

## **VoIPs: Discord's Effects on Communication and a Comparison to Speech and Text**

### **1. Abstract**

This paper will be investigating Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIPs) as a communication platform with a focus on Discord. It will start off with a brief description of Discord as well as a summary of a recent study on the perception of Discord as a facilitator of conversations and whether it would be an effective communication tool in a classroom setting. Following that, it will analyse the properties of Discord and its impact on communication in terms of openness and the speed of communication. It will also briefly explain how Discord reinforces past modes of communication and its general effects on society as well as language. Finally, Discord will be compared as a medium of communication to text and speech characteristics according to the seven features by David Crystal.

### **2. Introduction**

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIPs), is a type of modern online communication technology that allows individuals to make and receive voice calls over a broadband Internet connection instead of a typical (or analogue) phone line. Some VoIP services (e.g.: WhatsApp, Viber, Skype, etc.) may only allow you to call other individuals using the same service while some others may allow you to call anyone who has a telephone number (Federal Communications Commission, n.d). Most basic plans of different VoIPs are free with premium plans (e.g.: unlimited international talk time) available at a low cost. Released in 2015 as a response to the need for voice-call chat for online collaborative gaming. Discord is known as one of the best VoIP applications used by gamers of Multiplayer Online Games (MOG). It provides free voice, video and text chat app for teens and adults ages thirteen and above and seemingly compatible with any sort of online games. The common uses of Discord include playing games, discussing common interests and games (Hellinga, 2019). It has been recorded that there are 56 million monthly players using Discord and about 963million messages sent a day (Nelly, 2017).

### 3. Summary of relevant literature

A recent study investigated how the use of Discord could serve as a communication platform to facilitate virtual teamwork. This study was done with hopes to be an insightful response to the growing demand for teamwork across various industries and the growing use of online platforms. It was interesting to find that Eighty-four percent of the research's participants thought that Discord was either Excellent or Good, with the majority of those responses being Excellent. The primary reasons for such a response was due to reasons such as how Discord was simple to use and communicate with, how Discord is multi-compatible with their devices, including their phones, allowing an anytime and anywhere communication to happen and finally that they could scroll back through all the messages to find out information they may have missed.

However, it was interesting to find out that in the same study, participants also suggested that Discord has the limitation of being a potential form of distraction as it is an online communication platform mostly targeted at gaming (Lacher & Biehl, 2019).

### 4. Properties of Discord and its effects on communication

**Table 1.2 GameCorp design in terms of texts and word counts**

Subcorpus	Texts (N=)	Words (N=)	Average words per text (N=)
Videogame magazine articles (incl. reader comments)	168	206,546	1229.44
Gamer fora threads	5	15,418	3083.6
Gamer chat threads	6	30,302	5050.33
Live conversations during gameplay ('oral')	5	28,450	5690
<i>Total</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>280,716</i>	<i>Mean average: 3763.34</i>

*Table 1: GameCorp design in terms of texts and word counts*

Firstly, due to the fast-paced, competitive virtual social environment on many of these MOGs. Gamers tend to use fewer words to communicate with one another in an attempt to be quicker in the communication of ideas, strategies and solutions. A study found that during gameplay, players tend to have a much less number of texts, average words per text and total

number of words (seen in the table 1) (Ensslin, 2011). Therefore, the need for a quick response of gamers affects the speed of communication on Discord.

Secondly, due to the need to work in teams in these multiplayer online games, the way gamers communicate may be more open due to the meeting of other gamers online on gaming supported VoIP platforms like Discord. This is support by a study which shows that that strategy gamers have a greater propensity for actively open-minded thinking than non-strategy gamers (Gerber & Scott, 2011). Also, another reason for their openness could be due to the ease in accessibility to Discord's colossal number of servers, communication is varied and it provides individuals with the liberty to join a server that fits what they are comfortable and interested in talking about.

Lastly, the availability and integration of bots on Discord have breached the gap of communication on its platform. Gaming is an interest and activity that does not discriminate nationality, race or language; a colossal variety in demographics. However, the Discord translator on Discord provides gamers and players translation commands, automatic translation of messages on channels for over 100 languages over 10 different locales (Nvu, n.d). The providing of a translation service breaches the gap between speakers of different languages and reduces the idea of linguistics insecurity (how speakers perceive their speech variety as inferior in a variety of other linguistic communities across a variety of different country) (Foo & Tan, 2019) in an individual. Therefore, with such a property of Discord, it eases the flow of communication as there is a reduction in speech barriers.

## **5. General effects of Discord on society**

### **- Community Building**

Firstly, Discord provides a platform for online gamers to seek and be part of a community online. The ease of use and multifeatured-ness of Discord has allowed and encouraged the growth of many online gaming communities. A notable one is the Harbormen. It uses Discord as its platform to communicate aims and objectives for the various games they play and it is a fundamental mechanism in how the group operates. Discord is used by the Harbormen to make announcements, send alerts, vote and discuss issues and future directions of the group, send pressing game updates, and as simple as to communicate with members (Anderson, 2019). It is because of Discord that allows the creation and reinforcement of

social bonds between individuals and current members by enhancing the sense of unity and belonging among the online communities on the Harbormen Discord channel.

- Language Acquisition

Another interesting effect of a gaming centred VoIP like Discord is that it encourages language acquisition. This paper believes that language acquisition is encouraged because there is a common ground that Discord is providing: Multiplayer online gaming communication platform. This claim is supported by a study done on a World of Warcraft (WoW) game chat between an American and an Ukrainian college students to exhibit the idea that L2 learning episodes that occurred naturally during gaming. The analysis showed the two gamers came to a linguistic middle ground first by acknowledging their interest for WoW, and then by taking turns being learners and teachers for the language exchanges in Russian and English (Chik, 2014). Also, language acquisition can possibly happen on VoIPs like Discord simply because it integrates gaming and it has been argued that the ability to stay anonymous in video games and social media has potential to remove social insecurities and enhance communication freely (Anderson, 2019).

- Controversy (alt-right movements)

However, individuals might take advantage of the coverage and accessibility of VoIPs like Discord. VoIPs like Discord may sometime fail to enforce their terms and conditions upon users which encourages the abuse of such platforms. This is seen in the case of increasing use of VoIPs and social media platforms by Alt-right activists. Discord itself was utilised as a tool by a Youtuber under the pseudonym Nikolai Alexander to kickstart and publicise the project: Reconquista Germanica, to invade the internet with coordinated attacks that would spread and far-right propaganda material. Also, due to the sheer colossal size of Discord as a VoIP, Project Reconquista Germanica's server was only taken down in February 2018 after gaining an assembly of around 5000 members (Donovan, Lewis, & Friedberg, 2018). Hence, it is when VoIPs and communication platforms do not moderate its contents and activities that encourage such abuse of its features and platform.

## 6. Effects of Discord on language

Firstly, due to the fast-paced, competitive virtual social environment on many of these MOGs, gamers often use acronyms and modify English words in hopes to communicate faster but effectively enough for their fellow gamers to understand them. Hence, it proposes the idea that VoIPs like Discord promotes the idea of using non-standardised forms of languages (similar to those of texting) and possibly creating a word bank for gamers. This is supported by research that shows that the word/phrase distribution of gamers shows Modified Meanings at 38%, Acronymic contractions at 34%, Newbies at 21%, and Simple Contractions at 7%. Additionally, there seem to be a growing prominence of synonyms but spread across acronyms and words. For example, “PK” means player killing, but the phrase “Player Killing” is also used. This indicates that gamers have a certain amount of choice in selecting words and phrases and that the language characteristics are not fully standardised. This emulates the rules of the English language, from which a majority of the M gamer word bank is created (Bawa, 2018).

Another interesting effect Discord as a gaming centred VoIP has on language is that there is a difference in language use towards veteran players and those who are newer to the game. Newer players struggle with the syntax and the word bank of “game-specific language” and tend to use simple English words to communicate amidst gameplay. One study found that the acquisition of such gaming language would require long term dedication to the game (e.g: number of hours spent on the game and how often does a gamer plays) and of course interest in picking it up (Bawa, 2018). Hence this shows that VoIPs like Discord are able to showcase a difference in the level of proficiency in the game through the type of language use.

Secondly, many VoIPs like Discord features visual ideograms like emojis and bitmap image format like GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format) functions on their platforms. These functions seem to promote the use of visuals as a form of communications instead of actual words. However, with increasingly inventive and more complex use of emojis, alone and with traditional writing alphabets and symbols suggests that emojis may be evolving into something more linguistically significant. A study found that emojis have an emerging syntax (Luu, 2016). For instance one cannot relay the message: “☹☹(Screw you)” the placement of the face emoji cannot be in front of the screw emoji as it would mean “You screw” or just as

how the dog and heart emojis cannot change its place in the sentence of: I♥️🐶(I love Dogs), because if the heart was to be at the end of the sentence then it would act as an object while dogs would be the syntactically wrong verb. Also, on many social media platforms and VoIP chats, it appears that what were once non-linguistic gestures in speech (e.g: flipping the table in frustration or facepalming to show disbelief) have now become gesture-based compounds (GIFs) used in place of actual words on chats. The popularised use of GIFs can be said to be based on a common understanding of these terms within a speech community these phrases could become lexicalized into compounds (Luu, 2015). Hence it is interesting to see how visual ideograms and bitmap images may have a syntax and an ability to replace traditional words in online chats like those on Discord.

### **7. Discord in comparison to the Seven features introduced by Crystal**

A VOIP service such as Discord seems to be exhibiting many similar features in comparison to both speech and text.

This paper would like to propose that Discord is both time-bound and space-bound as the ability to provide both video/voice chat and instant messaging simultaneously for a user.

It is also socially interactive and factually communicative, immediately revisable and repeatedly revisable, and prosaically and graphically rich. This is because through the use of Discord video/voice chat we can get immediate spoken responses, information, and visual reactions from the other member (only video chat). Also, Discord's instant messaging feature is factually communicative as information that is being shared between members can be done by sending him/her files, photos, etc. Lastly, spoken words via Discord's voice or video call can be immediately revisable by saying, corrective phrases like 'sorry, I mean..... instead'.

Another thing about Discord is that whatever is being sent over the instant messaging function can also be immediately corrected (using the edit text function) or deleted entirely, allowing a gamer/member to convey their message more accurately.

Finally, video calling on Discord enables a gamer to see a correspondence's display of emotion and expression as well as is graphically rich depending on the internet connection of all parties. Interestingly, Discord's service can be also be considered speech like to some extent. With its video and voice chat functions, the conversation is instinctive as opposed to messaging a member (e.g: sentence that is typed out is arranged before the text is being sent). Video chats on Discord, provides a relatively close physical face-to-face like conversation; whereby you can see the person you are chatting with just like in real. It should be noted that on such social VoIP conversations are loosely structured as mentioned above, gamers have created shortened forms of words and a word bank to speed up communication between one another, instead of using full standardised sentences/phrases.

### **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Discord provides a greater and almost limitless platform to communicate, relay information, whilst establishing networks between people. Research has also shown interesting evidence of how the nature of a communication platform may give rise to new inventive words in ungrammatical, informal and unstructured language styles. Finally, as this paper has made comparisons of Discord to David Crystal's seven features, it would like to propose due to Discord's multiple features (video and voice call and instant messaging) there are both speech-like and text-like characteristics with the more prominent type of characteristic depending on which function the gamer uses.

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