Abstract

The article attempts to show how turn taking strategies of using particular devices in asynchronous forums differ from face-to-face communication, how they are conditioned by the medium and also how they are influenced by the aim of a particular discussion. The analysis, as part of bigger research, is based on comparison of two corpora of on-line discussions with different topics and aims, and it shows the shift of functions of typical written devices such as titles, greetings, etc. It is evident that even if interactive exchanges in asynchronous computer mediated forums tend to be linked together less tightly than in face-to-face communication, the potential confusion is prevented by adopting compensatory strategies.

Key words

computer mediated discourse (CMD), asynchronous communication, learners’s language, addressing strategies, adjacency pairs, informative and emotional functions of discourse

1 Introduction

The discourse of asynchronous computer on-line forums has usually been considered a mixture of features which are typical of speech and writing. Authors quite frequently look for an appropriate descriptive term of a new form of communication. Thus we can encounter labels like e-style, written speech, spoken text and many other attempts to find an appropriate title expressing that the two types of text are somehow mixed together (Biber 1995, Baron 2000, Crystal 2001). If we apply the seven criteria introduced by Crystal to distinguish between spoken and written discourse, four of them are not relevant here because they are not decisive enough and they depend very significantly on the particular type of communication: spontaneous vs. contrived reaction of a participant; loosely vs. elaborately structured message; primary purpose of the communication is socially interactive vs. factually communicative; the message is immediately vs. repeatedly revisable (Crystal 2001: 43). The following three criteria suggest that the explored texts are samples of written-like communication because: asynchronous chats are space bound and not time bound; they are not face-to-face, but visually decontextualized; they are/or can be relatively graphically rich, but they cannot be prosodically rich (if we strictly distinguish between