Utterance-Final Particles in Computer-Mediated Communication

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I. Introduction

With rapid advances in modern technology, computer-mediated communication, or CMC, has established itself as a new mode of human communication in the past few decades. This newly-sprung mode of communication, defined by Herring (1996:1) as "a communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers," is significantly different from both the traditional modes of speaking and writing. First of all, its synchronic aspect in exchanging messages and on-line editorializing may characterize it as similar to speaking; yet, it involves neither face-to-face encounter nor audible signals, both of which essential to the spoken language. On the other hand, the apparently spoken style of its language refrains one from considering it as a form of writing. In fact, CMC is essentially "speaking by writing," intrinsically endowed with the fundamental conflict in its delivering channel and participant intention: performing the interactive function of interpersonal conversation over long distances by the linking of computers, often with a group of participants whose background and identity one has little idea of.

The intrinsic "speaking-by-writing" nature of CMC has attracted attention from researchers of different disciplines. One of the most interesting questions for linguists is its accommodation of the expressive features, which characterize all types of interpersonal communication. The unique context

of CMC renders it impossible for the exchange of non-verbal signals between participants, such as gaze, silence, gestures, facial expressions and intonation contours. Such paralinguistic elements, however, are usually no less powerful in delivering messages than words. Thus, these "missing links" in language expressiveness must somehow be supplemented. But how? How do participants of CMC incorporate the non-verbal elements into such a text-based environment?

Chatroom users have long been reported to demonstrate surprising creativity in their coinage of "network lexis," using punctuation and other symbols available on the keyboard as well as their combinations to convey meaning beyond words. However, it still remains to be resolved as to whether there is any linguistic mechanism internal to the structure of language itself that may be called upon to help fulfill the need of CMC participants in their expression of feelings/emotions and maintenance of interpersonal relations.

This paper thus aims to investigate the use in CMC of one linguistic device uniquely available in the Chinese language system, i.e., the utterance-final particle (henceforth UFP), a category which has generally been assumed to serve the function of conveying the speaker's feelings and attitudes. In what follows, we will compare the frequency rates of UFP occurrences in one specific type of CMC, i.e., the chatroom conversation, and those in face-to-face communication. We will then account for their different distributions in the light of the unique characteristics of CMC, and argue that the extensive use of UFPs helps to achieve the distinct expressiveness of CMC language.

The data in this study come from two major sources: recordings of four face-to-face conversations, and six extracts from chatroom conversations at Kimo websites.[1] The size of the two types of data is calculated in terms of the number of total syllables/characters, since the use of other units such as

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1 Part of the spoken and CMC data are from Ms. 秦微雲 and Ms. 廖婉雯. We would like to extend our appreciation to them for generously sharing their data with us.

IUs or turns may not be equally applicable to the two, owing to the different natures of their modes. Table I and Table II show the relevant information regarding the data.

Table I The Spoken Data

Talk	1	2	3	4	Total
Name of Episode	酸辣湯	買禮物	兒子的數學	陳進興	
Number of Participants	6	5	4	3	18
Number of Syllables	4332	3301	4333	7936	19902
Duration	15'30"	13'50"	16'20"	30'	75'40"

Table II The Chatroom Data

Talk	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Name of Episode	女朋友	陰雨綿綿的夜	Seize the day	青春美少女	網聚	我愛你，但只一生爲期唷	
Number of Participants	19	27	28	10	12	48	145
Number of Characters	1801	2867	1679	916	2190	6478	15225
Duration	60'	60'	30'	30'	60'	90'	330'

II. Some Characteristics of CMC

Since its appearance in the early 1970s, CMC has been examined from various perspectives by linguists with different backgrounds and diverse interests. On the whole, previous research on CMC can be divided into two major areas. One is mainly concerned with the nature of its linguistic traits: Where should CMC be located in the traditional dichotomy between

speech and writing? Does CMC show more resemblance to oral discourse, or is it closer to the written mode? The other camp focuses on its interactional features, attempting to illuminate its unique social contextual factors and the development of its new mode of interpersonal relationship. Results of all these studies help to unveil the characteristics of CMC, as may be seen in the brief review that follows.

2.1 Is CMC Oral or Written Communication?

The distinction between speech and writing has long been a line hard to define. Earlier works addressing this issue often focused on the discussion of lexical density and structural complexity. Drieman, as early as in 1962, reported that written language consists of shorter texts and a more varied vocabulary, while oral description is longer and contains lower ratio of word types. Similarly, Nida (1967) suggested that spoken texts use simpler and more limited vocabulary while written texts contain richer vocabulary. Chafe (1979a), based on the notion of structural complexity, proposed the famous dichotomy of "fragmentation" and "integration" as characterizing the two modes, respectively. Halliday (1979), however, pointed out that both speech and writing can be very complex, and that their complexities tend to be of different kinds: speech has complex sentences with simple words, while writing has complex words in simple sentences. Ochs (1979) attributed Chafe's proposal of the 'integrated' written discourse to the more planning time allowed to the writer and the lack of visibility and absence of extralinguistic factors between writer and audience, suggesting that the differences actually lie between planned vs. unplanned discourse.

Along with the fragmentation-integration contrast, Chafe (1979b) also proposed the dichotomy between "involvement" and "detachment", holding that involvement in speech is characterized by the speaker's monitoring of the communication channel, his emphasis on actions and agents rather than states or objects, his being more personal, and the

"experiential"' nature. Tannen (1984), on the other hand, viewed involvement as reflecting what Goffman (1981) described as "footing", and that the different strategies alleged as growing out of speech and writing are derived from their different kinds of personal involvement.

More recent studies have also found that the different features attributed to speech and writing are by no means inherent to the two modes. Biber (1988), in his book *Variation Across Speech and Writing* (1988), contended that no genre can be absolutely classified under either one of the two modes. The same observation can be applied to CMC language. Collot and Belmore (1996) studied the language used by BBS conversationalists and found that it displays some of the linguistic features often observed in certain forms of writing, and others that are more typical of spoken language. The hybrid nature of CMC language is also confirmed by Yates (1996), who suggested that CMC is neither simply speech-like nor writing-like. On the one hand, CMC is more akin to written discourse in terms of its range of vocabulary and lexical density. On the other hand, CMC resembles speech because it contains high frequency of modality and pronoun use.

Researchers on the linguistic traits of CMC agree that it is not easy to assign a specific textual attribute to this new mode of communication. The tacit assumption seems to be that CMC lies somewhere in between speech and writing. However, as we will find out later, the use of UFPs in chatroom conversation exhibits a distribution pattern that is more "speech-like" even than typical spoken language, largely due to the very special interactional features of this type of communication.

2.2 "Democracy" in CMC

Anyone who visits the chatroom for the first time would be impressed by its atmosphere of freedom and democracy. Since its visitors often do not have any visual contact with each

other, social cues such as appearance, age, race, gender, social economic status, etc., which under normal face-to-face circumstances serve as important reference for aligning the relative positions of participants in their interaction, become unavailable altogether. With these social cues filtered out, participants can usually interact with each other on a more equal standing.

Following from the free and democratic atmosphere of network communication are some unique features that set it distinctly apart from normal face-to-face interaction. Many researchers have found that network communicators tend to behave more uninhibitedly and will usually carry on their talks in a daring or direct manner. Kiesler et al. (1985), for example, reported "flaming" as a common practice in computer-mediated communication and that participants tend to engage in hostile, emotional expression of feeling. They also tend to give more critical evaluation on others or on subjects than they would normally do in face-to-face communication.

Moreover, "uninhibitedness" in CMC conversation is also demonstrated in the closer relationship assumed among strangers. As observed by Smolowe (1995), two people who meet for the first time via computer linkage may share with each other their private affairs, which in normal face-to-face contexts would be possible only between intimate friends. In fact, relationship developed over computer network can be even more intimate. Wilkins (1994) attributes this enhancement of personal intimacy to the spontaneous nature of CMC, which gives participants the feeling that they are close to each other.

Aside from the daring style, direct manner of expression and tendency for self-disclosure, the democratic nature of CMC is also reflected in its unique conversation structure. According to Chang (1999), chatroom users typically exhibit certain conversation deviations. First of all, they often attend to several topics at one time. The "one-topic-one-time" norm generally observed in traditional face-to-face communication apparently collapses here: new topics always emerge when the

old topic is still being discussed. The life cycle of each topic may be long or short, depending on the amount of interest invested on it. Participants do not have to dwell on the same topic, but are rather free to jump from one topic to another, shuffling around and looking for one that interests him most. Thus, abrupt topic change is by no means infrequent. Also, the turn-taking model developed by Sacks et al. (1978) for FFC fails to account for the type of interaction here. In chatroom conversation, there can be more than one person "talking" at the same time. CMC participants do not bother to wait for floor-yielding (i.e. the TRP) signals to get the next turn; and in response to a previous turn, there can be more than one participant competing for "speakership". In a sense, everybody holds the floor at any time. The highly structured sequences or "routines" in face-to-face conversation, which serve to guide a person's normal participation in social interaction are often unobserved. Dispreferred second pairs are far from unusual in CMC; greetings and questions, particularly those issued by unfamiliar visitors, may be ignored; messages that do not specify a specific addressee are often neglected.

To sum up, in the unique environment of network chatroom, where visitors come in and out throughout the whole communication process, the real identity of the participants is often hidden behind thick veils and their relations always in the flux. Consequently, the notions of social distance, power structure, rank of imposition, etc., which figure prominently in face-to-face communication, all need to be reexamined and redefined, and the traditional values of the CP and the PP are often seen to collapse at the face of the "mask" worn by the conversationalists. These characteristics are reflected in the massive use of UFPs in CMC interaction, as will be shown below.

II. Utterance-final Particles in CMC

UFPs in Chinese dialects have long been identified as a

class of words which ypically occur at the end of an utterance to help convey the emotions and/or attitudes of the speaker (Li 1999). Previous studies on UFPs in discourse have found their occurrences to be distinctly different in spoken and written communication. Chen (1990), in her study on cohesion in spoken and written Chinese discourse, argued that UFPs are an important cohesive tie in spoken Chinese, serving to mark the boundaries and signal the type of cohesive relations between/among discourse units. Li (1999), with her focus on the discourse-pragmatic functions of UFPs in Taiwan Min, pointed out that UFPs are scarcely found in formal writing but occur massively in common everyday conversation, and argued that they serve as discourse markers which indicate both textual relations between utterances and speaker attitude toward the addressee.

The use of UFPs in Chinese CMC discourse, however, has not been carefully examined. As pointed out in Section 2.1, CMC language is found to be neither simply speech-like nor writing-like, but lying somewhere in between the two ends, sharing some features of the spoken language and some of the written language. Thus it might be expected that the use of UFPs in CMC discourse would also resemble to a certain extent both speech and writing. However, such expectation is not borne out in our data. Observe the frequency rates of UFPs in our spoken and CMC data as represented in Table III and Table IV, respectively. Table III shows that in our spoken data with a total of 19902 syllables, only 753 UFPs are found. The number of syllables per UFP is roughly 26.43, which means that one UFP is used in every 26.43 words. However, in Table IV we find in the total amount of 15225-character chatroom data as many as 1236 UFPs. The number of characters per UFP drops to about 12.31. In other words, chatroom speakers use one UFP in only every 12.31 characters.

Table III UFPs in the Spoken Data

UFP	Total	Subtotal in each recording				Percentage
		1	2	3	4	
啊/a/ya	254	48	50	59	97	33.73%
了	102	31	15	21	35	13.54%
啦	71	9	13	21	28	9.42%
嗎	64	16	13	7	28	8.50%
喔 /o/yo/oh	59	28	5	5	21	7.84%
吧	49	9	11	4	25	6.51%
嘛	43	6	13	5	19	5.71%
耶/ye/ei	32	8	5	11	8	4.25%
HoN	28	2	25	1	0	3.72%
呢/ne/nei	24	3	6	12	3	3.19%
囉/lo/no	7	2	5	0	0	0.93%
哪/na	15	6	4	5	0	1.99%
Hei	1	0	0	1	0	0.13%
嘿/ni/li	3	0	0	1	2	0.40%
HaN	1	0	0	1	0	0.13%
Total number of UFPs	753	168	165	154	266	100%
Total number of syllables	19902	4332	3301	4333	7936	
Number of Syllables per UFP	26.43	25.7	20.01	28.4	29.8	

Table IV UFPs in the CMC Data

UFP	Total	Subtotal in each recording						Percentage
		1	2	3	4	5	6	

啊/呀/ㄚ/阿/哇	407	27	45	52	13	30	240	
了/ㄌ	160	30	37	22	13	21	37	
嗎/ㄇ	139	12	16	20	6	7	78	
喔/哦/ㄛ	114	21	12	14	4	19	44	
啦/6	109	10	10	15	4	23	47	
呢/ㄋ/勒	101	3	10	9	4	7	68	
吧/捌/ㄅ	59	1	10	3	3	5	37	
喲/唷/呦/ㄡ	40	5	2	3	4	15	11	
耶/ㄟ	34	3	10	10	3	2	6	
囉/嘍	26	5	3	5	0	6	7	
嘛/ㄇ	19	2	0	1	2	2	12	
哩/咧	16	2	1	1	2	10	0	
咩	8	0	0	0	6	2	0	
Ho/ㄏㄡ	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	
噯	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	
呵	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Total number of UFPs	1236	122	156	157	64	149	588	100%
Total number of characters	15225	1801	2867	1679	916	2190	6748	
Number of Characters per UFP	12.31	14.76	18.37	10.69	14.31	14.70	11.48	

The figures from Table III and Table IV thus clearly indicate that in terms of UFP uses, chatroom discourse by no means demonstrates any textual tribute intermediate between

the two modes of speech and writing, but rather exhibits features which are far more drastically "speech-like" than ordinary face-to-face conversation. But why?

A closer look at our CMC data shows that the key lies in the democratic atmosphere and the uninhibited nature of chatroom interaction, which in turn follow from the participants' lack of visual contact with each other. As stated in Section 2.2, chatroom talks typically exhibit certain conversation structure that deviates from both the structural patterns of topic progression and turn-taking rules generally observed by participants in face-to-face interaction. Many of the UFP uses in our CMC data are seen to arise from the need to accommodate such "conversation deviations." First of all, quite a few occurrences of the UFPs 啊/阿/ㄚ, 喲/呦 and 喔/ㄛ in all the six excerpts are found to suffix greetings, forming such expressions as 安安ㄚ and 安安唷, as illustrated in (1):

(1) (Talk 2)

	1	[snu]	DEAR 老婆你的工作是什麼
	2	[豆豆]	~小芸妳這麼晚還沒睡ㄚ!明天要上課ㄇ
	3	[ABC]	人生中想做的事太多，只能考量現實，定出輕重緩急去取捨吧
	4	[落葉知秋]	我想美伊ㄍ決定都會有有得有失ㄅ
	5	[DEAR老婆]	落葉知秋 我知道..所以我會多想的..還好現在只是一個人..否則又得要有人同意
>	6	[小伍]	大家安安ㄚ
>	7	[宿願]	大家安安唷
	8	[落葉知秋] ABC	如果有規則有計劃那就不叫人生ㄌ

In (1), 小伍 and宿願 has just entered the chatroom as the others are actively engaged in the their respective topics, and

they cut in the conversation with their greetings suffixed with the UFPs 丫and 唷. Notice that here the suffixation of these UFPs adds a touch of the speakers' earnest intention to greet the other members in the chatroom, serving as a marker explicitly signaling that the speaker wants to make sure that the message will be received. The use of such an overt marker is obviously motivated by the unique environment of CMC. In a chatroom conversation, where participants do not often observe the turn-taking routines, questions may not get responded and greetings may be ignored altogether. It is by no means infrequent to see visitors who, after several attempts to attract others' attention, still fail to receive any response in a chatroom and thus decide to leave. Thus anyone may cut in at any point of the talk, but he may also stand the risk of being unattended to. In order to successfully join the chat group, one often has to try his best to attract others' attention, and tagging a UFP to one's greeting as one enters the chatroom thus becomes an effective alternative. Since such UFPs as 啊 and 喔 often serve to indicate assertion endorsement and to perform the speech act of reminding, respectively (cf. Hsieh 1991), their attachment to the greeting derives a reading of the speaker's strong intention in sending his greetings to the other participants, thus helping to strengthen his intention to join the chat group. In contrast, such overt signaling is often not necessary in face-to-face interaction, since the speaker's sincerity in sending his greeting to the addressee may securely and effectively be conveyed with such paralinguistic features as gaze, facial expression, gestures and body movement.

Besides greetings, many UFPs in our data are also found when a participant tries very hard to get a response from a certain addressee. A typical example is shown in (2):

(2) (Talk 1) 1 [強] 小佩 給我衛生紙
(5 turns later)
> 2 [小佩] 強 我給你一整包*喔* 接住*呀*.....

(8 turns later)

3 [強] 各位晚安了 我下線了

(2 turns later)

> 4 [小佩] 強，收到我寄給你的衛生紙了嗎?????

(3 turns later)

5 [LU] 強 886[2]

6 [海潮] 強 886

7 [賴皮] 強 886

(4 turns later)

> 8 [小佩] 強)))))))))))) 88***6***

9 [00] 強 強哥掰掰 祝美夢

(2 turns later)

10 [強] 88

11 [阿宗] 強 掰掰囉

(7 turns later)

> 12 [小佩] 強))))))))) 小佩給你信心***喔***

In the foregoing part of the talk, 強 told his net friends about how he had just lost his girl, showing them a crying face and telling them how sad he was. The disclosure of his personal feeling has obviously shortened the distance between 強and the other participants, and many of them are trying to comfort him and show him their concern. Among these people, 小佩 appears to be the most eager in sending 強 her best regards and encouragement. Lines 2, 4, 8 and 12 show that she makes repeated attempts to talk to 強, but fails to get any direct response from him. Notice that 小佩 attaches a UFP to all her sentences, and except for the question particle 嗎 in 4, all the other UFPs are included to add to the force of her sentences. As may be seen in 2 and 12, the attachment of the

2 886 stands for "Bye-Bye 了" in chatroom talks.

UFPs 喔 and 呀 creates an emphatic effect for her statements 我給你一整包*喔* 接住*呀*..... and 小佩給你信心*喔*, as if she was raising her voice, trying to make herself clearly heard by someone in the far distance, since強, who has not provided her with any response, seems to be kept a long distance away from her. In fact, after her failure in getting 強's attention in 2 and 4, 小佩does resort to the expression symbol))))))))) in lines 8 and 12, a symbol which means that the foregoing message has been intensified, i.e., shouted out aloud.

Cases like (2) are by no means scarce in chatroom conversation. Because of itsunique setting, an immediate response in discourse progression is hard to attain, and there are often many people competing for their turn of speakership at the same time. Consequently, delayed response is the norm rather than exception, and non-response is not held as face-threatening. Participants thus often have to resort to some effective devices to remind their chosen addressee that they are still awaiting for a response from him, or that their current statement relates to a foregoing question/statement posed by him a few turns ago. UFPs in Chinese, as observed in Chen (1990), serve as cohesive ties which signal different types of textual relations among utterances in discourse, and thus are best candidates for immediate use to meet the demands of chatroom users. In contrast, in face-to-face communication, turn-taking rules are normally observed and delayed response and non-response are scarce, so the necessity for such UFP uses is greatly reduced.

A third type of situation which tends to motivate extensive UFP use in CMC is when the participants try to establish intimate relations with their net pals. As pointed out in Section 2.2, two strangers who meet for the first time via computer linkage may assume very intimate relationship with each other. On the one hand, the simultaneous nature of network communication makes them feel close to each other. On the other hand, the protection of their thick "mask" helps to remove their fear for

losing face even when rejected by the other party. Thus, examples abound in the data in which chatroom participants flirt even with a total stranger. (3) shows the extensive use of UFPs in this particular context.

(3)(Talk 4)

1 小癡 給Maybe一個熱情的擁抱

(2 turns later)

2 [Maybe] 先聲明喲...我如果又斷線了就不上來了

(5 turns later)

3 [Maybe] 爾雅 一直斷線Y...好討厭咧

4 [安娜] Maybe 你的電腦常當耶

> 5 [小癡] Maybe 不可以~~ 叔叔我沒走 你怎麼能走ㄟ

(6 turns later)

> 6 [爾雅] Maybe...^^不要這樣*咩*...^^ 人家粉想你的...=====➔ 小癡叔叔...呵呵

(31 turns later)

> 7 [小癡] 安娜 呵呵 Maybe是我姪女*啦* 我是她叔叔

> 8 [Maybe] 小癡 你秀逗了*喲*

(4 turns later)

> 9 [Maybe] 安娜 都是你*咩*

> 10 [小癡] Maybe 怎麼這樣說叔叔我*啊*

Example (2) shows that小癡 gives Maybe a warm welcoming hug in line 1 right after Maybe enters the chatroom, and then

goes on with a series of silly talk directed to Maybe, which not only gets responses from Maybe herself but also attracts occasional teasing from other participants, such as 爾雅's comment in line 6. Language used in interaction of this type is often not meaningful at the descriptive level, but it certainly serves to achieve some affective purposes. And it is this kind of expressive function that chatroom talks are seen to serve. Chatroom visitors do not usually intend to engage in any in-depth talk on a serious topic with someone on the net, but simply hope to meet new friends whom they may otherwise have no chance to know, and to further establish some intimate relationship with them. Since UFPs in Chinese serve to explicitly mark the speaker's attitude toward the addressee and indicate to him how the utterance is to be interpreted, they are thus extensively used in chatroom conversation to help fulfill the expressive function.

Finally, frequent use of UFPs is also found in talks where the participants appear to be more critical of or even criticize each other. Just as Kiesler et al. (1985) have accurately observed, "flaming" seems to be a common practice, and use of hostile language may even serve as a strategy for building rapport among participants in a CMC talk. Furthermore, network communicators also show a much higher degree of tolerance over an imposing act. Maybe's statement in line 8 of (3), for example, shows a certain extent of hostility, at least at the surface level, but this only provides 小癡 with a further subtopic for his flirting talk. The excerpt in (4) below illustrates this use of UFPs.

(4) (Talk 2) 1 [小傻] 真是冷清 居然沒人要理啊

(小傻 leaves the room. 8 turns later.)

2 [tintin] 小傻真可憐~~~~~

(6 turns later)

> 3 [落葉知秋] tintin 我看你也差不多*啊*呵呵

4 [tintin] 落葉知秋 我差不多啥???

(12 turns later)

> 5 [落葉知秋] tintin 差不多媒人李*啊*...

(6 turns later)

> 6 [tintin] 小寶~~我還以爲你死ㄌ*ㄋ*~~~

(2 turns later)

7 [落葉知秋] tintin 你ㄅ小寶找你阿

(3 turns later)

8 [tintin] 原來是去把妹妹~~~~~

Example (4) reflects a common turn-taking phenomenon in chatroom conversation, that is, a visitor may not receive any attention from the rest of the people and often may just leave the room, as what 小傻 decides to do in line 1. What is worth noticing here is that tintin's expression of sympathy toward小傻 is followed by the sarcastic comments from落葉知秋 in lines 3 and 5, directly pointing out that tintin her[him]self is far from being in a better position. Such blunt statements are usually to be avoided in our everyday interaction with either friends or strangers, since criticisms of this sort usually threaten the face of both the speaker and the addressee. However, in network communication, where speakers are hidden under their thick mask, expressions even more bold and daring are used and tolerated. And UFPs are often called for in this situation when the speaker wants to strengthen the force of their confrontation with the other party, and elevate the key of their emotional outlet. The suffixation of such UFPs as 啊 and 呢to the statements in lines 3, 5 and 6 serves this expressive function.

While conversation deviations and bold expression of strong emotions are reflected in the massive use of UFPs in our CMC data on the whole, marked differences in UFP use are observed across the different chatroom talks in our CMC data, as shown in Table IV (cf. p. 10). The number of characters per UFP in Talks 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 does not really show significant difference, the figure being 14.76, 10.67, 14.31, 14.70 and 11. 48, respectively. Talk 2, however, exhibits much lower UFP density, with its number of characters per UFP as high as 18.37. What discourse factors could there be that have led to such drastic differences in the frequency rates of UFPs?

A closer look at Talk 2 reveals that the key lies in the participants' common interest in the topic under discussion. Talk 2 started just like the rest of the chatroom talks, with its participants shuffling from one topic to another, trying to find a topic that interested them the most. But as the talk went on, three of the visitors, ABC, DEAR 老婆 and 落葉知秋 began to settle down on the more serious matters such as career planning, economic depression, and what love means for men and women. Example (5) illustrates part of their talk.

(5)	1	[落葉知秋]	Dear老婆　對大多數ㄉ男人來說　在他ㄉ生命中有共多是會比愛情重要
	2	[snu]	再聊什麼
	3	[DEAR 老婆]	很多的事情..工作上的成就..及姻的不定..都是煩心的事
	4	[小毛]	百事可樂 安安
>	5	[ABC]	那...怎麼辦*呢*
	6	[落葉知秋]	Dear老婆　但並不表示全部的男人都是這樣ㄉ

7	[DEAR 老婆]	也還想著再去唸研究所
8	[苗苗]	小毛你好
9	[ABC]	我前一陣子才跟我爸爸聊了不少
10	[DEAR 老婆]	但是也想在現在多工作..

The excerpt in (5) shows that the kind of talk among ABC, DEAR 老婆 and 落葉知秋 differs substantially from ordinary chatroom conversation. The speakers are fully concentrated on their common topic, paying complete attention to what the others have to say, while disregarding any interruption from any outsider. Consequently, they do not have to resort to any linguistic or non-linguistic mechanisms to secure a response from each other. Furthermore, their common interest has also shortened the distance among them, and thus rid them of the need to establish comradeship or rapport through the common practice of bantering or expression of strong emotions. All these features greatly reduce the necessity for UFP use in this particular talk. However, it should noted that the low frequency of UFP occurrences in Talk 2, which is found to lack most characteristics of the CMC talk, further supports our observation that the overall extensive UFP use in typical CMC language indeed arise from its unique interactional features.

Therefore, we may conclude that the exceedingly extensive use of UFPs in CMC interaction originates from its democratic and uninhibited nature, which in turn is created by the unique environment for this mode of communication through the linkage of network. On the one hand, its conversation structure is typically marked with random topic jumps and absence of preference sequences. Such "conversation deviations" demand a more frequent use of cohesive ties to relate, or even regulate the randomly sequenced utterances in CMC discourse, so that a reasonable degree of coherence may

be achieved in order to facilitate smooth progression of the talk. On the other hand, the "mask" uniquely provided in this mode of communication rids the participants of the need to maintain their image or "face", and frees them from many social constraints which they are required to observe in the real life context. Therefore, direct expression of strong emotions is the norm, serious confrontation is not avoided, and intimacy with strangers obtained almost instantaneously—all of which achieved exclusively through the use of written symbols on the screen, without the assistance from any paralinguistic cues. The category of UFPs in the Chinese structure itself thus offers a very important resource, serving both as cohesive ties that help achieve textual cohesion and coherence, and as overt markers of speaker emotions and attitudes.

III. Implication for Further Investigation

In recent years, the nature of CMC interaction has become a hot issue, and different aspects of this new mode of communication has been unveiled. An interesting perspective to take in CMC study is to look at how certain linguistic features manifest themselves in this unique environment; and, furthermore, how the uninhibited nature of CMC may interact with certain part of the language itself and thus help shape its structure. This paper has presented an overall picture of UFP use in CMC, and it has also provided an account for the massive occurrence of these discourse markers based on the characteristics of CMC interaction. Many questions related to UFPs in CMC, however, are still left unanswered. Is it possible that CMC users may develop some discourse markers of a similar sort to meet the strong demand for textual cohesion and expression of the complicated participant feelings and relations? What can we learn from the linguistic features displayed in CMC discourse about the interaction between language structure and language use? The answers to these questions await results from further investigation.

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