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Question: Describe one medium of communication not discussed in class and compare it to both speech and text.

Chosen medium of communication: Tumblr

Since the beginning of mankind, humans have always used mediums to communicate with one another. Primary communication is essential for survival, as we need to be in contact with one another in order to proceed on with our daily routine. However, with the rise of technology over the last decade and in particular the Internet, secondary tools of communication have emerged in the form of emails, blogs, social networks and chat rooms. With its unique mixture of the characteristics of both speech and text, the social platforms on the Internet has played a significant role in affecting the interpersonal interaction among people (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). In this essay, we will discuss how the popular microblogging and social networking site, Tumblr serves as a medium of communication and its similarities to both speech and text.

Launched in 2007, Tumblr has steadily established itself as one of the most prominent medium of communication in the 21st Century. Hosting over 203.7 million blogs and more than 96 billion posts as of September 18 2014; Tumblr is the platform where people with similar interests come together to (Tumblr, 2014). A hybrid between microblogging and social networking, it is a place where wordplay is celebrated and has consistently been used by a myriad of fandoms¹ to communicate with their counterparts all over the world without much commitment of building a real relationship

For those who are unfamiliar with using Tumblr, it is basically a platform where a user can create a private or public blog to post photos, text,

¹ Fandom is a word which derives from the root word *fan* [fanatic] and the suffix *-dom*, as in kingdom is a term used to refer to a group of people who share empathy and common interest usually in celebrities, movies or television series.

quotes, links, audio or video. The user can choose to follow other users by simply clicking the follow button at the top right hand corner of the blog. Subsequently, the posts posted by the people the initial user chose to follow will appear on his homepage, termed as 'dashboard'. In return, other users can also choose to follow him. An important feature of tumblr is that it allows for the user to reblog² the original source onto his blog with the option to add comments at the bottom of the post. If a user reblogs a post, his followers can see it appearing on their dashboard. Another important feature would be the notes feature, which refer to the combination of the number of times the original post has been reblogged or liked³.

As introduced by Crystal (2006, Ch3-6), there are seven features of speech and text, as shown in Figure 1 below. This figure provides the brief characteristics that will be used in this essay as a basis of comparison between Tumblr and speech or text. It is however, intricate to classify Tumblr as either speech or text as it proves to contain the characteristics of the two forms of communication.

Speech Like	Text Like
time bound	space bound
spontaneous	contrived
face-to-face	visually decontextualized
loosely structured	elaborately structured
socially interactive	factually communicative
immediately revisable	repeatedly revisable
prosodically rich	graphically rich

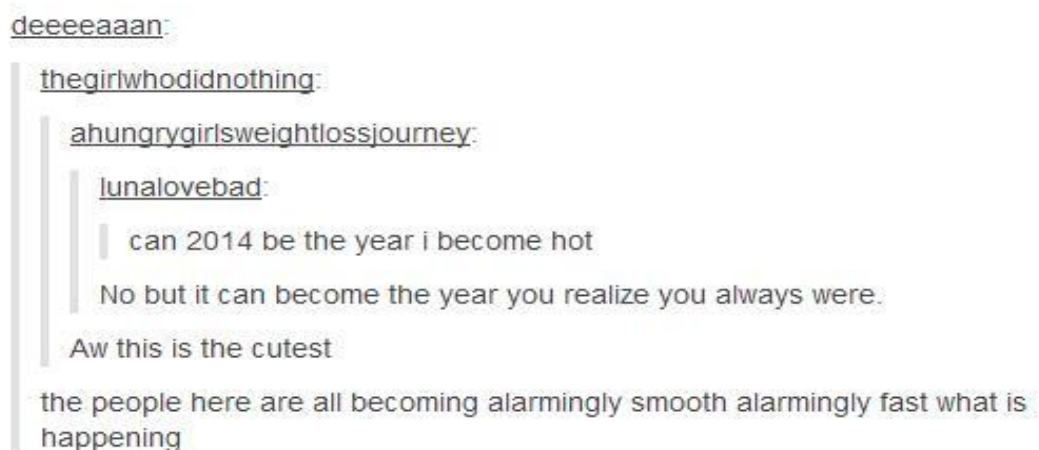
Figure 1

² Reblogging is a tool on Tumblr which allows users to repost, with proper credits, the content of another user on his blog.

³ Like refers to the physical action of leaving a standard notification on a post without any comments or actions to the original post. It is often used in Tumblr on posts that you can relate to but do not want to reblog

Firstly, Tumblr is similar to text in the way that it is space bound. As the posts are written within a framed page and space limit, it can be seen that Tumblr is akin to text. It is not however time bound as users are given the freedom to come up with a post at their own pace. There is no time limit set for posting on this site.

Secondly, communicating on Tumblr can be both spontaneous and contrived. This is because, like speech, Tumblr users are allowed to comment immediately on the posts that they see on Tumblr. There are multiple platforms on the site such as a chat box and also a question-posting segment, which allows the user to immediately communicate with other users on the site. In this form, it adopts the similar spontaneity that is present in speech. On the flip side, the website allows users to be contrived and to choose their response accordingly and deliberately. This can be seen on feature of communication that most Tumblr users cultivate which is the culture of wordplay in the site. As Tumblr allows for comments to be made on the post itself, this often creates a series of response that can be witty and melodramatic as seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3. This shows that like text the posts on Tumblr are contrived.



The screenshot shows a Tumblr comment thread with the following text:

deeeeeaan:

thegirlwhodidnothing:

ahungrygirlsweightlossjourney:

lunalovebad:

can 2014 be the year i become hot

No but it can become the year you realize you always were.

Aw this is the cutest

the people here are all becoming alarmingly smooth alarmingly fast what is happening

Figure 2: A screenshot taken from <http://www.pleated-jeans.com/2014/01/07/18-times-tumblr-users-were-smoother-than-silk/>



Figure 3: A screenshot taken from <http://www.pleated-jeans.com/2014/01/07/18-times-tumblr-users-were-smoother-than-silk/>

While text messaging has encouraged abbreviations and shortening of words, Tumblr has steadily been credited for the source of new words or phrases that are being used all over the internet and for some, in daily use. These Tumblr slangs are widely popular among teenagers regardless of their location or nationality and this forms a bonding tool of communication among people. More than often, these slangs of Tumblr revolve around the reactions of users to contents posted by other users. These words or phrases hardly mean what they do when taken in a literal sense but the frequent users of Tumblr identify heavily with them. The expressions have evolved from exclusively being used in text-like form of microblogging to inclusively being adapted into daily speech. Below are examples of words or expressions that are created or popularized by the platform (Douglas, 2012; Bargh & McKenna, 2004). The examples below show how expressions that can be used in daily life have derived from Tumblr, which shows how it has evolved into a tool for social interaction.

Expression 1: I'm dying

Meaning in context: This is an expression that was initially a shortened form of the sentence "I'm dying of laughter." Currently, the expression could fit any strong emotional response.

Example in daily context: This movie is so funny. I'm dying right now.

Expression 2: I can't even

Meaning in context: This is used when the user has so many emotional response to the post or the news that he cannot process it coherently enough to express it verbally.

Example in daily context: When Michael asked me to go on a date with him; I was so shocked I can't even.

Expression 3: Ship

Meaning in context: An extension of relationships between two (or sometimes more) people who may or may not be romantically limited in the original fiction or real life. Shortened from the original word relationship, ship can be used to describe your enthusiasm for a couple that you may know in real life.

Example in daily context: Michael and Jane look so cute together. I ship them.

As Tumblr has a global following, the website is a melting pot of languages of the world. With 45% of Tumblr users being below the age of 35 (Sala, 2012), Tumblr is the meeting place of global languages used among the young adults who prove to be the trendsetting generation of the world. With the vast amount of languages in the world, Tumblr becomes a place where one learns a new word or language that suits his interest. Users often cite or identify with these words to express an emotion within them that cannot be quantified by any word in their home language. This also supports the notion that it has the prosodically rich characteristic of speech. Popular terms such as *L'esprit de l'escalier* (French) which is loosely translated as the act of

thinking of a clever comeback when it is too late to deliver it are popular among the Tumblr community that seeks to verbalize emotions and thoughts.

As Tumblr is a very new phenomenon, many researchers have yet to explore the depths and potential of this tool in its role as a medium of communication and effects on languages.

However, like as it is partly a social networking site, it shares similar characteristics with other social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. As it provides a comfortable platform for sharing, the input of Tumblr from people of all walks of life creates a unique diversity of content.. Taking into consideration that this platform does not make it necessary for face-to-face interaction and allows for anonymity, it is a good avenue for introverts to interact and share their thoughts, even if in a contrived manner. (Jones, 2013). Jones adds on that in order for social media to be an effective medium of communication, it must be supported by real-life interaction and should only act as a secondary tool of communication. It is generally agreed that communication mediums such as the one mentioned above is beneficial as it helps one to be more socially adept and to communicate more effectively (Human Kinetics, 2010).

In conclusion, Tumblr is an effective medium of communication, which combines the characteristics of speech and text and forming the platform for human interaction. While it is difficult to quantify how far this socialnetworking site has impacted our global language use, it has contributed in shaping and evolving the language among young people today. As compared to traditional speech and text, it is evident that this platform allow people to communicate according to their interest and in a language form unique only to them.

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