorian gays.

6.A.2: I have no idea what sort of odd internal dialogue led you to progress from the first face to the last over a three hour period: all I know is it had nothing to do with me, since I had no more contact with you elsewhere than I did here. Regarding your belabored protests, I was actually quite familiar with the premise of The Picture Of Dorian Gray. This familiarity, however, was no adequate preparation for the Sisyphean labors inherent in parsing your tortured syntax. In short, my advice to you is this: **eschew obfuscation**. </highbrow>

Gloss: the above post incites a *flame*, by harshly criticizing a member (D) for his belabored posts on Pen that remind A of “highbrow” literary pretense.

7.E: To tell you the truth [D], I skip most of your posts. They are so damn hard to read.

Gloss: E is joining in the *flame* against D.

8.F: GODFUCKINGDAMNIT [D] GO AWAY  
HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU HAVE TO BE TOLD??  
[D]=BORING. LIKE hardcore BORING.  
I LIKE THE NON-PRETENTIOUS ARTISTS BIT. DOES THAT INCLUDE YOU?

Gloss: the above post is an outright *flame* of D, evidenced by both the direct and inflammatory language use and the demand that he leave the message board.

9.A.3: Okay [D], let's take this one slow:  
1. Yes, you have it so right. I fear your mighty p3n15 will violate my tender anus, therefore I attack you. Uh-huh. How "insightful" of you. (Was that an epiphany?)

Gloss: this is A's continuation of the *flame* that he initiated. The website name where the community interacts is named penismightier.com, hence the reference to the “mighty p3n15,” with “penis” written in *leet speak*.

2. The internal dialogue was whatever prompted you to make three separate posts over the course of three hours, with no input from anyone else, which changed drastically in tone as time went by.
3. Look *real fucking hard* at this very page and see where you can find the very three faces that I posted. Hint: they're in the same order I posted them. Another hint: they're immediately to the right of the letters "[D's name spelled in capital letters]" and immediately to the left of the word "posted." Clued in yet?
4. You don't "think in broad strokes", you trip over a ladder and spill 5 gallons of semi-gloss latex on the carpet, man. It's messy, really.
5. The "Sisyphean labor" is continuing to attempt to communicate with your befuddled ass. Jesus man, snap out of the fog and pay attention - you couldn't even figure out where the *faces* remark came from and *you posted them!*?

Gloss: again within the same post, A is berating D for his poor skills in writing and reasoning, reiterating the *flame* concerning D's muddled messages. His reference to “think in broad strokes” deals with a separate post where A *flames* D, but in a separate thread.



10.D.2: [A's real name, not his avatar – removed for anonymity]: ok, if you need to take it slow... (i heard you like it that way)

Gloss: here, D is responding to the *flame* incited against him by *flaming* A, with “i heard you like it that way,” suggesting that A not only needs to read slowly but that he enjoys “it” slowly (most *flames* involve suggesting that the *flamee* is homosexual, playing on the phrase that if you are gay, you “flame.” So if a member *flames* someone, he is not only insulting them primarily because they violated a community norm but he is also accusing that member of being gay).

1) ok, yer right, yer \*not\* a homophobe.

Gloss: by using asterisks around the word “not,” D is suggesting the opposite of what he writes. Asterisks are often used in chat rooms and in online discourse to emphasize a word or evoke some kind of tone were the language spoken.

2) the posts did not change drastically in tone. or if they did, you've failed to point out how.

3) and i thought maybe you meant something deeper than that i used three different message icons. oooh, did that throw you off?

Gloss: “oooh, did that throw you off?” is a mild *flame* of A, accusing him of lacking sufficient intelligence to follow D's writing.

4) and i do think in broad strokes. it's a gemini trait. i sometimes miss the trees for the forest. but i see that you just wanted to twist that into an insult. you had nothing of value to say. or no, maybe you wanted to inform me about how my brain works?

5) and i like how you skirted addressing the flaw i exposed in your analogy. if you must continue this attack, let's do it in email, huh?

Gloss: the comment about “the flaw” that D “exposed in” A's “analogy” refers to D relating “dorian gays” to members. Again, here D continues to defend himself against A's *flame*, and he asks A to take the fight outside of the message board to personal email, which can be likened to the physical fights indoors taken outside.

11.A.4: That dog in *Mad About You* rules

Gloss: The above post is from the same person who began the *flaming* of D, but he is trying to either ignore D's request or acquiesce to it by changing the topic.

12.G: But there's so many people and now an established target...

I much prefer public *flamewars*  
But then I'm a homophobic, non-link-clicking, non-understanding, sarcasm-missing, non-email-using, semi-literate, redneck-named, exaggerating asshole....  
...who just happens to have a 10 inch cock.

Gloss: within this post, G is lamenting that A quickly abandoned his *flaming* of D. He writes, "I much prefer public *flamewars*" as a direct response to the request to take the fight elsewhere so no one else could be involved. One could say that G then mocks the process of *flaming* by *flaming* himself; he dismisses his own opinion by using the discourse marker, "but then," and through self-deprecation and charges against himself that include being "homophobic" (which is what D accused A of earlier in the thread), not being *leet* ("non-link-clicking") and as in general meriting all of the criticism A heaped upon D (non-understanding, sarcasm-missing, non-email-using, semi-literate"), and exaggerating which he performs with the next line, "who just happens to have a 10 inch cock." G's language use, as well as insults to himself, point to the fact that one may be in the midst of a *flame war*, as these comments are not used in non-*flame* contexts.

Oh, and regarding this:

**quote:**

**Originally posted by [D]:**

**people can print my posts to**

**wipe their ass with them as far as i care.**

You have to care at least a little. Otherwise you wouldn't be posting the things to begin with. You sure as hell wouldn't be getting defensive if you didn't care. The trick is to learn how to deal with criticism and *flames*. You dont start a *flamewar* and then say "lets continue this where I wont be so embarrassed anymore". The cats out of the bag. You hang in to the end, give up, or ignore it.

I tend to hang on to the bitter end. I also frequently lose.

Gloss: after quoting D, G not only identifies the preceding discourse as a *flame war*, but he advises D to “hang in to the end, give up, or ignore it,” not to engage in a *flame war* and then ask that no one continue it.

13.H: sweet jeebus. in the time it took me to make a semicoherent post, this escalated from a minor scuffle into a near *flame war*. i just can't keep up. now you fuckers see why i avoid chat.

Gloss: H is the last member to post on this thread, using meta-commentary to point to the fact that a *flame* had occurred, rapidly escalating from a “minor scuffle” to a “near *flame war*” which was stymied by D’s request to take the *flame* to email. Members will often mark heightened discourse with labels such as these if they wish to comment on what occurred in those contexts or to rally behind one or more of the members involved in the *flame*.

*Flames* like this appear frequently enough in the Pen community to merit discussion and illustration, since these discourse events are similar to verbal arguments and sometimes physical fights but require special accommodation (quoting other members’ posts, orthographic nuances like asterisks around words for emphasis and “<” and “>” surrounding words like “highbrow” to highlight a tone of condescension or of pretension) for the lack of the bar room or the playground. Many of these nuanced orthographic uses stem from programming language, for example, using the “<”, or less than, before words that are in focus or for mathematical relationships, as seen above in “\*\*\*\* < pie < boobies.”

## CHAPTER 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The treatment of literature contained herein provides an overview of the scholarship related to and informing my project, which I consider to fall within the scope of ethnographically informed discourse analysis and anthropological linguistics. While the review is by no means comprehensive, nor does it cover all research up to this date (most of the literature I treat here has been published before 2006), my goal is to situate my work among the previously published work in the fields of communication, linguistics, and anthropology.

Crystal (2001, 2004, 2006) is among the first linguists to address *netspeak* and its importance in linguistic scholarship. In his dictionary of internet terms, he presents *netspeak* as a lexicon, as well as highlighting its significance for those who study language change. Much of the research I conducted for my earlier ethnographic project that relates to *leet speak* stems from his original dictionary of internet terms (2001).

This literature review is organized to correspond to the order of chapters in this dissertation, beginning with the various theoretical frameworks I engage and the related literature, beginning with individual or cognitive pragmatics leading to scholarship concerning speech communities and communication and discourse analysis. The motivation behind this organization is to provide a parallel with the proposed EPM and its layers, which begin at the center with the individual and progress to wider spheres of communicative interaction.

### 3.1. Frames of Analysis

Relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) provides an entry point into an individual's understanding of the construction of a shared or collective context, constantly re-negotiated as discourse evolves. Individuals are doing cognitive work, amassing both an individual and a shared body of contextual and communicative knowledge.

While (im)politeness in face-to-face conversation is usually viewed as the exception rather than the norm, in some virtual spaces including that of the Pen community, specific impolite language use strategies such as *flaming* and the strategic use of genres of *netspeak* (see Appendix A for gloss of italicized words), most particularly that of *leet speak* in this case, serve as exemplars of the discourse community's in-group interaction and function as a vehicle for socialization into appropriate or acceptable linguistic behavior. Because use of impolite speech is a norm within the Pen discourse community, the (Im)politeness approach in pragmatics provides the most appropriate framework for analysis of Pen interaction.

Stance serves to provide the bridge between an individual's cognitive processes and a community's interactive pragmatic competence building. Stance calibrates the articulated relationship of interlocutors with each other towards the content of their speech. By positioning oneself as a member of a community, one engages in a dynamic process of aligning herself in relation to her interlocutors and to her position among other members through linguistic interaction. Every utterance made by any speaker positions that speaker as a member of a community in a particular role, signals the alignment of that speaker to the content of utterances as well as to the speaker's relationship with interlocutors, and posits the speaker's evaluation of content, context, and relationships. Stance therefore provides a broad account of the intersubjective reality of communication within a speech community. Application of Stance in discourse (Du Bois 2007) allows the investigator to approach a unifying theory (the EPM) for interactive discursive practices.

The act of violating a norm provokes a response that allows the participant who commits the error to realize that the norm was violated. Although the online normative protocol seems to mirror what occurs in face-to-face interaction, because virtual communication is constrained by

the absence of a familiar, shared physical collectivity upon which to build, it relies upon specialized linguistic strategies with which to foster in-group associations and create identities within the virtual community.

### **3.1.1. Individual/Cognitive Framework – Relevance Theory**

Sperber and Wilson define relevance as the property that makes information worth the effort of processing (1995: 46). Relevance theory (henceforth RT) rests on several tenets, most importantly that humans are economic in their communicative endeavors, attending to the most relevant stimuli, while speakers choose their acts of ostension (informing) for what they believe will take the least effort on the hearer's part to gain the most contextual effects. The hearer's cognitive work is economic as well, searching for the most effect with the least effort. RT rests on two major claims: 1) that human cognition tends to be economic and geared toward maximizing relevance and 2) that every "act of ostensive communication" relays a "presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Sperber and Wilson 1995:260). Speakers intend to make information manifest to hearers; and our cognitive systems are geared for maximizing effects, or information, from the least processing effort on the hearer's part. The second claim is of the most importance in this theory. Sperber and Wilson term it the Principle of Relevance, and contrast it with Grice's (1989) Cooperative Principle (the CP).

The Cooperative Principle (henceforth CP), according to Grice, is that which "participants will be expected to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1989: 307). The four maxims of being cooperative are designated as the prescriptive and Kantian categories of: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner (1989: 309). The maxim of Quality concerns being truthful and sincere in your

communicative endeavor, not lying. Quantity relates to a presumption of being economically informative – give enough information to cooperate without extraneous or unnecessary additions. Relation refers to being appropriate in the immediate situation, staying on topic or attending to the matter at hand. Manner deals with being clear about what you are communicating, not circumventing or being obtuse. Grice explains that this system of observing maxims in order to be cooperative “could be thought of as quasi-contractual” (309) and serve as a basis for cooperative transactions. Foundational to the CP are several assumptions: that participants have a common goal, that their contributions should be mutually dependent, that there is an understood protocol for sequence and styling and that “you do not just shove off or start doing something else” (309). Grice then concedes that arguing or letter writing “fail[s] to fit comfortably” into the CP. Therefore, observance of the CP and maxims is

“reasonable (rational) along the following lines: that anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication (such as giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others) must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participation in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the CP and the maxims” (309).

If a speaker violates one or more of the maxims, she is not being as cooperative as possible and has thus violated norms of interaction. O’Sullivan and Flanagin (2003) remark on norm violations and “problematic” messages in online contexts. They consider *flaming* to be a problematic message because it is overtly hostile and thus un-cooperative. My analysis of Pen data leads me to disagree, as this speech event of heated debate or attacking an interlocutor in a virtual speech community actually entails quite a bit of cooperation. It is through the responses to these “problematic” messages that members negotiate what is appropriate behavior. Furthermore, *flames* are usually provoked by a violation of some kind of norm and are thus engaged in order to uphold cooperative norms, rather than being inherently un-cooperative. It is

not clear within Grice's framework that an unintentional norm violation is necessarily uncooperative.

One may not necessarily be cooperating within the parameters set forth by Grice when communicating, and this is where the Principle of Relevance extends to cover acts of intentional communication to allow the hearer the most contextual effects possible, or the most relevance for the existing context. According to Sperber and Wilson, cognition and communication are interrelated, and humans' cognitive systems are geared toward economically seeking a fuller understanding of the world. If one is given what the cognitive system deems extraneous, one affords little effort in paying attention to it and focuses instead on what part of the ostension that provides the most information about the world. Another important aspect of RT is that the hearer does not have to succeed in gaining optimal relevance, as the intention of creating contextual effects is the focus.

Researchers in a variety of fields of discourse analysis and pragmatics have engaged RT, most agreeing that the principle underlying RT is the goal of a speaker to produce the most contextual effect for the hearer from the least processing effort. Shared background knowledge becomes a central issue here, as it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which interlocutors actually share background knowledge. Also, the necessary assumptions from which to derive effects must be shared by the interlocutors. In virtual space, where shared knowledge for participants may not be overt or tangible, RT is problematic in accounting for conversational behavior. Cognitively, an analyst may find significant results for what is indeed shared knowledge, but in the absence of the conventional face-to-face knowledge that comes with interaction and a more "real" space of that interaction, RT only begins to provide the foundation



for a holistic understanding of the mechanisms employed to achieve relevance according to Sperber and Wilson's definition.

Arguments for and against particular assertions within RT have surfaced in large number since the appearance of the theory. Sperber and Wilson have revised and defended several tenets of their theory in the wake of some critics' complaints that RT is asocial and cannot easily account for the social aspect(s) of communication (Coupland and Jaworksi 1997) and that RT as a framework sometimes clashes with coherence (Giora 1997). Blakemore (2001) explains that coherence in discourse, including our "intuitions" about it, is the result of relevance seeking. She asserts that discourse markers such as "so," "well," and "in other words" that may have seen little treatment in RT (because they are non-truth conditional) are recently coming into focus because, as she claims, discourse markers interpreted in a relevance theoretic analysis shed more light into the psychology of discourse processing instead of looking at them as cohesive units (Halliday and Hasan 1976). Halliday and Hasan (1976) discuss cohesion as the sum of units entailed in discourse meaning.

With such a broad and encompassing theory as RT, it is difficult to assert that RT is indeed unable to account for social aspect(s) of communication, or the stronger argument that it is asocial. In examples from the 1995 work, which are constructed utterances, Sperber and Wilson focus on what cognitive work an individual engages in communicative interaction, but it becomes difficult for the researcher to account for the multiple phenomena that are simultaneously occurring in real interactions.

Sperber and Wilson attempt to illustrate through simple two-turn exchanges the different strata of constraints within their paradigm. In order to provide a succinct exposition of issues that arise with RT, I operationalize the theory with data from the Pen community to show

whether and how the principle of Relevance applies. In chapter 5, my analysis of the Pen data within the RT framework shows the theory's utility and limits as a discourse analytic tool.

### **3.1.2. Pragmatic Framework– (Im)Politeness Theory**

Moving from cognitive pragmatics to social interactional pragmatics, I turn here to the issues of face and politeness. Face threatening and face saving politeness strategies as well as definitions of politeness have been well documented in the literature ranging from negotiating status or rank to conversational maxims (Brown and Levinson 1987; Fraser 1990, Lakoff 1989; Leech 1983). Goffman's (1981) communication model is useful as a starting point for understanding face, in the sense that members of the Pen community are engaged in face work. Goffman's notion of face entails the self-image as manifested by the public perception of the individual. There are negative and positive aspects of face, as the private enterprising and public approval-seeking self, respectively. Brown and Levinson's explanation of face-threatening acts, or FTAs, builds on this notion of positive and negative face, founded upon principles of social distance, relative power or rank, and degree of imposition (1987: 74). Brown and Levinson assert that these principles are universally applicable to conversational behavior, providing evidence from cross-cultural data in non-western languages. Scholars working with non-western languages have since argued, however, that previous conceptions or theories of politeness are not universal, further distinguishing the position of the self and face contingent on factors such as culture, gender, class, rank, status, and age in conversational interaction (Gu 1990; Haviland 1988; Ide 1989).

The issue of politeness becomes important for my project because overtly impolite interactions manifest themselves on the Pen message boards. Nevertheless, members are indeed cooperating on some level. Human beings come together in communities, forming bonds with

each other, certainly through the language they use, but constrained by the context in which they use it. Considering the social community building aspects of the human condition in conjunction with the linguistic and cultural aspects of the human condition would prove fruitful for understanding the motivations, strategies and mechanisms of conversational behavior. Grice's (1989) maxims, based on the Cooperative Principle, are challenged in relation to Pen interactions; because while it appears that members of this community are cooperatively engaging in a collective effort to foster a sense of community that is unique in shared interest, scope, membership, and lexicon, they interact with seemingly anti-Gricean behavior.

More useful for my purposes than Grice or Brown and Levinson are theories of politic behavior from Watts et al. (2005) and Culpeper's (1996) (Im)politeness model, especially for understanding the strategies undertaken to afford entrance and membership in the Pen speech community. Instead of a negative and positive face negotiation, Watts defines politeness as two-fold: first-order politeness, which includes the tacit expectations of norms of behavior; and second-order politeness, which constitutes the theoretical umbrella for politic behavior, politeness, and cooperation. In other words, first-order politeness contains our expectations as participants in conversation, and second-order politeness is the theoretical category of the resulting behavior. Watts describes his theory of politic behavior as "mutually shared forms of consideration for others" which may extend beyond the cooperative and expected generalizations of previous theories (2003: 30).

Watts (2005) also warns against the tendency toward claiming universality for particular pragmatic theories. He proposes to resolve the issue of universality by distinguishing the "typological," or ideal, approach to politeness from the "underlying principles," or actual approach (2005:43). The typological approach serves as the class of expected behaviors between

interlocutors, while the underlying principles approach provides the theoretical description or conceptualization of politeness. Watts suggests that “politic behaviour” is a more comprehensive explanation of social interaction than earlier theories such as Brown and Levinson’s. “Hence, politic behaviour, which is culturally determined and is ‘generated’ from underlying universal principles, is transformed into polite behaviour under certain marked social conditions” (Watts 2005:57). Thus politic behavior expands the cooperative politeness model to include those interactions that seem uncooperative, with claims that it can account for linguistic interaction that is culturally calibrated. The similarity between politeness (Brown and Levinson) and politic behavior (Watts) is that both theories attend to what is expected behavior, which is fundamentally variable cross-culturally.

(Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996) also goes beyond Brown and Levinson’s positive and negative face and is salient for the Pen speech community, providing a useful framework within which to analyze Pen conversation threads that do appear to be frequently impolite. Culpeper describes two tiers of (im)politeness, which are important to note in order to adequately use his terminology in this examination. First, positive (im)politeness output strategies are those in which the interlocutor ignores or otherwise snubs the other. This is accomplished several ways according to Culpeper: ignoring, snubbing or otherwise dismissing the speaker, physically leaving the conversation, using forms of address or identity markers of a higher or lower status than deemed by the participants as appropriate for the situation, using secretive or obscure language (such as *leet speak*), or making the other person feel uncomfortable by using taboo words, epithets, or otherwise offensive language. In Chapter 6, some of these strategies are witnessed in use, pointing toward normative (im)politeness in the community.

Second, negative (im)politeness output strategies are those in which the interlocutor takes an active role in creating a hostile environment by frightening, threatening, condescending, ridiculing, invading physical space, or otherwise publicly offending the other. With this framework established, Culpeper suggests that these notions of what constitutes impolite behavior can serve as a catch-all for the interactions which do not correspond to positive or negative face. Power differentials play an important role in (im)politeness as well as in politeness strategies. Culpeper argues that if one has significant standing in the speech community or in the specific context of the exchange, he or she is more readily apt to acceptably engage in negative (im)politeness output strategies in addition to positive ones. The Pen discourse provides examples of exchanges exhibiting both positive and negative (im)politeness output, as some members with authority in the Pen community employ both strategies successfully while newer members with lower statuses engage in both strategies with less success or acknowledgment.

Bousfield (2008) approaches his research of face-to-face interaction with respect to (Im)politeness as an alternative to Brown and Levinson and their assumption that most communicative acts are built on the cooperative model. He also criticizes Culpeper for making the same mistakes in reasoning for which Brown and Levinson have been criticized: focusing on single exchanges that are removed from context rather than ongoing discourse events in their contexts. He warns that considering (im)politeness in singular talk exchanges is limiting. Instead of single exchanges of talk, he investigates “extended, real-life interactions” (2008:3); specifically “conflictive, impolite illocutions” (2008:7) taken from television series. However, Bousfield himself is open to critique for having chosen constructed and written scripted discourse.

### **3.1.3. Intersubjective Framework - Stance Analysis**

Models dealing with interactionally negotiated alignments and evaluations provide a framework with which to analyze discourse (Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Haddington 2006; Jaffe 2009; Karkkainen 2006). Stance, or stance-taking, is the evaluative work interlocutors do when they engage in conversation. With each turn, an interlocutor positions herself within the broader sociocultural context while evaluating the presupposed context or information, aligning either with or against the other interlocutors and evaluating the content and the interlocutors' messages. The stance model mediates the theoretical gap between individual cognitive work (Relevance Theory) and politeness theories ((Im)politeness). With each turn, interlocutors invoke the norms of the speech community in order to inform their co-interlocutor regarding their evaluation of content and speaker. Stances are constantly re-negotiated through ongoing discourse. Intersubjectivity builds over the course of the conversational exchanges within the discourse. This approach allows consideration of a series of exchanges, as each turn builds on previous turns and stances amass. "Stance both derives from and has consequences for social actors, whose lives are impacted by the stances they and others take" (Du Bois 2007: 141).

The Stance Triangle model provides a more holistic account of language use, one that includes the individual, the interlocutors, and the discourse in which they participate. At one point of the triangle, an interlocutor aligns herself to her co-interlocutor and to the content of her message. At the next point, she evaluates the content of the message sent to her. At the third point, she positions herself either with or against her co-interlocutor with a response. These stance-takings are simultaneously occurring, and with each turn, the triangulated assessment is engaged. The alignments, evaluations, and positions build on each other over a sequence of interactive discourse. Du Bois explicates stance as both a process and a product of social

interaction. He characterizes stance as having the “power to assign value to objects of interest, to position social actors with respect to those objects, to calibrate alignment between stancetakers, and to invoke presupposed systems of sociocultural value” (Du Bois 2007: 139). See Figure 1 (below).

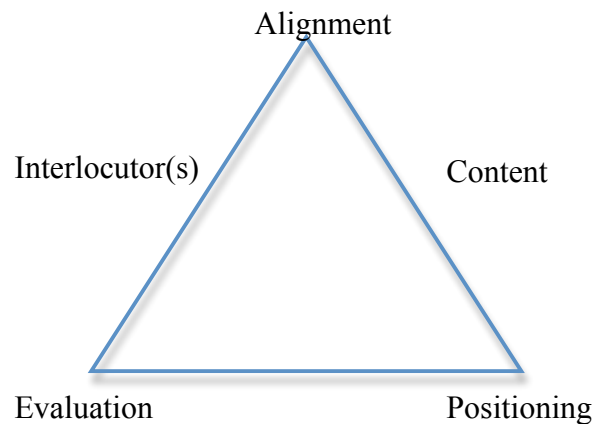


Figure 1: Triangulation of Stance

Also invoking a triangular model, Brody (2006) employs a model of interaction that includes the individual self, the other interlocutor(s), and the larger community as a whole. In her analysis of gossip discourse in Tojolabal, each side of this triangle model provides insight for understanding the culturally informed discourse. Members of this particular community engage in communicative strategies that rest on and come from the larger body of community knowledge. Thus, as they interact, each interlocutor as well as the community at large play a role while holding a place on each point of the triangle. This perspective draws upon the Bakhtinian (1986) model, where the larger community that provides communicative knowledge is peripheral to the analysis, not the source of interactional history, or collective memory. While Du Bois’ points on the triangle designate actions taken by interlocutors, Brody’s points on the

triangle designate the personal and cultural entities which inform the actions interlocutors take in the discourse.

Stance taking operates in the context of previously acquired knowledge of past interlocutor stances, which are held in the memory and accessed in subsequent discourse. Interlocutors not only align themselves with others, but they also simultaneously attribute stances to the other speakers. The stance model is a promising candidate to bridge the gap between individual cognitive processes and the social interaction of dialogue, as it includes several co-occurring factors. Analysis within the stance model supersedes the individual cognitive work that Relevance Theory provides for and the public offense or defense that face and (Im)Politeness provide for. However more inclusive, it would be impossible to have gotten to this point without prior work in cognitive and face-based pragmatics that accounted for each of these elements of discourse and the participants involved.

Cognitive pragmatic theories serve to place the individual in the world and make connections between what is said, what is meant, and what is understood. Social interactional pragmatics deals with expectations of behavior, status negotiation, and norms of communicative interactions. Both these processes occur between individuals that exist within communities. These communities, along with the individuals within them, play roles in the discourse as well, so defining and drawing boundaries around community is of equal importance for this project.

### **3.2. Analytic Theory and Method**

Ethnographically informed discourse analysis is the basis of my project and my consideration of a new model for discourse analysis in Pragmatics. The understanding gained through fieldwork is essential to understanding a culture's language use. Fewer assumptions arise from vague or otherwise incomprehensible discourse if the analyst is familiar with the



culture and its norms and values, both linguistic and non-linguistic. Anthropological linguists appreciate the value of ethnography in gleaning richer analyses and include extensive intersubjective understanding in their research (Bauman and Sherzer 1975; Brody 2006; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Hymes 1974; Johnstone 1990; Kuipers 2004; Sherzer 1983; Sherzer 1987). The proverbial divide permeates the literature – where frameworks for pragmatic analysis often decontextualize data as a necessary accommodation for lack of ethnographic data. However, ethnography illuminates what occurs between culture and language, informing linguistic analysis and it is therefore essential.

### **3.2.1. Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis**

Conversation analysis (henceforth CA) stems from the sociological perspective of studying language in use. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) devised a method of analysis for turn taking in conversation where they felt Goffman's model of interaction had left off. Conversation analysis first focused on turn sequencing and greetings in verbal interactions, on the telephone, or face-to-face (ten Have 2004). Stemming from this tradition are works of scholars like Schiffrin (1994), who studies discourse markers and their relation to discourse coherence. Schiffrin stresses that a confluence of both structural and functional analyses are most fruitful when investigating discourse (1994:361), going beyond face work and the dramaturgical setting of actors and scenes toward illustrating the discourse as an entity in flux.

Other conversation analysts include more elements of the conversation including the context surrounding it and the culture within which it takes place (Gee 2005; Moerman 1988; Scollon 2001). Moerman (1988) sets out to bridge the perspectives of the strain of CA stemming from Sacks et al. with ethnography, thereby combining aspects of specific language interaction and ethnographic knowledge of the participants. He speaks to the advantages of combining

analysis with ethnography for the benefit of culturally informed discourse. According to Moerman, the conversation analyst should be highly skilled in the technical procedures of transcription and detailed analysis while also having sufficient knowledge of the culture where the conversation occurs. With any conversation, the moment, place, and participants are all significant elements of the conversational context. Without accurate understanding and integration of the cultural norms and beliefs into the analysis, the work is incomplete.

The terms discourse analysis and conversation analysis are sometimes interchanged to describe the same endeavor of analyzing talk. Gee (1999) employs analytic methods to study “discourse in Discourses,” distinguishing discourse (little d) from Discourse (big D). He claims that the difference is important when analyzing interactions, as Discourse (big D) encompasses all communicative activities we engage for interaction, including language along with all other non-language activities, while discourse (little d) is specifically the language in use that “enacts” the activities we engage in and identities we form through it. It is through the analysis of discourse in Discourses that we are able to go beyond a description of language towards useful application in areas outside of academia because we have a greater understanding of “how and why language works the way it does when it is put into action” (1999:8).

Gee states that the primary functions of language are to 1) “scaffold the performance of social activities” and 2) “scaffold human affiliation within cultures and social groups and institutions” (1999:1). He considers these two functions as intertwined, where culture creates the space where interactions occur and informs the way in which they occur. Those interactions also re-create and maintain cultures, groups, and institutions. He argues that participants within groups amass knowledge for future interactions; cultural knowledge informs the discourse and discourse provides further opportunity for interaction. Gee argues that discourse in Discourses is

informative beyond grammatical concerns. It is the means through which we can understand and explore our connections to the physical world and to each other: creation of identity, negotiation of relationships, formation of attitudes, and how important words are when used in particular situations.

Social action, communication, and history are the three principles underlying Scollon's method of mediated<sup>3</sup> discourse analysis, where the analyst should maintain awareness of and attend to the particular concepts, as an exchange of talk is over so quickly yet so complexly contextualized and housed within a larger discourse. These concepts are: mediated action, site of engagement, mediational means, practice, and nexus of practice (2001:3). He terms the inextricable whole of linguistic interaction within its contexts, or the sociality of discourse as a unit of analysis, as "mediated action." The focus is on the interlocutors as they interact. The second term is "site of engagement," which is the social space or situation in which action occurs. Important to note here is the point that Scollon makes about instantiations of interaction being fleeting moments in history, so attention to the site of engagement is crucial as an element of the interaction as they may build upon the social histories later invoked in subsequent discourse. "Mediational means" are the material objects in the world involved in the action, including the interlocutors, as every situation is unique containing several means, or objects, which inform or surround the discourse that occurs. Interconnectedness surfaces here with "practice," which is the "necessary intersection of social practices and mediational means which in themselves reproduce social groups, histories, and identities" (Scollon 2001:4). Last is "nexus of practice" which loosely equates to the culmination of similar habits in similar

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, "mediated" is not computer-mediated, but technologically-mediated discourse fits into this schema. Since he states that the means "inform or surround the discourse that occurs," the medium (including the internet connection and the computer) is part of the discourse.

situations, as each mediated action begins but never ends, and other actions simultaneously occur and/or other actions mediate those previously formed actions.

Scollon's (2001) analytical concepts speak to the complexity of discourse, with contexts both linguistic and non-linguistic, histories built into and built from each new conversation, and the unique character of each moment in time. By identifying these foci for study, he also points to the importance of studying mediated discourse as actions (for example, turn-taking behaviors) that are understood to be as valuable as the mediation of them. In Scollon's terms, a Pen member's discourse is not necessarily mediated by a specific place on a specific day at a specific time with particular bystanders within earshot, although some members may indeed be mediated by such a context. Both discourse analysts and linguistic anthropologists approach the illumination of the dynamic interplay of language and culture, attending to discourse as produced in context and having histories built from previous interactions that may inform future ones.

### **3.2.2. Anthropological Linguistics**

Scollon and Scollon (1979) previously employed methods borrowed from the ethnography of communication, or ethnography of speaking, as developed by Hymes (1962). The ethnography of speaking was devised as a tripartite system of description of communication using categories of speech events, constituent factors of speech events, and functions of speech. The ethnography of speaking provides a framework within which to situate speech events by overtly calling attention to the settings, participants, ends or goals, tone, genre, channels, etc. in order to understand the "big picture" of communication and the numerous situations of where and how people communicate. Hymes' work has informed much of the discourse analysis engaged by linguistic anthropologists (Bauman and Sherzer 1975; Scollon and Scollon 1979; Sherzer 1983). Hymes (1974) reaffirms his earlier point that ethnographic research provides not

only data, but that ethnography can serve to elucidate the intricacies of communicative behavior in cultural contexts. Hymes created a niche to use both grammar and ethnography as evidence for patterns of the act of communication (Bauman and Sherzer 1975). Hymes later worked together with Gumperz on the ethnography of communication, approaching language in its context of occurrence (Gumperz and Hymes 1986). Gumperz (1982) provides his insights to discourse strategies within the sociological framework; his work in *Discourse Strategies* informs the interactionist model of communication. He argues that social categories are articulated in language use, and are constituents of the communication itself, beyond the scope of phonology, formal semantics, and syntax.

Language in use online, particularly *flaming* behavior, provides data best analyzed within frameworks like ethnography of communication. *Flaming* is a heightened speech event in online discourse, much like verbal dueling. Sherzer (1987) argues that heightened speech events instantiate the interdependence of language and culture. Heightened speech events, including verbal art, playful discourse, and key turning points in narratives or interactions are exemplars of the highly symbolic interaction of language and culture. Archaeologists use the term *in situ* for provenance of artifacts discovered in undisturbed context; provenance provides part of the meaning of an artifact. Artifacts without known provenance have lost historical, regional, and cultural meaning. So, in language use, the provenance is the context of language use and, without context, much of the meaning is lost, left for speculation or hypothesis. Discourse analysis informed by linguistic anthropology and its rich history of reflexivity enhances the analysis of conversational behavior. However, research in anthropological linguistics and discourse analysis has still not broached what is occurring online (see below for exceptions). Other disciplines, such as communication and media studies have focused on the virtual

community (Jones 1997; Rheingold 2000; Smith and Kollock 1999), but I hope to show that linguistics and anthropology hold the keys to researching all kinds of speech community interaction, not only real or only virtual.

Some recent work has attempted to bridge this gap and study the connections between communication and the virtual medium (Hutchby 2001; Holt 2004; Levine and Scollon 2004). Hutchby (2001) considers the role of conversation analysis as a tool for investigating two major themes: how technology affects conversation and how communication technologies are social, much like other technologically mediated communication via radio and telephone. He is moving beyond restricted focus on information exchange toward understanding how technology is used for and affects social networking. Holt (2004) examines how we create and negotiate identities through virtual media. He reiterates the notion (Hutchby 2001; Wilson and Peterson 2001) that the virtual medium is simply a new context in which humans engage the same communicative mechanisms for the purpose of social cohesion. In other words, interaction and community building are mediated, not defined by the internet. Levine and Scollon (2004), while touting discourse analysis as useful for investigating virtual communication, claim that new communication technologies affect social interaction, stressing that the medium indeed matters, and affects the ways we interact with each other. These scholars focus on questions of how the virtual medium does or does not affect community building, identity, and the ways in which participants compensate for the lack of shared physical space. Kuipers (2004) implores the anthropological community to broaden the ethnography of communication to allow for more flexible, multi-modal ways of interacting linguistically.

Anthropologists are increasingly engaging in fieldwork in the virtual world and producing ethnographies of virtual places (Boellstorff 2008; Hine 2000). Hine acknowledges the

reflexive ethnographic approach as particularly fruitful for the virtual participant observer (2000:64-65). Doing reflexive ethnography allows all participants to engage in intersubjective negotiations of meaning. Constraints in early work in discourse analysis and conversation analysis stemming from Goffman's work focused on ritualized verbal interactions, discussing minimal pair-like turn-taking, greetings and leave-takings, narrative structure, etc. – those forms of language use which are rooted in formalized and ritualized formats. However, within the Pen community and those described in the ethnographies mentioned here, the rich data provided by the members is unscripted, real, naturally occurring conversation that also provides the researcher with evidence for the members' "metalinguistic awareness" (Silverstein 1979).

Boellstorff's (2008) work is the first rich ethnographic product from years of online participant observation. He conducted his fieldwork in Second Life, the online virtual reality where people commune, erect and visit markets, celebrate births and funerals, and engage many other activities within the virtual "imagined community" (Anderson 1983). The data from this ethnography is intertextual - streaming audio and video from "real" sources co-occur with virtual dinner parties, weddings, and any other number of interactions. Boellstorff became a citizen of Second Life, and reflected in the ethnography on his dual experience as both homesteader and researcher, much like Rheingold (2000) reflected on his experience in the WELL in the 1980's and 1990's. Boellstorff provides the first model for conducting an ethnography tailored for online communities. Boellstorff's work has catapulted anthropology through the crisis period created in postmodernism (Johnson and Michaelson 2008) and re-established the importance and value of fieldwork that may not actually get your nails dirty (unless the keyboard is dirty). By applying traditional ethnographic methods and employing reflexivity, ethnographies of virtual places now serve as models of investigating communities' online data. Paccagnella (1997) views

CMC communities as objects or market places, while Boellstorff focuses on the human actor in the world as part of a community that exists online but constitutes life on and offline. This leaves a research niche ready to be filled, namely to close the gap between on and offline interaction.

### **3.3. Speech Communities**

Brint argues that defining community is so problematic that he proposes a “generic community,” one which is at most a collection of individuals who share activities or beliefs and who are “bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern” (2001:8). With this generic term for community, one can create subcategories for more specifically tied social networks of people based on more specifically shared interests or motives for coming together. Because there are so many different kinds of communities, an agreement upon what constitutes or defines a community or a speech community is difficult beyond recognizing that a community is a collective endeavor of social interaction between people with common interests.

The term speech community (Gumperz and Hymes 1972), or what Gumperz (1968) called a linguistic community, has various definitions. Duranti (1997) describes the collective of interdisciplinary efforts put forth to address the concern for defining a speech community, yet each definition that has been offered differs slightly. He describes a speech community as “the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people” (1997:82). If we follow this line of thought, when we attempt to define a virtual speech community, then “virtual” becomes a modifier, indicating a subset of all speech communities, restricted to the medium of the internet. Designated by the medium, the term “virtual speech community” draws a boundary around a particular group of people engaging this medium in a particular way and focuses the



researcher's attention upon how interaction within a virtual medium contributes to the constitution of said speech community. Compared to other non face-to-face media like the television or the telegraph, where a community forms from one broadcaster and multiple receivers, the internet allows the formation of a community of multiple broadcasters and multiple receivers. Further, the receivers (unlike television) are potential broadcasters as well. These facts about the "geometry" of community do not by any means fully determine the nature of the virtual community formed, but they certainly play a critical role.

Ellis et al. (2004) review perspectives on what constitutes a virtual community from the various disciplines that have ventured into cyberspace to study virtual communities, ranging from information science to sociology. The approaches these researchers take include defining virtual communities, outlining what scholarly work has been done on virtual communities, and examining the extent to which and way in which they have been studied. Given that the underlying foundation of community is a group of individuals who come together for the purpose of connection and solidarity, it is possible for this communion to occur whether the participants interact face-to-face or virtually. What changes with respect to the community is the medium. If it is possible to analyze the discourse created by participants of a community and position their conversational behavior within models of communication, then arguing whether that community is real or not is therefore unnecessary. The models of communication based on face-to-face interaction may require modification when applied to virtual communication, but nonetheless serve as a starting point for understanding the exchanges that occur in this endeavor of creating community.

The virtual medium, or the computer-mediated space, strips away many of the contexts that face-to-face communities may share. This does not characterize the virtual realm as

relatively impoverished. It can also be seen as affording a place for a new kind of community to take shape. Taking into account the multi-modal features available online and used by Pen members (see 2.3.1), the virtual medium offers particular kinds of enrichment to keyboarded text. Therefore, what could be considered as potential constraints of the medium actually invite intertextuality. Without a shared physical space, without physical interaction and mutual perception of facial expressions, body language, or tone of voice, participants in virtual space accommodate through both linguistic and paralinguistic means. Innovations include the use of emoticons, program applications allowing the user to quote posts and reply to someone, the use of a specialized register (in this case, *leet speak*) mentioned in chapter 2 and discussed below, and the strategic use of marked, heightened speech events. Ho's findings from research of an online discussion forum of young Singaporeans led her to conclude that the community she studied created and achieved identity as a distinct discourse community with "shared norms and shared expectations; and the creation of mechanisms to regulate interactional norms of participant behaviour" (2004:27). She observed discourse regulating how membership is achieved and maintained in this forum and the way in which participants display or are made aware of norms and expectations in the community. She shows that through the use of self-regulating discourse and dialogue focused on expectations concurrent with discussion on appropriate topics in the community, the members of the community "essentially shape and define a distinct discourse community characterised by the identifiable linguistic features and strategic devices used by participants" (2004: 27).

Rheingold (2000) explicates the construction of virtual communities from his perspective as an administrator for an early online community in the 1980's. He discusses the nature of identity in virtual communities through his own experience of becoming a member of the WELL

community. The identity of a real person taking on membership in an imagined, or virtual, community is achieved through conversational exchanges mediated by the internet. When a participant replies to another participant, those persons' identities are acknowledged. Just as in face-to-face interaction, mutual acknowledgment recognizes an exchange. The shared background or sense of place in offline versus online media is one realm where differences surface. The physical aspects of a virtual community can only be imagined. Rheingold states that

“different people in cyberspace look at their virtual communities through differently shaped keyholes. In traditional communities, people have a strongly shared sense of place – the room or village or city where their interactions occur. In virtual communities, the sense of place requires an individual act of imagination” (2000:53).

In other words, written language, though it may be layered and intertextual, is the sole means of online linguistic communicative interaction whereas offline interaction consists of many more ways in which participants engage in order to foster togetherness. Linguistic interaction affords the expression of a collective identity, while collectively imagining a community provides a place for communication in virtual space. A virtual community cannot exist without linguistic interaction.

Rheingold draws upon his experience as both member participant and observer of the WELL to define virtual communities as “social cyberspaces,” noting that these cyberspaces have grown exponentially since the early 1990's when he wrote the first edition of his book (2000:323). He reports that in 1985, only a handful of virtual communities existed, and they consisted mostly of technophiles, scholars (e.g. Linguist List), and programmers. Since that time until the mid 1990's, membership in online communities had increased to millions of people. Both numbers and types of users increased, resulting in a proliferation of different kinds of communities being formed. For Rheingold, the term “social cyberspaces” encapsulates the

activity of users without dismissing the development and expansion of the medium and its participants.

Categorizing virtual communities is a daunting task. More productive instead is to describe what attribute(s) they share as social spaces of interaction. Rheingold's work was one of the first to document an early virtual community. Although early computer networking technology was remarkably complex, "it would be far easier to understand the physical, or hardwired, connections than to understand the symbolic connections that emerge from interaction" (Jones 1997:12).

In the above quote, Jones is referring to computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) as a social construction of reality, whereby interacting online constructs a sociality without constraint of geographical or physical space. He argues that while just being "connected" to the internet does not necessarily mean that a user is part of a community, it is also dangerous to dismiss the creations of new media that preceded the internet – telegraph, radio and television – because these are potential social spaces as well, affording new ways of interacting than were previously available. He notes that with each new technology, interaction is re-contextualized, and each communicative media innovation provides new opportunities for people to reach out to and be reached by many more people than existed before in their immediate or physical social spheres. Jones argues that CMC "not only structures social relations, it is the space within which the relations occur and the tool that individuals use to enter that space" (1995:16).

Whether creating new space or manipulating extant space for a new locus of social interaction, it is precisely through the communicative acts of participants that communities are created and maintained. The above work has led to the understanding that perhaps the term

“information superhighway” that gained popularity in the early 1990’s is too restrictive a term because of its concentration on information; it reflects the bias toward valuing the informative over the social functions of language. The internet is a medium where people interact, not necessarily for the sole or primary purpose of sending and receiving information. The behaviors that Malinowski (1923) first labeled as “phatic” communication occur frequently in virtual communities through communicative actions. In social network use of the internet, what is more often transmitted instead of information is mutual acknowledgment of community membership or non-membership.

Recognizing the social function of online linguistic communication, the two most frequently used terms for the virtual medium – the “net” and the “web” are of particular interest. These terms highlight the function of this medium that goes beyond the informative or mechanical. What people connect to, interact in, create social connections through, and perhaps become ensnared in is the web or the net. Geertz’s (1973) notion of culture itself as a “web of significance,” where human beings create, negotiate, act, and sometimes may become entangled in a giant web of interaction is instructive here. For both instantiations, the “web” or “net” exists only through the interaction of its denizens. It is through participation in the place in question that effectively creates the place. In the virtual medium of social interaction, the internet becomes a place for participation and interaction. What humans are doing online is exactly what their ancestors have done for ages in other media: creating social networks wherever they afford space.

Wilson and Peterson approach online communities as “new sorts of communities and communicative practice” that have been afforded by information and communication technologies (2001:449). Although they refer to CMC as a “new sort” of practice, they hold that

the dichotomous relationship of online/offline networks of humans is counterproductive to anthropological inquiry. Communities in any context have the potential to change location. Wilson and Peterson critique the majority of scholarly focus in sociology and information science for their heavy reliance on contrasting “real” and “virtual” instead of recognizing the continuum of social interaction – “communities, identities, and networks that exist” regardless of the medium (2001: 456). They refer to Crystal’s (2001) work on language and the internet to support their thesis that community building online is accomplished through linguistic work and provides an opportunity for study for which linguistic anthropologists are uniquely suited to engage. To support the tenet that the medium is a secondary concern to the more pressing issue of identity and community building, Wilson and Peterson note that, not unlike face-to-face identity formation, people can form identities and create community online and just as easily transform or extend those identities and memberships across communities of practice (2001:457). In other words, the medium matters little if at all. I disagree that the medium matters little, as the data in this project shows that the medium is integral to the meaning and the message of the virtual community.

From a sociological standpoint, DiMaggio et al. (2001) echo other sociologists by discussing CMC in terms of social capital, its negotiation, and the resulting inequality therein (Blanchard and Horan 1998; Garton et al. 1997; Kobayashi et al. 2006; Lin 2001). Investigating the “digital divide” as one of social inequality or as a vehicle which reproduces social rankings is better left to sociologists; this question is not as important to the enterprise of linguistic and anthropological investigation of the ways in which users of CMC foster interactive community, regardless of whether that community is egalitarian or stratified.

### **3.3.1. Ethnography of Community**

Linguistic anthropological inquiry into virtual communities has mostly been empirical and descriptive in nature (Beaudouin and Velkovska 1999, Hakken 2004, and Axel 2006). This limits anthropological contributions to a Geertzian “thick description” (1973) and has thus far restricted anthropological approaches to the margins of CMC. The majority of CMC research has been carried out quantitatively within the frameworks of information science, sociology, and communication studies, and has focused on systematizing what is occurring in online communities. This in turn has led to a preponderance of CMC study based on theories of either information exchange (Burnett and Buerkle 2004) or divisive social capital and inequality (Thurlow et al. 2003; Warschauer 1997). In sociolinguistics, social capital and inequality have been focal points for investigating language change. As a social factor for determining standards and norms of behavior, speakers and hearers accommodate each other by negotiating their social capital in interaction (Milroy and Milroy 1992).

Ward challenges the appropriateness of methodology in information science research couched in a social capital model; rather she holds that “cyber-ethnography is the most appropriate tool in reaching a definition of the virtual community” (1999:95). From a qualitative sociological research perspective, Paccagnella (1997) asserts that qualitative, “naturalistic analysis” proves to be more fruitful than methods based on experiments to understand the cultural and symbolic implications of CMC. In the field of media ecology, Sternberg (2000) conducted fieldwork in chat rooms, where she focused on interaction surrounding community misbehavior and how participants reacted to it. She supports the endeavor of online ethnographic research to gain insight into the ways “in which people make, break, and enforce rules of conduct in online environments” (2000:56). I agree that in documenting and analyzing

where breakdown or violations occur, we can illuminate the norms of virtual community behavior, and that examining behavior in natural settings is ideal, as opposed to responses to surveys or simulacra.

The concept of normative behavior, reflected in much literature including Grice (1989) is now treated in virtual interaction as well. For explication on Grice, see section 3.1.1. above. My previous linguistic ethnography of the Pen community (LeBlanc 2005) described an online community of practice from both social and linguistic perspectives. Here, I will go beyond description to explain how members strategically employ linguistic mechanisms with the shared goals of building and maintaining whatever identity they choose and creating and maintaining particular communicative norms for their communities. For this reason, a systematic approach is necessary beyond empirical work. The trajectory of my work is to build on ethnography toward making applications of linguistic approaches with which to analyze data from Pen discourse in light of a linguistic anthropological understanding of human social interaction in a virtual space. The Pen virtual speech community can be seen to exemplify what participants in virtual communities are doing to create and maintain community. This community fits the general description of speech community (Duranti 1997). Their specialized in-group language use and norms of interaction can provide a starting point for a holistic analysis of communicative interaction online.

Relevance Theory, (Im)politeness Theory, and Stance Theory are integral to understanding communicative interaction, but they can each account for only part of what constitutes speech community building. My endeavor is to show how they can be linked into an integrative model that can provide a fuller, more detailed, and contextualized (rich) account of communicative interaction. In the following chapters, I analyze Pen discourse data within each



of the three frameworks detailed above, then with the introduction of the EPM I show how three existing models interact to explain a particularly challenging domain of data.

## CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Social Sciences – Ethical Considerations

A researcher must be aware of available methods and choose the most appropriate method(s) when undertaking a research project. This careful choice necessitates both ethical and methodological considerations. With a project involving discourse analysis of naturally occurring data, ethical concerns that surface include the protection of all research participants, of their language use, and of the research itself. In this case, the researcher must protect the Pen community. In order to adhere to the highest ethical standards, I have consulted the American Anthropological Association's Statement on Ethics (<http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmnt.htm>), which is regularly updated to ensure an ongoing awareness of ethical standards for its members and those outside of the discipline who wish to protect their research participants, their research projects as scholarly endeavors, and themselves. Linguists should also adhere to these ethical standards, as they are part of the larger community of social scientists and encounter the same issues when researching language data. Some of these guidelines for ethical behavior that apply to this particular project include the explicit and complete permission of the participants, full disclosure of the project to all participants, unrestricted access to findings, and full disclosure to the dissertation committee concerning permission, methods, and outcomes.

The Pen community (specifically those involved in the research and whose data appears in this project) have given me full permission to use any of the archived data. Since this data is public record and since I have consulted with the administrator of the website, both the Pen community and I are confident that any research undertaken in this project is both fair, identity-protecting, and ethical.

#### **4.1.1. Protection of the Pen Community**

I have been an active member of the Pen community since 2000, and I was participating in it as a member before undertaking this project. This grants me insider status, even though I am female (the majority of the community are males) and I am not as technologically savvy as most Pen members (an outsider trait), nor do I participate as regularly as most members.

Through my participation in and observation of the community, I became aware of the special discourse contained in this virtual collective. Once I decided to undertake examination of Pen discourse at a scholarly level, I publicly announced my intentions to the community by posting on the same message board I reference in this project. In lieu of obtaining signed consent from each member, I posted a new thread of discourse outlining my research project and my request for permission from the community for me to reprint and analyze the language found on archived message board postings within a specified timeframe (2000-2003) with names, avatars, and signature files removed. I also informed the community that I created and made available an email account so that any member who did not want his or her posts analyzed could exclude themselves. I assured any member who opted out that I would not use any thread of discourse in which they participated. I left this email account open for several months and received only one email from a member who wished to be excluded. No threads in which he participated appeared in my ethnography. Once I had achieved community permission, I took the further step to obtain written permission from the owner of the domain name, also the web administrator for the website, for explicit consent of the use of archived data from 2000 to 2003. I then obtained an archive of data from the web administrator. During the process of writing my thesis, Pen members would inquire about my progress and offer encouragement. When my thesis was complete, the administrator linked it to the Pen website. Several members responded with

approval and support. After reading my thesis project, the one Pen member who chose to be excluded from the research gave me permission to use threads containing his posts as well, so I now have permission of all members whose posts appear in the data I have analyzed for this project.

I sidestep my tenuous insider status by using an archived set of online discourse threads. I further avoid the following pitfalls: the observer's paradox of changing the field by participating in it; the danger of contaminating natural data with transcription errors; and potentially marring authentic data if members were aware of my observation. The archived message board constitutes naturally occurring data that needs no re-transcription, nor is it compromised by members' altering their natural behavior because they know they are being observed. The data is also public record - anyone who visits the website can read the threads I analyzed for this project. The fact that the data is public in nature poses less than minimal risk to the Pen community, since they have already agreed to be public by posting online; they continue to interact publicly with the full knowledge that participation is public – one does not need to register on the website in order to view the threads of discourse. Another advantage of using archived data is that I allow the reader to appreciate the full context of the discourse, as all members' posts remain intact. My efforts to make the members aware of my project and to provide the opportunity for opting out arose from general concerns of research ethics, and particular concerns of insider research, resulting in my hyper-conscientious application of online research ethical considerations (<http://aaanet.org/cmtes/ethics/AAA-Statements-on-Ethics.cfm>)

The administrator of the Pen community website allowed me to conduct this project and agreed to my promise of securing the anonymity of all members. This anonymity extends as far as the search engine – if one copies and pastes data into an online search engine, depending on

the status of the particular thread it is a part of, the entire thread may be referenced online as a result. The Pen members are aware of this, and I have fulfilled my obligation as far as researching a public domain is concerned. In addition to removing avatars, I adhere to Spradley's (1980) "verbatim principle" that the researcher should never re-phrase, redefine, or in any way skew what the consultant or participant has said. When I quote Pen data, I use a verbatim reference, not only because it is preferable but because it is ethically mandated. When I quote members' posts, I quote exactly what they posted; therefore, typos are reproduced as they exist in the archived message boards. Since the data I reference for this project is archived in its original form as it appeared on the message boards before I secured permission, no member was able to return to that particular set of data and change it. Because user-editing is an option, the data from a particular thread I reference that can be found on the website today may differ from the data I show here, since anyone can post on a thread regardless of its age (if it is still available on the message boards) and any member may go back and edit one of their previous posts<sup>4</sup>.

#### **4.2. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

Data used for this project originates directly from the temporally frozen, archived message board. I conducted a search for specific issues of interest, namely topic shifting and *flaming*. I entered the terms '*flame*' and 'topic shift' into the search function available on the Pen website to generate a list of possible threads of discourse. The search function displays all threads with the mention of either a *flame* or a topic shift. Once I amassed a list of threads, I read them to evaluate their structure and content. My criteria for choosing appropriate threads were containing at least ten posts, not originally containing posts by the member who opted for his data to be omitted from the project, and threads where either a topic shift or a *flame* were

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<sup>4</sup> The ability to go back and add to posts is another way that this kind of communication is enhanced – by freeing it from temporal constraints that otherwise arise in asynchronous online communication.

present. I chose to eliminate both cursory and extremely lengthy threads from consideration.

This search identified several threads, some containing both extensive topic shifting and *flaming*.

Taking into account the tacit knowledge I may hold as a member of the Pen community, I have drawn from several theories and methodologies to ensure the most fruitful analysis possible, specifically discourse analysis informed by ethnography (Gee 2005; Hymes 1974; Scollon 2001; Sherzer 1987). Especially when analyzing events like *flame wars* within a framework that incorporates both ethnography and linguistic analysis, one discovers the nexus of language and culture and the product of its interdependence. I liken *flaming* to “verbal dueling” (Sherzer 1987), where participants are actively engaged in accessing and creatively playing with their repertoire of grammar and communicative histories. Events like this serve an important function in the data I have chosen for this project for this very reason. I intend to show, through this project, that Pen speech events like *flame wars* and shows of gratuitous topic shifting are extremely informative of that language/culture interaction.

In addition to a discourse-centered approach to understanding how virtual speech communities are built, I operationalize three major linguistic theories to account for various communicative phenomena within the community. First, I analyze threads of discourse within a relevance theoretic framework (Sperber and Wilson 1995) in order to show how Pen members engage in their version of coherent discourse, deriving contextual effects of assertion of *leetness* and membership despite their overt flouting of Gricean cooperative principles, abrupt topic shifts, and *flaming* behavior. This analysis attends to the individual as a cognitive agent in her linguistic interactions with others.

Second, I analyze threads of discourse within the framework of (Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996) in order to show how Pen members negotiate their identity within the community through

attempts of entrance and acknowledged acceptance or rejection. The members exhibit substantial evidence that they engage in positive and negative (im)politeness output strategies. Operationalizing Culpeper's theory allows the analyst to make connections between the individual and her interlocutors on a broader level than with the relevance theoretic approach. By showing successful strategies of *leet speak* code-switching, *flaming*, and accessing membership, contextualized language in use informs the analyst (at least minimally) of how speech communities coalesce without physically shared contexts.

Third, I analyze Pen data in terms of Stance (Du Bois 2007). Stance exceeds the two previous pragmatic approaches in its ability to bridge the points between the individual and the social pragmatics of linguistic interaction and community entry. Stance allows the analyst to explain in detail at each turn in discourse what an interlocutor is achieving in terms of her relative position in the speech community, her position with other individuals in the speech community, and her position on the content of her fellow interlocutors' utterances. The cyclical nature of Stance as applied to each subsequent turn in discourse affords connections not accessible in the two previous theories. Further, it provides the foundation for constructing communicative history built in speech communities – the learned, shared, and expected norms of interaction are concretely organized from the experience of community members.

The threads I chose to engage with the above theories contain overtly impolite behavior, abrupt topic shifts, *leet speak* code-switching, and *flaming* behavior. Pen members strategically choose to engage in each of these behaviors for some purpose. Without an in-depth explication of these behaviors in terms of both cognitive and social pragmatics, one may not see the overarching goal of behaving in such ways, which is to create, maintain, and solidify community solidarity. Finally, I propose the EPM in order to highlight the benefit of using a holistic method

rather than analyzing data in the three previous frameworks. The goal is to show that rather than doing several analyses to gain a finer grained picture of language/culture, a more inclusive and integrated method, like the EPM, accounts not only for what each member is doing through language and how, but also for what is occurring between these interactions as well as what is occurring on the periphery of them in the larger discourse.



## CHAPTER 5. DATA ANALYSIS IN TERMS OF RELEVANCE

### 5.1. The Cognitive Work of Awareness

Members bring to light several salient linguistic features in the message boards concerning rules of conduct, including thread topic changing behavior. The interactional communicative performance of topic change, continuity, and derailment (both intentional and unintentional) appears overt to members and follows a pattern that aggressively flouts Gricean maxims of communicative order (Grice 1989). Once posting in a Pen thread of conversation begins, the opportunity is created to maintain discourse within one particular thread on the subject at hand. However, topic change within a thread occurs frequently, and covert rules for successful and appropriate topic change become manifest to members, usually in direct violation of at least one of the Gricean maxims, most often Relation.

Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) appeared as a response to the lack of cognitive pragmatic theories accounting for conversational behavior and surpassing Gricean analysis to outline human cognitive processes when engaged in communication. According to RT, when engaging in communication, humans expend effort to the processing of an utterance in order to maximize “contextual effects.” In other words, we are economic in our communication. These cognitive effects produce shared context for the interlocutors and may produce relevance in a Gricean sense, but affords analysis where conversational turns do not necessarily require simply being relevant.

Being cooperative for Pens entails sometimes not cooperating with interlocutors. Changing topics within one thread of conversation works against normative principles of communication, especially being relevant. A thread may begin on the topic of *modding* a box, where a member will post pictures of his newly upgraded computer, and within three posts,

members purposefully derail the thread; they may be bored, uninspired, or insufficiently impressed by the upgrade. In fact, they are acting in accordance with their community's covert categories. "I hate black people" posted as a reply in a thread, seen in (1), marks an instance of intentional thread derailment, or what appears to be one of the anti-Gricean maxims of this speech community's communicative order. Relevance-seeking may be activated, but the relevance sought is not what one would assume it to be were she not familiar with the Pen covert categories of appropriate participation. In this thread (1), titled "this place is falling apart," the topic is topic-shifting behavior on the Pen message board, highlighting metapragmatic awareness of members.

#### Thread (1)

- 1.A: this place is falling apart  
<http://penismightier.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/005360.html>  
read the 1st post (main thread post)  
then immediately click page 2 and read the 1st post on page 2  
then ponder what is in the middle, and what's up with all these thread hijackings lately.  
[administrator] needs to get >\_< better so he can start getin things in b4 teh l0ck
- 2.B: I hate black people
- 3.C: I can't wait for the day they invent a way to make your poo different colors.  
not green or brown, those are lame.
- 4.D.1: I don't see what any of this has to do with Howard Deane.
- 5.E: PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!
- 6.F: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [E]:**  
**PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!**  
**THEY DO?**
- 7.G.1: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [A]:**  
**<http://penismightier.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/005360.html>**  
**read the 1st post (main thread post)**  
**then immediately click page 2 and read the 1st post on page 2**  
**then ponder what is in the middle, and what's up with all these thread hijackings**  
**lately.**  
**[administrator] needs to get >\_< better so he can start getin things in b4 teh l0ck**  
**omfg you noob when has pen ever stayed on topic?**

8.H.1: still he has a point

me being a dumbass and what the topic ended up being are kind of far apart it should have taken at least 3 pages

9.I.1: ...and for the block... *I disagree.*

10.J: Have I mentioned how much I like boobs?

11.K: AITOOJOTT?<sup>1</sup>

12.L: ...no.

13.M: Drink a lot of food coloring. Your poo will change.

14.N: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [C]:**  
**I can't wait for the day they invent a way to make your poo different colors. not green or brown, those are lame.**  
Would you like PURPLE instead?

I'll stick with brown.

15.G.2: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [H]:**  
**still he has a point**

**me being a dumbass**  
**and what the topic ended up being are kind of far apart it should have taken at least 3 pages**

Who fucking cares man? Opening a topic may start a conversation far different than you intended (you sick little Nazi) ... it might bog down completely for four pages over a trivial bit of completely random transmissions, it might slouch off the front page with zero comments, [a member's name] might even stingray-ho the second or third page leaving testable neurosisis ...

STFU

16.O: so...should i design a webpage with java or flash or should I try to mix and match both. I don't have a real reason to pick one or the other, but I heard that they're both cutting edge technology and I want to appear "hip".

oh, AMD vs Intel: which to pick?

17.I.2: \*\*\*\* < pie < [animated picture file with a woman shaking her breasts side to side]

Words to live by.

18.P: king george peed bright purple.

19.I.3: Yeah, but he came from a long line of inbreeders.

20.H.2: [G] made me cry

but the stingray doesn't cus i have it blocked

21.Q: my novelty has totally worn off

22.G.3: sorry [H], it's a sore subject ... people treat the message board like there's some level of service they should expect (when the board costs users roughly zero cents mind you)

seems kinda rude if ya ask me

23.D.2: You said it [G], mob rule.

Happy birthday btw. ^^

24.R: so who else here hates ketchup potato chips? and for that matter has anyone noticed that black people have white palms? it's like their colouring is wearing off and they're really honky's just like me. haHA

The participants in this particular thread are displaying metapragmatic awareness (Silverstein 2000) of Pen topic shift norms by performing topic shifts in response to A's comment, commenting on prescriptions of conversational cooperation and their flouting of those prescriptions. They are cooperatively and collectively posting new topics with almost every turn. Many of the raised topics speak to the larger set of identity markers of *leetness*, whether that is properly interrupting, invoking in-group language to state that pie is better than cake, or referencing a specific thread derailment attempt by the use of a picture of a stingray. Unless one is a member of the Pen community, a post such as

“AITOOJOTT” preceded by a post on a member’s affinity for breasts, which is preceded by several posts about various disjointed topics, seems incoherent.

Before invoking Relevance Theory, it is advantageous to revisit the principle of Relevance in order to subject the data to analysis according to RT. The principle of Relevance is “every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 158). The form and content of each message, or ostension, produce contextual effects for the addressee, depending on the shared context. Inherent in RT is the tension between minimal effort of processing a message and gaining maximum effects from minimal effort. We can assume here that the desired contextual effect of each post is, minimally, to convey and even outline the relevance of irrelevant posts in this community – the covert categories of *leetness* adhere to the primary endeavor of asserting an identity of *leetness*. At most, effects are also that the addresser is adding to the conversation and/or conveying that she is bored or wishes to derail a thread, and has membership status to do so by ostending something that seems to flout Gricean relevance. Where Gricean analysis falls short, a Relevance theoretic approach may be engaged to show what contextual effects are being produced by being anti-Gricean.

In (1), A is setting up the thread topic of topic shifting behavior, asking participants to explain or at least seek out why so many threads are “hijacked.” B then posts, “I hate black people.” This message is intended to both answer A’s question, “what’s up with all these thread hijackings lately” and by the form and content of B’s post, also display the community knowledge that topic shifting is one means by which

this community coheres socially. For Grice, “I hate black people” is not very cooperative much less relevant in the initiated exchange, but in RT, this post, with minimum processing effort for a member of this community, achieves several contextual effects:

(1)a.

1. That A may not be a member of the community since he is asking why so many threads are derailed.
2. That B is a member of this community, since he posted a short albeit veiled answer to A’s question instead of posting something like “On Pen, we topic shift as a norm. You don’t understand that because you are not a member and therefore don’t have the shared understanding of our norms.”
3. The answer to the question should be some form of a topic shift, since Pen members shift topic as normative behavior.
4. The content of the post, “I hate black people” speaks more to as random an answer as possible and not to the fact that B may or may not actually hate black people.

(1)b.

Following B’s post, “I hate black people,” C posts “I can’t wait for the day they invent a way to make your poo different colors. not green or brown, those are lame.” C is adding to the contextual effects already achieved from B’s post, and enhancing the shared context by this anti-Gricean post. The intended effects, again with minimal effort if a member of the community, are:

1. That C is also a member of the community.

2. That C is making manifest that he is asserting his membership and/or status in the community, allowing him to post something “off-topic” which does not literally answer A’s question.
3. That C does not need to add to the topic which seems to now be hating black people, because the topic is in fact, topic shifting.
4. That C is adhering to the community awareness and behaving appropriately, or relevantly, by posting off-topic yet again.

(1)c.

By D posting “I don’t see what any of this has to do with Howard Deane,” he produces or intends to produce the following contextual effects, which are salient at this point in the discourse:

1. That D is also a member of the community.
2. That D is playing along with the game of posting off-topic.
3. That D is mocking A, or anyone who would ask why they are changing topics with each turn by asking what any of the preceding posts have to do with something that is also a new, unrelated topic (Howard Dean).
4. That D enjoys status in this community which affords him the authority to mock A, again questioning A’s status.
5. By posting in the form of a statement, what could be framed as a question (“what does any of this have to do with Howard Deane?”), D is intending to produce an effect of explaining the norms of behavior, not going along with A and questioning the behavior, since D is well aware of the norms.

(1)d.

E's ostensive act produces much the same effects as members' previous posts with "PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!" since porkchop sandwiches are yet another new topic, but do not whatsoever adhere to Gricean relevance. Then F posts, quoting E and responding "THEY DO?" This post presents a number of issues as well. The intended effects from posting "THEY DO?" as a response to "PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!" are at least:

1. That F is also a member of the Pen community.
2. That F is making manifest that he is asserting his position in the Pen community by asking a question that is supposed to follow from E's statement "PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!"
3. That F is also playing along with all posters thus far besides A by posting a seemingly irrelevant message (in anti-Gricean fashion).
4. That F is brilliantly playing along by posting something off-topic, but at the same time, displaying that while it may seem to A that he is asking a relevant question, he is adding to the anarchic tones of the thread in response to A's question of why the topics shift so often. Again, F is giving a veiled answer to A.

(1)e.

When G surfaces on the thread, after six posts, A is finally answered in a straightforward, hostile fashion, "omfg you noob when has pen ever stayed on topic?" Gricean analysis could account for this post quite easily, since G is clearly cooperating where B through F were not. But with RT analysis, G is achieving much more than simply answering a question. His intended contextual effects, with minimum processing by the other thread's participants are at least:



1. That G is a member of the community and holds status in the community to engage in *flame*-like language toward A.
2. That G is efficiently, yet not nicely, answering A's question.
3. That G is displaying that by answering a question with a hostile question, he achieves the contextual effects listed above.
4. That A is a *noob*, or a novice, and should be addressed as such.

The thread continues, containing several more posts that flout Gricean relevance, quantity and manner, but which produce much contextual effects to add to the cognitive environment. A does not post again in the thread, and by the lack of any subsequent act of ostension, where one would assume he would re-enter the frame and either say "back off" or "I get it" or "see, this is exactly what I was talking about," contextual effects are had, at least:

1. That the thread posts in response to A contain an optimal relevance of community building around the members who participated correctly, OR
2. That the thread posts in response to A achieved enough contextual effects both for A and the other participants that A did not need to respond again.

So, for Sperber and Wilson, the above thread of conversation, whether examined by two turn intervals or in its entirety can be accounted for by their theory, since any failure on A's part to find relevance does not mean for them that an act of ostension was not optimally relevant. What is left for the addressee or the observer, from any of the above posts is simply that regardless of the post's content, what is always optimally relevant is that the poster is primarily making manifest that s/he is asserting his or her *leetness* in the community.

## 5.2. *Leetness* Assertion as Relevance

Another example of topic shifting that does not adhere to Gricean principles, but that RT can mostly account for appears in thread (2), titled “last new topic I swear.”

Thread (2)

- 1.A: new dictionary coming soon!  
is anyone else jerking off to this?  
ok, I'll be quiet now.
- 2.B: no, just you.  
I LUBV JOO, [A]!!
- 3.C: ☹  
I work at a McJob :\  
:
- 4.D: It's not polite to swear.
- 5.E: [B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...

In (2), the original proposed topic is a new dictionary. Although the interrogative in the first post makes reference to male masturbation, the topic is primarily about a new dictionary; the question is secondary to the topic, but it can be noted that A is using Pen in-group language for expressing excitement, and conforming to the Pen Novelty principle. The second post follows the first in what seems to be a coherent fashion. The answer to A's question is no. Then C's post requires significant processing effort to derive the intended contextual effects if relevance can be achieved at all.

(2)a.

I would posit that even an image or emoticon, can be taken as an act of ostension, since the code for RT is not important, signaling to the addressee(s) that C is intending to produce some effect from posting a frown image. Beyond this, the intended contextual effects of this image or the post, “I work at a McJob :\  
:” are difficult to determine, even as a member of the community and within the established context. Where RT could usually pick up where Grice

leaves off, even this case poses a problem for RT. The only effect one can assume to be intended if at all achieved would be:

1. That B and C are both members of the Pen community, and by being extremely obtuse, that
2. B and C are making manifest that they are asserting their *leetness* in the community.

(2)b.

D's post, "It's not polite to swear," is obviously a response to the previous posts, but again, beyond this, it is difficult, nigh impossible, to glean any contextual effects from stating that it is not polite to swear, since even in the Pen community, working at a "McJob" is not known to be taboo or off-limits. Again, what a McJob is varies and is not well established in the shared cognitive environment, so for this act of ostension, no contextual effects are achieved other than perhaps:

1. D is also a member of the Pen community
2. D may be making manifest that he is asserting his *leetness*, and working at a "McJob" contains no inherent *leetness* in it, so D's stating that "it isn't polite to swear" may make manifest to C that this job reduces her *leet* status.

(2)c.

E's post, "[B] and [A] need to have teh lexb0 sex s00n. or just kiss..." is a familiar act of ostension in the Pen community and blatantly signals that:

1. E is a member of the Pen community.
2. E knows that A and B are female members.
3. E is making manifest that he asserting his *leetness* by mentioning "lezb0" sex.
4. E is also signaling by the content and form of his post that he intends to change the topic.

Instead of simply writing, “This is boring. Can we move on?” E uses a typical Pen topic shift marker – mentioning something of a sexual nature which Gricean analysis would dismiss as irrelevant. In this sense, RT can at least account for E’s optimal relevance and outline maximum effect from minimal processing, but in other posts before this, even a theory as encompassing as RT, because of its inherent individualistic bias, fails to account for what is being made manifest, what optimal relevance each post contains, and what contextual effects are achieved or even intended other than making manifest the assertion of *leetness* or re-affirmation of membership status.

In the above threads, what is always a contextual effect, enhancing the cognitive environment, is the establishment of a community that is uniquely Pen. One of the characteristics of this ongoing community building is re-enforcing Pen members’ blatant disregard for Gricean relevance. What is occurring, and the only principle which can always be accounted for is that each of these participants is vying for a position in the Pen hierarchy of *leetness*.

If most human cognition and communication is, as Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue, based on the communicative principle of Relevance, or the tenet that every communicative act contains a presumption of optimal relevance, then members in this speech community must be acting in accordance with this principle. What seems on the surface to be true – that Pen members are being relevant in the Sperber and Wilson sense still comes into question with some obscure posts, especially in the context of jarring topic shifts. At a minimum in these instances, the contextual effects achieved will be slim or non-existent beyond the assertion of status or membership in the *leet* Pen community.

The discourse space and contents are necessary for the socialization process to occur. New visitors, lurkers, and members negotiate not only their relationship with other members, but their roles in and knowledge of the community (Reid 1992). Group members contribute to or contradict a previous post to support their fellow member, to harass or argue with him or her, or to topic shift. This interaction has purpose, but the purpose could be relevance-seeking or new relevance framework building. In other words, the community, in building itself as *leet*, is creating identity through its communicative conventions that rarely coincide with Gricean relevance, but are usually understood as relevant in the RT sense. The paradox is a result of the members' engagement in each interaction. At the level of relevance-seeking, enculturation in the community provides members with a foundation that includes, in this case, the optimal relevance of *leetness* assertion or male dominance.

Contextual effects derived by a seemingly disjointed discourse are not necessarily what a member or addressee would assume to be the optimally desired ones, especially in marked instances of off topic posts (like replying "I work at a McJob" when the topic is clearly about a new dictionary).

### **5.3. Topic Shifting and *Flaming* as Relevance**

Topic shifting plays an important role in the cohesiveness of the message boards. If a thread continues from one coherent point to another, all focusing on the same basic theme(s), members will eventually attempt to derail the thread. On the other hand, if a thread veers too far off topic, a poster in the community-labeled role of a "topic nazi" may post using threats, like "don't make me unleash the goatse on you!" or simply shift the topic back to the original theme in order to re-direct the discourse. Other more serious floutings of *leet* conventions could result in a *flame* or a *flame war*.

*Flaming* is a recurring speech act in the Pen speech community as well as in many virtual speech communities. This speech act is comparable to verbal dueling in face-to-face communities. Without *flaming*, it would be difficult to locate and thus articulate the various covert categories, including what is relevant. *Flames* arise as the result of a flouting of the covert categories gleaned precisely from the *flame wars*. *Flames* are the virtual equivalent to face threatening acts in face-to-face speech events and exist on a continuum from sparks, or *mini-flames*, to *flame fests* (LeBlanc 2005).

*Flame wars* are common to virtual speech communities, especially those of close-knit groups who commune online with users of similar interests. Thurlow et al. (2003) characterize *flaming* as “incendiary messages, inflammatory remarks, rude or insulting messages, vicious verbal attacks, nasty and often profane diatribes, derogatory, obscene or inappropriate language, overheated prose, or derisive commentary” (2003:69). This seems plausible on the surface, with an understanding of what a *flame* is in other contexts. Within the Pen speech community, however, profane language is commonplace and is not usually constitutive of incendiary language. In fact, profanity and derisive commentary are not usually indicative of *flame wars*.

A Pen *flame* is usually provoked by someone’s post that is off a covertly approved topic, marginal to this community’s chosen sphere of interests, or insulting a long-time member of the community and therefore attempting to question the communicative pecking order of the community whether knowingly or not. Some *flames* serve as proving ground, similar to verbal face-to-face disputes. If someone survives a *flame*, he (or less often, she) gains respect within the community. “Teh” winner in a *flame* successfully engages one or more covert categories that drive the talk.

Another purpose of the *flame war* speech event is bonding, creating or maintaining a social connection between members, identifying a member as one of their own. Again, the recognition of deviation sufficient to provoke a *flame* and how to incite it is an indicator of *leetness* and of belonging. O'Sullivan and Flanagin (2003) echo this idea, and warn that generalizing norms for *flaming* behavior is problematic, as each community may have different norms of appropriate interaction. It is in fact the case that Pen *flaming* behavior does not conform to the general principles of *flame* behavior as laid out in the literature (Thurlow et al. 2003, Danet and Herring 2007).

Although *flames* are seen as “problematic interactions” (O'Sullivan and Flanagin 2003:77), they can and should be analyzed *in situ* for their merit in deriving communicative norms for the community. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, *flames* as heightened speech events are precisely the context where Pen language and culture come to the forefront. If *flames* are the result of a flouting of Pen covert categories, the inciting of a *flame* provides an opportunity to discover the covert rule that was violated. *Newbies* may learn about Pen behavioral norms when they make an error that is met with *flaming*.

From the perspective of RT, miscommunications in face-to-face and online interactions, *flames* can and do fail as a speech event. If the sender's intent was not taken up the way she meant the post to be understood, there is no *flame*. By this account, *flames* only become *flames* once the intended recipient correctly interprets a post as an intent to *flame*. *Flames* are not fully realized until the sender has enough contextual effects and accepts the original message as having been adequately conveyed, received, interpreted, and noted (O'Sullivan and Flanagin 2003:74). However, in the Pen community, the intended recipient of a *flame* does not have to respond to a *flame* or reveal that he or she interpreted a post as *flaming* behavior for the post to

be considered a *flame*. If other participants in the thread acknowledge the behavior, it constitutes a *flame* in their community.

For the Pen speech community, several elements converge to constitute a *flame war*. The *flamer* seeks to publicly humiliate the violator of covert categories through displays of power. This aggressive behavior, or what I call the virtual pissing contest, occurs often on the Pen message boards. A new member or an established one can find herself within a pissing contest at any given juncture of conversation. *Flames* could consist of one post, ‘yu0 are teh funnay!’ or ‘pwnd.’ Other *flames* consist of one or a few isolated posts ranting against one or more other members. Members sometimes identify *flames* as such, but depending on the context, the words ‘*flame war*’ may never surface on the thread. For further explanation of Pen *flame* behavior, see 2.3.3.

Posts from members during or after a *flame war* not only display power through language, but posters could potentially control the dialogue thereafter with complex insulting and *flaming*. The dialogue is covertly organized into *flames* and bonding. Some *flames*, however, achieve both insult as well as bonding (if members resolve their dispute). New members are at a disadvantage for several reasons, including being unaware of covert categories of Pen talk and not yet having established membership or solidarity in the community. By participating in appropriate topic shifting and *flame* behavior, posting on the covertly approved topics, and exhibiting fluency in the register of the *leet* sub-genre of *netspeak*, members on the Pen message board collectively assert themselves as *leet*. In addition to their *leet speak*, members convey *leetness* through behavior, specifically thread behavior. Several extra-linguistic factors contribute to *leetness*: use of specific computer knowledge, namely how to *mod* a *box* (or a car) for optimal performance; posting news that is so new it can rarely be found elsewhere on the



web; pithy remarks that are loaded with *leet speak* and techie terminology; the ability to post pictures (*pics*) appropriately without help from the administrator; and thread behavior that follows anti-Gricean covert categories of interaction. This fluency is acquired as a result of enculturation, and involves precisely the same mechanisms that build community, face-to-face or virtual. Learning to reside and appropriately interact in this community creates tension when *newbies* fail to conform to established norms, creating situations where processing effort sometimes outweighs what is gained in contextual effects, because the only effect that is certainly achieved is that of *leetness* assertion.

RT can provide a framework within which to analyze discourse in this virtual speech community, but its limitations become apparent where members establish their own community-specific principles for determining what is relevant, or a local hierarchy of priorities in relevance-seeking. Relevance and the assumed norms for achieving optimal relevance are not universal, as Pens evidence through their communicative exchanges. The content of the post is often times irrelevant in a Gricean framework, but RT has been shown in the above treatment to be able to account for most of the Pen exchanges. Where RT falls short is when it confronts instances where few if any effects are achieved for the participants, except that of building and maintaining community, or re-enforcing a member's status within it.

## CHAPTER 6. DATA ANALYSIS IN TERMS OF (IM)POLITENESS

### 6.1. (Im)politeness as Social, Interactional Pragmatics

Haugh (2003) posits, “if politeness is to arise, there must be some consensus about the social norms for that particular situation” (400). New communities, particularly at their inception, do not necessarily have established norms and politeness expectations. Norms for regulating interaction are negotiated according to community-specific processes of consensus through interaction. No precedent exists for online communicative norms, prompting prescriptive guidelines to e-mail etiquette (Booher, 2001; Danet, 2001). Online discourse has been described as being similar to but never completely mirroring face-to-face interaction or informal letter-writing. Communicative competence is co-constructed with community. The interdependence of community building and competence/norm building is exemplified in Pen discourse threads.

Going beyond the cognitive processes inherent in communication (referenced by the preceding RT analysis), the pragmatic theory of (Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996) deals specifically with communicative interaction with respect to the two tiers of (Im)politeness: positive (im)politeness output strategies and negative (im)politeness output strategies. I engage this framework in the analysis of three threads below to showcase when and how these strategies mediate communicative norms in the Pen community. The first thread of Pen discourse I analyze in this chapter, titled, “Roommate from HELL,” is one where Pen topic shifting (see 2.3.3.) features as a central behavior. In order to provide context for the analysis, the thread (3) is presented below in its entirety.

### Thread (3):

- 1.A.1: Well, boys, girls, and strange mixes between the two, it's story time. My roommate tried to kill me Saturday night- because I wouldn't unlock a door for him. In the house where I'm living, there were three people- me, the sane roommate, and the insane roommate. Sane Roommate abruptly left for because he was sick of insane roommate harassing him for money, eating his food, et cetera. After he left, SR called me and asked me to lock his door so Insane Roommate couldn't get inside and sell his stuff for extra money. I complied, and, come Saturday Night, IR asks me why I locked SR's door. I explain, and then have IR pull his knife on me (he bought the same model that Hannibal Lecter uses in "Hannibal"), and says "I'll fucking kill you if you don't open the door. A minute and a scratch on my arm from an errant knife slash by him later, the door's unlocked. I'm just wondering what I should do. I'm moving back home in December, but don't want to live in fear for my next month or so here. I can't call the police, because his parents are wealthy and will post bail for him. I can't drive home, because I lack a car and driver's license. The only defense that I have is a Maglite full of rocks (because I can't afford batteries for it) and a katana blade. And I know that IR is crazier than a shithouse bat- he washes his hands to the point that they bleed, showers at least 5 times a day, lifts weights for three hours, and was born inside the Utah State Mental Hospital. Any input, even witty remarks to the effect of "Gee, you're fucked. Hope you have a will written" would be appreciated.
- 2.B.1: Hrm. I always wondered what happened to Bob.
- 3.C: How the hell did you end up moving in with someone who is apparently so obviously insane?
- 4.D: I think I'm going to have to join in with the "you're a fucking retard for moving in with this guy" contingent, here.  
Or call shenanigans.  
Or possibly both.
- 5.E.1: They never seem insane until you take away their \*\*\*\*.
- 6.E.2: I've seen my friends get taken by what seems like a decent or stable roommate.. I've seen someone who seemed stable (a little needy for attention) just go fucking completely insane.  
Also seen someone who seemed like the nicest guy in the world, had everyone fooled for months then suddenly looted everything.  
Also he could just be poor and can't really pick and choose where to live..
- 7.A.2: Well, our friend the Insane Roommate was formerly one of my best friends, and never exhibited any kind of freakishness when I was around... until I moved in with him. Then, he becomes a total fucking nutjob... I always thought that the State Mental Hospital thing was a joke until I saw a copy of his birth certificate.
- 8.F: I suggest you watch Dean Man on Campus.
- 9.G.1: his parents are rich, yet one of them (his mom most likely) was in a mental house when he was born. yet he wants to get into your sane roommates room to steal food/stuff for money. if his parents are rich why don't they send him more dough?  
oh and investing in several locks to your room might be a good idea.  
or you contact his parents and the police and see what happens  
later and good luck  
[G]

- 10.A.3: [F] - I've already contemplated that, but I don't have the balls.  
 [G] - His parents are worse than him. One's a rabid bible(well, Book of Mormon)thumper, and one's a major survivalist. They refuse to send him any money, and won't visit him. He told me once (when we were friends) that his parents had never complimented him on anything, so I know that his problems were a combination of genetics and lack of parental attention. His father also abused him- broke his collarbone and several ribs when he was seven. I had just thought that the insanity had skipped a generation, since he claims to strive to be nothing like his parents. And finally... when my parents visited me a month ago, they left me a \*\*\*\*. And he ate the whole damn thing. I know that isn't deep-rooted mental problems, but I at least have to be able to complain about petty things, too.
- 11.H: Look, it's very simple. I feel silly explainin this, but I'm feeling generous. Here's whatcha do:  
 1) Cut your arm off with the katana blade.  
 2. Call police (with the other hand) and tell them your roommate has cut your arm off.  
 C- Watch roommate get even more insane when arrested for something he didn't do.  
 \$) Sue roommate's parents for damages in civil court.
- V. Destroy all traces of this post so you don't get busted  
 [H]  
 PS In all seriousness? Go home early. Your parents will pick you up.
- 12.B.2: He.  
 Took.  
 Your.  
 \*\*\*\*.  
 GRRRR! Theres just some lines a man dont cross, if you catch my meaning. Thats one of them.  
 Another is dont forcefeed your roommate's cat yogurt without permission.  
 DEATH TO THE \*\*\*\* STEALER!  
 What flavor was it?
- 13.I.1: dude buy a gun and the next time he comes at you make him walk with a limp.
- 14.J: Okay, here's what you do, you get a pumpkin, some jellybeans, and a pair of snowpants. Now what you need to do is hang the snowpants from the ceiling with some fishing line, and then put jellybeans in the pockets. Then, when he's not around, you put the pumpkin in one of the drawers in his desk, and tie it to a pencil. Now, when he...  
 ...  
 Why the hell did that sound like a good idea a few minutes ago?
- 15.A.4: [B] - It was 2 layers of devil's food with a nice buttercream frosting and sugary raspberry tasting stuff in between the layers. My favorite.  
 [I] - No money, no gun. Also, being 18 means that all that I can get here is either a deer rifle or a shotgun. And I've never fired anything more than a pellet gun before that, besides.  
 [H] - Closest that I could come to coming up early is 10 days for Thanksgiving break, this Saturday 'till next Sunday. They won't let me up for more because it's past withdrawal time and they want me to survive at least one semester of school down here because I paid so damn much for it (for me, at least... I got off easy compared to most, though. Only 1300 bones for 16.5 credit hours).
- 16.K.1: Just kill him and dumb the body somewhere.

- 17.L: Assuming this isn't a troll.  
Get the fuck out of there. Call your parents,  
borrow the money, whatever it takes.  
This guy's bad news.
- 18.M: Gee, you're fucked. Hope you have a will written.  
Get him on tape being a nutcase. Put some friends, preferably no-neck Football player or  
ROTC friends, in your sane roommate's room with a tape recorder, lock it, wait for the  
magic to happen.
- 19.N: (self-labeled as a "troll")  
An insane roommate just rolled out of my ass. Am I fucked?
- 20.O: Hmm, the guy came at you with a knife in your own home. So he could steal the  
roommates stuff.  
I've gotten in trouble here in the past for being descriptive about stuff like this, but  
honestly do you feel safe sleeping there?  
The easiest way would probably be just to get the hell out of there, go to school and ask if  
they can help you out.  
But honestly, do society a favor ... wait until he goes to sleep, steal a baseball bat and  
bash that freak into a million tiny pieces. Beat him bad enough that you can finish the  
quarter without worrying about him causing any more drama. Lock him in the trunk of a  
stolen car and speed over bad roads, leave it in the desert in a nice sunny spot. Stick that  
knife he's so proud of up his ass and give it a twist. Duct tape his freak ass to a tree out in  
the middle of nowhere.  
Whatever you decide, don't stay there AND let him think he can get away with shit like  
that.  
Crack is fun, but goddamn when you gotta stab one roommate to steal from the other it's  
time to check yourself in.
- 21.B.2: You know... maybe you should move into the dorms.
- 22.I.2: if a 4 year old can pick up a 9 mil for \$50; i am sure you can suck some dick to get  
one yourself.
- 23.P.1: when he's sleeping one night..  
simply get some cement, mix it up inside the house (so its room temp) and then slowly  
(as not to wake him) cover him (in his bed) with the cement (that you just mixed) but do  
it quietly (and slowly) so that you dont wake him up(or he'll kill you) also bring a shovel  
with you (the one you mixed the cement with maybe?) and if he wakes up (from his  
sleep) then smash him in the head.
- 24.P.2: THEN SELL HIM SOME WAERZ BUT DOANT GET CUAGHT BY THE COPZORZ  
OR YUO WIL GET ARRESETD LIEK ME!!!
- 25.Q: (don't forget the parentheses)  
(you idiot)
- 26.I.3: ok).(
- 27.R: (.)
- 28.K.2: BOOBIES!!  
I like [picture of woman looking at her breasts that are moving side to side]!

29.A.5: Well, here's the latest scoop on the roommate saga:  
-Called the school housing office, and they aren't willing to let me use a dorm room for the few weeks left in the term unless I pay for the entire term. So that idea's out.  
-Parents are still firm on making me finish the term (it ends mid-December), but are going to help me move out when the time comes.  
-Psycho roommate dropped a bombshell... he's joining the Army. Signed his papers today. Boot Camp January. I pray to whatever deities are listening that he's sent off to war immediately and has his testicles shot off.  
-Psycho roommate has also not noticed that I've been cleaning the toilet with his toothbrush. I admit that it's quite petty, but so is threatening to kill the guy who provides you with rent money.  
-Finally, before I leave for Thanksgiving vacation, I'm clipping one of the pins on his processor. Also petty, but he'll never know what's wrong with his computer.

30.B.3: Um...

"I'm the only sane one! Everyone else is crazy!!"

Seriously though, I'd recommend not clipping the pins on the processor, as two things are gonna happen:

- 1) If he pays to have it fixed *they'll* tell him what was wrong, and he could conceivably figure it out.
- 2) He'll have a lot more free time on his hands...

31.G.2: interesting my brother is joining the army and leaving in january as well. wonder if the 2 will meet in boot? god i hope not.  
as for those petty things your doing.  
that toothbrush thing would make a good idea for the guy who videotaped his wife cheating. as for the computer damaging, yeah it'll probable take him a while to figure out whats wrong unless he how to build upgrade and debug comps.  
as for leaving for thanksgiving be sure you have a decent lock to your room and you take your more valuable stuff with you.

later

[G]

(discourse continues for several turns, but topic remains on roommate issues)

In order to situate the discussion of impolite behavior here, it is important to note that members participating in thread (3) exemplify two kinds of topic shifting behavior, both for continuity and derailment, while showcasing the importance of building both community and participatory competence within it. In thread (3), members are sharing stories about their worst roommates. The topic of bad roommates remains the theme for several posts, and subsequent posts generally follow the previous one without the kinds of topic shifts seen in Thread (1) in Chapter 5. When the topic does shift is significant. Several posts subsequent to the first thread post, a new member, P, writes the following, which is met with several responses by various

members. P is attempting to gain solidarity with members by also suggesting ways of getting rid of a bad roommate. The first post (23.P.1) is his first offer.

23.P.1: when he's sleeping one night..  
simply get some cement, mix it up inside the house (so its room temp) and then slowly (as not to wake him) cover him (in his bed) with the cement (that you just mixed) but do it quietly (and slowly) so that you dont wake him up(or he'll kill you) also bring a shovel with you (the one you mixed the cement with maybe?) and if he wakes up (from his sleep) then smash him in the head.

The second post (24.P.2) is his second offer.

24.P.2: THEN SELL HIM SOME WAERZ BUT DOANT GET CUAGHT BY THE COPZORZ  
OR YUO WIL GET ARRESETD LIEK ME!!!

In addition to his attempt to break into the community and to display his *leetness*, P types his second offer in *leet speak*.

Then, Q responds to P:

25.Q: (don't forget the parentheses)  
(you idiot)

Here is an instance where a positive (im)politeness output strategy is invoked, provoked by the attempted breaking in. Q shifts the topic from roommates, responding not to the content of P's post, but to its form - ridicules P for his ubiquitous overuse of parentheses by posting "(don't forget the parentheses)." Then Q directly, albeit parenthetically, calls P an "idiot." Q not only engages in impolite behavior, but he also shifts the topic from roommates to appropriate use of parentheses, thereby simultaneously engaging in two Pen practices (being a "grammar nazi" and topic shifting).

26.I: ok).(

I publicly calls Q to task for being so severe, through both content – "ok" – and form – inverted parentheses. R then posts:

27.R: (.)()

This particular post uses a formulaic Pen topic shifting discourse marker, representing female breasts. Specifically on Pen threads, encoded in “(.)” is the message that the topic is going to or is intended to shift.

28.K: BOOBIES!!  
I like [picture of woman looking at her breasts that are moving side to side]!

K spells out what was visually depicted in R’s post, and then he adds that he likes them, inserting a formulaic Pen image illustration. The topic has now been successfully shifted to breasts. But, A then posts and shifts the topic back to roommates, by using the mainstream discourse marker, “well.”

29.A: Well, here's the latest scoop on the roommate saga:  
...

The thread continues for several pages and the topic remains roommates. Two important events occurred in this thread which are characteristic of the Pen community’s interactional behavior: turn-taking and (im)politeness. The turn-taking behavior in the above quoted section includes a topic derailment and a re-installment – the derailment is brief and the return is successful with many on-topic posts after re-engagement.

P attempts to break in to the discourse, but the reactions of other members, especially Q, reveal that his attempt is unwelcome. In his second post (24.P.2), he uses all caps and *leet speak* in a bid to achieve solidarity with other community members. Pen members do code-switch to *leet speak* when they are asserting their prowess in technological contexts or when they are positioning themselves as more powerful members of the community. However, in P’s clumsy attempt to engage this strategy as a relative *noob*, P errs by over-using *leet speak*, in violation of Pen norms. Q is a long-time member and part of the administrative team, so he is considered a powerful authority in the community, information to which P may not be privy as a *noob*. After



Q mocks the form of his posts, P does not post again in the thread. This may be a result of Q's (im)politeness output strategy of creating a hostile environment for P.

## 6.2. Community Membership Regulation Through (Im)politeness

Another example of an attempted break-in to the Pen community occurs with a new female member. In the following thread (2), titled "Last new topic I swear," A, a female, attempts to invoke Pen norms of interaction by introducing a new topic on an upcoming dictionary.

Thread (2):

- 1.A: new dictionary coming soon!!  
is anyone else jerking off to this?  
ok, I'll be quiet now.
- 2.B.1: ....no, just you.  
I LUBV J00 [A]!!
- 3.C: ☹  
I work at a McJob :\
- 4.D: It's not polite to swear
- 5.E: [B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...
- 6.F: **quote: originally posted by [E]:**  
**[B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...**  
The thing is, I get the strange feeling that if that ever were to happen, you wouldn't be invited
- 7.B.2: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [E]:**  
**[B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...**  
What? I lubv (almost) everybody here! Not just [A]!
- 8.G: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [F]:**  
**The thing is, I get the strange feeling that if that ever were to happen, you wouldn't be invited**  
**BRING A CAMERA!**
- 9.H: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [G]:**  
**BRING A CAMERA!**  
I love [G]'s simple solutions. Kickass!  
Problem = solved!  
Now.. OMFG! PICS?  
...

A is attempting to adhere to the Pen Novelty principle by posting a link to a new dictionary. In order to display *leetness*, she also uses the formulaic phrase “is anyone else jerking off to this?” but she writes the words out instead of using the Pen normative acronym, “AITOOJOTT.” Then she states that she will be quiet, as if she has worn out her welcome in conformance with another Pen strategy – retreat from strong statement.

1.A: new dictionary coming soon!!  
is anyone else jerking off to this?  
ok, I'll be quiet now.

2.B.1: ....no, just you.  
I LUBV J00 [A]!!

B is also a female member in the community. She manages to retain solidarity with the Pen community; she answers A by telling her that she is the only one, meaning no one is interested in a new dictionary. She also softens the negative comment with “I lubv joo” (I love you).

3.C: ☹  
I work at a McJob :\  
:

C, a male in the community, tries to derail the topic here with a typical Pen topic shift, which, according to Culpeper (1996), could be interpreted as snubbing A and B. Therefore, C engages in a positive (im)politeness output strategy. While he ignores the content of A’s and B’s posts, he adheres to Pen topic shifting norms.

4.D: It's not polite to swear

Another off-topic post from a male member continues to steer the focus away from the original female poster.

5.E: [B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...

Here, E continues to shift topic, introducing the topic of A and B as sexual partners. This could be seen as a display of E’s male identity; he asserts his male dominance by suggesting (in *leet speak*) that the females in the thread engage in a sexual act.

6.F: **quote: originally posted by [E]:**  
**[B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...**  
The thing is, I get the strange feeling that if that ever were to happen, you wouldn't be invited

F replies to E by using the quote function to suggest that although E is a member of the Pen community, he does not have solidarity with A and B.

7.B.2: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [E]:**  
**[B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...**  
What? I lubv (almost) everybody here! Not just [A]!

B, with this response to E, seems to be defending herself against the notion that she is not a full member in the community (perhaps because she is female). She attempts to regain position by stating that she loves “everybody here.”

8.G: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [F]:**  
**The thing is, I get the strange feeling that if that ever were to happen, you wouldn't be invited**  
**BRING A CAMERA!**

G has a long history in the Pen community and an identity as one who posts pornographic images and insults particular females in the group that he deems unattractive. He contributes a post in this thread to reinforce this identity, and perhaps to join the topic shifting performance which, in effect, is snubbing A.

9.H: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [G]:**  
**BRING A CAMERA!**  
I love [G]s simple solutions. Kickass!  
Problem = solved!  
Now.. OMFG! PICS?  
...

H's message employs conventions that adhere to Pen normative discourse. The topic has successfully been shifted away from A's proposed topic, never returning to it. It is possible that every member posting in the above thread except B snubbed A, collectively engaging in a positive (im)politeness output strategy.

### 6.3. Flaming as (Im)politeness

The last analysis within (Im)politeness deals with the data in thread (4) below, titled, “grammar.[member] < grammar.yoda,” which is a productive expression equivalent to that of a “grammar nazi.”

Thread (4):

- 1.A.1: **quote** (of D’s article written on the main page of the website):  
**all of this is well and good, and helps me to focus my energy on projects which are likely to better the collective self portrait all of us dorian gays paint of humanity; instead of focusing it on bellyaching about having not even a prospect for a girlfriend**  
Okay, I'm less than enlightened here. Does that sentence mean what it looks like it means? 'Cause it looks like you're saying you, and all of us, are "dorian gays" - whatever a "dorian gay" is.  
And considering one of the links in those words was to someplace called "gaystation", I'm pretty sure I get enough of the idea to know VERY well I'm not one.  
I have a sneaking suspicion this wasn't quite what you meant to say, but fuck if I could manage to parse that sentence any other way. Clue me in here, willya?
- 2.B: "I'm not gay. I didn't ... gay."
- 3.C.1: wang  
can wang
- 4.C.2: wangismightier.com
- 5.D.1: it is a play on words of the title of  
a novel by oscar wilde: the picture of  
dorian gray.  
i was saying that people's unwillingness  
to internalize the ugliness, to love the  
beauty as well as the ugliness of humanity  
while earnestly trying to better humanity  
is, in short, gay. and that we all  
collectively paint the ugly picture of  
humanity we see before us.  
thus, we are all dorian gays.
- 6.A.2: I have no idea what sort of odd internal dialogue led you to progress from the first face to the last over a three hour period: all I know is it had nothing to do with me, since I had no more contact with you elsewhere than I did here. Regarding your belabored protests, I was actually quite familiar with the premise of The Picture Of Dorian Gray. This familiarity, however, was no adequate preparation for the Sisyphian labors inherent in parsing your tortured syntax. In short, my advice to you is this: **eschew obfuscation**. </highbrow>
- 7.E: To tell you the truth [D], I skip most of your posts. They are so damn hard to read.

8.F: GODFUCKINGDAMNIT [D] GO AWAY  
HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU HAVE TO BE TOLD??  
[D]=BORING. LIKE HARDCORE BORING.  
I LIKE THE NON-PRETENTIOUS ARTISTS BIT. DOES THAT INCLUDE YOU?

9.A.3: Okay [D], let's take this one slow:  
1. Yes, you have it so right. I fear your mighty p3n15 will violate my tender anus, therefore I attack you. Uh-huh. How "insightful" of you. (Was that an epiphany?)  
2. The internal dialogue was whatever prompted you to make three separate posts over the course of three hours, with no input from anyone else, which changed drastically in tone as time went by.  
3. Look *real fucking hard* at this very page and see where you can find the very three faces that I posted. Hint: they're in the same order I posted them. Another hint: they're immediately to the right of the letters "[D's name spelled in capital letters]" and immediately to the left of the word "posted." Clued in yet?  
4. You don't "think in broad strokes", you trip over a ladder and spill 5 gallons of semi-gloss latex on the carpet, man. It's messy, really.  
5. The "Sisyphean labor" is continuing to attempt to communicate with your befuddled ass. Jesus man, snap out of the fog and pay attention - you couldn't even figure out where the *faces* remark came from and *you posted them!*?

10.D.2: [A]: ok, if you need to take it slow... (i heard you like it that way)  
1) ok, yer right, yer \*not\* a homophobe.  
2) the posts did not change drastically in tone. or if they did, you've failed to point out how.  
3) and i thought maybe you meant something deeper than that i used three different message icons. ooh, did that throw you off?  
4) and i do think in broad strokes. it's a gemini trait. i sometimes miss the trees for the forest. but i see that you just wanted to twist that into an insult. you had nothing of value to say. or no, maybe you wanted to inform me about how my brain works?  
5) and i like how you skirted addressing the flaw i exposed in your analogy. if you must continue this attack, let's do it in email, huh?

11.A.5: That dog in *Mad About You* rules

12.G: But there's so many people and now an established target...

I much prefer public *flamewars*  
But then I'm a homophobic, non-link-clicking, non-understanding, sarcasm-missing, non-email-using, semi-literate, redneck-named, exaggerating asshole....  
...who just happens to have a 10 inch cock.

Oh, and regarding this:

**quote:**

**Originally posted by [D]:  
people can print my posts to  
wipe their ass with them as far as i care.**

You have to care at least a little. Otherwise you wouldn't be posting the things to begin with. You sure as hell wouldn't be getting defensive if you didn't care. The trick is to learn how to deal with criticism and *flames*. You dont start a *flamewar* and then say "lets continue this where I wont be so embarrassed anymore". The cats out of the bag. You hang in to the end, give up, or ignore it.

I tend to hang on to the bitter end. I also frequently lose.

13.H: sweet jeebus. in the time it took me to make a semicoherent post, this escalated from a minor scuffle into a near *flame war*. i just can't keep up. now you fuckers see why i avoid chat.

In thread (4), the topic is derailed and re-directed, a *flame war* is incited, and positive and negative (im)politeness output strategies are evident. The hierarchy of membership within the community is actively contested yet remains vague, but there are instances where even an outsider can detect its operation, by the content and nature of the post, the power differential in force. The first post is a response to an article written by a longtime Pen member, D, which appeared on the main page of the website. A, another established member of the community, implicitly invokes the “grammar nazi” norm (see 2.3.2.) by commenting on D’s grammar in D’s article, a section of which he quotes in his initial post.

1.A.1: **quote** (of D’s article written on the main page of the website):

**all of this is well and good, and helps me to focus my energy on projects which are likely to better the collective self portrait all of us dorian gays paint of humanity; instead of focusing it on bellyaching about having not even a prospect for a girlfriend**

Okay, I'm less than enlightened here. Does that sentence mean what it looks like it means? 'Cause it looks like you're saying you, and all of us, are "dorian gays" - whatever a "dorian gay" is.

And considering one of the links in those words was to someplace called "gaystation", I'm pretty sure I get enough of the idea to know VERY well I'm not one.

I have a sneaking suspicion this wasn't quite what you meant to say, but fuck if I could manage to parse that sentence any other way. Clue me in here, willya?

The very first post sets the tone of the discourse in this thread as a series of strategic (im)politeness moves. The first post attacks D’s grammar and perhaps his character, exhibiting negative (im)politeness output strategies.

Both established (C, G, H, I) and newer members (B, E, F) contribute similar posts all with the thesis being that they do not enjoy reading D’s posts. A returns to post more *flame-inciting* images which link to a website where one can buy the book, *Many Faces Of Homosexuality: Anthropological Approaches To Homosexual Behavior*, and adds:

6.A.2: I have no idea what sort of odd internal dialogue led you to progress from the first face to the last over a three hour period: all I know is it had nothing to do with me, since I had no more contact with you elsewhere than I did here. Regarding your belabored protests, I was actually quite familiar with the premise of The Picture Of Dorian Gray. This familiarity, however, was no adequate preparation for the Sisyphean labors inherent in parsing your tortured syntax. In short, my advice to you is this: **eschew obfuscation.** </highbrow>

Recall that the means by which a member can be *flamed* is by insinuating that the target is gay.

E, a first-time poster in the forum, joins in the *flame*.

7.E: To tell you the truth [D], I skip most of your posts. They are so damn hard to read.

Then a newly registered member posts,

8.F: GODFUCKINGDAMNIT [D] GO AWAY  
HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU HAVE TO BE TOLD??  
[D]=BORING. LIKE hardcore BORING.  
I LIKE THE NON-PRETENTIOUS ARTISTS BIT. DOES THAT INCLUDE YOU?

F engages the most severe negative (im)politeness output strategy in the thread. She uses all caps and inflammatory language similar to that which is characteristic of many *flame wars* on Pen threads, and scolds D for being boring. She thereby exacerbates the already hostile environment in the discourse space by using a negative (im)politeness output strategy. Perhaps because she is a *newbie*, her post is largely ignored (a positive (im)politeness output strategy) by subsequent posters, and the discourse returns to the less inflammatory but still impolite treatment of why members do not read D's posts. The fact that D, a longtime member, does not respond to this *flame* against him could also be attributed to the Pen hierarchy of membership. F is a newly registered member; she posts in a manner that she assumes to correspond with *flame war* engagement, but she does not have the community seniority that would authorize her to escalate a *flame war* using negative (im)politeness output strategies. Several posts follow that ignore F completely, thereby exhibiting positive (im)politeness output strategies by refusing to engage in an exchange of any kind with her.

However, other more established members continue the thread and engage in a heated discussion that is not yet overtly labeled a *flame*, but the tone, language, and debate all point to what constitutes a *flame war*. A then posts again, with a considerably more hostile tone, compounding the impolite strategy first invoked to attack D.

9.A.3: Okay [D], let's take this one slow:

1. Yes, you have it so right. I fear your mighty p3n15 will violate my tender anus, therefore I attack you. Uh-huh. How "insightful" of you. (Was that an epiphany?)
2. The internal dialogue was whatever prompted you to make three separate posts over the course of three hours, with no input from anyone else, which changed drastically in tone as time went by.
3. Look *real fucking hard* at this very page and see where you can find the very three faces that I posted. Hint: they're in the same order I posted them. Another hint: they're immediately to the right of the letters "[D's name spelled in capital letters]" and immediately to the left of the word "posted." Clued in yet?
4. You don't "think in broad strokes", you trip over a ladder and spill 5 gallons of semi-gloss latex on the carpet, man. It's messy, really.
5. The "Sisyphean labor" is continuing to attempt to communicate with your befuddled ass. Jesus man, snap out of the fog and pay attention - you couldn't even figure out where the *faces* remark came from and *you posted them!*?

In point 1., A makes reference again to sodomy (*flame* subject matter) and sarcastically states that he is afraid of D. In point 3., he engages in negative (im)politeness as he commands D to “look real fucking hard.” This post exhibits negative (im)politeness through condescension, commands, and inflammatory language. D responds using the same style as A (numbered lists of attack/response).

10.D.2: [A]: ok, if you need to take it slow... (i heard you like it that way)

- 1) ok, yer right, yer \*not\* a homophobe.
- 2) the posts did not change drastically in tone. or if they did, you've failed to point out how.
- 3) and i thought maybe you meant something deeper than that i used three different message icons. oooh, did that throw you off?
- 4) and i do think in broad strokes. it's a gemini trait. i sometimes miss the trees for the forest. but i see that you just wanted to twist that into an insult. you had nothing of value to say. or no, maybe you wanted to inform me about how my brain works?
- 5) and i like how you skirted addressing the flaw i exposed in your analogy. if you must continue this attack, let's do it in email, huh?

A and D are engaging in an argument, while referencing previous texts and analysis of them in order to engage in this *flame war*. In point 1., D uses asterisks for marking a sarcastic tone to accuse A of actually being “a homophobe.” The “message icons” that he notes above refer to images he posted to symbolize A’s facial expressions changing with each of his posts, representing A’s progressively negative tone and increasing hostility. Then in point 5. in the above post, D attempts to end the argument on the thread and move it to another space. “If you



must continue this attack” is an over marking of this heightened discourse event. To emphasize his request, he performs a Pen-type topic shift in his next post.

11.A.5: That dog in *Mad About You* rules

However, he fails to successfully shift the topic, as seen in the following post.

12.G: But there's so many people and now an established target...

I much prefer public *flamewars*  
But then I'm a homophobic, non-link-clicking, non-understanding, sarcasm-missing, non-email-using, semi-literate, redneck-named, exaggerating asshole....  
...who just happens to have a 10 inch cock.  
Oh, and regarding this:  
**quote:**  
**Originally posted by [D]:**  
**people can print my posts to**  
**wipe their ass with them as far as i care.**  
You have to care at least a little. Otherwise you wouldn't be posting the things to begin with. You sure as hell wouldn't be getting defensive if you didn't care. The trick is to learn how to deal with criticism and *flames*. You dont start a *flamewar* and then say "lets continue this where I wont be so embarrassed anymore". The cats out of the bag. You hang in to the end, give up, or ignore it.  
I tend to hang on to the bitter end. I also frequently lose.

G declares that a *flame war* has begun, and then explains why he thinks that it should continue within the thread instead of elsewhere (in private). He overtly labels the ongoing discourse as a *flame war*. Then he backs off from his statement in similar fashion as seen in thread (3) with “ok, I’ll be quiet now” by stating that he is not *leet* or that he may not belong to the Pen community because of the list of attributes he offers or that he does not wish to be *flamed*. He then inserts hyperbole to assert that he does indeed belong to the Pen community as an outstanding “member.” G’s meta-commentary includes an acknowledgment of F’s infelicitous attempt to incite a *flame war*.

This example from the Pen data serves to highlight three important points:

1. A *flame war*, whether it ever eventually took place, was not picked up from F’s attempt and she was ignored through positive (im)politeness output strategies.

2. Criticism of D is indeed picked up; members engage in arguing with D but not engaging in the way F intended them to (with extremely negative (im)politeness).
3. A successfully incites a flame war against D, and in doing so, engages in several instances of negative (im)politeness output strategies.

In order to fully analyze the discourse within the (Im)politeness framework, much contextualization is necessary. The above threads reveal impolite strategies, but I attempted to analyze a more complex and layered thread (as seen Chapters 5 and 7 – thread (1) “this place is falling apart”) within this framework and found that without more context provided by discourse within the thread, it becomes impossible to identify impolite strategies of any kind.

## CHAPTER 7. DATA ANALYSIS IN TERMS OF STANCE

### 7.1. Stance as Interactional Pragmatics

Stance (Du Bois 2007) accounts for what beliefs and positions interlocutors take when engaged in communicative interaction. Stance-taking (Englebretson 2007) in discourse is the activation of the individual's understanding of the world while sorting through interlocutors' utterances for their understanding of the world and then positioning either with or against the interlocutor. Below, I re-analyze the same Pen thread (1) I engaged through Relevance Theory in Chapter 5 in terms of Stance. Within this thread, 18 Pen community members reveal their stances in relation to other members of the community during an extended discussion of 24 posts on varying topics. Although asynchronous, the posts occur mostly in real time sequence, allowing the analyst to see the rapid evolution of a thread. The following analysis highlights intersubjectivity that Du Bois mentions is a benefit of analyzing discourse through the stance triangle. Since the thread is long and contains many participants, I limited the analysis in this chapter to include only this thread. Stance analysis is considerably more involved than previously engaged theories, because it takes into account positions and attitudes between members and toward the community. Each turn produces several insights to the Pen community's exchanges.

### 7.2. A Stance Approach to Pen Discourse

Stance analysis offers a means to account for what goes on in interaction beyond the cognitive work accounted for in RT and beyond impolite exchanges accounted for in (Im)politeness. Within the thread (1), titled, "this place is falling apart," members of the Pen community align themselves with and against other members and their posts with each turn. The following analysis shows what stance-taking entails for members participating in this thread.

## Thread (1):

1.A: this place is falling apart  
<http://penismightier.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/005360.html>  
read the 1st post (main thread post)  
then immediately click page 2 and read the 1st post on page 2  
then ponder what is in the middle, and what's up with all these thread hijackings lately.  
[administrator] needs to get >\_< better so he can start getin things in b4  
teh l0ck

In the initial post, A, who creates and titles this thread, is complaining about the prevalence of “thread hijackings,” referencing a thread of discourse where he evaluates the Pen practice of topic shifting as excessive. He seems to address the Pen community as a whole, with “all these thread hijackings lately,” while evaluating the prevalence of thread hijackings as negative through the use of the word “hijackings.” A also takes the position of having authority to accuse the administrator of negligence or shirking his duty of addressing the perceived problem. By opening the thread, A creates a space for other members to enter the thread of discourse and, through their posts, position themselves with A or with the administrator. Specifically, A criticizes the practice of frequent topic shifts on the Pen message board. The second participant then posts:

2.B: I hate black people

B responds by performing exactly the behavior that A is lamenting – the excessive use of topic shifting. While this post is only four words, B aligns himself both with topic shifting in general by performing the topic shift as the first response to a critique of excessive topic shifting and with the administrator. He also takes a stance against A. The form of B’s topic shift, “I hate black people,” might, in other contexts, incite responses regarding racism. However, no response is made directly to B on the literal content of the post. What is of primary concern here is the act of topic shifting.

3.C: I can't wait for the day they invent a way to make your poo different colors. not green or brown, those are lame.

Here, C continues the play of topic shifting by performing another dramatic topic shift, thereby aligning with B and the administrator and against A. Since no reference is made to the racist remark, the lack of response is taking a stance with the message itself as a performance of topic shifting only, which renders the content unimportant.

4.D: I don't see what any of this has to do with Howard Deane.

D's short response achieves the following:

1. aligns with B and C via another thread topic shift
2. takes a stance against A via the topic shift
3. posits that previous posters have derailed a topic that was never mentioned, which is a mock critique of B and C, but a genuine critique of A.
4. provides meta-commentary on the critique of topic shifting
5. invokes a topic that was currently being discussed in a separate thread

(Howard Dean).

So far, B, C, and D have each begun their post with "I" and a negative comment – "I hate," "I can't," or "I don't." This marks a negative evaluation of A, while mocking the problem of thread hijackings by doing exactly that.

5.E: PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!

Unlike D, E simply performs another topic shift. This evaluates the ongoing shifting as positive and aligns with the content and positions of B and C and against both A and D. The next poster performs a different type of topic shift used frequently in Pen discourse, which involves quoting a previous post and directing a response to that particular poster.

6.F: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [E]:**  
**PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!**  
**THEY DO?**

While performing the topic shift, like B, C, and E, F reveals a stance not only with B, C, and E, but with A by writing, “they do?” as an on-topic response to “PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!” Since there is no verb in E’s content, F’s comment can only be interpreted as a positive evaluation of the ongoing mockery of A and an alignment with all other participants, including the administrator. Important to note here is that the administrator is being evaluated and placed within the group of interlocutors of the moment even though he is not participating in the discourse thread. G’s quote of A’s initial post engages the authoritative response to A. G is known for chastising members who are ignorant of Pen norms.

7.G.1: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [A]:**  
**<http://penismightier.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/005360.html>**  
**read the 1st post (main thread post)**  
**then immediately click page 2 and read the 1st post on page 2**  
**then ponder what is in the middle, and what's up with all these thread hijackings**  
**lately.**  
**[administrator] needs to get >\_< better so he can start getin things in b4 teh l0ck**

omfg you noob

when has pen ever stayed on topic?

G quotes A’s post, then labels him a “noob,” which constitutes a negative evaluation of A and challenges his Pen status of credibility in making such a critique. The comment, “omfg you noob” positions A outside of the community and suggests that he has insufficient status within the community to merit critiquing its practice. The second part of his post indirectly references the Pen established preference for frequent topic shifting. G aligns with B, C, D, E, and F and with the Pen community itself through

the second comment, “when has pen ever stayed on topic?” G uses indirect speech in order to state that pen has never stayed on topic.

8.H.1: still he has a point

me being a dumbass and what the topic ended up being are kind of far apart it should have taken at least 3 pages

H takes up G’s post and directly addresses the Pen community norm of topic shifting. He aligns to a degree with A, by stating, “still he has a point.” In addition to aligning with A, H aligns with all participants by using the discourse marker “still” (as a discourse marker, “still” signals that the speaker may align with both sides). H’s characterization of himself as “a dumbass” who has difficulty following Pen topic shifting strengthens his alignment with A, while maintaining alignment with the Pen practice through his use of “should,” stating that topic shifting should occur but not as quickly as in the thread that A references. Then I negatively evaluates H and narrates what this disagreement entails – negative evaluation (“the block”) as well as remaining on topic for the first time since the thread began.

9.I.1: ...and for the block... *I disagree.*

J then abruptly disrupts the meta-commentary by restoring the ongoing topic shifting with a variant of a formulaic Pen expression:

10.J: Have I mentioned how much I like boobs?

The content of J’s message reinforces several Pen-specific norms of interaction while aligning with the norm of topic shifting. This particular message is a common topic-shifter in the Pen community, used in order to position the poster away from whatever the current topic is and against the previous poster.

11.K: AITOOJOTT?

This post resumes meta-commentary, where K aligns with both the process of the interaction and with the community as a whole with another commonly used post in the Pen community. This is also a direct response to previous posts, but it remains unclear whether this stance is intended to align with the content of J's message or with the overall interaction of topic shifting. Certainly, K is behaving in a normative Pen manner, using an acronym instead of typing out the entire phrase. In the subsequent post, L simply agrees with K and aligns with the community as a whole, since there is no mention of a position taken either for or against A or topic shifting. This short post, however, does remain on topic as it answers the previous poster's question – expressing enjoyment of both its reflexive commentary and J's reversion to the normative behavior. This on-topic response thereby violates the ongoing performance of topic shifting, and could be interpreted as a negative evaluation of the topic shifting behavior. However, this is not the case, since both K and L (following) engage in meta-commentary that is not held to local sequences.

12.L: ...no.

M enters here.

13.M: Drink a lot of food coloring. Your poo will change.

By referencing a topic that C introduced much earlier in the thread, M is simultaneously aligning with topic shifting behavior and with the community as a whole, while re-introducing a previous topic as a quasi-adherence to topic continuity. With N, there is no need to quote C since his post is immediately following, but he does.



14.N: **quote:**  
**Originally posted by [C]:**  
**I can't wait for the day they invent a way to make your poo different colors.**  
**not green or brown, those are lame.**  
Would you like PURPLE instead?

I'll stick with brown.

N shows non-*leet* status here by being polite and remaining on topic – “would you like purple instead” is a response to C with indirect speech (a question). Responding directly to another post in the context of members’ topic shifting display reveals that N is unaware of norms. In this post, N aligns with the community as a whole simply by participating without evaluating anyone or any of their content. However, she quotes unnecessarily and remains on topic, which other members would usually evaluate negatively, but no one responds directly to N. The thread continues with a second post by G.

15.G.2: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [H]:**

**still he has a point**

**me being a dumbass**

**and what the topic ended up being are kind of far apart it should have taken at least 3 pages**

Who fucking cares man? Opening a topic may start a conversation far different than you intended (you sick little Nazi) ... it might bog down completely for four pages over a trivial bit of completely random transmissions, it might slouch off the front page with zero comments, Dave might even stingray-ho the second or third page leaving testable neurosisis ...

STFU

G re-enters the thread by quoting H. Because he quoted a post that was not immediately preceding, G shifts the topic back to the quoted content. He is again chastising a participant for aligning with A and for not understanding the norms of interaction on the Pen message board. By using Pen in-group language in calling H a “sick little Nazi,” it is clear that G is aligning away from H and H’s alignment with A. He is *flaming* H for showing his lack of community knowledge. In this post, G supports the performance of topic shifting as he asserts the position that topic shifting is expected, if not always performed. This post harkens back to G’s first post, where he is evaluating a similar complaint against the normative behavior as ignorant. He explains what to expect in the threads on the board, and ends with a very direct and impolite acronym, thereby taking a stance against H. By the content of G’s scolding of H, he again aligns with the community. The explanation and insider knowledge of particular topic shifters show membership, and this reinforces G’s evaluation of himself as a rightful member. G accomplished this authoritative statement advocating topic shifting while engaging in on-topic discourse. Also, G calls on a particular member who is known in the community for his abrupt topic shifts and who contributes a comment in the subsequent post.

16.O: so...should i design a webpage with java or flash or should I try to mix and match both. I don't have a real reason to pick one or the other, but I heard that they're both cutting edge technology and I want to appear “hip”.

oh, AMD vs Intel: which to pick?

O participates in the performance of topic shifting, but does so in a different manner than previous participants. O employs a mainstream English discourse marker for signaling a topic shift, “so,” to introduce a topic that conforms to appropriate techie content, but O’s adopted language use is markedly non-*leet*. The choice to shift topic in

this manner is a negative evaluation, or mocking, of those previous participants who tried to perform the topic shift, but did so inappropriately (by unnecessarily quoting or continuing to post on an existing topic). O evaluates negatively and aligns against those participants, while positioning himself as a communicatively competent member of the community. With this post, he also asserts the quality of *leetness* and aligns with the majority of the posters in the thread. Mentioning AMD (Advanced Micro Devices, a company that produces, among other things, processors for computers) and Intel in the post is especially informative of O's intentions and alignment – if one is *leet*, one already knows which product is superior and there would be no such question posed to the board.

The subsequent posts show topic shifting and alignment with each other and against A. A second post by I invokes another typical Pen topic shifter, mentioning that cake is inferior to pie, which is inferior to breasts. The post's content aligns with the community through the proper approach to and use of topic shifting.

17.I.2: \*\*\*\* < pie < [animated image file with a woman shaking her breasts side to side]

Words to live by.

18.P: king george peed bright purple.

In a pseudo topic continuation, P provides content that may be interpreted as indirectly responding to 3.C. and 14.N and aligning with the group practice of frequent topic shifting. Then I responds directly to her in the subsequent post. This may show a personal alignment with P, but a negative evaluation of her message content. I agrees with “yeah,” then negatively evaluates with “but...”

19.I.3: Yeah, but he came from a long line of inbreeders.

Again, here I is performing the pseudo topic continuation.

20.H.2: [G] made me cry

but the stingray doesn't cus i have it blocked

H rejoins the discourse, and in line with the majority of participants on the thread, changes the topic from the immediately preceding topic. This continues the performance of the topic shift norm and takes a stance with the community members who are participating in the performance. However, by stating “[G] made me cry” H makes an evaluation of G’s previous post as *flaming* him. This means that G was harsh, and that H does not align with G, which has already been established, but is here reinforced. He then references the “stingray” that was already aligned with O’s topic shifting ability (an image of a stingray sometimes appears as a post in order to shift the topic). Another interpretation could be that instead of evaluating G’s post as a *flame*, H could be mocking G as provoking an emotional reaction, “made me cry,” when H, as a member, knows that most members are flame-resistant and what transpires on this thread is a very mild *flame*.

21.Q: my novelty has totally worn off

The removal of avatars and signature files prevents the reader from seeing that Q’s name is intentionally very similar to A’s name. A member of the community registered under a new name, one that looks much like A’s in order to use the first person and post on this particular thread. Q is taking on A’s voice. Q is mocking a member of the community (A), stating that his novelty has worn off. This is a blatantly negative

evaluation of A. As such a simple sentence, it reveals the complexity, intertextuality, and intersubjectivity inherent in the Pen discourse threads. Subversion of membership protocols, the adoption of a name similar to that of A, and the fake, negative self-evaluation are all necessary for the post to convey the intended content. If a non-member were to read this, they may misinterpret this post as coming from A. This may or may not be Q's intention.

22.G.3: sorry [H], it's a sore subject ... people treat the message board like there's some level of service they should expect (when the board costs users roughly zero cents mind you)

seems kinda rude if ya ask me

G apologizes to H, but forcefully reiterates his dis-alignment with A, reigniting the debate on topic shifting prevalence as a problem.

23.D.2: You said it [G], mob rule.

Happy birthday btw. ^^

D directly responds to G, and uses “btw” (by the way) as a discourse marker that is prelude in most non-Pen conversations as an imminent topic shift. By agreeing with G, D aligns with G by stating, “you said it,” and the G-aligned topic shift, “happy birthday.” D also aligns with the Pen community as a whole, with “mob rule.” Finally, R attempts to continue the thread by posting yet another topic shift that invites further topic shifting behavior, but there are no more posts to this thread. Perhaps the performance was sufficient at that point to no longer merit posting on the thread, or perhaps since D made an inclusive statement, aligning with the community as a whole, there was no need to continue.

24.R: so who else here hates ketchup potato chips? and for that matter has anyone noticed that black people have white palms? it's like their colouring is wearing off and they're really honky's just like me. haHA

### **7.3. Limitations of Stance Analysis**

Du Bois (2007) emphasizes the intersubjectivity of stance, shown through analysis of discourse that “a stancetaker’s words derive from, and further engage with, the words of those who have spoken before – whether immediately within the current exchange of stance utterances, or more remotely along the horizons of language and prior texts as projected by the community of discourse” (2007: 140). In the above discourse, Pen community members derive their words from previous posts, building on previous alignments and evaluations to arrive at a community with some shared knowledge of the world. In this respect, a researcher would most benefit from employing both a Relevance theoretic approach and a stance approach in order to arrive at a fuller, more intersubjective account of conversational interaction and what that interaction entails and means to participants.

By performing according to Pen community norms, the participants in the above thread are strengthening their community. Stance analysis can easily account for the community building aspects of the Pen discourse in the thread. Within each turn of the discourse, each poster presents her position on the content of the previous posts and aligns with or against other participants. The norm of topic shifting surfaces either directly or indirectly in most of the turns in the thread. By performing according to a Pen norm and evaluating other posters’ performances in relation to that norm, members are enforcing the forum community. Topic shifting itself is an evaluation of previous discourse – usually a negative evaluation, but in this case a community-strengthening and positive one. However, limitations exist beyond the content of the message and the poster’s self positioning via the content of their message. In many instances during analysis, accurate stance analysis required my additional familiarity with the

community's orthopraxy (e.g. "\*\*\*\* < pie < [animated image file with a woman shaking her breasts side to side]" stems from the longstanding Pen debate on the hierarchical ranking of cake to pie to breasts, and this phrase now serves as a normative topic shifter). Were it not apparent to the analyst that particular discourse markers are normative, some of the analysis would be lacking. Other turns in the discourse involve intertextual commentary for posters' alignment and/or evaluation ("porkchop sandwiches" refers to a shared history of this phrase becoming a normative discourse marker), and again I invoked here my membership's privileged information in order to provide a fuller stance account.

If, as Du Bois (2007) proposes, a "linguistic act" occurs as a "social act," then by speaking, or taking a turn in discourse, one is involving herself in the social world, bringing along with her previous socialization, norms of appropriate language use, attitudes about the world, and opinions of her interlocutors. All of the culturally-informed and context-framed understanding of the world results from socialization over time in any speech community. This evolved and increasing understanding may not be apparent through the stance-taking of one speech act or even several acts within a discourse. Therefore, the stance analysis may not be able to account for distantly acquired wisdom that may have and, in the case of the Pen discourse, usually informed the discourse. The ethnoprismatic method I propose in the following chapter should be able to incorporate what may have been left out with previous analyses.

## CHAPTER 8. THE ETHNOPRAGMATIC METHOD

### 8.1. Previous Analyses

To this point, the discourse analytic models I have presented allow for limited analysis of complex discourse like that of the Pen community. Although each model accounts for different aspects of discourse and perhaps even meaning, none of them are able to fully account for what the Pen community's data reveals about speech community building, construction of *leet* identity, in-group language use, and metapragmatic awareness. Only ethnographically informed discourse analysis is equipped to illuminate the larger discourse picture. The following proposed method presents the various dimensions of discourse involved in any exchange between interlocutors. Each of the previous theoretical frameworks reveals certain aspects of discourse (cognitive work of the individual, negotiating position in a speech community, and socialization with regards to norms of interaction). Contributions of the EPM include giving equal weight or attention to all these perspectives interactively while providing the necessary ethnographically informed context to render discourse meaningful.

Analysis within a relevance theoretic framework reveals that each new act of ostensive communication creates the potential for a larger context, or body of shared knowledge, among the interlocutors. This context may grow with each new utterance, or it may become obscured by the hearer's extra effort in processing for optimal relevance. This processing is evident in the Pen data, where at many points in the discourse, all that one may derive as relevant for the hearer is that the speaker is making manifest her assertion of *leetness*. The scope of RT is purposefully constrained within the cognitive aspects of discourse processing, and it is not designed to be a discourse analytic framework. I employed this framework in order to illustrate the relevance in Pen, which revealed creation of community where members assert dominance.



Analysis in a pragmatic model of (Im)politeness is no longer constrained to individual processing or intention. Nevertheless, a different limitation arises when applied to complex discourse like that of the Pen community. Since the analysis is framed around discerning interlocutors' strategies with respect to positive or negative (im)politeness output, the analyst is confined to data that only those with knowledge of the theoretical model of (Im)politeness could interpret – data which is not informed by community knowledge of expectations, community-specific power stratification, and other factors affecting impolite behavior or expectations. My analysis within this model therefore required me to draw deeply upon my membership in the community in order to be able to more accurately discern members' strategies of topic shifting and non-members' attempting to break into the community. I provide some of this background in the glosses for posts in Chapter 2. Without access to interactional norms afforded by the process of acquiring community membership, one could not successfully or completely discover the intentions or expectations of the language use by members of the Pen community, as there is no forum or message board providing rules of conduct, norms of communicative interaction, or an obvious articulation of members' positions in the community hierarchy. One can only accumulate this understanding by interacting in the community for an extended amount of time, observing patterns of communicative behavior, acceptability of particular topics, and norms of topic shifting and *flaming* behavior.

Analysis of the Pen data within a Stance model reveals the complexity of turn-taking, where with each turn, a member takes a stance, or position, within the speech community. One triangulates this position with each turn, both with respect to other interlocutors and to the content of their utterances. Where RT would allow that taking a stance, or aligning with particular interlocutors, could be the main, or one of the main, contextual effects intended by an

utterance, Stance allows for the recognition of the complex shifting architecture of stances within a discourse. This is the most comprehensive of the three models I engaged for analysis, as it provides the opportunity to take note of and engage with the community's shared understanding in order to analyze their exchanges. However, limits to a full analysis still arise. The community understanding that provides the foundation for the analysis of interlocutors' stance taking is confined to the data at hand. If one were to use Stance alone to analyze a Pen thread, one could only note the relationships revealed within that particular set of data. Again, as a member of the community with broader experience than that available to an outsider analyst, I was able to call upon my familiarity with members' sex, positions in the community hierarchy, and in-group language use. Without this background gained over several years of participation, I would not have been able to present a full account of stance taking, even through this more fully comprehensive and open analytic framework.

The three frameworks engaged in previous chapters are useful for discovering different aspects of communication. Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) accounts for individual cognition as it intersects with others in communicative interaction. (Im)politeness (Culpeper 1996) accounts for interlocutors' learning and following or breaking communicative norms of the speech community. Stance (Du Bois 2007) accounts for how communicative norms are regulated in interactions. Each approach provides one piece of the communicative puzzle. The only way to analyze this complex and lengthy data within these frameworks was to call upon insider understanding of norms informed by the history of Pen interactions. In each of the previous analyses, I enriched the analysis with shared history, which I have as a member of the community, in order to show the model's utility. Ethnography is necessary to inform

discourse analysis. Outsiders can conduct discourse analysis if and only if their analytic model accounts for what history is brought into the discourse, informing the discourse.

## **8.2. Holism and Inclusion – The Ethnopr pragmatic Method**

One means to overcome the limitations mentioned above would be to combine the three frameworks in data analysis with the goal of producing a richer account of communicative interaction. Although such a combined approach would enrich a discourse analysis, the combination fails to allow access to the historically informed normative community practices. Each individual is a member of a speech community, which exists and operates within and/or among other speech communities, which exist and operate within a larger culture, which exists and operates among other cultures, whose members may at some point interact with an individual who is a member of neither of the aforementioned collectives. Individuals within a culture are members of some of these communities but not all of them, experiencing the ongoing process of socialization and enculturation, amassing their individual inventory of norms, expectations, and understanding in the context of the various communities in which they participate. These communities may intersect, or they may not. Given this understanding, the linguistic individual is not operating on one level at one time. My proposed method can provide for this open and dynamic existence. The EPM is open, as it is not fixed or closed, and would provide a means to account for any interaction because all levels of the discourse world are activated when the linguistic individual engages in discourse. The EPM is dynamic because it is flexible in accounting for interaction when any level is affected or changed; when interlocutors interact, they add to the history contained within the EP world. Figure 2 (on the following page) illustrates the interacting levels of the EP world.

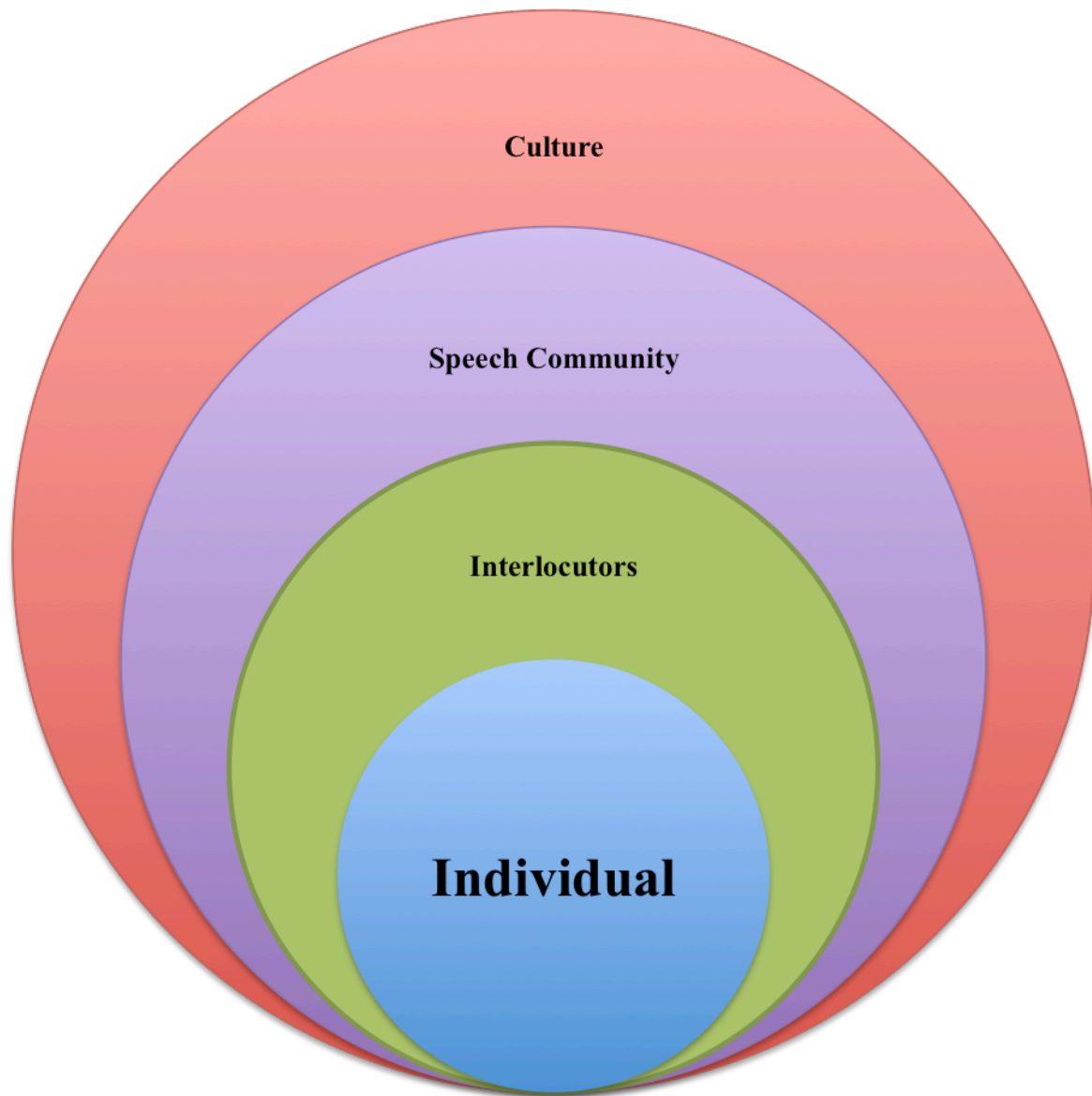


Figure 2: The EP world

The EPM is a method for dealing with how individuals inhabit a multi-layered community of discourse. Here, the linguistic individual is understood to be solitary but learns communicative competence through interaction with other linguistic individuals in the EP world. RT operates within the Individual level of the EPM. The Interlocutors level represents the intersection of the individual as a member of a group of people who interact linguistically with the group of interlocutors in any conversation that the individual has had. (Im)politeness

operates within the Interlocutors level of the diagram. The Speech Community level represents both the individual's speech community that contains the previous two levels as well as any speech communities of which the individual has ever been a part. Stance operates within this level. The Culture level represents both the larger culture - which incorporates the speech community, interlocutors within that speech community, and the individual within all of these – as well as any culture of which the individual has been a member. Here is where the built history of all previous interaction rests and informs future discourse. With the Pen community as an example, we can see that each member inhabits an EP world, while the Pen community as a whole inhabits an EP world. If a participant attempts to enter the Pen community, she enters the EP world where all existing members are interdependently engaged and share a history of interaction. This intersection also builds history, affecting each level of the Pen EP world. Each time someone posts to a thread, she brings with her all of the previously built history contained within her EP world. Each interaction affects in some way, large or small, the entire complex of communities.

Consider that all people participate in their speech communities located in the interrelationships in the EP world. Any instance of communicative behavior both calls upon past communication and triggers the dynamic EPM to potentially effect change throughout the EP world. The individual as part of the larger speech community, which is housed within the larger culture, learns to communicate according to the norms of each level of the EP world of discourse. Through interactions over time, an individual amasses an inventory of any previous discourse of which she has been a part, which informs future interaction. This inventory is a warehouse for any interactions with other individuals and provides a rich context from which to assert her position in the speech community of the moment.

Even though I have not offered here a mechanism for applying the EPM to data, it is clear that the process of analysis would rapidly become cumbersome but it is necessary to engage in order to discover the awareness of norms and expectations that ultimately inform meaning. Duranti and Goodwin (1992) assert that in ethnopragmatics, motivations for language use and meanings in language can be most fully understood if the analyst approaches language as informed by ethnographic history. Wierzbicka (1996) proposes another kind of holistic approach to cross-cultural pragmatics of “natural semantic metalanguage.” This theory has led to successful translations of terms found in many cultural settings, thereby avoiding the assumptions of popular pragmatic theories concerning universal expectations of appropriate language use. Again, there are limitations: where the lists end, real discourse occurs, involving many more instances of language use in various social situations. Without an extensive ethnography of the culture and its language use, one can only present lists of shared terms that compare to others’ terms regarding attitudes of language use.

“The medium is the message” (McLuhan 1964). Pen interaction is multiply mediated: the Pen message board, the internet connection a member uses to participate in the discourse, and the keyboard a member uses to innovate orthographic accommodations. The content of particular posts contain layered meanings derived from what members in a speech community do - interact with other members, build competence, and negotiate membership. This process of socialization can only be understood with the awareness of an EP world where all levels are engaged.

### **8.3. Conclusion**

The EPM is proposed as a method for analyzing the EP world. Where previously engaged models were easily applied to complex data, they offered only limited degrees of

explanation. The EPM reminds us that the linguistic individual simultaneously inhabits all levels of the EP world. Furthermore, culture is pervasive in every discourse event and it is necessary to include it in the EP world for interpreting meaning in discourse. One cannot fully account for meanings and purposes of discourses without an inclusive method such as the EPM. The current dilemma is how to conduct discourse analysis or how to create analytic models to account for the elusive, tacit knowledge of linguistic individuals that accumulates through interactions.

Linguists' awareness of specific cultural constraints of the analyst is crucial to approaching a model that will be useful for full discourse analysis within the field of pragmatics.

Language in use is complex, and this complexity presented challenges in my analysis within each of the three existing theoretical frameworks. The EPM reveals this complexity and the factorial nature of the contextualized and historical interactions. Context now becomes the central feature of any given discourse entity, and therefore must be included in any analysis. In the EP world, context includes any previously acquired knowledge by the individual in the ongoing discourse, as well as any previously acquired knowledge from previous discourses. The shared knowledge stems from other individuals' acquisitions that have been brought into the sphere of discourses – both ongoing and previous. Here, one can appreciate the complexity of context as being greater than that of a given moment in a linguistic interaction.

A discourse analytic model must be able to handle not only face-to-face turn taking in small bits of discourse but also in lengthy, complexly veiled, multi-modal, multi-party, and highly specialized interactions. The Pen community's discourse, although physically constrained to a virtual setting, presents an ideal challenge for creating new models of discourse analysis. The Pen speech community contains a rich history of language use – some aspects specific to Pen, others that may be shared with other virtual speech communities, and still others that may

be shared with face-to-face communities. The underlying Pen expectations and norms are unavailable to outsiders because they are housed within a specific paradigm of Pen *leetness*. Other pragmatic models are constructed using data that is constrained and scripted. Pen data is not constrained in this way. It contests pragmatic theory because of its complexity and exclusivity, making it a particularly challenging corpus of discourse. The nexus of language and culture is engaged in Pen discourse threads. It is precisely at this juncture of language and culture where the EPM offers a means to access a speech community and how it uses language. *Leet* ways of speaking (communicative competences) are built as the *leet* community builds, in the same way that all speech communities construct themselves. A rich analysis of *leet* ways of speaking requires an ethnographic foundation. Future analysis of language use should aim to highlight the awareness that a full discourse analysis must necessarily include low-level pragmatics (the individual's cognitive work), high-level pragmatics (the interactional work of interlocutors), and ethnographically informed history. Discourse analysis is much richer and more meaningful when these three aspects are combined. Most importantly, approaching a unifying pragmatic theory using a method like the EPM will make it possible for the future analyst to deal with complex, real, and multi-faceted discourse data on a meaningful, holistic level.



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## APPENDIX A: GLOSSES OF ITALICIZED TERMS

ITALICIZED TERM	GLOSS
<i>Flame(s)</i>	The ritualized argumentative behavior witnessed online
<i>Flaming</i>	The act of inciting or participating in a <i>flame</i>
<i>Flame war(s)</i>	An ongoing and progressively more aggressive flame
<i>Netspeak</i>	The umbrella category for computer-mediated communication
<i>Leet</i>	Shortened from 'elite,' used as adjective for technologically apt gamers, programmers, and Pen members who exhibit <i>leet</i> characteristics
<i>Leet geek(s)</i>	Someone who is <i>leet</i>
<i>Leet speak</i>	The netspeak register involving specific orthographic conventions (see Table 3)
<i>Leetness</i>	The quality one possesses if she exhibits <i>leet</i> characteristics
<i>Textese</i>	Netspeak dialect referring to language use typically seen in phone-to-phone keyboarded communication
<i>AOLer(s)</i>	One who uses the America Online internet browser and chat applications
<i>Blog(s)</i>	Web log
<i>Techie(s)</i>	One whose interests lie in technology and gaming or computer programming
<i>Newbie / noob</i>	Newcomer, ignorant of norms
<i>Puter(s)</i>	Computer
<i>Mod</i>	Modify
<i>Box(x0rz)</i>	Computer



## APPENDIX B: THREADS OF DISCOURSE

Thread (1) - "This place is falling apart"

1.A: this place is falling apart

<http://penismightier.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/005360.html>

read the 1st post (main thread post)

then immediately click page 2 and read the 1st post on page 2

then ponder what is in the middle, and what's up with all these thread hijackings lately.

[administrator] needs to get >\_< better so he can start getin things in b4 teh l0ck

2.B: I hate black people

3.C: I can't wait for the day they invent a way to make your poo different colors.  
not green or brown, those are lame.

4.D.1: I don't see what any of this has to do with Howard Deane.

5.E: PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!

6.F: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [E]:**

**PORKCHOP SANDWICHES!**

THEY DO?

7.G.1: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [A]:**

**<http://penismightier.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/005360.html>**

**read the 1st post (main thread post)**

**then immediately click page 2 and read the 1st post on page 2**

**then ponder what is in the middle, and what's up with all these thread**

**hijackings lately.**

**[administrator] needs to get >\_< better so he can start getin things in**

**b4 teh l0ck**

omfg you noob

when has pen ever stayed on topic?

8.H.1: still he has a point

me being a dumbass and what the topic ended up being are kind of far apart it

should have taken at least 3 pages

9.I.1: ...and for the block... *I disagree.*

10.J: Have I mentioned how much I like boobs?

11.K: AITOOJOTT?**1**

12.L: ...no.

13.M: Drink a lot of food coloring. Your poo will change.

14.N: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [C]:**

**I can't wait for the day they invent a way to make your poo different colors.**

**not green or brown, those are lame.**

Would you like PURPLE instead?

I'll stick with brown.

15.G.2: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [H]:**

**still he has a point**

**me being a dumbass**

**and what the topic ended up being are kind of far apart it should have taken at least 3 pages**

Who fucking cares man? Opening a topic may start a conversation far different than you intended (you sick little Nazi) ... it might bog down completely for four pages over a trivial bit of completely random transmissions, it might slouch off the front page with zero comments, [a member's name] might even stingray-ho the second or third page leaving testable neurosis ...

STFU

.

16.O: so...should i design a webpage with java or flash or should I try to mix and match both. I don't have a real reason to pick one or the other, but I heard that they're both cutting edge technology and I want to appear "hip".

oh, AMD vs Intel: which to pick?

17.I.2: \*\*\*\* < pie < [animated image file with a woman shaking her breasts side

to side]

Words to live by.

18.P: king george peed bright purple.

19.I.3: Yeah, but he came from a long line of inbreeders.

20.H.2: [G] made me cry

but the stingray doesn't cus i have it blocked

21.Q: my novelty has totally worn off

22.G.3: sorry [H], it's a sore subject ... people treat the message board like there's some level of service they should expect (when the board costs users roughly zero cents mind you)

seems kinda rude if ya ask me

23.D.2: You said it [G], mob rule.

Happy birthday btw. ^^

24.R: so who else here hates ketchup potato chips? and for that matter has anyone noticed that black people have white palms? it's like their colouring is wearing off and they're really honky's just like me. haHA

Thread (2) - "New Dictionary Coming Soon"

1.A: new dictionary coming soon!

is anyone else jerking off to this?

ok, I'll be quiet now.

2.B: no, just you.

I LUBV JOO, [A]!!

3.C: ☹

I work at a McJob :\

4.D: It's not polite to swear.

5.E: [B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...

6.F: **quote: originally posted by [E]:**

**[B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...**

The thing is, I get the strange feeling that if that ever were to happen, you wouldn't be invited

7.B.2: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [E]:**

**[B] and [A] need to have teh lezb0 sex s00n. or just kiss...**

What? I lubv (almost) everybody here! Not just [A]!

8.G: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [F]:**

**The thing is, I get the strange feeling that if that ever were to happen, you wouldn't be invited**

**BRING A CAMERA!**

9.H: **quote:**

**Originally posted by [G]:**

**BRING A CAMERA!**

I love [G]'s simple solutions. Kickass!

Problem = solved!

Now.. OMFG! PICS?

...

### Thread (3) - "Roommate from HELL"

1.A.1: Well, boys, girls, and strange mixes between the two, it's story time. My roommate tried to kill me Saturday night- because I wouldn't unlock a door for him. In the house where I'm living, there were three people- me, the sane roommate, and the insane roommate. Sane Roommate abruptly left for because he was sick of insane roommate harassing him for money, eating his food, et cetera. After he left, SR called me and asked me to lock his door so Insane Roommate couldn't get inside and sell his stuff for extra money. I complied, and, come Saturday Night, IR asks me why I locked SR's door. I explain, and then have IR pull his knife on me (he bought the same model that Hannibal Lecter uses in "Hannibal"), and says "I'll fucking kill you if you don't open the door. A minute and a scratch on my arm from an errant knife slash by him later, the door's unlocked. I'm just wondering what I should do. I'm moving back home in December, but don't want to live in fear for my next month or so here. I can't call the police, because his parents are wealthy and will post bail for him. I can't drive home, because I lack a car and driver's license. The only defense that I have is a Maglite full of rocks (because I can't afford batteries for it) and a katana blade. And I know that IR is crazier than a shithouse bat- he washes his hands to the point that they bleed, showers at least 5 times a day, lifts weights for three hours, and was born inside the Utah State Mental Hospital. Any input, even witty remarks to the effect of "Gee, you're fucked. Hope you have a will written" would be appreciated.

2.B.1: Hrm. I always wondered what happened to Bob.

3.C: How the hell did you end up moving in with someone who is apparently so obviously insane?

4.D: I think I'm going to have to join in with the "you're a fucking retard for moving in with this guy" contingent, here.

Or call shenanigans.

Or possibly both.

5.E.1: They never seem insane until you take away their \*\*\*\*.

6.E.2: I've seen my friends get taken by what seems like a decent or stable roommate..

I've seen someone who seemed stable (a little needy for attention) just go fucking completely insane.

Also seen someone who seemed like the nicest guy in the world, had everyone fooled for months then suddenly looted everything.

Also he could just be poor and can't really pick and choose where to live..

7.A.2: Well, our friend the Insane Roommate was formerly one of my best friends, and never exhibited any kind of freakishness when I was around... until I moved in with him. Then, he becomes a total fucking nutjob... I always thought that the State Mental Hospital thing was a joke until I saw a copy of his birth certificate.

8.F: I suggest you watch Dean Man on Campus.

9.G.1: his parents are rich, yet one of them (his mom most likely) was in a mental house when he was born. yet he wants to get into your sane roommates room to steal food/stuff for money. if his parents are rich why don't they send him more dough?

oh and investing in several locks to your room might be a good idea.

or you contact his parents and the police and see what happens

later and good luck

[G]

10.A.3: [F] - I've already contemplated that, but I don't have the balls.

[G] - His parents are worse than him. One's a rabid bible(well, Book of Mormon)thumper, and one's a major survivalist. They refuse to send him any money, and won't visit him. He told me once (when we were friends) that his parents had never complimented him on anything, so I know that his problems were a combination of genetics and lack of parental attention. His father also abused him- broke his collarbone and several ribs when he was seven. I had just thought that the insanity had skipped a generation, since he claims to strive to be nothing like his parents.

And finally... when my parents visited me a month ago, they left me a \*\*\*\*. And he ate the whole damn thing. I know that isn't deep-rooted mental problems, but I at least have to be able to complain about petty things, too.

11.H: Look, it's very simple. I feel silly explainin this, but I'm feeling generous. Here's whatcha do:

- 1) Cut your arm off with the katana blade.
2. Call police (with the other hand) and tell them your roommate has cut your arm off.
- C- Watch roommate get even more insane when arrested for something he didn't do.
- \$) Sue roommate's parents for damages in civil court.

V. Destroy all traces of this post so you don't get busted

[H]

PS In all seriousness? Go home early. Your parents will pick you up.

12.B.2: He.

Took.

Your.



\*\*\*\*.

GRRRR! There's just some lines a man don't cross, if you catch my meaning. That's one of them.

Another is don't forcefeed your roommate's cat yogurt without permission.

DEATH TO THE \*\*\*\* STEALER!

What flavor was it?

13.I.1: dude buy a gun and the next time he comes at you make him walk with a limp.

14.J: Okay, here's what you do, you get a pumpkin, some jellybeans, and a pair of snowpants. Now what you need to do is hang the snowpants from the ceiling with some fishing line, and then put jellybeans in the pockets. Then, when he's not around, you put the pumpkin in one of the drawers in his desk, and tie it to a pencil. Now, when he...

...

Why the hell did that sound like a good idea a few minutes ago?

15.A.4: [B] - It was 2 layers of devil's food with a nice buttercream frosting and sugary raspberry tasting stuff in between the layers. My favorite.

[I] - No money, no gun. Also, being 18 means that all that I can get here is either a deer rifle or a shotgun. And I've never fired anything more than a pellet gun before that, besides.

[H] - Closest that I could come to coming up early is 10 days for Thanksgiving break, this Saturday 'till next Sunday. They won't let me up for more because it's past withdrawal time and they want me to survive at least one semester of school down here because I paid so

damn much for it (for me, at least... I got off easy compared to most, though. Only 1300 bones for 16.5 credit hours).

16.K.1: Just kill him and dump the body somewhere.

17.L: Assuming this isn't a troll.

Get the fuck out of there. Call your parents,  
borrow the money, whatever it takes.

This guy's bad news.

18.M: Gee, you're fucked. Hope you have a will written.

Get him on tape being a nutcase. Put some friends, preferably no-neck Football player or ROTC friends, in your sane roommate's room with a tape recorder, lock it, wait for the magic to happen.

19.N: (self-labeled as a "troll")

An insane roommate just rolled out of my ass. Am I fucked?

20.O: Hmm, the guy came at you with a knife in your own home. So he could steal the roommate's stuff.

I've gotten in trouble here in the past for being descriptive about stuff like this, but honestly do you feel safe sleeping there?

The easiest way would probably be just to get the hell out of there, go to school and ask if they can help you out.

But honestly, do society a favor ... wait until he goes to sleep, steal a baseball bat and bash that freak into a million tiny pieces. Beat him bad enough that you can finish the quarter without worrying about him causing any more drama. Lock him in the trunk of a stolen car and speed over bad roads, leave it in the desert in a nice sunny spot. Stick that

knife he's so proud of up his ass and give it a twist. Duct tape his freak ass to a tree out in the middle of nowhere.

Whatever you decide, don't stay there AND let him think he can get away with shit like that.

Crack is fun, but goddamn when you gotta stab one roommate to steal from the other it's time to check yourself in.

21.B.3: You know... maybe you should move into the dorms.

22.I.2: if a 4 year old can pick up a 9 mil for \$50; i am sure you can suck some dick to get one yourself.

23.P.1: when he's sleeping one night..

simply get some cement, mix it up inside the house (so its room temp) and then slowly (as not to wake him) cover him (in his bed) with the cement (that you just mixed) but do it quietly (and slowly) so that you dont wake him up(or he'll kill you) also bring a shovel with you (the one you mixed the cement with maybe?) and if he wakes up (from his sleep) then smash him in the head.

24.P.2: THEN SELL HIM SOME WAERZ BUT DOANT GET CUAGHT BY THE COPZORZ OR YUO WIL GET ARRESETD LIEK ME!!!

25.Q: (don't forget the parentheses)  
(you idiot)

26.I.3: ok).(

27.R: (.)()

28.K.2: BOOBIES!!

I like [picture of woman looking at her breasts that are moving side to side]!

29.A.5: Well, here's the latest scoop on the roommate saga:

-Called the school housing office, and they aren't willing to let me use a dorm room for the few weeks left in the term unless I pay for the entire term. So that idea's out.

-Parents are still firm on making me finish the term (it ends mid-December), but are going to help me move out when the time comes.

-Psycho roommate dropped a bombshell... he's joining the Army. Signed his papers today. Boot Camp January. I pray to whatever deities are listening that he's sent off to war immediately and has his testicles shot off.

-Psycho roommate has also not noticed that I've been cleaning the toilet with his toothbrush. I admit that it's quite petty, but so is threatening to kill the guy who provides you with rent money.

-Finally, before I leave for Thanksgiving vacation, I'm clipping one of the pins on his processor. Also petty, but he'll never know what's wrong with his computer.

30.B.4: Um...

"I'm the only sane one! Everyone else is crazy!!"

Seriously though, I'd recommend not clipping the pins on the processor, as two things are gonna happen:

1) If he pays to have it fixed *they'll* tell him what was wrong, and he could conceivably figure it out.

2) He'll have a lot more free time on his hands...

31.G.2: interesting my brother is joining the army and leaving in january as well. wonder if the 2 will meet in boot? god i hope not.  
as for those petty things your doing.

that toothbrush thing would make a good idea for the guy who videotaped his wife cheating. as for the computer damaging, yeah it'll probably take him a while to figure out what's wrong

unless he how to build upgrade and debug comps.

as for leaving for thanksgiving be sure you have a decent lock to your room and you take your more valuable stuff with you.

later

[G]

(discourse continues for several turns, but topic remains on roommate issues)

Thread (4)

“grammar.[member] < grammar.yoda”

1.A.1: **quote** (of D's article written on the main page of the website):

**all of this is well and good, and helps me to focus my energy on projects which are likely to better the collective self portrait all of us dorian gays paint of humanity; instead of focusing it on bellyaching about having not even a prospect for a girlfriend**

Okay, I'm less than enlightened here. Does that sentence mean what it looks like it means? 'Cause it looks like you're saying you, and all of us, are "dorian gays" - whatever a "dorian gay" is.

And considering one of the links in those words was to someplace called

"gaystation", I'm pretty sure I get enough of the idea to know VERY well I'm not one.

I have a sneaking suspicion this wasn't quite what you meant to say, but fuck if I could manage to parse that sentence any other way. Clue me in here, willya?

2.B: "I'm not gay. I didn't ... gay."

3.C.1: wang

can wang

4.C.2: wangismightier.com

5.D.1: it is a play on words of the title of

a novel by oscar wilde: the picture of dorian gray.

i was saying that people's unwillingness to internalize the ugliness, to love the beauty as well as the ugliness of humanity while earnestly trying to better humanity is, in short, gay. and that we all collectively paint the ugly picture of humanity we see before us. thus, we are all dorian gays.

6.A.2: I have no idea what sort of odd internal dialogue led you to progress from the first face to the last over a three hour period: all I know is it had nothing to do with me, since I had no more contact with you elsewhere than I did here. Regarding your belabored protests, I was actually quite familiar with the premise of *The Picture*

*Of Dorian Gray*. This familiarity, however, was no adequate preparation for the Sisyphian labors inherent in parsing your tortured syntax. In short, my advice to you is this: **eschew obfuscation**. </highbrow>

7.E: To tell you the truth [D], I skip most of your posts. They are so damn hard to read.

8.F: GODFUCKINGDAMNIT [D] GO AWAY

HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU HAVE TO BE TOLD??

[D]=BORING. LIKE HARDCORE BORING.

I LIKE THE NON-PRETENTIOUS ARTISTS BIT. DOES THAT INCLUDE YOU?

9.A.3: Okay [D], let's take this one slow:

1. Yes, you have it so right. I fear your mighty p3n15 will violate my tender anus, therefore I attack you. Uh-huh. How "insightful" of you. (Was that an epiphany?)

2. The internal dialogue was whatever prompted you to make three separate posts over the course of three hours, with no input from anyone else, which changed drastically in tone as time went by.

3. Look *real fucking hard* at this very page and see where you can find the very three faces that I posted. Hint: they're in the same order I posted them. Another hint: they're immediately to the right of the letters "[D's name spelled in capital letters]" and immediately to the left of the word "posted." Clued in yet?

4. You don't "think in broad strokes", you trip over a ladder and spill 5 gallons of semi-gloss latex on the carpet, man. It's messy, really.

5. The "Sisyphean labor" is continuing to attempt to communicate with your befuddled ass. Jesus man, snap out of the fog and pay attention - you couldn't even figure out where the *faces* remark came from and *you posted them!?*

10.D.2:[A]: ok, if you need to take it slow... (i heard you like it that way)

- 1) ok, yer right, yer *\*not\** a homophobe.
- 2) the posts did not change drastically in tone. or if they did, you've failed to point out how.
- 3) and i thought maybe you meant something deeper than that i used three different message icons. oooh, did that throw you off?
- 4) and i do think in broad strokes. it's a gemini trait. i sometimes miss the trees for the forest. but i see that you just wanted to twist that into an insult. you had nothing of value to say. or no, maybe you wanted to inform me about how my brain works?
- 5) and i like how you skirted addressing the flaw i exposed in your analogy. if you must continue this attack, let's do it in email, huh?

11.A.5:That dog in *Mad About You* rules

12.G: But there's so many people and now an established target...

I much prefer public *flamewars*

But then I'm a homophobic, non-link-clicking, non-understanding, sarcasm-missing, non-email-using, semi-literate, redneck-named, exaggerating asshole....

...who just happens to have a 10 inch cock.

Oh, and regarding this:



**quote:**

**Originally posted by [D]:**

**people can print my posts to**

**wipe their ass with them as far as i care.**

You have to care at least a little. Otherwise you wouldn't be posting the things to begin with. You sure as hell wouldn't be getting defensive if you didn't care. The trick is to learn how to deal with criticism and *flames*. You dont start a *flamewar* and then say "lets continue this where I wont be so embarrassed anymore". The cats out of the bag. You hang in to the end, give up, or ignore it.

I tend to hang on to the bitter end. I also frequently lose.

13.H: sweet jeebus. in the time it took me to make a semicoherent post, this escalated from a minor scuffle into a near *flame war*. i just can't keep up. now you fuckers see why i avoid chat.

## VITA

Tracy Rene LeBlanc was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, in June of 1978. She earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She earned a master's degree in anthropology from Louisiana State University and subsequently began her doctoral studies in the Interdepartmental Program in Linguistics at LSU, which has now been foolishly eliminated. She was instrumental in the founding of the Linguistics Graduate Student Organization, who raised funds for student travel and successfully planned and hosted a regional linguistics conference. While pursuing her degree full time, she worked as an adjunct faculty member in the departments of Geography and Anthropology, Women's and Gender Studies, Independent and Distance Learning, English, and Linguistics. She was also a teaching assistant in the linguistics program at LSU and an adjunct anthropology faculty member at River Parishes Community College. She has presented at national and international conferences and is published in a peer-reviewed book on digital discourse.

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