

Introduction

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It is by now a cliché that the Internet has affected life and society in many, and in part, fundamental ways.

So it does not come as a surprise that one of the affected areas is language and communication itself. In earlier work, we have taken a stab at issues such as whether we are faced with a new medial language variety. We looked at how language and communication are packaged in different and/or new kinds of Internet genres in the new medium. Certain questions in the field of domain-specific Internet communication can be asked: to what extent are genres affected by the Internet? Can old genres survive in corresponding Internet genres? Is the chat a conversation? Is a blog a diary? Or for that matter, is a scientific article the same if published in, say, “Language” or in an open access e-journal? What are the general properties of the new Internet genres and how do they differ systematically from written and spoken genres?

The rise of new genres, new and autonomous prefabs, through the Internet is certainly the first way the Internet differs from domain-specific communication. New genres in various societal domains are emerging. In addition to the expected limitations on new Internet genres, the domains themselves are a constraining factor in the sense that domain-specificity, by definition, adds another dimension of constraints. Therefore, unique communication becomes not only unique, but also opaque to those outside the domain-specific speech community (Berman, Bergs).

Apart from the rise of new domain-specific genres, the Internet would appear to affect professional communication in another two basic ways:

1. it affects practice in these domains themselves as well as the structure and relationships within the domains (Bensoussan et al., Berman, Bergs)
2. it affects, in a more narrowly linguistic sense, the language varieties used in terms of the linguistic composition that constitute language (Berman)

One area that has been prominently affected is, of course, the domain of scientific discourse. Discussion lists, websites, and e-journals have affected a change of culture in scientific discourse. Let me exploit this opportunity shamelessly, and quite unobtrusively, to point to our two new open access e-journals, one on “constructions”, the other, unsurprisingly, on “Language@Internet”.

The papers of this AILA symposium “Domain-specific internet communication” (14th World Congress of Applied Linguistics; University of Wisconsin at Madison, U.S.A.; July 24 – 29, 2005,) singled out a small number of areas where the Internet has had quite a dramatic effect. One area is, of course, education, in particular language learning. Bensoussan et al. report on this field from Israel, a country where the application of e-learning is widespread. They describe students’ online communication in an educational environment. Also based in Israel, Berman combines language learning with a specific domain, law, and looks at the impact of the medium on actual language use in this area. She details the emergence of a medial language variety within a specific speech community. Another high impact area of the Internet is economics. Stein distinguishes between paper text and hypertext, presenting examples of language from bank websites. The paper by Felden reports on a way knowledge stored on the Internet is utilized in a most sophisticated way by companies. Analyzing online communication using a social network approach, the paper by Bergs reports on how the Internet affects communication in the professional domains of economics, administration, law, and education.

The papers in this volume span a variety of styles, from informal to formal written language. It will be interesting to see whether this is the beginning of a trend, with e-journals and paper journals diverging stylistically.