Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World
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Naomi Baron’s book Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World is an important book for parents and educators alike. The book offers insight into how and why the current college-age generation use computer-mediated communication (CMC) platforms and social networking sites such as Instant Messaging, Text Messaging, Facebook, and MySpace. Baron (2008) argues that these new forms of communication are having "profound impacts upon both the linguistic and social dimensions of human interactions" (Baron, 2008, p. 29). In each chapter, the author investigates different aspects of online and mobile forms of communication and she discusses the impacts of these technologies on our language, social interactions, and identity construction.

Always On is presented such that the book can be read in individual chapters or as a whole book. In the first three chapters, Baron (2008) provides an overview of the book. She discusses the concept of being "always on" in our modern world with its abundance of communication technologies. In addition to providing an historical overview of the terminology that is relevant to CMC technologies and social networking sites, such as Multi-User Dungeons/Dimensions (MUDs), Listservs, Text Messaging, Instant Messaging (IM), Blogs, Second Life, MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube, the author describes the difference between synchronous (real time) and
asynchronous (not occurring at the same time) as well as one-to-one (intended for a single person) and one-to-many (intended for a larger audience). Her description of these myriad CMC platforms and social networking sites presents the reader with an understanding of when and why the college students use each of these different platforms. For example, since most college students have accounts on Facebook, they can create a persona with this asynchronous and one-to-many platform that has a significant impact on their social interactions.

In addition to providing an overview of CMC platforms in the first three chapters, Baron (2008) points out that there are two important changes that email and its descendants are having upon language. Namely, CMC technology allows us to have an increased amount of control over when and with whom we interact. The author describes this phenomenon as controlling the "volume" of our social interactions. Since adults and college students alike are now able to engage in "discourse management" through the increased use of CMC platforms such as using certain ring tones to distinguish callers or checking the phone number with caller ID before answering the phone, we are becoming language czars with increased control over our conversations. Baron (2008) asks the important question: "as technology multiplies these possibilities, and as social practices begin shifting to exploit these new technologies for interpersonal 'volume' control, are social relationships themselves affected?" (Baron, 2008, p.6). Throughout the book, she returns to this question and her answer is resoundingly affirmative.

The second transformation that has occurred as a result of email and its descendants is the quality and quantity of writing in our modern society. Baron (2008) pointedly asks: "Is the sheer fact that we are replacing so much of our spoken interaction with written exchanges gradually eroding a public sense that the quality of our writing matters?" (Baron, 2008, p.6). Baron (2008) explains that we are "flooding the scriptorium" with an abundance of Instant and Text Messages. As a result, we are unable to distinguish the important from the unimportant and the great works from the so-called vapor text. Baron (2008) warns that, unless we learn to regulate our current language use, we will have difficulty understanding each other and the standardized forms of our written language will be lost. In the middle chapters of the book, Baron (2008) provides empirical data on the uses of CMC platforms by the current college-age generation in an effort to further our understanding of the standardized uses of these technologies.
In chapters four through seven, Baron (2008) describes the research that she has conducted on CMC platforms, specifically Instant Messaging, Test Messaging, and Facebook. In chapter four, Baron (2008) describes her 2003 study on Instant Messaging (IM) in which the author explored the ways that undergraduates (or very recent graduates) use IM with their friends. The central question of the study: Is IM more like spoken or written language? Throughout the chapter, Baron (2008) investigates the ways in which IM imitates spoken language and the ways in which IM imitates written language. She provides conversational analysis of her IM data in a score sheet that compares IM with face-to-face speech and with conventional writing in terms of general discourse scaffolding, lexical issues, and utterance breaks. In this study, Baron (2008) discovers that IM resembles speech in terms of general discourse scaffolding and utterance breaks but it differs from face-to-face speech in terms of lexical issues. As a result of her study, Baron (2008) acknowledges that IM is more a combination of spoken and written language rather than just spoken language.

Chapter five investigates how college students use IM and Facebook as a platform for self-expression. She explores the notion of "presentation of self" as presented by the sociologist Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1969). In his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1969) argues that people present themselves as if they were actors. According to Goffman (1969), we present ourselves as introverted, extroverted, shy, vulnerable, or funny in terms of how we want to appear to others. Baron (2008) explains that Facebook and MySpace (both asynchronous and one-to-many CMC platforms) provide students with the opportunity to control their presentation of self. In a study conducted on the spring of 2006, Baron (2008) explores how college students at American University use Facebook to "construct and conduct social interactions with peers" (Baron, 2008, p.87). With the increased control of our presentation of self, the author finds that people have more opportunities to manage the terms of their interpersonal linguistic engagements thus controlling the "volume" on their social interactions.

In chapter seven, Baron (2008) discusses a research project that she conducted to investigate the similarities and differences between texting and Instant Messaging. Baron (2008) explains the reasoning behind her research: "Why compare these media? If parents and teachers are concerned that IM and now texting are destroying young people’s grasp over the written word, we need firm information on the linguistic features of their messages. Is
texting ruinous but not IM? Or vice versa" (Baron, 2008, p. 151). Her comparison of the two CMC platforms included message length, the use of emoticons, the use of abbreviations, and the use of acronyms. Her findings about the linguistic features of both Instant Messaging and texting were interesting, especially the use of lexical shortenings. While many parents and teachers think that the use of acronyms such as ttyl (talk to you later) and btw (by the way) are ubiquitous in texting and Instant Messaging, Baron (2008) discovered that students used lexical shortenings less than 1% of the time. Her research discovery is relevant since, as Baron (2008) points out throughout the book, it is often the case that we blame technology for the downfall of written and spoken language in our society. However, pointing the finger at computer-mediated communication technologies may be a case of blaming the messenger rather than considering the underlying causes of the changes that are taking place in the ways that we communicate.

In the final three chapters of the book, Baron (2008) points out that we have turned into the "Whatever" generation. She states, "A convergence of forces is engendering a new attitude towards speech and writing. We might dub this attitude 'linguistic whateverism'. Its primary manifestation is a marked indifference to the need for consistency in linguistic usage" (Baron, 2008, p. 169). As a result, our spoken and written communication is in a state of flux. However, we need to stop blaming computers for the changes in the ways that we use our language. Instead, we should consider the shifting societal views that have occurred concurrent with the increased use of CMC technologies. The author also explains that along with the proliferation of online and mobile language use, we need to create spoken and written norms to regulate the use of these new platforms. In conclusion, Baron (2008) states that we have the ultimate control in our online and mobile world: we can switch the technologies off.

There is no doubt that Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World is an important book. It provides the reader with empirical data on the uses of computer-mediated communication platforms by college students and it reminds us that we have control over the ways that we use theses online and mobile technologies.

References