

**Positive (Im)politeness:
Banter as a Form of Social Cohesion in Internet Relay Chat**

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In my MA thesis (2012) I have focused on the ways in which members of Internet Relay Chat (IRC) use banter in building and maintaining social cohesion. The thesis focuses on the channel #chatzone operating within Undernet. One example of banter was seen in an exchange where a male chatter said "I'm saving myself for [female chatter]" and continued that he has "decided to lower his standards.. like six feet below sea level.. at least". The female chatter replied "pfft.. you love my ass shaddap". The reply and the exchange act as an example of the derogatory humour highlighting the *inherent playfulness* in Danet et al. (1997). The theoretical background of the thesis is divided into three chapters: social cohesion, banter and computer-mediated communication (Thurlow et al. 2004). Of these the first chapter introduces the ideas of *customary joking relationship* (Norrick 1993) and *conventionalised mock-impoliteness* (Culpeper 2011) which act as grounding points in my definition of banter. The majority of the literature in the theoretical background is based on face-to-face interaction which IRC is not. The relevantly recent field of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring 2004) acts as the methodological framework for the analysis of the data, i.e. log files recorded on the hard drive of the computer of my informant. The results confirm the findings of Danet et al. (1997) and Valanne (2001) in that the language of Internet Relay Chat is indeed inherently playful. I suggest that term *positive (im)politeness* (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987) can be used to describe cases where the impoliteness is intended to bond the interlocutors together through the exchanges of biting remarks. The surface level of impoliteness is replaced by the idea of "claiming common ground" through *positive politeness* (Brown and Levinson 1987).

References

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