Introduction

The term “discourse” has been successfully, though very differently, used by different researchers, each defining it against their different disciplinary backgrounds, methodologies of research as well as objects of investigations. Thus, it comes as no surprise that “discourse” has been a driving force in such seemingly distant disciplines as philosophy, rhetoric, anthropology, text linguistics, sociology, psychology, cognitive sciences, literary studies, as well as in pragmatics and applied linguistics. Consequently, one is not surprised that the notion of “discourse” as applied in Discourse Analysis (DA), an interdisciplinary approach viewing “discourse” either as designating ways of representing certain aspects of social life (i.e. distinguishing various political discourses) but also designating the broadly semiotic elements of social life (language as well as visual semiosis, body language, etc.), has recently also been an increasingly popular framework among those researching human communication over and within various electronic media. Understanding “discourse” as a form of “semiosis” – demonstrating ability to produce meanings in a process involving various semiotic signs such as verbal language, visual cues in a form of elements of interface, has had a particular appeal to Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) researchers. This work draws on the experience of research within the field and uses “discourse” as framework to study the subtle mechanisms of manipulating signs in interaction on a message board – a specific type of CMC environment where technological and situational factors equally contribute to creating a highly interdiscursive environment. “Discourse” seems then a very appropriate umbrella term and an interdisciplinary framework which allows covering the heterogeneous and ephemeral character of online communication.

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The purpose of this short paper is to investigate the discourse features as demonstrated on an internet message board and indicate the unusual components which are exhibited within the realm of a particular type of message board – an image board. Apart from linguistic specificity of the medium in question, aspects of computer-mediated discourse are studied with focus on the contextually and discursively significant factors (i.e. technical elements and properties of the environment) against the more traditionally defined and accepted notions of context and reference as derived from discourse analysis. What results from this is a picture of an inevitably interdiscursive environment demanding an equal focus on linguistic as well as contextual elements.

Despite the undeniably different backgrounds of each of the aforementioned fields of study, we can assume that at least some of the emergent sub-disciplines taking on “discourse” as framework for their analyses share some dimensions. Certain aspects of some of these dimensions also lend themselves to investigation in this study in the context of interactive digital discourse of the message board. Nevertheless, different disciplines involved in discourse analysis shape not only the meaning of the term “discourse” but also its scope and form. They can sometimes take “discourse” far from studying purely linguistic aspects, shifting focus in the direction of ideas and philosophies rather than language. Thus none of the views or definitions of “discourse” can be perceived as ultimately “right”.

Traditional Discourse Analysis (DA) and Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) vs. Computer-mediated Discourse (CMD)

While principles and methods of DA as applied by most linguistic studies perceive discourse through the lens of pragmatics that investigates the actual language use, this work revolves around unusual discourse, where meaning is transferred in a very specific manner and by a fairly new medium. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to indicate how certain assumptions on discourse are being displayed in the specific environment of message board communication. Selected pragmatic principles of discourse analysis are evaluated to indicate how some of the assumptions about discourse can be strictly obeyed or flouted, while still remaining meaningful. In other words, this paper gives examples of unusual: context, referential expressions, various cohesive devices, coherence, elements of cooperative principle and politeness (or lack of those that contribute additional meaning) to display the unique character of discourse in this specific environment. For this sake I draw on Brown


and Yule’s idea of DA as a combination of analytic approach and contextual considerations that belong mainly to “pragmatics”\textsuperscript{28} and the idea of discourse as a “pragmatic process of meaning negotiation”\textsuperscript{29}. Also, some implications from the field of Communication Studies and some insights offered by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that relates specific meanings with social groups are taken into account\textsuperscript{30}.

Whereas typically Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) studies have been defined as encompassing mostly sociological, technical and psychological aspects of communication between humans as mediated over networked computers, Computer-mediated Discourse (CMD) refers to a much broader range of phenomena with focus on language use and language itself\textsuperscript{31}. Furthermore, later research, drawing on : McLuhan’s view of a growing role of the medium in shaping the message, started to recognize medium effects on CMD rather than simply speak of them as a form of either spoken or written form of communication taking part in virtual environment\textsuperscript{32}.

One of the largely disputed aspects of CMC and thus CMD\textsuperscript{33}, have also been the different modes in which communication within computer networks takes place, namely the breakdown of CMC as either being of “synchronous” or “asynchronous” type\textsuperscript{34}. However, as the type of medium in question in this study is a message board, typically categorized as falling into the asynchronous type, therefore, CMD is defined here as of one-way, largely text-based mode with written form as a primary carrier of information accompanied by some symbolic use of graphics. However, drawing on Herring’s broader view of more recent technological developments within CMC, this work also encompasses technological as well as social influences on CMC, with some of the most important factors shaping CMD presented in a short list\textsuperscript{35}.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{H. Widdowson H., Text, Context, Pretext: Critical Issues in Discourse Analysis, Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2004, p. 8.}
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{R. Wodak, M. Meyer, Critical Discourse Analysis..., p. 6.}
\textsuperscript{33} Further in this work both of these terms are used as synonymous due to negligible differences in this work and shared view on communication as “human interaction carried over networked computers.”
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{S. C. Herring, Computer-mediated..., p. 615.}
Emergent media in recent years have largely challenged earlier assumptions in CMC studies, making it necessary to abandon a simple approach where factors M1 and M2 used to play a pivotal role (exemplified earlier), M3 (explaining how long the message can be kept online) and M4 (how long a single message can get). The choice of channels (M5) is also wider now as we tend to send text messages and supplement them with other multimedia, all of which are easily available as a “click of a button”. Modern systems have also introduced more subtle changes in such areas as providing communication parties with various levels of anonymity (M6) and modifying the message content and/or form by either filtering them (M8)\textsuperscript{36}, quoting (M9) or allowing users to easily limit the range of recipients (M7).\textsuperscript{37} Finally, it leaves no doubts that sequencing of messages in the turn-taking continuum, as well as their format (i.e. graphical representation) play a crucial role in the way such practices as addressivity, referencing, and floor taking in general function.

All of the above mentioned factors should be taken into account when approaching any analysis of CMD in modern systems. However, as a proper, thus comprehensive, overview of CMD should comprise not only the medium factors, a faceted classification of social and situational factors is further presented and taken into consideration.

\textsuperscript{36} Similar mechanisms are applied to either allow or block advertising content on the Internet, and supervise employees or children’s online activity on an ongoing basis.

\textsuperscript{37} This technique has served a basis for most modern social networks where we can set up several levels (not just recipients) at which we can communicate selectively different messages.
This research also makes reference to the above eight situational factors which, equally to the earlier mentioned medium factors, contribute to interaction within any CMD environment, affecting linguistic and interactional aspects, as well as shaping the message content and many other aspects. Consequently, in order to fully cover the purely linguistic related aspects we need to draw on a following framework developed for analysis of text-language aspects, namely Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Typography, spelling, word choice, sentence structure, message organization, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Meaning of symbols, words, utterances exchanges, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Turn-taking, topic development, back-channels, repairs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social function</td>
<td>Identity markers, humor and play, face management, conflict, use and abuse of power, norm articulation and enforcement, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure2: Social/situational factors of CMC

Figure3: Discourse analysis phenomena exhibited in CMC

38 Ibidem.
39 Ibidem.
In the above division, drawing on the earlier discussed approaches to CMD, we can see how different research perspectives view various elements, most of which are exhibited in CMC environment in a different way from this of more traditionally accepted in CDA studies. Some of the crucial characteristics specific to CMC environments, thus to CMDA, are discussed further in this work with focus on the environment in question – discussion board. It is therefore necessary to at least give basic characteristics of the specific system of discussion board.

Medium variables in imageboard CMD

Different CMC systems encourage different discursive practices, therefore in order to investigate CMD as it is exhibited on the type of discussion board in question in this paper – imageboard, it is of high importance to first outline its basic characteristics. For this purpose, two different threads from 4chan.org board (/b/ - random and /int/ - international) are examined for existence of discursive phenomena of context, meaning and reference. Selected medium factors (see Figure 1) as well as situational factors (see Figure 2) are reviewed in order to ascertain the specific elements characterizing CMD on imageboard of 4chan.org.

4chan.org is an imageboard, which is a type of message board (based on the idea of a classic bulletin board) where text-based communication is accompanied or quite often replaced by posting of pictures (generally related to anime, manga, and popular culture) and their discussion (see Figure 4 for 4chan.org starting page).

“We can easily assume that in terms of CMD the discourse of 4chan.org imageboard is primarily shaped by the technological specificity of the medium of web-based message board as well as unique situational factors that make up context and meaning creation.

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40 Because of the obvious limitations of length of this paper it is assumed that the idea of Internet forum and bulletin board are known to the reader, therefore, only necessary technical details unique to the imageboard system of 4chan.org are explained.

41 The statement is a brief characteristics of the system by the 4chan.org administrator – “moot”, delivered upon entering 4chan’s FAQ page. See http://4chan.org/faq (01.02.2013).
Unlike in most traditional message boards, in an imageboard every thread starts with a message that is a combination of an image and text. A typical message carries information that from the perspective of CMD shapes the exchange of meanings.

The poster of the message in Figure 5 remains anonymous. This feature, further discussed in more detail, in most CMC systems poses a serious problem in communication as it inevitably raises referential problems, thus leading to turn-taking problems. However, an imageboard system assigns each message a unique number, therefore, despite the fact that only a small number of users carry nicknames, messages can be referred to with a number (written in Arabic numeral...
system). In Figure 5 a user refers to an earlier post numbered 1111919 (the reference is also signaled by “>>” mark) which is also a hyperlink he may use to click through to track the particular message. For a fragment of an original message to be quoted in a reply, users can make use of “>” sign to differentiate between their own reply and a quoted part. However, whereas referring to the whole message is done automatically after clicking a number of a particular selected post, the process of quoting is done manually by copying and pasting portions of text. Users may in fact use “>” to address the supposed meaning of the whole post that they extracted from the message or even paraphrase its elements.

Anonymous user in Figure 6 that posted a comment no. 1111938 did not actually quote the message above that he referred to. By means of quoting signaled by “>”, the user quoted a portion of text, paraphrased it, and applied his own knowledge and values to the original message. The quoted part includes “Greece” and “Japan”, whereas the rest of the signaled quotation is derived from the meaning of the previous message (Japan being as significant as Greece) and applied knowledge and values (Greece is referred to as “the niggers of Europe”). On the part of linguistic forms, the poster of message 1111938 used deixis to place his utterance within the continuum of the discourse here. Presence and personal attitude were signaled here by the person deixis (in a form of pronoun “I”) and referred to the content of preceding, quoted message using expression “that”. However, technological features of 4chan, allow users to make coherent, meaningful references without deixis or endophoric/exophoric relations:

In the exchange above (Figure 7 and Figure 8) from /b/ board, the poster of the message 231243454 (Figure 8) gave a nickname “newfag” (designating a person new to the board) to the poster of the message 231240054 (Figure 7). The reference was only signaled by “>>” function, and the content of the message can only be

42 Gender remains unknown in most imageboards. Unless a user discloses it in some way, the interface does not offer any cues as to what sex a certain user is. Consequently, in this paper it is assumed, for the sake of consistency, in such cases to use masculine 'he' rather than some 'broken' forms of dual-gender marke like 's/he' or 'she/he'.

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understood in relation to the external context of the whole board that resides outside of the exchange and which is shaped by situational factors (analyzed further in the paper).

Figure 9: Sample post from /int/ board

Figure 9 shows a post from /int/ board – a board dedicated to discussing foreign language and culture issues. The sender (Anonymous) posts an image of country flags followed by a textual request directed at other users and a template of questions to be answered by other users. It is obligatory for a post initiating a new thread to contain an image, whereas others when replying to this message can choose if they wish for their message to also follow dual-channel mode (i.e. image and text) or either of the channels – text or image. In the following examples (Figure 10 and Figure 11) two users opted for different solutions, each applying a different strategy in their replies.

Figure 10
User in Figure 10 used a photograph (actually it is a movable type of photograph in GIF format which allows for a couple of frames to be packed in one picture, thus acting as a short movie) of a man making a “thumbs-up gesture” and a twisted face (in GIF version). This message is later backed up with text channel message leaving no doubts that the user wishes to express his agreement with an earlier message 9231395 in the thread to which the reply makes a reference.

Unlike Figure 10, a user in Figure 11 uses text channel as an exclusive message carrier. However, he tries to ridicule the 9231023’s claim of Poland being the country with the best weather. He does so by excessively replicating an onomatopoeic form of laugh (HUE...HUA). What is more, he uses capital letters which also in message boards, just like in most part of the internet, is perceived as a raised voice or even shouting, thus regarded as offensive and undesirable. However, in this imageboard discussion the final aspect seems to be disregarded by most participants. In addition, it is worth noting that this user is identified as sending his message from Poland and as such his comment and its excessive emphasis may be treated not as offensive towards the people of Poland but rather ironic and self-deprecating.

In addition to the above mentioned strategies of replying to a message with either an image (even a movable one), a text or both of these channels combined in one message, participants of imageboard discussions quite often employ graphics and pictures as a reply, comment or content of message initiating a new thread. These, especially in case of 4chan.org, are quite often the so called “memes” — images carrying or referring to an idea easily transferable in a given group, resulting in the identification of the group of users. As CMC facilitates word-of-mouth transmission various fads and sensations spread rapidly.

\[43\] /int/ board is the only one in which participants’ geographical affiliation is revealed in a form of country’s flag next to the date of publication and user’s login name.

\[44\] A concept of meme will be considered closer further in this work.
User in Figure 12 ridicules 9231383’s claim of Japan or Israel as allegedly the top countries in respect of educational level. For this purpose he uses a popular meme – an agog face.

![Meme reaction faces](http://fancythought.blogspot.com/2010/12/tumblr-faces.html)

The choice of this particular “face meme” does not only have its graphic expressive load but is a deliberate expressive in-group action on the user's part.

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as incorporating memes in messages is clearly a social-identification practice as many users refer to a particular word, phrase or idea by means of a particular meme. The fact that in 4chan images are message carriers makes this type of CMD a particularly convenient form of expression, social identification, and the potential of the choice of channels of communication gives user the functionalities and power of expression which are either not exerted in such a way in other places on the internet or they are not seen as socially identifiable.

Figure 14 is an example of an image use which is distinct from that of Figure 10–Figure 12. This post comes from an /int/ board (International) where thread-initiating posts must obligatorily start with an image, i.e. you cannot choose to post the first message with just text as content. However, unlike in Figure 10–Figure 12, the visual aid of image carrying message “Where is the best place to hide a dead body?” in Figure 14 is of different character as the image carries a text message itself so it is a seemingly dual channel message, which in fact covers just one channel – the text based one.

Many of the 4chan imageboard messages exhibit one more feature shaping CMD in this environment in a very unusual way, namely its seemingly asynchronous character. Most research assumes that bulletin boards and other types of message boards have to necessarily fall in the category of asynchronous mode of communication, with messages composed and retrieved at different times. However, 4chan, as a highly popular site with a high daily message count seems at times like synchronous mode of communication, with new messages pushing older ones to expire a lot faster than one might expect it to happen in a message board. It is not unusual for a thread to run up more than a 100 replies in less than 20 minutes or shorter. In fact one of the threads extracted from /b/ consisted of 122 messages posted in 29 minutes, thus an average delay between every comment was 23 seconds. This results in a high turnover of the “top ranked threads”, as each new message “bumps” the thread to keep it visible on the first page, thus prevents the

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47 At the time of writing this paper, ranked 899 popular website in the world and 414 in the US by Alexa Web Information. See www.alexa.com (as of 01.02.2013).
most popular ones from expiring as new visitors see the most popular threads upon entering 4chan’s homepage (see Figure 4). At the same time, threads not receiving attention quickly die out and are soon removed by the system, unless users “bump” them again which is a common practice in order to “bring some threads back to life”.

The short lifespan of threads is crucial for CMD at 4chan, as quick exchanges enforce messages to be short and brief. However, it is not uncommon for a lengthy message to appear as a thread opening, only to be followed by some shorter comment messages just like in the following Figure.

**Figure 15**

Except for the basic activity of “bumping” threads by simply adding content to them, users can also take active role in CMD at 4chan by filtering threads. They do so by replying to them but without adding the attribute of “bump”, thus deliberately performing the so called action of “saging”. This filtering activity clearly shows the users' choices in the subjects (threads) and plays a major role in shaping users' behaviours, as each contributor can apply value to a conversation of choice. Consequently, they are each equally empowered by the system to decide on which discussions are worthwhile, and therefore deserve “a bump”, and which should receive “sage”.

48 However, each board has a certain bump limit. If the limit is reached, the thread descents through the pages on the board and eventually, gets deleted by the system. Threads are also limited in number by the boards (160 for /int/, 240 for /b/). They can disappear quickly if the new ones exceed the number of available threads per board. They are not archived by the system, thus there is no possibility to refer back to the topics left “unbumped” and thus expired.
The above mentioned medium factors undoubtedly influence CMD at 4chan and evoke certain meanings. However, as they are mostly concerned with the aspects of CMDA, they are concerned primarily with the technological aspects of the medium, and therefore, missing on what interlocutors know and believe, and disregard the meanings embedded in the context of communication that are interrelated with rules and regularities displayed in the message board. Those factors present social and situational features hypothesized in CMD discussed further in close-up.

Situational variables in CMD on imageboard

In this part we are going to draw on the faceted classification of situational factors, which suggests that the particular mode of CMC is influenced by the social context, and the context of situation. On 4chan imageboard, the situational factors evoke specific meanings extracted from the presupposition pool which consists of background knowledge of the interlocutors, bounded by situation and previously completed discourses.

The structure of 4chan presents interesting data from the perspective of discursive features, such as the number of participants, as well as the very interactional issues that stem from this fact. Communication is conducted on “many-to-many” basis, hence the exchanges are between many users at the same time. This necessarily causes difficulties in tracking participation structure as exemplified in Figure 16. The following comments were posted within time of 16 seconds, thus presumably different users contributed to the exchange. Message 231240430 refers to 231240319, and other two posts refer to the question uttered by a message initiating the thread (see Figure 14 “What is the best place to hide a body?”). The factor that plays a major role here is the degree of anonymity.

Technical characteristics of 4chan encourage anonymous posts as there is no obligatory registration process, so users do not use nicknames and the distinction between particular users’ posts can only be made by means of “tripcode”. A tripcode is a unique code generated from the user's nickname (if one is provided). However, the usage of tripcode and nicknames is poorly represented on 4chan as most users tend to post anonymously, which clearly turns out to be a referential problem. However, “anons” – as anonymous posters are called, also form a basis of 4chan context and culture.

The concept of “anon” forms a contextual feature of 4chan that makes it stand out from other message boards, which do not provide such level of anonymity.

49 S. C. Herring, A Faceted Classification...
50 The stats, as reported by 4chan.org website engine script itself, are impressive: Total Posts: 1,190,073,865; Current Users: 115,854; Active Content: 103 GB (as of 01.02.2013). However, there does not seem to be a reliable source on the total number of participants as the data is only representative of a limited recent period and changes with messages expiring and users coming and leaving as lack of obligation to log in makes impossible to track in a reliable way the actual total number of users.
Anonymity is a largely appreciated feature on 4chan and a major factor contributing to the content and form of messages. It encourages disinhibition, which in turn makes users feel safe and free to use a particular word, phrase or image and remain unpunished. It has become a meme of its own, regarding a group of users widespread on 4chan, that acts not only as a part of the whole Internet community, but is also involved in real-life activities such as “Project Chanology”\textsuperscript{51}.

![Figure 16](image.png)

Both exchanges in Figure 17 as well as Figure 16 give an idea as to what extent the disinhibition that 4chan allows shapes the exchanges and CMD within this system.

First message in Figure 17 contains an insult (“Now please kindly go fuck yourself!”), which uses an otherwise polite introductory structure, followed by an offensive phrase (“fuck yourself”). Despite the fact that the other messages, including 465877290, are equally offensive, a user replying in a post 465877875 ignores the otherwise flaming replies\textsuperscript{52}. Rather than that he refers to one of them specifically, and makes a reference to his original post (see Figure 15) by reprimanding author of post 465877290 allegedly “his son” (as he refers to him “dad”, drawing on the initial message of this thread).

\textsuperscript{51} Masked users organized a protest against the Church of Scientology. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Chanology (01.02.2013).

\textsuperscript{52} Flaming is another aspect of communication on the Internet that is mainly related to anonymity. Users are encouraged by anonymity to post insults, irrelevant posts or similar content which may be referred to as “flaming”. Flaming on 4chan, in comparison to other boards and, more generally, modes of CMD, is additionally empowered by the degree of anonymity on which the board operates.
This confusion of posts, each spaced in time by just a couple of seconds to minutes, is occasionally twined with messages containing memes (465876532 uses “ponies meme” also referred to earlier in Figure 15) and some other abstract references (occasional reference to “pasta”). This seemingly jumbled exchange forms a basis of most part of 4chan communication, full of situational variables, which only outwardly can be seen as puzzling and incomprehensible, however, for the 4chan regulars they seem to be a clear marker of social belonging as reported by one of the participants of this thread in Figure 18.
Apart from the structure of the exchanges on the board, information on the factors influential for CMD can also be derived from demographics and supposed identities of the 4chan community participants. However, the reliability of user provided information is questionable in principle.

The example of post in Figure 15 where the user claimed to have a son he cared for can be interpreted as true or as a made-up identity for the purpose of the topic. Such claims, as it was mentioned earlier, cannot be considered as ultimately true or false, because of the degree of anonymity. However, some insight is provided by the speaker's usage of the English language (namely proficiency) and the proficiency with CMC and technologies, which in terms of 4chan users is a lot broader than in most of other CMC systems. Users have to know how the board operates, hence be acquainted with terms such as “tripcode”, “Internet meme”, “saging”, “bumping” and other mechanisms which are not present in other modes such as chats or instant messaging systems.

The requirements towards users in CMD of 4chan are also visible when analyzed through the lens of the situational factor of topic and norms. Topic can function both on the level of the whole imageboard and particular threads. The topic of the whole group may vary depending on the board that is analysed. 4chan.org site, consists of various sub-boards that revolve around certain topics. Each board has a different letter or abbreviation assigned to it for referential purposes and accessibility (for instance, /b/ or /int/ as previously used in this paper). Boards are dived according to the channels that can be observed.

Although 4chan allows a considerable amount of freedom in terms of published content, the Rules page, accessible from the main page, covers 14 general rules of participation, which apply to all boards unless otherwise noted. Apart from these, each board is supplemented with another set of rules that apply particularly to the given board. Rules of participation on 4chan display a considerable amount of relevant information in terms of the content of discourse. Most of the general rules are popular in other modes of CMC, such as those concerning illegal content, spam, flooding, advertising and exploiting the 4chan system. Interestingly though, one of the rules provides interesting information on 4chan's context:

“3. Do not post the following outside of /b/: Trolls, flames, racism, off-topic replies, uncalled for catchphrases, macro image replies, indecipherable text (example: "lol u tk him 2da bar|?") anthropomorphic ("furry"), grotesque ("guro"), or lol/shota pornography.”

53 See 4chan.org's main website https://www.4chan.org/ for a complete list of boards.
54 See https://www.4chan.org/rules (01.02.2013).
Indeed, board /b/ - Random allows users to post offensive comments, off-topics, replies limited to visual channel; involve in flames and write: in an indecipherable manner. Moreover, other general rules do not apply to /b/. Thus, posts are not required to represent “quality”, while comments on 4chan’s policies, impersonating staff members, and using bots (scripts that automatically reply or post new threads) are allowed. In this sense, /b/ presents no features of most of the public boards available.

On the other hand, /int/ requires users to be respectful and disallows any racist comments, off topic replies and other activities forbidden by the general use. However, in practice, analyzed threads from /b/ and /int/ treated both general rules and board-dependent rules quite differently. In the above examples in Figure 19 and Figure 20 both messages violate general rule and a board-dependent rule. Both messages also contained racist comments (“nigger”) and insulting phrases (“massive faggot”) that eventually resulted in a “flame”.

In Figure 21, the transparent meaning would imply that the message is against the global rule, because of the linguistic features which are forbidden on /int/. However, the rule regarding quality of posts was obeyed as the comment consisted of an “Internet meme” (defined earlier in this paper) which is allowed in the context of language of the 4chan imageboard.
Figure 21

Code, and norms of language are the major factors that shape the unusual discourse of this message board. An example above, without the knowledge about the context of 4chan and background knowledge in terms of Internet memes, may seem difficult to understand. The meaning however, becomes transparent in the context. The suffix “.jpg” is derived from the popular image filetype. In this sense, the original sentence might have been, for instance: “what the fuck am I reading?” (“wtf” is a common abbreviation in many modes). However, the filename form suggests that user made in fact use of an Internet meme.

Figure 22

This reaction image implies that the user does not believe what he is reading. To arrive at the same interpretation as the author of the post in Figure 21, thus to understand the intended meaning, user has to extract information regarding computer technology (image filetype), information about a particular meme (here – reaction image) and its usage in context from the presupposition pool.

Memes are created and acknowledged dynamically, there are no rules for qualifying a catch-phrase or an image as a meme. A meme can occur in every thread, but it has to be approved by the community to become embedded in the context and, eventually, a widespread phenomena. Apart form Internet memes, 4chan displays...
different usages of language variety. In general terms, language in this mode is similar
to other modes of CMC, thus participants make extensive use of abbreviations -
“wtf”, “lol”, emoticons - “xD” (smiling) and other contextualization cues that can
signal particular activity. However 4chan's discourse also consists of linguistic forms
that are characteristic only for 4chan community. A popular concept includes
neologism with “-fag” suffix.

Situational factors discussed above, present many different features of context
that shape CMD on 4chan. Some of the factors are transparent (the structure of
participation) and some are visible only when meaning is inferred from the
presupposition pool (Internet memes, language variety). Situational factors account
for the complexity and enacted meanings in 4chan's discourse.

Conclusion

4chan imageboard is a site that displays many different discursive features in
terms of context and meaning. The mode of CMD in the case of 4chan, allows users to
present certain behaviors, which they can communicate on different channels of
choice. Interlocutors are encouraged to post anonymously, which gives them
a possibility to speak freely, mainly without consequences in the real life. High rate of
anonymity also includes distinctive referential techniques that users will use during
the exchanges. The rules are treated freely by both users and members of 4chan staff,
thus communication often contains racist comments, insults and flaming. Users are
allowed to impersonate others, fake their identities and write in an incomprehensible way. The understanding of the context, relies not only on the
background knowledge about the topics (threads) of discussion, but also significant
knowledge about technological and cultural features of the Internet (Internet
memes) is required.

The above mentioned features, in the lens of medium and situational factors of
CMD and discourse analysis, prove that 4chan differs not only from face-to-face or
written communication, but also from other modes of electronic discourses. It is, in
this sense, unusual as it allows users to behave in a way that in most contexts would
be considered as inappropriate or even illegal.