

The convergence of language in online communities

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When a set of individuals converge on an online space to interact over time, they begin to create a culture in that space. In the construction of this culture, a shared sense of the symbols, language, and beliefs also begins to emerge, and the environment through design and/or through content will begin to reflect those symbols, language, and beliefs. This work aims to explore how one of these aspects, language, begins to converge on the words that make the culture distinct from other cultures, and the dynamics behind that process as a function of various structural and contextual aspects of the culture. Previous experiments have established strong support for the creation of coherent culture in decentralized social networks similar to online spaces (4), while qualitative research has shown remarkable consistency in the language and an emergence of a social identity (3). This work turns to the currently largest forum on the Internet, Reddit.com, and argues that the Reddit's distinct sub-forums or subreddits is a structural element to the social network that allows for the creation of clearly marcatd cultures that are distinct from one another, beyond the background similarity of the general Reddit culture. This work considers a random sample of subreddits, defines a simple metric for identifying the terms most distinct to that subreddit over the course of the subreddit's currently observed lifetime, and defines several other structural and contextual variables about the subreddits. The work then analyzes this data and shows a quick adoption of the terms that ultimately come to be most unique to the space, and relatively quick stability in the amount of usage those terms receive.

Potential Papers:

1. Mnemonic convergence in a social network: Collective memory and extended influence
2. Towards Modelling Language Innovation Acceptance in Online Social Networks
3. Common voice: Analysis of behavior modification and content convergence in a popular online community
4. The spontaneous emergence of conventions: An experimental study of social evolution
5. Personally relevant vs. nationally relevant memories: An intergenerational examination of World War II memories across and within Belgian French-speaking families
6. Remembering stories together: Social contagion and the moderating influence of disagreements in conversations