Searching for Safe Text
Transfers on to the Infobahn

Rita Pasqualini

This dissertation is presented for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Murdoch University
2003
I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution

Rita Pasqualini
Abstract

“Searching for safe text” is the main title of the dissertation, and also refers to the process involved in writing (and reading) it.

“Transfers on to the Infobahn” is the subtitle, which applies the guiding metaphor of movement to the central concept of transfer, used to explain potentially unsafe text, and to its application in cyberspace, seen as a further step from off-line experiences.

The research is on difficulties in interaction associated with differences in background languages and cultures, with an increasingly narrow focus on trans-cultural computer-mediated communication using written text, mainly in English. The thesis investigates whether and how forms of linguistic interference, particularly negative transfers, lead to unsafe text and serious misunderstandings, which negatively affect interactions.

Aims of the project include increased awareness of the characteristics and problems of both media and messages, and promotion of basic skills and tools to recognise, resolve, reduce and prevent such misunderstandings, to supplement broadly applicable (trans-)linguistic and transcultural communication capabilities. For this research I have collected, analysed, evaluated and compared many relevant examples, which are mostly compatible with online settings, to illustrate problems and promote approaches to their resolution. The most serious outcomes are in areas which impact on basic human needs and values, such as life, liberty and self-esteem, and involving the notion of face, also in the context of linguistic conventions of politeness.

This work brings a lifelong interest in forms of transfer between different languages to the new and rapidly evolving arena of computer-mediated communication, with primary concern for interaction difficulties involving native and non-native users of a supposedly ‘common’ language. Attention to polyglots, though not exclusive, intends to highlight the often ignored issues of differences in background languages, particularly within the wide and varied English-speaking world. The challenges range from ethical concerns for equity, access and diversity in multicultural societies to economic needs for competitiveness and effectiveness in the international arena.
Preface

Searching for safe text is about recognising where words and thoughts come from, and linguacultural diversity in what is expected and accepted in communication. At the start of the dissertation, this preface offers a practical and possibly interactive demonstration of the central process, and could be titled ‘Read me first (please)’.\(^1\)

Conventions for prefatory matter provide a valuable opportunity for exercising the above skills, for both the author of this text, who does not like using the first person singular, although told it is advisable (should I?) and those who read it, whom I wish I could address in the second person, as ‘dear reader’ seems a safe and pleasant option.

The item chosen for practice is the dedication (something I do for the first time) of this work to my aunt, discussed below and inviting introspective reactions.

The custom of authors to include thanks to family in the acknowledgments, and to dedicate written work to someone who is nearest and dearest, seems widespread, possibly universal, and certainly acceptable in English-language contexts. Such a choice, made by someone with an Italian family name,\(^2\) could also be attributed to cultural, even more than linguistic, background and values, and thus what is expected by and about each side would lead to mutually acceptable outcomes and explanations of how and why I decided to follow the practice, or where that text is ‘coming from’.

However, there are more specific and substantive reasons, as the thesis considers the individual background as the source or place where words and thoughts come from, and the family of origin plays an important role in its development, particularly in terms of linguistic forms of expression. More precisely, language acquisition and learning start at home and school, and I wish to credit a family member as my first literacy teacher (although my appreciation at the time may have been limited).

The choice is also a tribute to mastery of communication skills that would serve in trans-cultural contexts as well as in the classroom, from the ‘elementary’ level up.\(^3\)

---

\(^1\) This refers to a book on the effect of text conventions in computer-mediated communication (Read me first! a style guide for the computer industry, 1996).

\(^2\) The choice of language in the dedication confirms that my personal background corresponds to what the name suggests, whereas such links can be misleading when marriage changes a woman’s name. The rules, conventions, options and re/actions in this matter vary considerably in time and space.

\(^3\) Primary school is called in Italy ‘scuola elementare’, where teachers are ‘maestri’.
Other family members have also been teachers, including the few surviving ones of my parents’ generation, and this heritage is the only claim I have to pedagogic skills. Thus aunt M. deserves the first place among the many people who contributed to my lifelong search for safe text, with my parents and other relatives, friends, colleagues and countless people who could not be named, even if I had the memory and space.\(^4\)

In the academic context of this dissertation, acknowledgments go to people who helped me in the research project, listed in the main categories of supervisors (the most important, from any point of view), experts, academic and other supporters, often in reverse chronological order (a recurrent feature in my work). I thank and praise Dr. Nado Aveling, my principal supervisor, within the school of Education; Professors Horst Ruthrof, co-supervisor \textit{ex-aequo}, in Humanities and particularly Philosophy; Duane Varan, in Interactive Media, who accepted to supervise me in the first year and led me to a PhD question I could live with happily ever after; Alex Main, in Psychology, originally contacted in view of supervision, who has remained interested in my project and shared precious inputs; Michael O’Toole, my very first contact with Murdoch University, who provided help also in the final stages; David Andrich, who (aside from his administrative role) invited me to a course for research students. I also remember the late Dr Gentilli, among those who had assisted me in Perth, before I joined Murdoch University.

Many other experts have generously offered their time and attention for specific consultations, and while several are cited with their inputs, there have been more general types of collaboration, for example through seminars and groups, also involving fellow students, and I express here my thanks for the contributions of people who chose anonymity, and for inputs that permeate my work, as if by osmosis.

Support for academic work takes many forms, and staff of various Divisions and offices provided both encouragement and help. This is also linked to the two main sources of financial support, a Murdoch University Research Studentship from late 2000, and the IMAGO Multimedia scholarship it replaced, received from mid-1998. According to conventions, the last words of thanks return to a more personal level, addressed to somebody who made available, \textit{inter alia}, a home computer. \textit{Dank je!}

\(^4\) People’s names, along with forms of address, are important items for safe text, but linguacultural and personal preferences and skills in their use differ considerably.
Table of contents

Abstract...................................................................................................................ii
Preface...................................................................................................................iii

Introduction ..........................................................................................................1
Overview ...............................................................................................................4

Part One    Evidence ........................................................................................8

Chapter 1    Questioning ..................................................................................10
Method ...............................................................................................................13
Positions ..........................................................................................................17
Relations ...........................................................................................................22
Approaches .......................................................................................................25

Chapter 2    Un SAFE text ...............................................................................31
Tales of sails .....................................................................................................35
Mis-taking measures ......................................................................................40
Map co-ordination ..........................................................................................44
Interpreting commands ..................................................................................45
Findings ............................................................................................................49

Chapter 3    Sources ......................................................................................51
Documents .......................................................................................................53
Studies ............................................................................................................62

Chapter 4    Precedents ...............................................................................72
Freudian bliss ....................................................................................................77
What slips show .............................................................................................81
Paths ...............................................................................................................86
The ‘right’ thing ...............................................................................................91
**Introduction**

This dissertation discusses and demonstrates the process of identifying troublesome items in transcultural communication, on and off-line, so as to limit their negative effects on interaction, particularly when based on written text, using English.

Searching for safe text aims at facilitating interaction, or at least explaining why miscommunication occurs and how serious it could become, by noting problems in written messages and proposing acceptable versions. Transfers on to the Infobahn are a narrow and novel focus, but the processes involved have much wider applications.

Looking (out) for unsafe text factors leads to a questioning attitude, which in itself contributes to solving problems, even without exact/ing answers. This is illustrated in the dissertation, and specified in the ‘tool kit’ offered in it as a ‘way out’ of trouble.

This Introduction presents the overall theme of the thesis, noting its nature, aims, and context, in relation to areas of investigation that only partly overlap the specific field to be covered, identified below as a gap in research. A concise illustration of what is meant by words in the title is followed by an outline of the dissertation, highlighting the main points, to guide readers along the successive chapters, grouped in three parts.

The following is a brief mention of the disciplines and approaches that can contribute to searching for safe text, aimed mainly to point out a gap, in relation to the specific domain covered by the dissertation. Attention to unwanted negative outcomes in interaction leads to pragmatics as a major perspective, and the search for inputs along the communication process also includes consideration of de/faults in discourse, syntax, morphology and grapho-phonetics. The framework cannot be limited to a ‘linguistics of inter-cultural communication’ (see for example Clyne, 1994), but refers, among others, to semiology, philosophy, cognitive and social psychology.

The topic of ‘safe text’ on the Infobahn combines a number of approaches that have been largely ignored within the respective areas of study, from the older traditions of linguistics to the more recent concerns for computer-mediated communication (CMC). With the notable exception of conferences on cultural attitudes towards technology and communication (CATaC), the literature review has yielded hardly any studies focused on the interface between CMC and CaLD (cultural and linguistic diversity), and this need is increasingly felt, as noted at the end of Ch.3 on Sources.
Beyond the technical aspect of character sets (cf. Part Two), specific linguistic forms are rarely noted among the culturally-based differences that frustrate, rather than facilitate, world-wide communication and understanding on-line, and even off-line. Very few (if any) studies provide examples of conflict or difficulties in interaction associated with differences in language use, particularly transfers from elements in the background. The latter mechanism or process is a central factor in the thesis, and can also be seen in the use of new technologies and genres of communication. Conversely, studies of conflict and its resolution tend to pay scant attention to situations where people ‘do not speak the same language’ in verifiable but often subtle ways. Miscommunication involves strong affective and behavioural components, probably more than does ‘normal’ or successful communication, where cognitive aspects may appear to predominate. Searching for safe text needs to recognise social and psychological factors, linked to matters of manners, form or face, in contrast to matters of fact, and these main groups relate to the three elements above (affect, behaviour, cognition), associated with the mnemonic ‘ABC’.

With the aim of including people of diverse backgrounds among users of written text, priority is given in the thesis to Australia and the geo-cultural region around it. Examples are mostly in English, for a number of practical reasons, but also because its role in transcultural communication between non-native users remains notable, although it is no longer ‘the’ language of the computer (cf. Crystal, 2001, 2002).

Next is a brief review of the main terms used in the title, as a way to practise what is preached, since a protective measure against unsafe text and related troubles is to clarify the intended meaning of one’s words, particularly when they may reach people from diverse linguistic and cultural (in short, linguacultural) backgrounds. To avoid confusion of use and mention, of things with their names, signs with their objects, the terms as such appear in (single) quotation marks, where a “quotation names its insides” (Quine, 1987: 231). As confusion is a negative unwanted outcome, it should be noted that “another use of quotation marks, called sneer quotes or scare quotes” (ibid., p.234) is frequent in the thesis (again in the form of single inverted commas), at least when terms first appear. “It has the force of use without prejudice” (ibid.), stressing linguacultural relativity, and contributes to safer text use.

1 Double inverted commas introduce quoted passages. Quine notes also the use of italics to name expressions, but in the thesis it is mainly reserved to items in foreign languages.
“Searching for safe text” is the main title of the dissertation, which is the product of my research, but it also describes the latter as process. “Transfers on to the Infobahn” is used as subtitle, and refers to the main focus and finding of the thesis, as the term is also used to explain the general mechanism leading to unsafe text.

- ‘Search/ing’ refers to a process, with safe/r text as the intended outcome or goal. The term applies more commonly to on-line exploration than academic research, highlighting the link between them in the subject, object and nature of this thesis.
- The word ‘safe’ illustrates its own opposite, as it can have connotations that appear both negative and unwanted, and are not intended here (such as excessive caution, considered as the opposite of creativity). Safety is a relative notion, and the evaluation of risks and costs depends in each case on context and outcomes.
- The meaning of ‘text’ in the thesis is general, yet compatible with the specific focus on written computer-mediated communication (CMC). Text, as what is meant by that word, is therefore seen as a tool of communication, which may also lead to mis-communication, when it carries the risk of unwanted negative consequences, and therefore is not safe.
- ‘Transfer/s’, as a general function of life and learning, including more specific linguistic forms, can be applied to the context privileged in the investigation.
- The choice of ‘Infobahn’, rather than ‘Internet’, introduces an element of CaLD (cultural and linguistic diversity) and a wider range of application and metaphors, suitable for the consideration of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as an arena for the application of findings of the thesis, rather than its exclusive focus.

Additional terms are introduced with ‘statements of intent’ in the text or footnotes, but a central pair is added here, as the two concepts have already appeared in the Preface. The roles of author and interpreter of text are used in the thesis to indicate the source / producer / sender and the receivers/ recipients of text and messages. Both extend from writer / reader of text ‘only’ to speaker / listener (and composer / viewer) of audio-visual materials, and interpretation is seen as a key to mis-/communication.

---

2 The narrowest focus would be Text Only, the name of the most elementary file format in word-processing. Text ‘only’ (or ‘mainly’) would refer to materials where written text, in contrast to audio-visual (A/V) components, is exclusive (or predominant), independently of the visual formatting.

3 See Goffman (1981: 167) for the functions of “animator” and “principal” as well as author (of speech), combined here. In written forms, author includes compiler, translator, editor, or copyist, and this simplification refers to the person/s perceived as responsible for encoding what a given text is meant to mean, including errors in production leading to unsafe text.
Overview

The parts of this thesis are respectively titled “Evidence”, “Process” and “Tracking”. Each has an overall introduction, to highlight common and complementary elements that link the chapters within it, thus expanding and developing the functions performed by this Introduction in relation to the entire dissertation.

Part One relates to the evidence of interaction difficulties associated with differences in linguistic expression, through a combination of examples and of criteria for the selection and analysis of what counts as ‘evidence’ in searching for safe text. The main issues and points of method are presented in the first chapter, “Questioning”, along with the subject, scope, approaches, and position of the thesis and its author. Examples include unsafe text use by experts, to stress that ‘nobody is perfect’, and forms of power are considered, as responsibility for safe text goes with ‘mastery’ in terms of context, even more than of the ‘code’ or language. In short, noblesse oblige.

The second chapter provides a first investigation of what makes text un/safe, and includes a few cases with the most serious type of outcomes. Such exemplary mis-communications illustrate how far wrong text can go, even at a ‘simple’ binary level. To facilitate understanding of the complex mechanisms involved, what may appear or feel ‘wrong’ is presented with a holistic and interdisciplinary approach.

The subsequent discussion of sources in terms of documents and studies includes in Ch.3 a literature review, mainly of the latter. Among materials that are available, the choice of what appears useful and desirable is related to the main goals of the thesis. In particular, recognition of the ubiquity of mis-communication, and of the role context plays in risky text outcomes, help to focus on the most relevant aspects.

Criteria and guidelines for the use of examples and corpora inform the definitions and descriptions of genres like anecdotes, where a key factor in selection is any form of introspection about the perceived outcomes of problematic interactions. Most inputs to the thesis are safely chosen from the public domain, as any study and analysis of ‘error’ incurs the risk of causing offence or embarrassment, which would limit ethical clearance (cf. also Goffman, 1981:197-8). The additional ingredient of humour, used to highlight key factors and risks, is also relevant to interaction (cf. Mulkay, 1988). Thus Freud’s study of jokes supplements his work on ‘slips’, the main precedent for the investigation of potentially unsafe text, its effects, possible causes or motives.
In Ch.4, suggestions from Freudiana follow short considerations about other ‘guiding lights’ in relevant domains, including spatial metaphors about relations with them.

The central component of the thesis (Part Two) deals with the general process of transfer, specifically on to the Infobahn, and three interrelated chapters highlight key issues associated with un/safe text. The exploration of transfer as crucial factor is the topic of Ch.5, which also looks at translation as a more explicit form of the process. The linguacultural background of people provides unmarked or default options for communication, and differences often remain implicit, leading to difficulties in interaction. Focus on cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) is an important thesis choice, and Ch.6 considers its on-line presence and perception, with concern for equity goals of better access and understanding. While the use of (and focus on) English is largely a matter of practical circumstances, it also affects text outcomes.

Life-long learning relies on positive transfer, but must take into account the danger of interference, in choosing what may be produced, perceived, projected, or rejected, in relation to written text on-line. More generally, aspects of communication are now being transferred on to the Infobahn (Ch.7), as new technologies spread across different geo-cultural, socio-economic, age and gender groups. Thus computer-mediated communication is considered in relation to its predecessors, to evaluate the applicability of findings from other forms of text, and any changes in safety factors.

Tracking and sorting (out) the problems is the theme of Part Three, where examples of mis-communication are considered on the basis of negative effects related to linguistic causes, following a reverse chain or ‘causeffectway’ of inputs/outputs.

One major case is singled out for detailed analysis in Ch.8, and findings related to ‘suspects’ are supported by complementary examples. More general types of dangerous ‘crossings’ are presented in Ch.9, and the sanctions associated with them in Ch.10, along with more samples. A review points to some way/s out in Ch.11, including steps or skills in a ‘tool kit’, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

---

4 This priority reflects the current policy aims of (student) equity, access and diversity, whereby criteria of fairness and impartiality apply to the reduction of obstacles and promotion of acceptance for all.

5 For example, re/actions associated with ‘knowledge’ and ‘power’ lack the visual and phonetic aspects of the French nouns ‘connaissance’ and ‘puissance’, much less the additional role of verbs, found in ‘savoir’ and ‘pouvoir’. Oddly, in English the latter only has defective verb equivalents (‘can / may’).
The research is oriented to outcomes of dynamic processes, rather than inputs, and to holistic perceptions of complex interactions, rather than re/strict/ed typologies. Thus the main categories of contexts, used as general framework and support for the thesis, include matters of face and manners, related to affective and behavioural aspects of communication, along with matters of fact, more closely linked to cognition.

Concepts and definitions take into account cultural and linguistic sensitivity about ‘standards’ and variations, including taboos. Embarrassment is a second-level problem, from such unintended and negative outcomes as (apparent) offence, confusion, ignorance, or failure, linked to any participant or aspect of the situation.

Consideration of what is (not) expected or accepted at various levels of text, with priority based on frequency and seriousness of outcomes, can lead to a ‘most (un)wanted’ list among suspects, by noting some recurrent items and relating them to computer-mediated communication using written text (only or mainly, as noted). The aim is to find priorities for prevention and repair, that is pro-active measures to prevent or repair damage, restore respect and save ‘face’ in word-based interactions.

To deal with identified difficulties based on differences, basic safety measures are recommended, such as prudence in (re)action, and clarification of what is meant (both as meaning and as intent). A specific ‘tool kit’ refers to a series of steps or skills, through retracing mis-communication processes ‘in reverse’ from the outcome. Raised mutual awareness is advised to spell out agreements, or acknowledge bias, in expectations related to standards, rules, and conventions. Besides questions to the source of messages, avenues towards answers include various resources, and the Infobahn is specifically considered as locus of problems and solutions in text safety.

A summary looks at main ways to search for safe/r text and remedial (inter-) action. Limits and wider uses of the research outputs are noted, in terms of applicability in time and space. Outcomes, connections, and possible remedies are noted among the conclusions. The study issues a global warning, and considerations on world-wide developments include linguistic and technological options, from dangerous fallacies to problem-solving supports. Looking at what may happen next, projections and proposals for progress include specific recommendations, offered for consideration.

---

6 The two ‘non-standard’ terms, adopted in this dissertation, derive from Burton (1990) and his approach to conflict resolution, and O'Sullivan (1994:117) on communicating between cultures.
As the shape of an hourglass is used to illustrate the approach followed in the dissertation, its two sides can be noted here. The narrow focus of searching for safe text is on communication in writing, mediated by computer, displaying difficulties associated with differences in background linguacultures, with potentially serious negative unwanted outcomes. The wider side can easily go beyond the contingent choice of English, and the key points apply to most components of communication, including their specific equivalents in computer-mediated contexts. The hourglass can widen in several ways, also because the selection process has included only a limited sample of the many illustrations available for types and aspects of un/safe text. In each case, brief references to individual stories or anecdotes can lead to full versions, mostly available in the sources cited.

The main aim of the thesis is to promote safe-text approaches in the course of any word-based interaction, including this one. The invitation is to read this dissertation as it has been written, searching for safe text and positive outcomes in theory and practice. In discussing and evaluating linguistic forms, an Italian idiom appears to fit: ‘val più la pratica che la grammatica’, meaning that practice is worth more (is more valid /useful) than grammar, or more generally theory and abstract rules.
Part One Evidence

Following the Introduction, this first part of the dissertation looks at ‘evidence’ used in searching for safe text, from a range of complementary points of view. These are developed in several chapters, which alternate the consideration of examples with criteria for their selection, sources and precedents for their study. Beginning with the substantive questions that lead to searching for safe text, Ch.1 presents approaches and positions of the thesis and its author, relevant to overall matters of method. As reference, a set of more general questions (What, Why, When, How, Where, Who, or Kipling’s six “serving-men”) brings attention to the research cycle. A first point is to establish aims and scope of the thesis in terms of subject (what: searching for safe text), but also relates to ‘subjects’ (who), the people involved in a variety of roles in transcultural computer-mediated communication, using written text. Focus on why and how choices are made and lead to results is a feature of searching for safe text, common to the discussion of the subject and the production of the dissertation.

Exemplary mis-communications are examined in Ch.2, where key cases of unsafe text are presented in pairs, to provide a measure of ‘control’ for specific aspects when searching for safe text. In the similar tales of sails associated with the deaths of Aegeus and Tristan, as in other disasters, two variables relevant to unsafe text are the context, which relates to the potential seriousness of negative unintended outcomes, and the text function of ‘command’. The latter is linked to communication, and has an impact in terms of actions and processes, whereby discrepancies from what is intended become apparent. The analysis of specific cases includes to some extent all the six questions, as descriptions use aspects of time and space (when and where), and explanations (why) focus on the process (how) of text-based mis-communication.

The last two questions or concerns guide the presentation of sources in Ch.3, in particular how they are selected and why certain criteria are applied. This refers to documents from which examples have been considered, in particular the main corpora of anecdotes, but also to studies, as the literature review extends and deepens the earlier mention of types of works relevant to searching for safe text.

---

7 Control groups are used in empirical quantitative research, where statistical differences are measured between otherwise matching groups, but the concept can apply to this exploratory investigation of text.
Some authors, particularly of studies that can also provide documents, function as ‘guiding lights’ are singled out in Ch.4 as precedents (in some cases going far back in time) relevant to how aspects of unsafe text can be examined and dealt with. The cases chosen for Ch.2 have readily identifiable and major negative outcomes, and their in-depth investigation leads on to safety concerns applicable whenever an interaction difficulty arises from text. Participants are encouraged to consider the possibility that something could be wrong with text production, transmission, or reception, as divergence between the intended messages and their results might be caused by ‘noise’ of various types, including a difference between the background linguaculture/s of interpreters and those of authors. This attention to cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) adds a key element to studies of mis-communication, such as the century-old works on ‘Freudian slips’, discussed in Ch.4 as a key precedent.

Conversely, the focus on interaction difficulties limits the range of ‘errors’ noted, in comparison to those listed in most language-related research. The thesis considers mis-communication that negatively affects interaction, leading to conflict and other damages or trouble (at least potential), but not intentionally. In addition, the problems relate to the form of linguistic expression, and a clarification of the intended meaning commonly leads to their solution. The identification of suitable evidence and frameworks for its analysis requires several considerations of method (Ch.1) and sources (Ch.3), which are pursued in further detail within Ch.4.

To facilitate review and comparison of cases, details of the context are provided in most of the sources used, particularly anecdotes found in periodical publications. A key qualitative feature in searching for safe text is the nature of negative effects of problematic communication on human interaction, and thus text is called unsafe, risky or dangerous if it can lead to problems or conflicts that are unintended, but also serious, at least in the opinion of participants (including observers or reporters), as demonstrated by their response. Interaction difficulties can be defined also through the use of a range of terms, such as ‘trouble’ and ‘embarrassment’, and the latter reaction applies both to cases of ‘simple’ confusion, regarding matters of fact, and to situations where the use of language is seen as offensive, here called matters of face or manners. In most cases, self-esteem is undermined, mainly in terms of competence and acceptance, linked to basic needs. Affective and behavioural factors become more important than cognitive ones, hence the mnemonic is ‘ABC’, in order of priority.
Chapter 1  

Questioning

To go progressively into the heart of the research, this chapter presents the questions leading to the key issues under investigation, followed by reference points concerning the selection of examples and the overall approach to their analysis. The subsequent discussion of matters of method includes the key elements that inform my work, linked through the research cycle of looking at each situation, looking for problems, for explanations and solutions, then looking at the situation resulting from any action.8

In many ways, this thesis is also an example of the material it investigates, and most aspects of the method/s used in the research process are also relevant to the writing and reading of the resulting dissertation. So are most recommendations for safer text practices in transcultural communication, intended as further outcomes of the research project, as the steps followed in my own research partly match the approaches listed in Ch.11 as ‘tool kit’. A central factor concerns the position of the thesis and its author, also as aspects of background to be considered when searching for safe text.

The thesis studies forms of transcultural communication through written text, compatible with the use of electronic text transmission, to see whether and how (far) interaction difficulties appear associated with differences or diversity in background languages and cultures (in short, linguacultures). A key point is the relativity of any ‘standard/s’, and the biased basis for negative evaluations of ‘deviant’ text use.9

The focus is on outcomes that appear ‘unsafe’ (i.e. problematic, or unsuccessful), through an exploration of text-based factors and patterns of mis-communication, searching for the ways in which friction or collision tend to start and can be stopped. In particular, any biased approach to communication, based on specific linguacultural backgrounds, is criticised for compounding inequalities in interaction. Issues of stigma, often associated with ‘shibboleths’,10 and more generally power imbalances, also receive consideration, complementary to the concern for differences and diversity in the ‘mastery’ (both proficiency and control) of linguistic and technological tools.

---

8 The visual bias, obvious in my choice of metaphors, is linked to my learning style and background. My first University degree was in Architecture, and research work had to do with (spatial) planning.

9 The use of ‘scare quotes’ around terms that convey negative evaluations aims to avoid prejudice.

10 Originally a test word. Hodge & Kress note under “Accent, difference, community” (1988: 83) the biblical “bloody incident”, discussed later in relation to the ‘shibboleth schema’ (Hopper, 1986). It refers to word use that reveals otherness and brings punishment. An example could be enforcement of the difference between the terms ‘thesis’ and ‘dissertation’, which I also use as stylistic variations.
To re/present the wider sources and applicability of the research, along with the chosen limits of its central attention, the image of an hourglass shape is used for ‘getting to the point’ and going beyond it.\(^{11}\) Such an approach is taken in narrowing the scope from (mis-)communication in general to the specific thesis focus, and widening to further fields, through the series of questions below. Issues considered in the dissertation start from the broadest formulation, successively adding details.\(^{12}\)

- What happens, and what can go wrong, when people communicate?
- What outcomes, inputs and mechanisms are involved in serious cases of miscommunication, particularly involving written forms of text?
- What are the potentially dangerous types of misunderstanding in transcultural communication, when people belonging to one language and culture (or linguaculture) need to communicate with people belonging to others?
- How are such interaction problems related to interference (or negative transfer) from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds?
- How do problems in the production of written messages, their reception, interpretation and perception apply to computer-mediated communication (CMC)?
- What lessons can be learned from the specific examples under investigation, and how could the findings be applied, from CMC using Text Only to more general areas, such as audio-visual communication, on- and off-line?

The substantive questions above are presented in formal terms, specifically ending with a ‘?’ and starting with an interrogative pronoun, adjective or adverb. This type of words, with w/h as initials, have been grouped in simple verses by a famous author:

```
I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who. (Kipling, 1978:66)\(^{13}\)
```

The service function of the sextet should be noted in respect of the thesis, and relates to expectations concerning text-based interactions, as the conventional wisdom is that the key ‘w/h-’ questions above will find some answer in the beginning stages.

---

\(^{11}\) The functional details of the metaphor are illustrated later, in relation to Kipling’s “serving-men”.

\(^{12}\) The points develop those noted by Kirkpatrick (1995), after a ‘transfer’ from talk to text. An earlier source investigating such issues is Sanders (1986:137), considered in chapters 6 and 9.

\(^{13}\) Since I did not grow up with English, stories ‘for little children’ reached my ears later in life, and my reaction to the item below is along ‘mature-age’ trans-cultural lines.
Here the pages introducing Part One have illustrated its structure, showing how each of the four chapters deals with some of the questions, and the previous Overview has related every part and chapter to the development of the argument in the dissertation.

Kipling’s “serving-men” are also highly relevant in terms of situated cognition, particularly in dealing with the bias of any researcher or reporter, also in the role of text author and interpreter. Not only who interacts with whom, through and about text, but also when, and where, affect what (or in other terms, which meaning) could be intended, and presumed un/safe, in searching for safe text and in the thesis.

The dissertation aims to cover as adequately as possible the range of ‘w/h-’ questions regarding the process of searching for safe text, but their relation to specific answers is not always bi-univocal, as noted further in the section on Approaches. Focus on ‘what, how and why’ under ‘method’ (as advised by J. Hobson, p.c., 2002) leads to something comparable to a research or planning cycle, where experience and hypotheses are linked by observation, analysis and intervention.

The selective process noted about the questions is applied to key features of communication, along the lines summarised below. Findings associated with the resulting ‘narrow point of the hourglass’ may also have wider applications, and vice-versa, as illustrated throughout the thesis by examples from a range of sources.

- Messages being communicated are expected to be mainly overt, and discrepancies in the perceived intentions and expected outcomes should derive accidentally from linguacultural aspects, rather than being part of a deliberate plot or plan.
- Codes or languages are limited to ‘natural’ (or rather ‘cultural’) ones: the thesis context leads mainly to forms of English. Acquisition, teaching and learning of languages affect their use; language status and related attitudes are also relevant.
- Signals and channels of communication include necessarily a written version, preferably retrievable through computers, not needing audio-visual (A/V) inputs.
- Noise is mainly equated with linguistic difficulties, selected on the basis of outcomes. Besides ‘slips’ and other errors that authors recognize as such, there can be interference or negative transfer from linguacultural background.

14 The use of terms from the code model (message, code, signal, channel, noise) can extend to the inferential model, as proposed by relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).
Further items relate to angles or points of view, going beyond ‘disciplines’, but linked to the times and places ‘crossed’ by the author (discussed further down), and a few ‘axioms’, or key views which inform the dissertation, are briefly listed below.

- Searching for safe text is an exercise in social research, and does not claim any objectivity (cf. Myrdal, 1969). There is no ‘object’, either inanimate or living, unlike in (some) research within the physical and natural sciences, but constructs.
- Society creates the context in which people perform, and there are no ‘natural’ forms to fulfil needs and functions, from ‘higher’ ones to basic bodily survival.
- Language and languages, like conflicts or other human interactions, are therefore social constructs, not ‘objects’ under investigation. These can be subject/object of study, but unavoidably interact with (participant) observers (cf. Garfinkel, 1967).
- Words, in particular, are construct(ing) elements that influence and reflect ‘views’ and perception. Hence it is important to clarify what one means, or intends (at least for key words) rather than assume understanding and universality of ‘ideas’.

One of the difficulties in recognising the above is that culture becomes ‘second nature’, and thus ‘automatic’ reactions can lead to unsafe text outcomes. Ch.10 considers what appears ‘funny’, as peculiar, ridiculous, or both: it all depends on the details provided by the “serving-men”¹⁵, and other supports to searching for safe text.

**Method**

This thesis or dissertation is a written presentation of my research project, called in short ‘searching for safe text’. The (hypo)thesis, or underlying concept, claims in synthesis that ‘safe text takes searching’. These formulations highlight the close link between the main idea, its written elaboration, and the process and method of working on the subject. The key claim is that there are rarely immediate or definite answers to a safe text search, and is widely corroborated by direct as well as indirect experience.

The proposed ways of searching for safe text reflect the findings based on available evidence, mainly through the analysis of documents (see Ch.3 on Sources for the selection of examples). The central concept of transfer is investigated in relation to a more specific hypothesis about the process involved in unsafe text. By searching, through carefully looking at problematic cases, safe/r options can be identified, and

¹⁵ This sexist expression seems unusual. Thanks to the rhyme, the metaphor puts ‘men’ in a markedly inferior position, as ‘serving’ anyone, regardless of gender. I am ready to employ them, as today the ‘common’ perception of ‘servants’ might be female in gender, possibly unlike that of the author’s time.
the difference that caused difficulties is likely to involve a form of transfer, from linguacultural background as well as from more mechanical or superficial elements.

An illustration of how something came about has to relate to the result of the process. In this section, the outcome (i.e. the thesis) is chosen as starting point, and steps that have led to it are traced in reverse, as in most etymologies (e.g., Partridge, 1966). The term ‘causeeffectway’ is used for such a path, reflected in the results of a search. The challenge is to report only what is needed and adequate, to facilitate recognition of key items in method and sources, plus replication and improvement of the research. The dissertation applies this principle by including a limited number of examples of unsafe text, compared to those methodically amassed during my research. In some cases, they are studied fairly extensively, to show the many aspects involved, while in others the main purpose is to illustrate one point and confirm its importance.

The crucial concept of text safety is far from univocal, and therefore the thesis relates it to the interaction outcome of performance, rather than to input specifications. Searching for safe text promotes sensitivity about what ‘feels’ wrong in the message resulting from a text, rather than rule-bound ‘knowledge’ of do’s and don’ts for linguistic components. The potential impact of text, given the specific context, orients the evaluation of risk as worthy of worry, and the importance of safe text practices.

In transcultural communication, key stumbling blocks, trip-wires or traps relate to implicit knowledge, and to hidden assumptions about the extent to which it is shared. By making explicit the steps related to text choices, and their possible limits or risks, authors ‘get their point across’ better. An example, with questions and comments, is ‘this discourse about method is also method about discourse.’

How safe is this text? It can be edited to read that, in the dissertation, this section or discourse about method also illustrates a method about discourse. Is that clearer?

All parties can profit from a lesson for future use, as in transcultural computer-mediated communication we are all in the same boat, even if some steer it, some travel in steerage, and there are countless ‘class’ combinations in between.

One aspect of difference in ‘mastery’ and ‘access’ has to do with translation, the most visible form of transfer, discussed in Ch.5 as a key issue in safe text. Above, discourse ‘about’ method (and vice-versa) is my version of the French original title ‘Discours sur la méthode’, which in published translations reads ‘on method’.
This ‘French connection’ leads to the time and place of my schooling, with study of Latin and French, in that order, well before I learned English.\(^\text{16}\) Not just knowledge, but also affective and behavioural aspects linked to ‘French’ vary among individuals and cultures (cf. Ch.9).\(^\text{17}\) In more general terms of method, such personal and emotional factors need to be acknowledged, mainly to expose the risk of bias and shibboleths (as noted later), but also in terms of noblesse oblige. Changes over time, and differences across geo-linguistic space, make it unsafe to use Latin and French as if everyone knew both, and each of those two languages of Empire/s could be further investigated, in aspects relevant to searching for safe text.

There is another, subtler element of risk involved in the effort to demonstrate the (hypo)thesis within the dissertation. It is illustrated in training materials that display the ‘faults’ against which they are warning users, usually through short lists that are also suitable for on-line dissemination. Most cases are obviously deliberate, like “The ten commandments of good writing”,\(^\text{18}\) ending with “10. About sentence fragments.” Even in accidental cases, like “pay for a poof reader, editor to take the burden”, those who notice the incongruity are not at risk of reproducing the error/s.\(^\text{19}\) Conversely, the intended effect of calling attention to the point may become ambivalent, causing doubts, or the increased awareness creates expectations of object lessons, which risk being frustrated. It helps to remember that nobody is perfect, and therefore some de/faults can be expected in any text-based interaction, but noblesse should oblige.

Goffman includes in “The Lecture”\(^\text{16}\) comments suitable to the written text of my thesis, criticising “puerile opportunism” (p.162) and noting as necessary conditions for the validity of such analysis that “I cannot avoid its application to this occasion of communicating it to you”, and “that this applicability does not, in turn, undermine either the presentation or the arguments.” Specifically,

\(^{16}\) Freud also uses French and Latin in several PEL examples. Barthes refers to Valéry and the naming of the lion in Latin, \((1993:115-16, 119)\), and notes that “the grammatical example will attract my whole existence: Time, …History, … paedagogic tradition, … linguistic habits” \((1993:115-16, 119)\).

\(^{17}\) To ‘speak English’, in the sense noted by Herring \((2001:vii)\) along with food and clothing habits shared by urban youth today, can be compared with use of French by upper classes through most of Europe in previous centuries. The quantity, quality and meaning of communicative actions and specific items would vary in both cases, even ignoring the confusion caused by transfer and other changes.


\(^{19}\) (Student Learning & Division of SSHE, 2002). ‘Poof’ can be the sound of something vanishing, or slang for “1. homosexual man 2. Weak, ineffectual, effeminate or cowardly man” (Johansen, 1996).
“who lectures on speech errors will inevitably make some of the very errors he analyzes,”20 which is unintended but “attests to the value of the analysis, however it reflects upon the speaking competence of the analyst.”(p.163)

This dissertation may well include unintended examples of unsafe text, but there is also a deliberate effort to support the thesis with (self-)analysis, as discussed next. A basic theoretical and ethical concern relates to introspection by researchers and authors, as it is necessary (in every sense)21 to make explicit the beliefs, biases, choices and circumstances affecting text-based interaction. They need to be clearly stated, preferably at the outset, but at least when they come into play. This point of method responds to the warning by Myrdal on valuations and biases.

Valuations are present in our problems even if we pretend to expel them. The attempt to eradicate biases by trying to keep out the valuations themselves is a hopeless and misdirected venture. (1958:131)

As books by Myrdal that discuss objectivity in social research (1969) and value in social theory (1958) derive from earlier major work,22 I wonder about the persistence of the problem, which includes biased language, over more than half a century.

Open introspection, as noted, pursues the vital aim of stating explicitly an author’s e/valuations, and thus uncovering their bases or biases.23 The following clarification and sharing of my personal choices and their sources, related to linguacultural background and context in time, space, ideas and technology, is a first example.

To ‘hear oneself think’ is an idiom for introspection, and may be extended to ‘listening’ for the process of text processing.24 In searching for safe text, questions are addressed to self and others, as introspection on all sides plays an important part.25

---

20 Goffman notes shortly after “the very questionable procedure of my employing ‘he’ in the immediately preceding utterances, carefully mingling a sex-biased word for the indefinite nominal pronoun, and an unobjectionable anaphoric term for someone like myself.” (Ibid.) This egocentric bias is in my view ground for objecting to the use of masculine pronouns and other sexist terms. “He who attempts … and fails … is just a plain schmuck” seems to refer to some male, but not to the author.

21 At least two meanings: ‘introspection is necessary in order to’, or ‘it is necessary to’ as ‘we must’.

22 Chapter Seven on Facts and Valuations (1958: 119) was Appendix 2 of An American Dilemma (1944), thus the ideas on Biases in Research (Section 1) were published in the same year I was born.

23 Word-play between ‘based’ and ‘biased’ (cf. Axline, 1992) specifically refers to “miscommunication regarding the … evaluation system”. The remedy involves “clarifying expectations of performance”.

24 This is a ‘documentary method’(cf. Garfinkel, 1967: 94-95 and note 6).

25 This applies to the thesis, as sample of the process of transcultural text-based communication.
Its principal function (or principle) is to explore inner processes, and make explicit the background factors and default settings that often remain implicit, ranging from cultural values and taboos to linguistic patterns, behavioural cues and emotional responses. The latter are seen as most important in negative reactions, as affective distress is not always manifested in behaviour, and rarely subject to cognitive control. Information of this type is often provided in examples of unsafe text, or can be reconstructed from available data and clues (cf. Ch.3 on Sources).

Introspection of motives is a basic human function, which "replaces the sureness of animal instinct" (Diel, 1980: xvi). This applies to communication, on- and off-line. The interpretation of text considers and classifies actions (such as the often elusive or confusing ‘speech acts’) and motives that are attributed to authors, who may disagree. Clarification of the intended text often involves such inner mechanisms, and specific introspection concerning metalinguistic elements of the situation is a key component of the safe text approach. This also applies to the thesis, not only as a criterion for the selection of sources and their use, but also in the production of the dissertation.

**Positions**

Introspection represents a personal inclination, bias or value, thus its importance leads to a choice about measure in method, and decisions about how far it should go. Members of the Kipling sextet can be variously selected and grouped, mainly to do the kind of teamwork where total outcome is more than the sum of partial inputs. Together, they help qualify the many situations where ‘it all depends’, and their interaction defines the context, both of situation and of culture. Concerning scope and parameters of the thesis, these ‘coordinates’ of its position relate closely to its author.

The use of introspection corresponds to a tradition in linguistics (cf. Coulthard, 1977:2-3, 9 with reference to Chomsky) and is compatible with Garfinkel (1967). A key reason for exposing my mental mechanism, through autoethnography and even auto-graphology (analysis of my own writing) is the close link between the thesis as outcome and its subject/s, and the role of the author’s background in explaining text.

Why am I engaged in searching for safe text? Where do I ‘come from’ and try to go? The author, subject as grammatical ‘first person’, is also part of the subject as topic, being one of the subjects or people under study, that is, users of written text involved in transcultural computer-mediated communication. An additional and highly relevant
variable is my non-‘native’ status regarding English, but all and any users of text (in any language) share it to some extent, particularly on the Infobahn (see Part Two). This thesis on ‘searching for safe text’ comes from a lifelong interest in language varieties,26 and in forms of transfer between them, and moves it on to the rapidly evolving arena of CMC (computer-mediated communication).

Growing up in a diglossic Italian household may resemble the situation of the many linguists of English who are Welsh. Life and work in every part of the world has led to using other ‘languages of Empire/s’, a title applicable to most of those I learned, and beyond.27 My extensive experience of transcultural communication is applicable to culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) contexts like contemporary Australia, its surrounding region, and the World-Wide Web (WWW).28 The focus of the thesis on English is a deliberate instrumental choice, rather than an intrinsic limit, and some examples are drawn from other languages I know in personal and professional terms. The category of ‘language professionals’, to which I belong, is used here to include translators and interpreters, but its status is not readily ‘translated’ in academic terms. Thus the title of ‘natural linguist’ would probably apply to my skills, which may include a ‘gift’29 but also practice, curiosity and study in assorted settings.

The view that key skills are stimulated through recognising ‘problems’ (from troubles to puzzles and other question-inducing items), and dealing with them, seems new.30 This educational point would clearly encourage my personal, professional and academic interest in linguistic difficulties in transcultural communication, often linked to different linguacultural backgrounds of authors and interpreters of text. Specific attention to language factors, as object and mediators of learning, is needed to solve problems of this type, and schools are a good place to search for safe text.

26 A review of my own process of acquisition, learning, study, work, play, and general observation of language/s in use would be too long, although often relevant to the thesis.

27 On this subject, my papers and presentations on have covered several geographic and historical contexts, with comments on the use of ‘continent’, leading to the choice of ‘parts of the world’.

28 This choice of term is linked to the widening geographic context mentioned in the sentence, and to the available abbreviation, as “the Web is one of several Internet situations”, and “the popular practice of using the terms Internet and Web interchangeably is very misleading” (Crystal, 2001: 13, n.16). Also see “The Difference Between the Internet and the World Wide Web” in the “Did You Know . . . ?” section of Webopedia, http://www.webopedia.com/DidYouKnow/Internet/2002/Web_vs_Internet.asp.

29 See the comment on Malinowski as a “gifted natural linguist” (Halliday & Hasan, 1985:5). This view combines the notion of ‘natural languages’ with that of ‘natural’ as ‘inborn’, said of a ‘gift’.

30 A seminar presented by Philip Adey at Murdoch, 9 August 2002, discussed a model of cognitive acceleration, based on well-managed cognitive conflict, social construction and metacognition.
The thesis considers situations that are possible on-line (though not necessarily limited to a single medium of communication) and the role of information technology. My use of writing tools over more than a half-century of literacy has included radical changes, affecting large cohorts around the world during a crucial period of transition. Thus my experience in text use covers most of the central aspects of the thesis, involving the process known as transfer, as noted with more details in Part Two.

The relative positions (in nearly every sense) of the author/s and interpreter/s affect any text-based interaction and its outcome. The latter is of crucial importance here, not only in the material chosen for research, but in the product itself: this dissertation. Just as I look at how my own reactions to various types of text relate to background and other bias factors, I consider reactions by others to what I have written, in terms of potential interactions and related risks. The previous descriptions and declarations about my own position includes some relevant credentials, to show that ‘I know what I am talking about’, or rather writing, but more aspects need to be presented here.

On the delicate question of identity, difference and diversity as source of stigma or prestige, the notion of ‘disclosure etiquette’ might apply to aspects of my self-positioning, and contribute to safe text practice. Admission “in a matter of fact way, supporting the assumption that those present are above such concerns while preventing them from trapping themselves into showing that they are not” (Goffman, 1968: 124), refers to an individual’s own “failing”, but could apply to an advantage. In many ways, both status and actions could also be valued positively or negatively, and this certainly applies to linguacultural aspects. Thus, when pointing out a ‘slip’ or other potentially unsafe text, whether by self or others, a ‘matter of fact’ formula should be similarly acceptable to all involved. Such comments may also require waiting “for ‘an appropriate time’”, and have to be expressed “calmly” (ibid.).

The power relations involved in the perceived ‘right’ to ‘correct’ text perceived as ‘wrong’ are delicate in most cases, and I see blaming authors as unsafe, because it can damage not only direct interactions, but even indirect or mediated exchanges.

There is always the risk of damaging self-image and self-esteem regarding linguistic competence, and of promoting bias and stereotypes, as discussed in Part Three. Thus the thesis recommends a cooperative attitude, supplemented by ‘noblesse oblige’, as I
also apportion responsibility in relation to authority, seen as power in the interactive situation, usually but not always associated with ‘mastery’ of the language being used.

The extent and importance of each aspect will, of course, depend on many factors. In a recent lecture by William Labov, discussion of the performance by schoolchildren of different backgrounds showed how Spanish facilitated vowel recognition, just as I could say ‘aeiou’ in a voice and diction class. Thus a ‘minority’ group researched by an established authority in this field is in a position similar to mine as researcher. Some of us are not necessarily ‘better’ than others (or worse, for that matter), but ‘better able’, because of linguacultural background, to deal with specific features of text processing, here involving features of spoken and written forms (cf. Ch.5 for the links between different channels, specifically the impact of spoken sound on writing).

My (nit-)picking of ‘slips’ is based on the biased view that nit-picking helps to avoid lousy outcomes, and in respect to language use I frequently use a slogan of my own devising, ‘nessuno è perfetto, ma ognuno può essere corretto’, meaning ‘nobody is perfect, but everybody can (may?) be correct(ed).’ The universal potential for being ‘correct’ as well as ‘corrected’ in one’s linguistic usage can be empowering, but interaction involves more than control of linguistic ‘surface’ aspects. In considering my ‘right/ness’ to ‘right wrong writing’ (cf. Lawe Davies, 2000), this common human frailty interacts with the ‘catch 22’ of looking at academic studies also as sources of examples, i.e., documents. Attention in reading such works helps notice text items of questionable ‘correctness’ or safety, and sources of substantive value are at higher risk of formal ‘failings’, requiring some ‘correction’, preferably with an explanation.

Aspects of ‘stigma’ (Goffman, 1968) apply to linguacultural diversity, and have relevant points in contact or contrast with ‘virtual’ identity and interaction on-line. For the thesis and its author, the main issues relate to attitudes that promote equity,

---

31 It also increased ‘failure’ in regard to final ‘ed’, possibly because that final consonant is often silent in Spanish. Public Lecture on ‘Using our knowledge of linguistic change to close the minority gap in reading’ on Tuesday, 25 June 2002 at 6:00 pm, University of Western Australia (cf. Labov, 2002).

32 The sounds being taught in a U.S. university matched the Italian vowels I learned at primary school.

33 The English version adds shades of possibility, through alternative verb forms (although defective, as noted earlier in relation to ‘power’ in other languages). Compared to the Italian, it loses both the rhyme and the dual role of ‘corretto’ after ‘to be’, as adjective and as past participle for the passive form.

34 Matters are complicated by the elusive nature of any ‘standard’ forms in transcultural settings. Aside from varieties in time and space of what counts as the same language, the same proper name (for example of a city) can have translated versions, not necessarily familiar to people native of the place. ‘Sienna’ is an example, recently come to my attention, as I had known it mainly as name of colours.
access and diversity in transcultural communication, and to the ‘moral career’ of a ‘natural linguist’. This also involves perception and adoption of linguistic sign(al)s and ‘standards’ associated with stigma, privilege or ‘normal’ conventions, as the aim of such accommodation (cf. Ch.6) is often to ‘cover’ divergences felt by some as shortcomings, and even to ‘pass’. In the literal sense, the last term describes the situation involving the original ‘shibboleth’, meaning also a stream or river (Ch.9). Figuratively, the term is used for the schema discussed in a relevant essay about “differences… between members of unequal-status groups” (Hopper, 1986:127), although those involved in unsafe text are not always matters of dialect or even idiolect, but can involve specific and often sporadic or accidental items, in the continuum from linguacultural ‘text transfer’ to mechanical ‘slip’. A basic point is that “the central and most basic communicative act” is “the making of meanings, interpretation” of text, whether speech, writing or other forms are used.

To oversimplify: where most suggestions about ‘speech and the underdog’ have involved changing the speech habits of the underdog, the present suggestion is to change listening habits shared by underdog and favourite alike. (Hopper, 1986:128)

In searching for safe text, we can read ‘speech’ and ‘listening’ with reference to ‘discourse’ and ‘perception’, including interpretation, response and attitudes. While Hopper’s spelling of “the speech assymetry” (sic, p.128) provides an irresistible temptation, as it confirms the previous slogan about being correct/ed, the substantive point that it “interacts with an added dimension of blaming underdogs for the way they speak” highlights equity issues in terms of linguacultural diversity, and is crucial in the thesis, given the focus on ‘default settings’ or habits.

One possible description of my attitude would be ‘self-conscious naiveté’, as I am aware of my position as ‘outsider’ in many respects, including the inability to recognise many of the differences and difficulties involved in my own text.

The complementary position of insider requires awareness of apparent privilege, and recognition of implicit knowledge, further discussed in terms of ‘deixis’ in Ch.4.

---

35 The latter has morally different outcomes for a person ‘passing as other’ in social interaction, or for a work submitted to ‘pass’ an examination. The author does not wish to ‘pass’, but hopes the thesis can.

36 The item is also found in other sources, and my reaction to it also confirms the point that “the most vicious shibboleth schemer may be the recent convert” (p.132, cf. also comments in Ch.9).
The bias of the investigator / reporter / observer is a key concern, and it is important to reiterate that I can be called a ‘natural’ linguist, being a language professional and (educated) polyglot, rather than a scholar in linguistics or ‘academic’ linguist, and thus personal perception and reactions about text ‘safety’ and origins have priority, rather than theories on the structure of language/s or their acquisition. Similarly, my perspective on computer-mediated communication (CMC) and human-computer interaction (HCI) is based on ‘everyday’ use (in both senses of commonplace and frequent) and non-technical approaches to information technology (IT), as the aim of my research is to help anyone recognise areas of risk for text-based interaction, often found on- and off-line, in a wide range of media, in writing and beyond.

Initial references to ‘position’ the thesis and its author have been provided in this section, and a review of related options is pursued in the following one, which could be given the label of ‘a/cross/inter/trans - mission statement’, and deals specifically with the metaphors involved in each of the prefixes. Further pointers to layers of meaning would read ‘a cross to bear (or inter)?’, and the successive ‘inter-positions’, leading to ‘transcending as mediation’, nearer to the detachment of a-disciplinary.

**Relations**

Spatial metaphors are common in many languages, and are used deliberately in the dissertation, with particular focus on movement. When referring to relations and interactions between participants that differ in a relevant variable, common expressions are compounds of the latter with one of the prefixes indicating positions in respect to boundaries, and a key example here is ‘cross-cultural / inter(-)cultural / transcultural communication’. However, a radical alternative is to step aside, ignoring differences in an effort to overcome them, as indicated by the prefix ‘a-’. Thus ‘a/cross/inter/trans’ is like a ‘menu’ of options, and the implications of these forms are investigated in the following pages.

---

37 I am accredited as translator and interpreter, in the narrow sense used by professionals (cf. Ch.11).

38 As a safe text measure, full expressions are repeatedly used with their abbreviations. The last one prompts two comments, as the similarity to the neuter pronoun makes IT suitable for word-play that is easily recognised, whereas the previous use of the initials for ‘interpreters and translators’ has been ignored or disregarded, and language professionals have recently changed I/T to T/I (Speekman, 1998).

39 The formula leads to a key concept as compound, and suggests the function of ‘mission statement’, defined in a recent film (“The Navigators” by Ken Loach) in terms of ‘something that you say you are going to do, and then you have to do it’, a version which confirms the value of using ‘plain English’.

40 The ‘menu’ simile here refers to a list of options for computer action, rather than food (cf. Ch.10).
The relation of this research to disciplines is comparable to that of its topic to cultures. Mis-communication from unsafe text is related to transfer from a default setting, usually involving some difference in linguacultural background among participants, and such difficulties are most frequent when communication takes place beyond the metaphorical boundaries of conventions shared by participants. Conflict resolution, which provides an important focus in searching for safe text, has been called “a-disciplinary” rather than interdisciplinary, as a synthesis that “accepts no boundaries of knowledge”. My perception is that it represents an approach rather than a field, area or arena, reflecting the difference between a process of movement and a static, relatively fixed domain. Wherever one stands, even without boundaries, creates a context, and potential complications, for text-based communication.

Searching for safe text is also an approach and a process, which applies in practice to communication, and in terms of research to the dissertation. In the latter respect, I would prefer to see this work as a-disciplinary, with a parallel in relation to cultures.

In the initial search for appropriate terms that describe the thesis subject and area of interest, I had noted several options. Alphabetically, the next one to ‘a-’ in relation to boundaries is in English (to)‘cross’, a term with a rich and varied use, creating a polysemy that I could not match in other languages (cf. Ch.9). As text use on the Infobahn rarely involves situations of duality, where the other party is usually known or identifiable, it differs from both cross- and inter-cultural communication, also because the latter choice of term involves “fostering mutualism or adaptation” (Dubin & Kuhlman, 1992:5), as noted also by Dodd (1998).

Aspects involved in CMC guide somewhat the choice to go beyond ‘inter-cultural’, which does not preclude the applicability of findings from other contexts, although a further step is required to emphasize the potential for ‘detachment’ in cyberspace. Similar comments apply to the place of my research, which I do not see as cross- or inter-disciplinary, if those terms imply belonging, crossing or extending into one or more areas, although I make recourse to a range of disciplines as sources of studies and documents (cf. Ch.3).

---


42 This use does not imply the kind of association with each that would entail, among other things, a ‘mastery’ of their language/s, as discussed further in relation to terminology.
A complementary approach to the initial abstention, indicated by the prefix ‘a-’, would reduce the abstraction from specific contexts, cultures or disciplines, but still transcend the individual range or boundaries, putting them in perspective from a ‘safe’ distance. In semantic parallel to the relation of corporations to nations, such a move leads to the prefix ‘trans-’, last in alphabetical order among the options. ‘Trans-’ words figure prominently in the thesis (particularly in Ch.5 on Transfer), have close links to communication, and no major negative connotations, unlike ‘cross’ (Ch.9). While the meaning of the Latin preposition ‘trans’ is comparable to ‘across’, it also means ‘beyond’, extending the dynamic components of the spatial metaphor.

Searching for safe text is a process and principle, aiming to facilitate transcultural understanding, and it can be compared to mediation, as it helps each side to share the other’s perspective. In academic terms, this leads to a trans-disciplinary relation to terminology, adapted to and from ‘common’ usage, rather than adopted from academic ones, and expectations of ‘insider’ understanding on the part of anyone are deliberately avoided. This safe text option is exemplified in the Introduction in regard to the general use of ‘text’, and technical terms are kept to a minimum in the dissertation, to facilitate recognition and application of findings beyond the boundaries of specific disciplines. This effort reflects the focus on language use as part of dynamic interaction within multi-faceted contexts and discourses, and some sources are briefly noted, following the principles of introspection and open ‘valuations’ (cf. Hasan, 1996:186; Myrdal, 1958:131).

The aspiration towards “a transdisciplinary theory, … at the intersection of semiology, sociology and psychology” (Hasan, 1996:154) refers to systemic functional linguistics, in an article noting “similarities between the two approaches” when discussing the views of Bakhtin, whom I mention among precedents in Ch.4.

This encourages my view, in particular the choice of an a-disciplinary terminology, based on similarities between various approaches (including the three disciplines and their intersection) and the ‘common (sense)’ use of terms like text, difference or interference. As to assume such ‘commonality’ is not a safe approach to text, and a warning against it is a key point of the thesis, several terms used in the dissertation are explained, as done in the Introduction for the main ones, at times in footnotes.

---

43 See Crystal (1980: 360-365), illustrating at length five words starting with ‘trans-’.
Just like an a-disciplinary study is for Burton “a synthesis that goes beyond separate disciplines, beyond interaction between separate disciplines, and beyond any synthesis of approaches from several disciplines”, trans-disciplinary work includes analysis and labelling which transcend divisions and specialisations. The aim is to make the study ‘transparent’, precisely by noting the possible biases involved in its own text choices. A final comment here refers to the post-modern licence to coin new terms, and the temptation of calling safe text research ‘transparapragmatics’: the sources are Freud’s ‘parapraxes’, linguistic ‘pragmatics’ along with the general use of ‘pragmatic’, and ‘trans-’ in regard to cultures and disciplines, but also transparency. This awkward compound may be used as mnemonic, as it also refers to ‘transfer’.

**Approaches**

The focus on outcomes, a central feature of this dissertation, is what I do and look at, how I approach description and explanation, and why something is chosen, as object of research or proposed re/solution of conflicts and problems. These stages in the research cycle, noted at the start of the chapter, can be described and explained in various ways. The process is largely iterative, circular but progressive, comparable to a spiral and to the movement of a whirl (-pool or -wind), also visually approximating the funnel shape of an increasingly narrow focus. This spatial and dynamic simile is applied from several angles, as the research is exploratory in nature, and depth can be pursued in m/any chosen direction/s, but only ‘up to a point’, not always ‘fine’.

The choice of a funnel-like approach, from something general as mis-/communication to un/safe text compatible with computer-mediated transcultural communication, using written text, mostly in English, leads to the more complete image of an hourglass shape, as the narrow focus leads to wider applications beyond it.

The initial concentration on a precise topic is repeatedly presented in gradual steps, approaching the issue from various directions, that can be visualised as intersecting planes, to help pinpoint the shared common issues. On each plane, a funnel-shaped outline marks the narrowing down of the field under consideration, and a widening is also projected, as findings can be progressively applied beyond the chosen focal point.

---

The composite three-dimensional shape, generated by such outlines on a number of planes, can be perceived as that of an hourglass, widely embracing at the start, then restricting to ensure a controllable flow, but broadening again after the passage.\textsuperscript{45}

As searching for safe text moves closer to the narrow point, the dissertation touches upon assorted aspects, first ‘doing the rounds’ at other levels of text, then dealing mainly with linguistic forms written in English, to note how differences in expectations can lead to difficulties in interaction. A key item is awareness of the risk of unintended negative consequences, which is expected to facilitate their prepair and provention through proactive measures, linked to safe text skills and practices. The ‘way out’ of difficult situations involves several steps, summarised in terms of a ‘tool kit’, but also refers to the wider applicability of the research, beyond its focus.

The basic approaches used are often illustrated with metaphors. One is the ‘hourglass’ covered in this section, which refers to the progressive narrowing of focus, with links to broader contexts, as used in the presentation of questions at the start of the chapter. Another is the tracking, in reverse chronological sequence, of possible steps along the ‘cause-effect-way’ linking outcomes to inputs among various context factors.\textsuperscript{46}

The thesis selects and analyses examples of problematic communication, with priority to negative outcomes of language use compatible with electronic text. The following paragraphs look at the treatment of examples considered, and at general aspects of their choice, while Ch.3 specifically reviews the sources used.

Large amounts of data were derived mainly from recorded anecdotes, with serious or ridiculous negative outcomes, and support key cases, drawn from a range of sources.

Criteria for labelling text as unsafe are multi-faceted, and a priority has been selection and labelling by the sources of examples of mis-communication, preferably recorded with comments on their problematic nature, also by participants in the interaction. A major effort is required to deal with bias, values, and related matters of method in research, and to this end the thesis attempts to include the position or intents of the author and interpreter originally involved, leading to a multiple exposure of views.

\textsuperscript{45} This diagrammatic representation of the process as an ‘hourglass shape’ is not done graphically, but through a verbal description, as priority attention to written text leads to its adoption as the form/ at of the dissertation. The extent to which Text Only had to be supplemented with other typographical support, given the need to respect academic conventions, is a suitable item for consideration.

\textsuperscript{46} See Part Three for details. Here the main concern is for outcomes that are worth worrying about.
Thus investigator bias has been reduced, by including a wide range of subjects who judged the samples in terms of seriousness or gravity of the problem perceived. Except for private text, such as errors in drafts, where the only option is my own introspection, evidence of problematic interaction comes from the sources, including any judgments on text as unsafe, and interaction outcomes as unwanted and negative.

The qualitative review of data seeks to extend and connect some theoretical models that apply to the key aspects under investigation, along with action-oriented arenas relevant to this research, including conflict resolution and prevention / provention, linked with basic needs and issues of linguistic policy, politics and economics.

The research aims to help readers, researchers, and practitioners of computer-mediated communication to understand better the role of diverse cultural attitudes, and related linguistic expressions, as hindering and/or furthering the effective and functional implementation of global computer-mediated communications, especially in the service of electronic democracy. The focus on interaction outcomes relates to social goals of equity, access and diversity, through a principle of noblesse oblige and a reminder that correctness and corrections are always possible, unlike perfection.

More specifically, unsafe text outcomes are evaluated in terms of risk of ‘damages’. In either direction of communication, the cost of mistakes by authors or interpreters of text could be measured in economic terms, but is also heavy in socio-psychological terms, within and beyond multi-cultural societies like Australia. Thus a human needs perspective is adopted, related to conflict resolution, along with a concern for human rights, and the previously mentioned issues of equity, access and diversity.

Unsafe text has measurable consequences, including delay, confusion, or breakage, and the “summation of costs can be very considerable” (Goffman, 1981: 201-2).

Besides repeated occurrences, through many media “any factual error that is imparted can mislead a vast number”, however small the ‘cost’ at the individual level.47

This aspect of outcomes highlights the importance of frequency, combined with seriousness, as a criterion for priority concern in searching for safe text. Preventive verification is crucial even in single cases, if a major cost is involved.

47 The “strong imperative to provide factual corrections” in the course of “text delivery” (ibid., p. 243), noted in ‘radio talk’, should be supplemented on-line with corrections of any ‘record’, as text dissemination and access is potentially very wide, but also spread in time and space.
For example, just two letters led to large financial loss, when a translation ignored them in ‘BDMT’ (bone-dry metric tons), used for wood chips in a sales contract (Ferrigno, 2002). The outcome may deter translators from repeating this omission of a detail, which may have appeared ‘minor’ or ‘irrelevant’ and therefore ‘negligible’. As illustrated in this case, searching for safe text encourages a deliberate shift from the (supposedly Australian) attitude of ‘no worries’ towards a greater awareness of risk, but criteria for selection based on outcomes should also limit concern to text where worries are warranted, and therefore a search can be undertaken.

The cliché about ‘a few well-chosen words’ provides a template for ‘just a few well-chosen worries’, condensed here into ‘feworries’. The key point is not how small is the number of ‘worries’ given attention, as they could be grouped into types or categories to an arbitrary level of ‘delicacy’, but how well they are chosen in relation to the concerns applicable to text and context.

The dangers of opposite extremes in ‘worry’ relate to a pair of animal metaphors, used to illustrate movements of the mind. The “formidable foe… described as the Boa Constructor”, or background bias affecting interpretation, relates to overinterpretation (as discussed by Eco, 1992), and is credited by Gombrich (1969: 71) to Panofsky. The choice of label fits post-modernity and deconstruction, and could be the low extreme of a continuum of self-awareness, where the opposite end would be the “proverbial centipede”, paralysed when “asked to take care which of its hundred legs it moved every time” (ibid. p.67; cf. also Koestler, 1976:75-77). Here the focus is on ‘feworries’ about unintended negative outcomes, thus only steps ‘putting a foot in it’, raising major dust clouds or mud spatter, need to be taken care of.

The mention of performance (outcome) rather than specifications (inputs), in discussing what counts as (un)safe text, relates to the linguistic distinction between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ (cf. Ch 4). In addition, the latter word has more general uses, associated with an audience and its reactions (cf. works by Goffman). This further relates to interaction, including forms involving the interpretation of work by authors, and specifically word-based texts, of direct interest to the thesis.

48 The choice of neologism aims to avoid confusion between uses of ‘a/ few’, that could also be ironic.
49 The term reflects the grammarian’s dream of lexis as most delicate grammar (cf. Hasan, 1996).
‘Performance standard’ can refer to specification-based standards for performance. The difficulty of applying such criteria to text use is occasionally acknowledged when default settings of both sides are considered, as in some discussions on tertiary literacy (Golebiowski & Borland, 1997). Even attempts to categorise unsafe text in relation to available models suffer from such limitations, and expectations of identifying a ‘systemic dysfunctional grammar’ appear unfounded, at least for recognizing ‘levels’ where negative outcomes of unsafe text are most likely.

Responses to text need to take into account the individual and cultural expectations of all parties, and pay attention to the intention or motive behind textual performance, as author or interpreter, besides any cause linked to assorted factors (cf. Roback, 1957). The complexity of issues is the crucial point, as there are no clear, specific and measurable ‘standards’ for safe text performance, but an open approach is needed.

Searching for safe text, as a way of reading and writing, is not simply ‘critical’ but promotes awareness and (self-)consciousness. It is ‘constructive’, in the general and metaphorical sense of adding positive elements that advance a process, as well as ‘de-constructive’, in the modest sense of inquisitive analysis of what may appear obvious, or taken for granted to the point of becoming invisible, such as a default setting.

While a ‘critical’ attitude implies judgment, the aim of analysis and evaluation in searching for safe text is to explain perceptions. The former can involve qualitative labels, such as (non-)standard, (in-)correct/appropriate, (im-)polite/precise, (un-)clear/acceptable, or even more problematic polarities like ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, which presuppose a fixed reference, ignoring cultural and linguistic diversity and relativity. Instead, the measure of safety refers to risk, which is intrinsically uncertain, and varies or depends, according to individuals as well as situations and culture.

The question in each case is not just whether text is risky, but how, in both senses of the English expression, rephrased below as ‘how risky is it?’ and ‘how is it risky?’.

The former helps focus more quantitatively on the ‘feworries’ that deserve priority attention, while the latter leads on to explain why such perception can arise, when and where, for and against whom. Both aspects are pursued in other chapters of the thesis.
Among matters of method and value is the relation of my work to word and world. The orientation to computer-mediated communication, with the related option of Text Only, largely excludes other audio-visual components, and reflects a bias regarding language as made up of plain, visible words. This approach goes beyond my personal preference for linguistic expression, and my long familiarity with written forms of communication, as the same inclination extends to the cultural and academic context, and informs the approach to (linguistic) literacy and technology, in relation to beliefs and debates on mind, thought and language. The bias favouring ‘the word’ appears ancient and widespread, and may need redress in transcultural communication.

While the study of safe text in the thesis requires such a narrow focus to ‘get to the point’, searching for safe text encourages an open, ‘BYO’ approach. The initials are an invitation to ‘bring your own’ knowledge and background, ready for introspection and possible sharing. More specifically, the phrase above refers to the frameworks and approaches associated with disciplines and ‘schools’, such as those noted by Cameron (1992, Ch.2) in terms of linguistic theory. This has been partly caused by circumstances, as the rich variety of cases prevented any evaluation based on large and consistent corpora, while encouraging in-depth consideration of ‘feworries’.

The ‘embarrassment of riches’ has also discouraged any classification of safe text, using approaches derived from relevant fields. Thus the expectation and invitation go beyond the thesis, and the chosen presentation of a range of examples is left open to further work, as it should be compatible with more than one system or point of view.

The following chapter presents the main types of sources used in the research, which provide an array of examples, cases, approaches, frameworks and perspectives.

---

50 BYO is largely used in Australia, and the similar phrase ‘bring a plate’ appears in recurrent episodes of misunderstandings where newcomers bring crockery, not recognising the implicit meaning ‘of food’.
Chapter 2    Un/safe text

The evidence in this chapter concerns the serious dangers of unsafe text, beginning with cases that may appear to be linguistically the most simple, based on binary code. This aspect is related to computer-mediated communication (CMC), also through similarity to the basic element in human-computer interaction (HCI),51 using ‘basic’ in accordance with the off-line notion of ‘fundamental’, which implies both an important role and a ‘low’ level in any development process or hierarchy.52 However, a detailed and holistic investigation shows the complex web of factors involved, and attempts to sort (out) or unravel it, retracing the ‘cause-effect-way’ of unsafe text, from outcome to sources (cf. Part Three). Some of these cases are referred to at various points in the dissertation, to illustrate aspects of the process of searching for safe text.

Concern for safe text is motivated by the ubiquity of mis-communication, and by the relative ease of dealing with linguistic expressions that may cause it, compared to the seriousness of possible negative outcomes. Safer text practices are effective means of preventing or repairing problematic situations (cf. Ch.11), before trouble develops without other reasons, and key cases (as in this chapter) suggest suitable approaches.

To convey the idea of what ‘safe’ text is or involves, consideration of its opposite seems both easier and safer, as no text can be guaranteed to be free of any risk.

A parallel can be drawn with operating theatres: none can be completely sterile, yet this should not lead to the conclusion that one might as well do surgery in a sewer. Unsafe text is broadly defined here as mis-communication with unwanted negative consequences, which include personal confrontation or damage. To defuse the risk of worsening interaction difficulties, unsafe text should be the prime suspect, whenever problems and differences appear associated with forms of linguistic expression.

More generally, discrepancies in the meanings attributed to messages by authors and interpreters should not lead to accusing any party of ‘fault’, as text can go wrong in many ways. To see just how far ‘wrong’, this chapter discusses cases of exemplary mis-communication, chosen with priority concern for the most serious consequences.

51 “Basic is the digital bit stream (e.g. 0011 0101) reflecting logic gate action” (Ruthrof, p.c., 2001).
52 BASIC is also a long-established acronym for computer programming languages (Beginners’ All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code).
One of the lessons derived from them, with wider application in the search for risks, causes and remedies, is that similar outcomes are potentially linked to very different types, levels or mechanisms of (mis-)communication and unsafe text.\textsuperscript{53}

The hourglass- or funnel-shaped approach to unsafe text starts with the fundamental role of communication in terms of survival and social organization, which makes it a widely shared function among living organisms. It is present in all human societies, and the same may be said of mis-communication, both deliberate and accidental. The thesis focuses on the latter, but similar patterns may also be involved in the former. Among intentionally misleading sign(al)s or messages are many types of computer viruses: those hidden in files are named after the Trojan horse, a classic example comparable to mimesis by plants and animals, which confirms the relevance of mis-communication across time, technology, space and species. This common ‘thread’, also in relation to bits and myths, is explored in this chapter, framed linguistically within “a striptease of meaning on the ladder of discourse” (Ruthrof, 1992: Ch.8).

At the top of the ladder, or perhaps of a flight of fancy steps on a linguistic variety stage, Ruthrof puts “the richly dressed and decorative acts of meaning endowment in literary reading” (p.133), then the procedure “works its way down” to the bottom, where “is revealed the stark ‘sense’ of formal logic and its digital offspring” (\textit{ibid.}). Intermediate stages, steps or layers are ranked and labelled as (2) mythical discourse, (3) the discourse of history, (4) juridical discourse, (5) the discourse of everyday life, (6) technical discourse and (7) scientific discourse. On the “bottom rungs” of (8) formal logic and (9) the digital, “meaning is shrunk to minimal sense.” (p.158)

As unsafe text can happen in a variety of contexts, the thesis includes examples from most of the above. Aspects or factors from several ‘layers’ can also be combined, for example when an example illustrating juridical discourse is \textit{Measure for Measure} (pp.146-7). On Ruthrof’s ladder, mythical discourse is second only to the literary, and is followed by history. When I studied the \textit{Divine Comedy}, and the translations of Homer’s \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Odyssey} as Italian literature, which of the poems would win which medal, if we match the first three places with the customary gold, silver and bronze?

\textsuperscript{53} Use of parentheses, as in ‘(mis-)’ instead of ‘mis-’, marks alternatives that are not equal.
At the ‘base’ level, Ruthrof notes (p.163) “As a discourse, the digital cannot process phenomena directly but depends on prior semiotization by a nondigital technology.” The ‘bit’ (binary digit, 0 or 1) can be a model for pairs of opposites, such as “Yes” and “No”, as the latter also “has no meaning on its own – it only has meaning in relation to the question asked”. Thus “the correct use of ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ depends on a precise understanding of the question” (Lane, 1985:198), and this creates serious problems in transcultural communication, specifically in legal contexts.

Two ancient examples considered below involve binary visual signals (black / white) for long-distance communication, associated with death and life. While this research looks at ‘natural’ languages, safety risks also apply to computer languages and other artificial codes, as illustrated by fears about the ‘Y2K bug’ in Part TI. In addition, the sources of unsafe text include ‘mechanical’ faults in the re/production, transmission and reception of messages, also involving human-computer interaction (HCI), and therefore ‘noise’ in ‘signals’ can derive from a human ‘slip’, a machine ‘glitch’, or both, possibly in combination with linguistic and other forms of interference.

While the code model of communication may not be exhaustive, it covers a facet that is obviously important for this research. Encoding and decoding are also key factors in computer-mediated work and communication. The process of encoding from one language and decoding into another is also parallel to the operation of the human mind, specifically when translating or interpreting, both in the technical or professional sense and in the more general or figurative use of the terms, as in the thesis. However, expectations that computers will achieve results comparable to the performance of human language professionals appear excessive or premature.

54 The spatial, visual and structural metaphor of ‘basic’, noted above, is mixed here with ‘base’ metals, in opposition to the ‘nobler’ ones associated with the highest positions. Such (hyper-)links are often highly personal, and risk posing puzzles to readers, hence the supporting footnotes.

55 Examples abound, whether or not interpreters are involved. Euphemistic use of ‘making love’ or ‘infatuation’, translated as ‘love’ in court questions, can lead to ‘yes’ answers and serious charges like molesting a daughter (cf. Martin, Moore, & Appelkamp, 1991: 33, 46; Re, Smith, & Mason, 1982: 95).

56 “Note, finally, the vulnerability … to technological faults that have have nothing to do with a script…. but only with the efficacy of its nonhuman transmission” (Goffman, 1981:268).

57 The terms are specifically used in a United Nations University project, aiming to provide a ‘universal networking language’ (UNL), to and from which natural languages can be encoded and decoded, thus leading to on-line translations. This would improve access to information through computer-mediated communication, beyond the boundaries of different languages.
Examples in other chapters discuss the dangers of mis-translation, which are often a macroscopic illustration of the problems linked to linguistic ambiguity and polysemy, but also a specific aspect of ‘noise’ in the transmission and processing of messages.

The importance of safe text practices is related to the combined effects of cumulative and negative re/actions.58 As repeatedly noted, these should be defused, to restore the interaction along a more positive direction, presumably intended by all the parties.

Images of movement, like the one used above, fit within the guiding metaphors in the thesis, and the kind of spatial representation reflected in the term ‘cyberspace’. Such a ‘place’ is full of similes, usually transferred on to the Infobahn from off-line contexts (cf. Part Two). Images of a network, or web/Web, reflect the multitude of connections and directions available electronically, analogous to mental associations, just like computers have been called ‘electronic brains’ in several languages. ‘Hyperthinking’ (Voysey, 1998) is a reverse transfer, from terminology associated with information technology to an off-line human function: the mental faculty to make (hyper-)links, which is available to anybody, although it may appear more developed in some people than others. The composite paths or tracks resulting from such connections, whether in cyberspace or ‘head space’, can be more or less complex, and the chances of following identical ones are inversely proportional to the quantity of passages, but also to the imagined distance from start to end, and between other ‘points’.

The virtual impossibility of a perfect match between text authors and interpreters reflects that of ‘perfectly safe’ text, noted at the start of this chapter. How serious is the risk associated with mismatch in the paths or approaches followed by different parties? As an extreme case, what happens when only one valid outcome or ‘exit’ is available, but not immediately visible or known? Not every path or avenue will reach it, many steps will be ‘false’, or rather lead to an impasse. This process could refer to various kinds of unsafe text, as a warning about situations where ‘mis-sing’ a point or turn can have serious consequences,59 and the spatial metaphor corresponds to the mythical labyrinth, where ‘dead ends’ would contribute to a literal deadly end.

---

58 ‘Chi mal comprende, peggio risponde’ (who understands badly, responds / replies worse). This refers to inadequacy in precision and appropriateness, but could transfer to ‘bad’ or negative expressions and correspondingly ‘difficult’ interactions, such as a brawl (cf. Keening, 1982: 46).

59 The English verb ‘to miss’ conveniently resembles the prefix in misunderstanding, misreading, etc., corresponding to Freud’s ‘faulty actions’ (or parapraxes: cf. Ch.4), usually prefixed with ‘ver-’ in German Here, however, a link is made with the better-known aspects of the myth discussed below.
**Tales of sails**

The adventurous story associated with the labyrinth image provides a ‘thread’ leading to a fabulous example of unsafe text, summarised in one line and discussed below it.\(^{60}\)

**Aegeus died of grief, believing his son Theseus dead, when he saw a black sail.**

Using an appropriate technology for telecommunication, Theseus had agreed with Aegeus to change the sail/s from black to white,\(^{61}\) in order to convey from a distance the crucial news of his success. Failure to do so, and thus to follow an agreement, had led to the use of the alternative (‘wrong’) code, and to an extreme reaction by Aegeus. To the father, looking out to sea, the unchanged black sail/s conveyed the message of the son’s death. This meaning of the agreed code was the opposite of fact, and not what Theseus had intended to communicate, at least presumably. But in another story, a comparable sequence of events is associated with deliberate mis-communication, leading to more complex questions: for whom is the specific text (un-)safe? Who is likely to suffer, or to profit from it (*cui bono*)? Is there guilt, besides fault? When a white-sailed ship is bringing Tristan’s lover to heal him, his spouse tells him that the sail is black, meaning that the other woman is not coming, and Tristan dies in despair. The meaning of the words, not of the actual code, was the opposite of fact. The deadly statement was intentional, and a potentially ‘safe’ text use for the author, as the healing reunion between former lovers would have been an unwanted outcome. In the thesis, a distinction is made between matters of fact (such as being dead or alive) and matters of manners, where ‘face’ is an important value that needs to be preserved through politeness. Mis-communication may involve both aspects together, but here the primary focus is on the risks of taking messages at ‘face value’, without checking against fact, or at least doubting the source or one’s own interpretation.

Considering the ‘black sail death’ of Tristan and Aegeus, we note that in both cases it is associated with the emotional response to a negative message. The later legend appears to have adopted from the earlier myth the ‘code’ of white or black sails, and knowledge of it allows the jealous spouse to deceive the wounded, lovesick Tristan. Like Aegeus, he takes the bad news at face value, and neither of them waits to verify facts, or pauses to think that the author could be mistaken or misleading.

---

\(^{60}\) The metaphor of a leading ‘thread’ ranges from Ariadne to Kant and to discussion groups on-line.

\(^{61}\) The mixture of singular and plural is also found within individual sources, and seems irrelevant.
This invites a discussion of the responsibility attributable to the parties involved, including the factors summarised in the five P’s model of conflict analysis: Problem, Participants, Past, Projections, and Pressures (Tillett, 1999: Fig. 2.1). Each ‘P’ item is visually represented by a pyramid, with its tip labelled as the ‘focus’, and a small ‘manifest’ layer below it, while a lower and larger one is ‘unmanifest’, further labelled as ‘undisclosed’ and ‘unconscious’. The pointed image relates to the idiomatic metaphor ‘tip of the iceberg’, and looks symmetrical to a funnel shape. Their complementary narrowing and widening create an hourglass shape, and Tillett also refers to the narrow ‘focus’ point as the primary concern of his book (p.9).

As I have studied conflict resolution with Tillett, the 5-P model is part of my background, and relates to the ‘tool kit’ of steps or skills I propose in searching for safe text. The latter are summarised, labelled and reviewed in Ch.11, on the basis of their application to cases that are presented holistically in this and other chapters.

The Problem is in the centre, and the approach followed in searching for safe text would place there the final outcome, in these two specific cases the loss of life. Comparing the death of Aegeus with Tristan’s, only the former appears unintended, though both are seen as negative by their apparent perpetrators, as Theseus grieves, and so does Tristan’s spouse, who regrets her misdeed in lying to him. But what is the role or responsibility of the key Participants, the victims themselves? How far is their text-induced death due to a regrettable accident, as opposed to (un-)conscious choice?

In presenting safe text issues that recur in a wide range of contexts, the use of a fabulous past helps, also because conflicting sources can be expected and accepted. Discrepancies appear less problematic than in situations closer to the time, place and people involved (in every sense) in interpreting both the event and the message. Here, a comparison of some sources adds options or details, with two possible reports:

Aegeus, who stood watching for him on the Acropolis, ... sighted the black sail, swooned, and fell headlong to his death into the valley below. But some say that he deliberately cast himself into the sea, which was thenceforth named the Aegean. (Graves, 1960:343)

Hasty and unquestioning acceptance of bad news as true may lead to rash actions, both unwarranted and unwanted. This would apply to self-inflicted more than to accidental death for Aegeus, while in Tristan there is an obvious loss of the will to

---

62 Fig. 1.1 has a somewhat different layering for conflict alone. Below the 5 terms retain a capital ‘P’.
live, when his spouse’s lie makes him believe that he won’t see his lover ever again. Attributing the death of Aegeus to suicide, instigated by grief, leads to the view that he did not wait to check the fact, but literally jumped to conclusions that were both erroneous and disastrous. The reaction by the interpreter or receiver is seen as a direct and preventable cause of the negative outcome, also in the case of Tristan.

Psychologically, reactions to bad news often involve at first denial or doubt, possibly as a safety measure, as there is indeed the possibility of error, or even jest. The risks of the latter could be seen in the film “This year’s love”, where a mentally unstable character is irreparably damaged, also in the body, after following a ‘joking’ set of instructions for drinking flaming sambuca. Conversely, in the film “Looking for Alibrandi” from the book and play by Melina Marchetta, the first reaction of a student to the news of a friend’s death is a stern “it is not funny”, as a ‘bad’ joke by classmates seems more likely than the suicide of an apparently successful student.

Italians say ‘a pagare e a morire c’è sempre tempo’ (‘to pay and to die there is always time’), and the recommendation of prudent patience is particularly relevant when one is about to hurt oneself. If the cause is attributed to a text, the responsibility or guilt can be shifted to someone else, namely or mainly the author, yet prevention remains in the hands and mind that re/act after potentially ‘wrong’ words, signs and symbols.

The Problem, or unwanted outcome of mis-communication, is death, unquestionably linked to the black sails as code for bad news, both for Aegeus and Tristan. The perception of a black sail is taken by Aegeus to indicate the death of his son. How come? What happened? Who was, or what went, ‘wrong’ along the way?

Pursuing the 5-P model, the Problem involves at this point one other Participant (Theseus), and a Projection or assumption associated with their Past (agreement on a code to communicate the outcome of the dangerous voyage). Two aspects of the operation to be considered are what had to be done, and who said it would be done. These affect the effort involved in remembering and fulfilling the promise, and thus the possibility of failure. Forgetfulness may lead to confusion, when one no longer remembers which option is acceptable, and has to take specific action, with a degree of deliberate choice. Forgetting to do something different or unusual may lead to unconscious omission or neglect, since inertia, which keeps bodies stationary or moving along the existing path, is also a very strong force in the mind.
In a recent source (Bently, 1995) there is a potential confusion, as Theseus, just like Tristan’s messenger, “should hoist a white sail if all had gone well and a black one if the mission had been a disaster”. This makes the two alternatives appear equal in terms of effort, but since the black sail was in use on departure, it presumably represented the ‘default option’ when he “returned with the black sails hoisted”. In this source, as in many others, the initiative for the instruction is a request from Aegeus. However, Brewer (1978) and Guirand (1968) have Theseus say, or tell his father, about the chosen code. This would increase his responsibility, but would also make him less likely to omit the action, or neglect a promise that had come from him.

There are practical parallels to the forgetful Theseus in the contemporary world. Various kinds of excursion require participants to signal their safe arrival at a given point, but this obligation is often overlooked, leading to concern and costly searches. Such undesirable outcomes are associated with the absence of a text (message or code), unlike the cases under consideration, where a code causes mis-communication.

The role of text is more important in Tristan’s case, where a party outside the original agreement takes a damaging initiative, based on a different Past and set of Projections. Tristan’s spouse knows of the supposedly secret code, and is intentionally misleading the victim, who believes her reported sight of a black sail. Her Projection is different from his, as a rival’s arrival would be bad news, but may not have included his death as outcome, and her grief shows that the choice of (false) text was not safe enough.

The Participant who had agreed to the code in the Past is correctly communicating the successful outcome of the mission, but an intermediary has maliciously reversed the message. Comparably disastrous outcomes may be the result of channel ‘noise’, and one may think of superficial distortion that seriously alter the meaning of written text, in situation where outcomes involve high risk. A personal experience involves an e-mail message in Italian, which announced a recent birth and included in the text the computer commands for accents. As this turned the verb ‘is’ (‘è’) into something with the word ‘grave’, I feared for a moment that the Italian adjective ‘grave’, followed by ‘in ospedale’, applied to the condition of the new mother in hospital. Such a reaction could be risky, if the human interpreter of the electronic message had a weak heart.

63 In addition, Grant and Hazel note in their Introduction that the “effects of this mythical para-history of ancient times can easily be traced onwards ... to now ... in the conscious and unconscious reliance ... upon the ways of thinking and ideas manifested by these mythologies” (1979: 7).
The fifth ‘P’ in Tillett’s model is Pressure, and this factor lends itself to a range of versions and hypotheses. The question about accident or choice, asked above about the death of the victims, also applies to other Participants, and more generally to the context of events, both Past and Projected. The notion of Fate (or destiny) is found in Greek myth and culture, but extends to medieval legends and beyond, where fighting Fate adds depth to drama, whatever the outcome. The discussion of determinism and chance by Freud is noted in Ch.7, and comments here refer to the myths in question. Chance as statistical value, or stochastic / random distribution, is compatible with contemporary science and technology, and while many see in such chance outcomes the sign of good or bad ‘luck’ (‘chance’ in French), the lesson of a basketball champion applies to searching for safe text: ‘the more you train, the luckier you get’.

Theseus had forgotten to change sails, and this ‘direct’ cause of mis-communication has in turn been explained as the consequence of a variety of possible events. Such ‘carelessness’ (Guerber, 1995:284) could come from joy and pleasure of victory and return, or from grief caused by the loss of Ariadne (Graves, 1960:343). However, many see it as punishment for deserting her along the way, even though various deities are said to play a role in controlling events and commanding actions.

Tristan’s marital situation can be compared to that of Theseus, who apparently seduced and abandoned his saviour, possibly under commands from above. Revenge by Tristan’s spouse is more direct, but her jealousy and frustration also have supernatural causes. A love philtre has forever linked Tristan and Iseult the Fair in love and death, and Iseult of the White Hands is Tristan’s wife only in name.

Myths figure prominently in the psychoanalytic tradition, and at least one author (Diel, 1980) has dealt specifically with Theseus. So many of his adventures lend themselves to such readings, that one might reappraise the death of Aegeus by taking into account several other Participants (including Medea and Poseidon), Past events (such as dubious paternities and family feuds), Projections (as well as retrospections) and Pressures, beyond those noted in this brief review.

64 Dionysus had made him forget her (ibid.), or had carried her off (Apollodorus & Frazer, 1921:137).

65 Tristan refuses to consummate the marriage, after accepting to marry her because of both her beauty and her name. It is, as shown or implied in many ‘tales’, nomen atque omen (name as well as omen).

66 Text and code may still appear, but their relevance is less crucial than in the black sail incident, chosen also for the advantage of being copied or repeated (as noted by Brewer) in the tale of Tristan.
**Mis-taking measures**

When ‘fault’ or responsibility is allocated, attitudes and previous information may bias the attribution, and this includes the many situations where faulty communication causes or complicates problems, whether by choice, chance or Fate. To support and supplement the ‘black sail deaths’, some shorter cases are presented in this section. Such comparisons, with emphasis on common or complementary features, highlight major types of interaction problems and unwanted consequences, to alert text users of the risk involved. Priority to outcomes matches the approach and sequence used in ‘tracking’ or sorting (out) problems (Part Three), focusing on the role of text and related factors in mis-communication, to promote awareness of linguacultural aspects.

The following choice of serious situations moves on from ancient myth to include contemporary fact. The ‘text’ trigger for disaster (actual or potential) is not always in written form, as the thesis can extend its consideration to various media and modes of communication, provided they appear relevant to computer use, and the next pair of mis-communication examples includes aspects variously related to cybernetics.

When asking the general question about unsafe text (what can go wrong in communication, involving people as well as tools or machines?), the first item for consideration is the outcome. Loss of human life and limb, or of machines that represent a vehicle for human bodies and knowledge, is among the worst, and the following unfortunate events provide an ideal sequel to the ‘black sails’, illustrating several elements relevant to searching for safe text. Again, a one-line summary is followed by a joint post mortem analysis, in the context of wider considerations.

**In the Gallipoli slaughter, British and Australian actions were unsynchronised.**

**The lost Mars Climate Orbiter had Imperial rather than metric thrust measures.**

Poor communication with and between commanders at Gallipoli appears similar to that involved in the Mars probe, though using far less advanced means. The former failed to match their references in measuring time for joint action, so that the same number did not correspond to the same moment (relative to the movement of the sun). In the latter, engineers who built the spacecraft provided figures “in poundal-seconds, an English unit. NASA scientists, however, assumed the supplied numbers were in newton-seconds, a metric measure.” (Christianson, 1999).
The visual inclusion of the watch ‘face’ in the film “Gallipoli” by Bruce Beresford points to the unsynchronised time references of British and Australian commanders, reflecting the official war records, and also relates to the ‘face value’ noted about unquestioning acceptance of a signal. The difference is that Aegeus and Theseus believed their eyes or ears with respect to ‘facts’ of death and life, or black and white. In the military situation, the discrepancy is between two measuring instruments, and thus the belief is not just that one’s reading is ‘correct’, but that it matches the other’s, just like the ‘code’ or unit of measure presumed to be used in the Orbiter.

The similarity to causes of linguacultural difficulties refers to different signals using the same code, or to different codes used for the same message. Thus readings of time on watches are like those of words in individual idiolects, or other varieties of the ‘same’ language, while the English/metric confusion could be compared with ‘false cognates’ between different languages, also known as ‘false friends’. A humorous form of the latter kind of association appears in ‘To assume makes an ass of U and me’, a folk etymology which is both false and forceful as a reminder, but which NASA regrettably ignored. Given the name of the Climate Orbiter, it helps to note that I learnt this untranslatable English formulation in a debriefing, to explain lack of communication of a cancellation caused by inclement weather. ‘Measures’ of the latter are not numerical, but careless ‘reading’ can have deadly serious effects, as in a recent rafting accident, caused by dangerous rainfall and unheeded warnings.67

The discrepancy in both cases has to do with binary options about action, associated with the ‘speech act’ of ‘cancelling’. Its absence, and more generally the lack of communication considered relevant by the other party, is a ‘pre-text’ type of cultural difference, exemplified in exchanges like “why didn’t you tell me?” “You didn’t ask.” It is worth asking, and double-checking. For the human thrust of wartime assault, as for that of the spacecraft, a relational ‘fact’ was mediated through instruments and measures, needing verification of agreement or adjustment between code systems. A further example, reported by the participant observer who solved the problem, involves a business fax message on a contract, sent to a hotel guest. “This gentleman has cancelled” was the reply, sent by hotel staff, but misread as ‘cancellation’ from the intended recipient, in turn puzzled by the sender’s silence.

---

67 Adventure holiday-makers in Switzerland, including Australians, were led in mid-1999 on a fatal excursion by guides who mis-judged the risk. (cf. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1999a, 1999b)
In crucial matters, even a small discrepancy can have disproportionately severe consequences, and the risks involved in the context affect the safety levels of the text. Erroneous or incomplete exchanges regarding measures, which take place among humans or in human-computer interaction (HCI), are comparable to those of Gallipoli or the Mars probe, and risks similar to the latter seem to apply in civil aviation, where both aircraft pilots and air traffic controllers could be labelled as ‘kybernetes’. That Greek word, translated by Wiener (1968:17) as ‘steersman’, was the source of the term ‘cybernetics’, and relates also to the Latin gubernator or governor, hence to decision-making, command and control in human inter/actions.

Wiener explains why control is classed together with communication, as “When I control the actions of another person, I communicate a message” (1968:18). His book *The human use of human beings: cybernetics and society* is an edited and revised version (1950-1954) of *Cybernetics* (1948), and half a century later it is easy to confirm Wiener’s thesis that “in the future development of these messages and communication facilities, messages between man (*sic*) and machines, between machines and man, and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part” (1968:18). All of the above are relevant to searching for safe text, and to its focus on computer-mediated communication (CMC), which includes human-computer interaction (HCI) and depends on computer functions (cf. Ch.7).

Cybernetic functions, including those within and between computers, can have models or origins in human (mis-)communication. Such technological developments can be illustrated by the cases under consideration, retracing their sequence and noting the role and function of cybernetics, i.e. control of action through messages.

In the contemporary sense of computerised control systems, it can certainly be found in the Mars Climate Orbiter and other kinds of flight. As discussed, the clear-cut difference between codes in the case of Aegeus and Theseus (or Tristan and Yseult) resembles the binary digits (or bits, 0/1 for ‘off/on’) used in computers, and the ‘black sail death’ of Aegeus has an obvious cybernetic parallel, no matter whether Theseus was the pilot (steersman) of the ship, or the commander (governor) of the expedition. In computers, a similar omission of a comparably crucial step or command can readily lead to ‘crashes’ and other trouble, as discussed in Part Two regarding the Y2K ‘bug’.

---

68 (Cf. Baker, 2001:1; McHoul & Rapley, 2001:57; Nevile, 2001)
Besides the dramatic consequences noted first, the examples of mis-communication used here have in common at least two aspects of the message, which bring them close to HCI and CMC. Rather than written text (in English or not), they involve some form of code, and they control the actions of another person, or those of a machine. In this respect, some categories of ‘speech acts’ are directly relevant, and such situations of ‘mis-commands’ could be labelled ‘matters of f/action’. Commands leading to actions, aimed respectively at directing thrust to land the probe on Mars, and at jointly attacking the Turks at Gallipoli at an agreed time, are clearly disrupted by the problematic messages. Flaws in the code used for the command contributed to unwanted outcomes in its execution, and even failure regarding the overall aim.

A difference or discrepancy in the production or interpretation of a specific symbol in the code system has led in each case to trouble and disaster, just as differences in linguistic expressions may lead to difficulties in communication and interaction. The relation between a conventional code and crucial events, shown through the conduit or conduct (as leading and behaviour) of humans and machines, explains how unsafe text in communication carries the risks of negative outcomes, in cases where things go in unintended ways. The ultimate outcomes of unsafe text could go beyond control and even knowledge, as illustrated by the ill-destined Mars Climate Orbiter, “knocked off course some 60 miles as a result of … metric/English confusion.” NASA wondered “how such a simple yet fatal mistake eluded its fine-tooth-comb system of checks and balances, … uncertain as to whether the doomed spacecraft crashed onto Mars, burned up in the planet's atmosphere or was orbiting the sun.” (Christianson, 1999)

More down-to-earth mismatches of code use can relate to measures of space, time and weather, as well as their combinations, which also affect context, as already noted. A contrived but realistic example would be a text-only offer of holiday stays for the New Year period, with mention of temperatures ranging in the low thirties, and a price figure simply marked as ‘$’. Who would find the choice and price attractive? When and where would they like to go on holiday, and would they swim or ski?  

---

69 ‘Matters of faction’ could be a sub-category of intentionally misleading text, including commands or speech acts. (Matters of) ‘fact’ and ‘fact’ could cause another confusion, as some pronunciations of the latter can resemble the past participle of the ‘f’ verb, leading to an unsafe but possibly fitting outcome.

70 In the death of Aegeus, the chain of command/s is less immediate, and may go beyond Theseus.

71 My invention was confirmed when air-tickets to Sydney brought on-line buyers to a place in Canada.
**Map co-ordination**

Before moving on to a related set of examples, a brief introspective *intermezzo* looks at the con/text of the previous presentation. Focus on the reasons that guided the choice and order of items can alert to relevant aspects of this specific communication. An ‘axiom’ in the thesis is that text, like meaning, is produced in a given way because something ‘comes’ to mind and ‘goes’ in the context,\(^{72}\) and that problems tend to arise when the paths of author and interpreter diverge in the above process and choice.

To give a practical illustration to this principle, mutual introspection is recommended, and interpreters can compare the (self-)reflexive insights provided by authors or sources with an analysis of their own expectations and reactions. ‘Mapping’ the respective minds relates the spatial metaphor to visual tools for the diagrammatic representation of such paths of thoughts and reasoning, coded through key words and symbols, including ‘branches’ and (hyper-)links. The map in/of my mind sketched below has geographic components, along with historic and mythical ones.

The main examples are in chronological and technological sequence, from ancient ‘black sail death’ legends of classical and medieval times, to the First World War and space travel, both of which marked the twentieth century.\(^{73}\) This progression could be labelled ‘from Aegeus to cybernetics, via Gallipoli and Mars’, thus arranging the four terms in alphabetical order, which is generally considered as safely impartial, but may vary between languages.\(^{74}\) There are also ideal links, which may help highlight the linguistic and cultural continuity of the words and names, including *cybernetics*.

Mars is the name of a planet, but it comes from that of the Graeco-Roman god of war. This neatly links it with the ‘Great War’ (World War I) episode of Gallipoli, close to the heart of Australians and to the Aegean sea, named after the mythical dead king. The relativity of position involves subjects and objects (cf. Ch.4 on deixis), as both ‘close’ and ‘remote’ are “token-reflexive adjectives” (Quine, 1987:123), thus spatial proximity of sea and peninsula appears greater when seen from the ‘antipodes’.\(^{75}\)

---

\(^{72}\) The expression is more immediate in Italian and other languages, as ‘goes’ also means ‘fits’.

\(^{73}\) The linguacultural relativity of labels applies to value (‘classic’), position (‘middle’), number (20).

\(^{74}\) Not only initial letters may change, even for proper names, like Germany / *Allemagne* / *Deutschland*, but also the place in the alphabet of letter combinations, as ‘ch’ in Spanish is after ‘c’ and before ‘d’.

\(^{75}\) Quine also comments on Perth and antipodes, under “Longitude and Latitude”. The bibliographic software (EndNote) used for the references has imported various coordinates (as for Cambridge and New York), confirming the limits of any notion of ‘standards’, even within narrow conventions.
Familiarity with any or all of the terms and references used above should not be taken for granted, although the cultural heritage of the Greek and Latin world, and words in those ‘dead’ languages, still provide inputs to contemporary lexical creations. The availability and acceptability of Latin and other languages of Empire(s) has changed over my lifetime, and the Infobahn is rapidly shifting away from virtually exclusive English dominance (cf. Crystal, 2001; 2002). The advice for Anglophones, mainly if they are monoglots, is to ‘make hay while the sun shines’, and learn safe text skills soon, as mutual intelligibility can be far more limited than many seem to assume.

This dissertation investigates various aspects of text-based misunderstandings, and the following section looks at outcomes comparable with the previous ones, but based on different text processes. This confirms that finding ‘fewories’ depends on context.

Interpreting commands
In the thesis, human communication using natural languages is seen as far more complex than cybernetic functions. Both may share the code re-cognition aspect, but the correspondence between commands and actions is mediated in human behaviour by social and personal conventions and reactions, particularly affective or emotional. Such human aspects can be incorporated in languages that are called ‘natural’, but not in their formal cousins, and this complicates matters beyond the merely linguistic. ‘Face’ and ‘manners’ belong to the affective and behavioural domain, interacting with what is known, perceived, agreed and felt as ‘fact’ (of sorts) in communication. This complexity applies to the ‘force’ of ‘illocutionary acts’, and is considered below in relation to the interpretation of crucial ‘commands’.

A resolution of the U.N. Security Council (242, of 22 November 1967) has been questioned: Israeli withdrawal ‘des territoires occupés’ could mean in English ‘from the occupied territories’ (all) or ‘from occupied territories’ (at least some of them).

---

76 The word ‘monolingual’ is a contradiction in terms, blending Greek and Latin. As ‘multilingual’ refers to con/texts rather than people, ‘unilingual’ could not be used as the opposite of ‘polyglot’.
77 Hopper (1986:127) sees “mutually intelligible intergroup conversation” in “a common language” as “enough to give each other directions, conduct trade and form friendships”. If ‘directions’ are like ‘instructions’ or the ‘commands’ discussed here, such a definition is also linked to safety of outcomes.
78 See the notion of schema, applicable in relation to discourse (Malcolm & Sharifian, 2002).
79 The latter text appears in an on-line source (The Avalon Project, 1996). I recall hearing comments on the debatable versions in the mid-1970s, as a lesson on the dangers of differences related to text.
A recent ‘tale’ in Nury Vittachi’s column also illustrates a key factor in the selection of suitable documents (‘well-chosen worries’ in the opinion of several people).

“NOT WHOLLY HOLY: A Filipino man reading the Bible came across a passage that said that if a part of your body offends you, cut it off. Roland Magsipoc of Bacolod City in the southern Philippines thought this was an excellent idea. … I heard this horror story from reader Wally Co of Manila.” (TT 0201_10/p069tales) 80

Both outcomes involve again loss of life and limb, whether self-inflicted or through armed conflict. In contrast with the previous cases, the form of message is far higher on the linguistic ‘ladder of discourse’ (Ruthrof, 1992, Ch.8) than the binary code of Aegeus and Theseus, or the numerical measures of Gallipoli and Mars. However, discourse is linked with the cybernetic function of command, in both the translation and the interpretation, concerning respectively the Holy Land and Scriptures. 81

In particular, failure to recognise the hyperbole in the rhetoric of the gospel seems to have led the man to take the text as ‘instructions’ to be followed literally, rather than ‘instruction’ to be applied in a more figurative sense. 82 Crucial linguacultural aspects are involved in the choice and perception of style, which the text user has ignored. Conversely, debate on the U.N. command to withdraw focused on the grammar of the two possible English versions. Attention to the letter, rather than the spirit, is found in both cases, but there are opposite attitudes towards acceptance and compliance.

Ambiguity in the U.N. formulation, however ‘diplomatic’ the French original may have tried to be, has led to unsafe text, if the desired outcome was a prompt execution of the command. When two parties disagree about the choice of interpretation, any action based on it becomes open to challenge, and the resulting situation of stalemate (comparable to a double bind or ‘catch 22’) appears complementary to the direct and disastrous outcomes noted in the previous cases of code-based error and rash action.

80 Issue cover-dated January 10, 2002, http://www.feer.com/articles/2002/0201_10/p069tales.html. Scriptures and the (male) body, in a naïve reading, can also lead to lighter outcomes, when Master Six (ex)claims to have found Adam’s underwear, a dried-out leaf in the pages of an old family bible (NI011201CW, p.95). This ‘minimal pair’ confirms that a similar path can have very different results.

81 As religious values can be a particularly risky area or field, the bias involved in the term ‘Scriptures’ or ‘Bible’ to refer to a specific set of holy books should be acknowledged. However, problems of interpretation could be found in other religious contexts, and key issues apply to less sacred writings.

82 The aim is to enter the kingdom of God and avoid hell, according to Matthew 5:29-30, or parallel Mark 9:47 and 43 (see citation further down in the text, and footnote relative to it).
When there can be different numeric or linguistic options in referring to a given point (in space, time or other aspects), the locus of text control must ensure agreement through a shared convention, since to assume both is a most unsafe attitude.

In the Magsipoc case, the ‘face value’ or literal implication of the message relates to cultural values, also associated with ‘face’ as (self-)esteem from approved behaviour. In most cultures I know of, males are socialised to endure physical pain, often self-inflicted, or linked to the pursuit of socially admired ends, generally seen as contests, and including war. To win is not vital: the slaughter at Gallipoli remains a ‘legend’.

The previous sections looked at facts of life and language found in myth and legend, on the basis of the two tales of sails, which show a keen awareness of the serious consequences of mis-communication. Emotional aspects play a role in several stages of the cause-and-effect chain, here called ‘causeffectway’, and the aim of exploring, however tentatively, detailed versions of fiction has been to find why and how such tragic outcomes could be caused. Even historical and contemporary events can be hard to ‘track’ and verify, as different versions can be given of nearly any ‘fact’, and interpretations of motives are all the more open, as other hypothetical exercises.83

Belief, including religious faith, is a crucial but elusive factor. Beyond the influence of Fate, under any name, and the many interventions that myth attributed to deities, the outcome of mis-communication may relate to faith, religion, and related values.84 The case of (mis-)interpretation of the Gospel has the most immediate relevance to un/safe text, as transcultural communication of the Scriptures (by definition written) has happened over the whole globe,85 and more generally because the traditions and processes associated with a wide range of faiths are centred on text interpretation.86

Religious celebrations in many countries, particularly within the Spanish sphere of influence, include self-flagellation and other ‘penance’. The previous reference to the cultural background (or past, to use terms of the 5-P model) of the key participant included gender, while the focus below is on projections concerning God’s will.

83 “While interpreting participants’ intentions is always difficult, the status of ‘insider’ helps.” (Holmes, 1985:40). Like Holmes, “I have used that status” whenever possible in searching for safe text.

84 A personal disclaimer is important at this point. Discussion of religious belief and behaviour is, in my view, a serious taboo, and my intent is to respect the freedom of conscience (religion and other) of anybody. The following lines explain the reasons for dealing with the Gospel in the dissertation.

85 Hence the title ‘Catholic’, used by more than one Christian denomination (Roman and Anglican).

86 Much of the material found in bibliographic searches by that key word refers to the Bible or Gospel.
Why should a lay member of Christianity not take its texts seriously and literally, even to the point of self-inflicted physical harm? Following the word of Jesus leads to salvation: “Ego sum via, veritas et vita” (“I am the way, the truth and the life”).

“It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire”.87 Roland Magsipoc applied the principle, beyond the detail of eye or hand. Given the source of this advice, how could it not be meant seriously, not be intended to be followed? The filter of authorised (thus presumably competent and experienced) interpretation would, could or should have the answers.88 Perhaps there were none because such queries are not likely to be formulated.89 The outcome of self-mutilation, of whatever part of the body, is viewed with ‘horror’ by those reporting it. I personally subscribe to such views, but my own perspective of events is not the only one presented, as the full tale provides details of why the Filipino man, unlike the reader and the editor, saw the idea as good. They fit with the notion of transfer, in this case from psychosocial and linguacultural contexts where the acceptance of harm as ‘redeeming’ (even if self-inflicted) is a value, and religious experience is compatible with this literal reading of the Scriptures as divine rules.

The choice of Evangelist is relevant to the conclusion by Eco (1992:24) that a claim by Jack the Ripper of a causal link between Luke’s Gospel and his crimes could only come from a deranged mind.90 In searching for safe text, the views of both the scholar and the criminal can be seen as extreme interpretations, on a continuum from those obvious and common to others that may shock in their outcomes, and may need explanation of their origins, but can be seen as legitimate, specifically under particular linguacultural circumstances associated with Gospel interpretations. Any judgement of ‘overinterpretation’ is unavoidably biased, even when a relatively ‘common’ sense can be identified across broad groups, and is not a criterion in searching for safe text.

87 This version of Mark 9:47 comes from the New Testament booklet distributed by the Gideons International in Australia. As “this up-to-date version of God’s Book” does not include a publication date, some could read the text production detail ideologically, as if it were to emphasise that temporal modality has no effect on the Bible’s propositions, and so aligning them with those of formal logic.

88 Questions on the availability of a ‘filter’, e.g., “how could the text not have been explained, or interpreted?”, may relate to varying measures of control over the text by Christian denominations. My (Roman) Catholic background is common in the Philippines, but I am unfamiliar with other options.

89 In the sense of not even being considered, let alone asked. This links with the point about ‘you didn’t ask’, made in the section on mis-taking measures.

90 Luke is the only synoptic evangelist who does not include the above passage: Matthew (ch.5) includes it in the sermon on the mountain.
This dissertation concentrates on mis-interpretations that not only diverge from the author’s intention, but also lead to negative outcomes, unwanted by all. Here, self-mutilation appears to go beyond the ‘command’ intended by the author, and at the same time not to ensure the salvation expected by the (mis-)interpreter. In contrast, killing others in the name of religious or ‘moral’ values appears generally instigated, and probably perpetrated, by people who clearly want those deadly outcomes.

Even if Magsipoc may have had ulterior motives for what he apparently saw as ‘good riddance’, I consider it a safer option to question the text of any ‘dubious’ commands, as was done in the case of the U.N. resolution. While that text failed in the attempt to solve a situation of conflict, it addressed an existing one, and did not start it.

**Findings**

The final section of this chapter links the examples above with previous ones, and pictures the overall approach, relating first to the ladder and layers of discourse and meaning, where the distance between the groups of unsafe texts was already noted.

On either side of the hourglass, progressive narrowing or widening of text elements considered would lead from one category to the other, keeping in mind the common element of a serious negative and unwanted outcome, related to forms of command.

Beyond the text item which triggers mis-communication and disaster, as suggested in commenting the ‘black sail deaths’, there are multiple and often hidden layers of context, which may be at least suspected in most cases of unsafe text. Thus the five pyramids of the 5-P model of conflict might turn into stormy whirlpools, merging the items on each (problem, participants, past, projections, and pressures) and sweeping them along with factors variously labelled as emotions, expectations, or even destiny, converging into the more visible and manifest, but increasingly narrow focal point.

A further hourglass parallel can be suggested with chemical substances. From the wide variety of compounds existing in nature, like the infinite texts in natural languages, analysis leads ‘down’ to essential formulations, allowing the successive development of synthetic compounds of increasingly wide variety. The ‘eye’ or narrow point of the hourglass is the ‘logos’ of technology, and the identification and isolation of substances as a chemical formula, crucial for their re/production, matches the basic digital bit stream, which can filter ‘natural’ language and other forms of text through its own code, and re/produce varied ‘virtual’ form(at)s and versions.
While the thesis also notes the possible differences in mis-communication between on- and off-line contexts, the above considerations have illustrated the pervasive nature of unsafe text, found at various levels of such hierarchical structures as discourse and meaning, including the use of different communication technologies. The comparative investigation of some examples of mis-communication has shown that various types of text can indeed go wrong, and be associated with negative outcomes, such as loss of life and limb, in terms that may be seen as cause and effect. However, the mechanics of mis-communication involve a range of factors, including those found in the five P’s model of conflict analysis (Tillett, 1999). They tend to obliterate the distinctions among binary code (white/black sail), technical use of scientific notions (thrust measures) or everyday tools (time pieces), legal ‘orders’ in historical contexts (U.N. resolutions) and religious discourse (the Gospel passage).91

Two main findings concern the role of commands in effecting actions that can negatively affect people through unsafe text, and the general importance of context in determining the level of risk, linked to the safety requirements that apply to text. These are the common element of these examples, whereas the types of differences in expression, associated with difficulties in interaction, include failure or malice in the change (or ‘switch’) between two opposite options, omission of needed verification of compatibility in measures, and problems of letter or spirit of a perceived command. Supplementary considerations have included broader conventions in communication, mainly concerning the duty of care in providing relevant warnings, as well as the more accidental factors or ‘noise’ associated with text transmission.

The concern for unsafe text has been illustrated in this chapter through various means and modes of (mis-)communication, generally compatible with the use of computers, even when they derived from ancient sources, with technology appropriate to the time and place. The hourglass shape, used to describe the approach to the specific thesis topic, has been related to levels on the ladder of discourse and the ‘strip-tease of meaning’, showing that unsafe text can happen at any step. The following chapters in this first part of the dissertation deal with complementary aspects of evidence, in terms of method and sources used, with specific attention to ‘precedents’ among the many studies and authors considered in the course of the investigation for this thesis.

91 As previously note, ‘mythical’ is not an easy category to apply, particularly to the above group.
Chapter 3    Sources

The review of sources provided in this chapter makes various distinctions and selections among the many fields or angles related or relevant to un/safe text.

The process of looking for problems and explanations, noted at the start of Ch.1 as central to the research cycle, considers the views of, and on, authors and interpreters of m/any kind/s of text. This condensed formulation about sources can be illustrated in relation to the work of Freud, one of the main figures included in the next chapter.

Freudian views, specifically on parapraxes, provide interpretation/s for a variety of ‘slips’, including several applicable to written text. In turn, disciples and critics discuss those views, commenting on specific items, but also on more general aspects of theory and practice, and the cumulative literature is open for further re/views.

At the opposite end of fame and scholarship, contributors of anecdotes to magazines like New Idea or the (Far Eastern Economic) Review report their perception of miscommunication, often commenting on other people’s re/actions. Sources for the thesis include examples from everyday life as well as theoretical works, and the chapter is divided in two sections, dealing separately with documents and studies, although the latter may include the former, as exemplified by Freud’s work on slips (cf. Ch.4).

The term ‘studies’ refers to sources for the conceptual aspect of scholarly work, from philosophy to applied research. This clearly includes issues of method, presented in principle and /or in practice, which are taken into account in the thesis and related to the aspects discussed in Ch.1. Studies are reviewed last, as their consideration extends to some major precedents or guiding lights, discussed in the subsequent chapter.

The ‘documents’ providing the available evidence, based on actual or possible interactions, are chosen for use in the thesis through a series of criteria, partly noted earlier, which necessarily supplement those of the sources that incorporate them.

Steps in selecting my samples of unsafe text add specific detail to the approaches noted in Ch.1, and issues of method relate to considerations made there about my own position, given the importance of introspection in this research, from many angles.
Communication, computers, conflict, and cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) are some of the fields relevant to searching for safe text.\textsuperscript{92} To understand and illustrate the range of phenomena under investigation, work on the thesis has used a wide variety of sources. While they are broadly classified as studies and documents, respectively providing concepts and examples useful in searching for safe text, both functions may appear in combination, often along with a classification framework. In searching for safe text, such frameworks are seen as useful supports, rather than results, particularly when they refer to linguistic inputs. As noted in Ch.2, comparable outcomes may relate to unsafe text of widely different characteristics, and the converse applies, thus a classification of inputs by form and even cause does not correlate with categories of text outcomes, as observed also by Freud (cf. Ch.4).

This chapter deals first with sources that are mainly documentary, focusing on the criteria leading to ‘few well-chosen’ corpora,\textsuperscript{93} and later with the more academic and research-oriented literature or studies, reviewed in several thematic groups, with comments on points in common or contrast with the thesis. The aim in both cases is to provide a panorama of sources relevant and related to un/safe text, even if tangential to the core issue, as the latter is defined almost like a reserved field in graphics, framed but not covered by the partly overlapping ‘colours’ of other approaches.

Returning to the metaphor of an hourglass, most items would be more general, thus well above the narrow point which represents the thesis focus, and in turn safe text concerns could be extended to such domains, as ‘onflow’ to the widening half below. Conversely, sources providing specific lines of collection, analysis and classification could be pursued in further depth, compatible with searching for safe text, but beyond the limits of this dissertation.\textsuperscript{94} Within each category of sources, a broad overview of materials consulted is complementary to more detailed consideration of specific items. Options for future research and the choice of approaches are left open, along the lines of wide theoretical compatibility that inform the thesis (cf. Ch.1). In a sense, the ‘sand’ I quarried from many places could be transferred on to other hourglass-shaped processing tools or filters, and future developments are also noted in the last chapter.

\textsuperscript{92} Alliteration is a common but valuable text tool, particularly to promote memory of elements that are classified together, for example in the 5-P model of conflict analysis. Here the four concepts are listed in alphabetical order, which is arbitrary and language-dependent (as noted), but relatively ‘neutral’.

\textsuperscript{93} Very few: only two have been extensively used, although many others were explored in the research.

\textsuperscript{94} For example, “Radio Talk” (cf. Goffman, 1981) is not Text Only, but takes place on the Infobahn.
Documents

This review covers the main features of what warrants search, in relation to the cases used in the thesis. The “right to life, liberty and the pursuit of meaning” (Hymes, 1996:208)\(^95\) is a stark and relevant rephrasing of the concern for equity, access and diversity, as the range of risks associated with unsafe text can be related to violations of such rights, and evaluated in terms of both seriousness and frequency. Some key criteria have been applied to instances of communication problems, combining text as input with trouble, or other kinds of negative outcome, and many examples have been considered, collected, selected and evaluated as data for use in the research.

Outcomes are the prime substantive variable in the identification of ‘feworries’. The evaluation of costs associated with mis-communication can refer to actual or potential consequences, as long as they are both negative and unwanted. Physical loss of life and limb has a counterpart in loss of ‘face’, broadly defined.\(^96\) A corresponding distinction between ‘matters of fact’ (usually subject to confusion), and ‘matters of manners’ (involving risk of offence or threats to ‘face’) is used in the thesis only in general terms, as many situations combine several aspects along their complex ‘cause-effectways’. A particular concern is for difficulties in interaction, as differences in linguistic expression can lead to conflict, even without other motives.

Inputs of a linguistic nature are the specific focus of a search for safe text. Differences among users of a ‘common’ language lead to transcultural crossings, and default options are also linked to other types of ‘errors’, such as ‘slips’, which authors may recognise as such. In addition, chosen problems are mostly compatible or comparable with the use of written text in computer-mediated communication, in particular on the Internet or Infobahn. Specific chapters deal with relevant aspects of those factors.

The first selection involves problems where some difference between the author’s intended message and the version processed by the interpreter is associated with linguistic expressions, particularly through interference, which is a negative form of language transfer. The latter is a key concept, discussed in Ch.5, related to the default option represented by what is on one’s mind at the moment, and influenced by linguacultural background, including various forms of diversity.

\(^{95}\) The original text (declaration of independence of the USA) had “the pursuit of happiness”.

Text counts as unsafe if it involves difficulties in interaction associated with differences in the linguistic expressions used. To be suitable as an example in the thesis, as noted in Ch.1, the best document of such incidents is a report or anecdote (a) recorded by participants, or direct observers, and (b) labelled in terms of the perceived seriousness or gravity of outcome.

Comments on the problematic nature for interaction may also come from editors, or further users of the text. Thus a wide range of viewpoints is represented, in terms of linguacultural background, attitudes and perspective regarding what is seen as ‘wrong’, or at least ‘funny’ (as ‘peculiar’, more than just ‘amusing’). The type of selection and labelling of examples by the sources is a priority criterion, as in the “horror story” titled “Not wholly holy” (cf. Ch.2). The use of other reaction terms, such as ‘puzzled’ or ‘embarrassed’, in reports made by a wide range of people, also reduces investigator bias, and allows each interpreter to evaluate independently the examples, in terms of seriousness of the problem as perceived by the various parties.

In order to analyse, explain and classify examples of mis-communication, it is important to deal with relevant aspects of the overall process, including context, thus the information needed should be adequate to justify at least hypotheses, and preferably conclusions, associated with a positive solution to the interaction problem. The above considerations or criteria have narrowed down the range of potential document sources, or what is there, to the specific selection of the examples used in the thesis to illustrate the dangers of unsafe text, or what is here.

As a complement to the review of literature under “Studies”, these pages outline the features of some sources of documents considered in the research project. Specific factors like length, context and purpose are examined in the selection, although there is no direct link with the outcome of their utilisation in the thesis, where the main illustrations of (un)safe text come from a range of different types of sources. 97

Examples can be from academic and even creative work, like drama, fiction or myth, as both actual and imaginary incidents involving unsafe text have been considered. 98

---

97 The extensive review of a classical myth in Ch.2 is based on several books. The two transnational examples in Ch.5 come from a ‘funny’ e-mail and items with photographs in Travellers’ Tales, while references to a court case (GOG, in Ch.8) come from a Conference on (professional) interpreting and the law. Part Three uses many items variously available on-line, particularly as urban legends.

98 The ‘truth’ of statements about events is not an issue here, because verisimilitude is more relevant, as in the Italian compliment to a story: ‘se non è vera, è ben trovata’ (if it’s not true, it’s well devised).
While personal recollection or other records are used for corroborating cases, preferred sources provide details, including comments on the problem and its nature by participants, observers, editors or scholars. Major corpora, briefly noted below and further discussed later, are the *New Idea* columns, titled “Children’s world” (CW) and “Mere male” (MM), which reflect differences in linguacultural default setting based respectively on age and gender, and the “Travellers’ tales” (TT) by Nury Vittachi in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, where examples come from the region and beyond, and provide on-line illustrations of a wider range of diversity (CaLD) in text use.

This section on documents relates to the criteria used to select examples, applied through the collection, investigation and evaluation of countless instances of unsafe text. As noted in the previous pages, the main focus in searching for safe text, and for what can best document unsafe text, is on the outcomes of interaction, both actual and potential. Negative consequences that appear unwanted and unintended by both sides could be linked to unsafe text practices, which involve the production and/or interpretation of specific linguistic expressions, possibly through accidental means (leading to ‘slips’) or deeper differences in linguacultural usage and background.

This thesis focuses on a general process of transfer from default settings, which range from ‘sounds in the head’, or the position of fingers on the keyboard, to more or less conscious associations and contexts, linked to individual situations, language patterns and cultural values,\(^9\) beyond simple measures of ‘competence’.

Finding ‘feworries’ among the many cases of mis-communication requires the identification of sufficiently problematic outcomes linked to linguistic inputs. Priorities in searching for safe text include relevance to the Infobahn, specifically compatibility with computer-mediated communication (CMC) using written text, mainly in English (for ease of use). Cases or examples used in research should remain available for verification, and therefore a large amount of data was obtained from established sources of anecdotes. Focus on computer-mediated communication has encouraged the use of on-line material, with priority to ongoing Internet sites, but it soon proved impossible to document conflicts in CMC attributable to misperceptions of unsafe text; attempts thwarted early in the project discouraged further efforts.\(^10\)

\(^9\) Indigenous schemas in Aboriginal English go beyond traditional uses (Malcolm & Sharifian, 2002).

\(^10\) A ‘flame’ (hostile electronic message) found in a discussion group of linguists, tracking back from a message about ‘posterior or posterity’ which tried to defuse it, was not relevant enough to safe text, while some cooperative gestures met with sharp refusals and rebukes from the sources of useful items.
Searching for suitable examples would have been like trying to find the proverbial needle in a haystack, while asking individuals to select and share cases would have compounded quantitative difficulties with ethical and other qualitative ones.

There is a striking similarity between the advantages for research of CMC and ‘radio talk’. Introducing a journal issue on Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, Herring (1996a) calls CMC systems “a boon to the study of language-in-use, indeed possibly the greatest boon since the invention of the portable tape recorder in the 1950’s”. Broadcasting “has much to recommend it. It is everywhere available, particularly easy to record, and, because publicly transmitted words are involved, no prior permission for scholarly use seems necessary” (Goffman, 1981: 197). The last point is crucial to my choice of sources, for the reasons of ethical clearance noted above.

Beyond references to written material on- and off-line, or media like radio, television, and film, relevant texts may come from theatre, including stand-up comedy. Personal recollections also take various forms, from introspection to reported events, and include distant sources that may not always be properly credited. However, this process helps illustrate the research topic, also by sharing my own re/-actions in terms of affective, behavioural and cognitive (ABC) components of text use.

Sources of comparable short texts can be vary greatly in purpose and approach, and the review of their use below includes materials noted also in the “Studies” section. Examples in style guides or manuals aim to teach useful points that are often subtle and rarely ridiculous, while many items in higher-level (e.g., philosophical) language studies are hardly relevant for practical communication purposes. The supposedly lower-level lists of ‘howlers’ and such concentrate on what is obviously ‘wrong’ and usually easy to correct, for purposes of amusement at funny outcomes. However, they can perform implicit didactic functions, as knowing the ‘right’ word helps not only to ‘get’ the joke, but also to avoid falling in similar traps associated with unsafe text.

Training materials offer relatively few examples of forms that may cause problems, possibly in relation to the pedagogical issue of presenting something ‘wrong’ as a sort

101 “Further, there is no question of the subjects modifying their behavior …under study”. Announcers are “very careful …. Their routine conduct on the air is already wary and self-conscious.” (p.197-8)

102 Examples and categories can be specific to an author or theory, and open to discussion by others.

103 Mulkay (1988) discusses didactic or informational uses of humour, but what one can ‘get’ (or not) from the same joke shows widely diverging ranges, and even scholarly interpretations may fall short.
of model. In addition, the choice varies with the purpose of the source, as certain types of works often use examples of problematic situations to illustrate their lessons.

Most manuals of style and language, and some materials about cross-/inter-/transcultural communication, may cater to users who want certainties. In this regard, the thesis aims to make clear that, even in terms of strictly linguistic ‘rules’, any certainty is always relative, and no text is ever completely safe, as observed at the start of Ch.2, since the outcome of interaction always depends on many factors.

Other sources provide frameworks and approaches to safe cultural ‘crossings’. These are more useful as studies than as documents, but also more likely than other types of sources to acknowledge and illustrate the risks associated with misunderstandings based on language, style, conventions and practices (related to what is called here ‘linguacultural background’), along with non-verbal behaviour and cultural values. The following quotation can be compared with some aspects of this dissertation:

> Our aim is not to give a dictionary of these differences
> or a long list of cross-cultural examples and anecdotes,
> but to present some underlying principles which people
> can use in managing intercultural communication.
> (Gallois & Callan, 1997:21)

In searching for safe text, examples and anecdotes are not simply listed, as in the typical sources here called ‘documents’, especially those circulating on-line. Their examination relates to the underlying principles associated with communication skills in cross-/inter-/transcultural situations, which include attention to the context and participants, to see how they are ‘positioned’, also in geo-spatial terms (cf. Ch.1). The latter types of coordinates have been related to linguacultural ones, as shown in the traditional naming of languages, but history and technology have added many other links, and therefore any background varies greatly with individuals.

---

104 Fox (1994:45) notes the interest in clichés by foreign students, who said “We appreciate your handout on dead horses,” laughing at the image. “We need this useful vocabulary.” New, questioning approaches (cf. Ch.1 and note about the 2002 Adey seminar on cognitive conflict) fit my experience of learning, as warnings of unsafe text have proved unforgettable (cf. the ‘slippery’ case noted in Ch.9).

105 As do many students taught by Aveling (2001), who expect “strategies for effective ... practice and cultural ‘information’ sheets that outline different cultural mores and practices”.

106 A list of “Ethnic schools in Sydney” (Robinson, 1978:103-105) names various ethnic associations, under headings that appear computer-generated, combining gross ignorance and subtle divisions. Part Two mentions the issue of languages and related lists in computer software and sites.

107 See Kelly-Holmes, Clyne, & Wright (1998) for details on the background status of language students, noting differences in kind and degree for most variables related to family circumstances.
Meta-linguistic awareness of diversity is best achieved through introspection and observation of the dominant variety, which functions as ‘standard’ in the respective context, and of one’s own default settings. The Australian context of this thesis in transcultural communication, which leads to a focus on uses of English, is also a point of reference in ‘positioning’ documents of different ‘Englishes’.

Another key aspect relates to ‘other’ languages (as in ‘LOTE’, cf. Ch.6) and cultures, which many sources present individually, for purposes of both linguistic and cross-cultural training, while some others deal with broader groups, such as ‘Asia’. This cross- or inter-cultural approach identifies the main linguacultures involved, helping the search for sources of de/faults, differences and difficulties in specific incidents.

In searching for safe text, the focus is on a more open transcultural context, and thus on the substantive aspects of underlying principles, which can apply to a variety of participants, while in the absence of such considerations, a superficial approach risks stereotyping the ‘other/s’. The thesis aims to find possible transfer sources for miscommunication, including background linguacultures, with specific reference to ways of saying, writing, doing things and meaning in particular places and contexts, and general findings come from a composite overall picture, based on widespread cases. Thus a source like Hello Australia (Chanock, 1986) is a useful local reference, covering a range of problems associated with English expressions that could be misunderstood by migrants to Australia from diverse backgrounds. The segment titled “Dr Know” could be an example of conflict resolution based on linguistic error analysis, and it provides a model approach to safe/r text, including alternative forms.

Searching for safe text can use many ‘sins pinned on screen’, and sites considered as sources of documents include selections in a variety of written genres, from ads and signs to church bulletins and notes on music programmes or records. Fellow language professionals (translators and interpreters, or T/I, formerly I/T) often share on-line examples of mis-communication across languages, with outcomes that range from humour to horror, while many other sites provide assorted howlers or bloopers.

---

108 The relativity of this expression makes it more confusing than ‘C/continent(al)’ or ‘down under’, but the latter is biased beyond the geographic basis. Questionable aspects of both are noted in the “Studies” section, where are also cited some handbooks on single linguacultures ‘other than English’ (‘LOTE’).

109 It is available in print, and as sound and video recording of the television programme (also 1990).

110 Regrettably, a site on the latter could not be accessed again: it provided an ideal model for safe text exercises, as each ‘musical howler’ had an optional link to the correction and explanation.
More informal channels, like newsletters and e-mail, at times include lists similar to the above, and some can be traced to printed sources, as noted elsewhere in the thesis, through scholarly work or the author’s websites. A rare but relevant option offers the recollections by famous people of their embarrassing moments (Spastic Centres of SA, 1984). These fit the main criteria used in the thesis, as they include context and introspection, and often have linguistic inputs pointing out some ‘usual suspect/s’.

The sources of ‘documents’ noted above range from studies and training materials to collections of humorous one-liners. The usefulness of relevant examples of unsafe text can be limited by the format of presentation, whereas the main corpora used in the research provide a structure suitable for discussion. The genre constitutes a peculiar variety of ‘anecdotes’, defined as “a short narrative of a particular incident or occurrence of an interesting nature.” To generate interest, there is an element of curiosity, or curiousness, in both senses of strangeness in what is told, and of inquisitiveness in the audience. This applies to cases selected for study in the thesis, as misunderstandings must be unusual enough in their (unintended) outcomes to stimulate the need or desire to find out about their mechanism. More than a beginning, middle and end, this type of story should have a lesson to teach or a principle to illustrate in relation to safe/r text, and requirements for use in searching for safe text are noted next, in relation to the features of weekly columns in New Idea and Review.

The mismatch in perceived ‘meaning’ (both as intent and content) between message author and interpreter may lead the reader of the anecdote to identify with either side, also depending on the position of who is reporting, and on the information provided. One aim of the thesis is to broaden such perceptions, through informed views on what problematic inputs may have meant, or what they were intended to be. This could shift the balance of the event as reported by the source, and affect the humour that is commonly found in the selected corpora (for relevant typologies, see Mulkay, 1988).

Mis-communication occurs when the author and interpreter are out of step in the basic process of text production, noted or mapped in the introspective intermezzo of Ch.2 as ‘something comes to mind, and goes in the context’. To guess why and how the author’s mind produced the text in question, it is useful to know the background, which may be evident in the text, as is often the case in the anecdotes from New Idea.

---

111 Macquarie Dictionary, 3rd ed (Delbridge, 1997). References to it have been abbreviated as ‘M3’.
The “Children’s World” column of the Australian women’s magazine usually gives age and gender, as in the Bible discovery by Master Six (cf. note in Ch.2), while in the “Mere Male” column additional explanations are required more often, for example if the person’s profession is relevant to the specific area/s of (in-)competence. Both columns regularly provide the context where text has been produced or perceived and processed inappropriately, and senders of items are credited with name and place, which may help identify both background and context of the interaction and its report.

In addition, each item has a title, presumably provided by editors, mostly including further word play. Thus the ambiguities of English text are further exploited for humorous purposes, and this type of title applies even to non-linguistic incidents, also in “Travellers’ Tales”\textsuperscript{112}. The editorial input in the latter goes beyond selection, and includes elaboration and comments on most items, usually specifying the location. Printed sources are noted, and when readers send in material, they are credited by name. “Humorist Nury Vittachi’s irreverent look at the lighter side of Asia” has some interactive debate, as illustrated in Ch.5 in discussing a set of precious gems.

These written sources have been explored extensively, as they suit the thesis criteria in qualitative terms, as noted below. The advantages of these two major corpora are also quantitative, as the items supplied every week are many, and conveniently short. As documents, they allow informed guesses about what may have been in the mind of the parties involved, including those reporting them. The latter contribute, along with the editor, to highlighting the curious and often humorous aspects of these short narratives of text-based incidents. Items in both periodicals include relevant types of information associated with mis-communication, as outlined in the following points:

- the central element is a text, considered problematic by the contributor and the editor, often with comments on potential or actual unintended outcomes;
- the context usually includes the place, implying local languages and cultures;
- authors and interpreters of text (especially when originally spoken) are often identified by gender, social role or relationship, and age in the case of children.

\textsuperscript{112} The column by Nury Vittachi in the weekly \textit{Review: Far Eastern Economic Review}, available in print and on-line (http://www.feer.com/indexes/talesindex.html), it is also referred to in the thesis as TT. As noted in the first example (cf. Ch.2, under “Interpreting commands”), anecdotes include a short reference to the source, derived from the original URL of TT and adapted to NI, including the issue cover date (yymmd), column title and page, as in (TT 0201_10/p069tales) or (NI011201CW, p.95).
The approach used in the thesis to select examples is illustrated mainly with reference to the two periodical sources noted above, namely the local “Children’s World” (CW) and “Mere Male” (MM) from *New Idea* (NI), and the international “Travellers’ Tales” (TT) from the *Review* (or FEER, for *Far Eastern Economic Review*). The purpose is to indicate the use made here of available material, and how the criteria and priorities or guidelines could be applied for future use of the examples, recommended in Ch.11.

To obtain a rich range of examples, some criteria associated with forms of un/safe text have been applied cumulatively, while those related to outcomes have been applied iteratively and led to a ranking of items by priority, aiming for ‘feworries’.

Concern for transfer from background linguacultures had originally focussed on identifiable non-native users of English, such as most authors of text in *Review* items (TT, or Travellers’ Tales). However, *New Idea* (NI) provides a vital complement and counterpart to that approach, bringing the concept of linguacultural background as ‘default setting’ to a level much nearer to the individual idiolect. In particular, the two NI columns illustrate aspects of difference that apply more widely to communication difficulties, as “Children’s World” (CW) shows the process of (first) language acquisition, similar to learning successive languages, while “Mere Male” (MM) highlights cultural differences, even within small groups that supposedly share a common language. Gender is one factor, and this ‘popular’ source helps to widen the approach of more academically-oriented work (cf. Roman, Juhasz, & Miller, 1994), but many other aspects of background differences are revealed in text processing.

The position and attitude of ‘tales’ (TT) contributors in relation to English is varied, as Nury Vittachi notes in several occasions. Some ‘native’ users may only know one variety, while many people have acquired or learned English in addition to other languages, in various sequences and combinations, and ‘outsider’ exposure to English may lead to a more observant attitude (in every sense) concerning its conventions. Several ‘tales’ comment on the relative seriousness or gravity of minor or surface errors, often in terms of the source (*noblesse oblige*) or the context of the outcome. Thus combined use of the *Review* and *New Idea* covers a wide range of English text authors and interpreters, approximating that of CMC in Australia and the region.

---

113 The abbreviations TT, NI, CW and MM are used in references to the specific source of anecdotes.

114 An example is the mis-interpretation of ‘vacancy’ (outside a motel) as referring to jobs rather than rooms. This reflects priorities, probably associated with socio-economic status. (NI000422 MM p.95)
Studies
Academic works that have been consulted or considered are generally noted in this section, with indications of how each type of studies applies to searching for safe text. Given the a-disciplinary position of the dissertation, the task involves mainly thematic approaches, broadly grouping works and authors that often transcend specific ‘fields’. Successive choices and distinctions approximate the focus on interaction difficulties related to differences in linguistic expression, compatible with the use of written text in computer-mediated transcultural communication, mainly in English. As the last aspect has very extensive coverage in the literature, the thesis aims to generalise the key points to other languages, both as sources and destinations of transfer/ence.¹¹⁵

The concern for cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) involves an interactive approach to text, illustrating the effects of my own linguacultural background, mainly in European languages of Empire(s).¹¹⁶ In reviewing the literature, the geo-cultural focus and context of studies is related to that of the thesis, which is based in Australia, and thus takes a worldwide view from ‘down under’, to use and expose a notoriously biased expression. Therefore Northern sources, largely from the United States of America, are listed below Austral ones (i.e. Southern, referring to the hemisphere).

This applies in the first place to the following review of works dealing with cross-, inter- or transcultural communication, as in these approaches (discussed in Ch.1) the linguaculture of authors plays a double role. Discussion of difference and diversity highlights the importance of background as default setting, for both authors and interpreters of text of any kind, but the point of view of the study (often a text-book) and its author/s in relation to norms and values is often implicit. Such studies are often useful also as documents, and many works concerned with communication beyond one’s culture have a specific focus on languages, crucial in searching for safe text.

Thus works most relevant to this research include specific comments on differences in written text that may lead to difficulties across linguacultures. A key point (cf. Ch.5) is that recognising linguacultural background as the source of mis-communication can help trace the ‘original’ version of text, thus making clear/er what others mean in their

¹¹⁵ The central concept and process of transfer is discussed in Part Two, and Pauwels (1995) notes various types of transference (grammatical, lexical, phonological, pragmatic, prosodic and semantic).
¹¹⁶ This limiting feature is reiterated in the dissertation, as it reflects a key fact of life and languages, but is easily overlooked. I first reflected on this aspect of my own linguistic repertoire only recently.
usual, unmarked way of communicating through words, with mostly implicit ‘rules’. This view is compatible with the findings of key authors and studies, and a collection dealing specifically with mis-communication (Pride, 1985) is particularly relevant. Clyne (e.g. 1985; 1994) deals with the impact of cultural values on discourse, including unsuccessful communication, in English-language exchanges among non-native users in Australia, and covers topics of direct interest to this dissertation, like written discourse across cultures, interpretation and expectations patterns.

In searching for safe text, the choice of ‘feworries’ is based mainly on the seriousness of unwanted negative outcomes associated with mis-communication, and basic concerns in this respect are ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’ (or meaning). These criteria lead to the domains of health and (physical) safety, followed by law and order, then by a widening range of activities associated with text-based interactions.

Health, law and social work are variously covered, mainly in collections of essays, with respect to interpreting (Martin, Moore, & Appelkamp, 1991; Roberts-Smith, Frey, Bessell-Browne, & De Pieri Tentori, 1990), cross-cultural communication (Pauwels, 1995, 1992), and to more specific settings and groups (Eades, 1995; Pasquarelli, 1966), as illustrated in two essays on (mis-)communication (Koch, 1985; Lane, 1985), always in the context of Australia and New Zealand.

More general works (Gallois & Callan, 1997; O’Sullivan, 1994) promote awareness across domains and linguacultures, as do some training materials like Hello Australia. Others take a bilateral approach, comparing Australia with an individual culture, as in the NCELTR series (Brick, 1991; Koyama, 1992; O’Sullivan & Songporn, 1997; Ronowicz, 1995) respectively on China, Japan, Poland and Thailand. Key functions of transcultural communication are noted in such contexts as defining self, living and interacting, values and thinking in society, besides learning and teaching. Textbooks for social science education (Goodacre & Follers, 1987; Young & Lovat, 1988) provide a useful supplement to those concentrating on languages.

Among training and reference materials, some are addressed to the educational sector, with focus on such aspects as adult literacy (Farrington, 1992), international students at TAFE (Mezger, 1993), communication and supervision in a multicultural workplace (Aresti, Guse-Brennfleck, & Dempsey, 1993; Mawer & Wise, 1986).

117 Some essays are cited in relation to specific points, within this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis.
Topics like training of trainers (Kroehnert, 1990) and communication for business and management (Elder, 1994, 1995) include many concerns relevant to safe text. Tertiary literacy is the focus of two volumes of proceedings (Golebiowski & Borland, 1997), which include the comparative essay by Spizzica on Italy. Mis-communication studies include educational applications, dealing with children (Christie & Harris, 1985; Kearins, 1985; Nicol, 1985; Zubrick, 1985) and adults (Benton, 1985; Eades, 1985).

Some domain-oriented works cover broad regions or cultural areas, often with specific country chapters. Asia is frequently the focus (e.g., Irwin, 1996), especially in works addressed to marketing and business people (Commerce and Trade, c.1997; Sheehan, 1992). A comparable approach is found in an extensive U.S. work (Dunung, 1995), while Asia-related cases include analyses of unsafe text (Cremer & Willes, 1998). Other management and business-oriented works produced ‘overseas’ can also help foster awareness of differences on all sides of electronic text exchanges, associated with background languages, and involving assorted users (Harris & Moran, 1996; Hoecklin, c1995; Mockler & Dologite, 1997; Mueller, 1996; Wisinski, 1993).

A European perspective appears both original and worthwhile (Guirdham, 1999), while transcontinental works (Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars, 1993) encourage views of complementary positions along various cultural dimensions, and stress the importance of values and ‘meaning’ in any contact, also noting the role of language. Focus on the latter (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001) illustrates options, specifically in terms of relative proficiency and power. A work on intercultural marriage (Romano, 2001) includes language and communication in the list of 19 potential trouble spots, covered in as many chapters, and often refers to difficulties associated with linguacultural differences in several crucial contexts, also in relation to values.

Other transoceanic texts offer insights relevant to transcultural communication (Dodd, 1998; Gudykunst, 1986; Gumperz et al., 1979; Porter & Samovar, 1997; Samovar & Porter, 1991), and some collections include essays from a range of perspectives. There is often specific focus on education and academic writing (Dubin & Kuhlman, 1992; Fox, 1994; Peitzman & Gadda, 1994; Ventola & Mauranen, 1996).

---

118 ‘Asia’ is a questionable ‘geographic’ expression in trans-cultural terms, as noted in the section on Documents, particularly when the reference to ‘Asian’ people is focused on ‘local’ immigrant groups.
Cross-cultural studies are relatively recent (cf. Nieuwenhuijze, 1963), and still fluid in nature, as illustrated by the wide range of cross-cultural communication resources listed in an Australian guide (Haines et al., 1992). Conversely, studies focused on interpersonal communication (Kotzman, 1989; Shuter, 1979) often highlight sources of misunderstandings in affective and behavioural (rather than cognitive) terms, and note the individual element, compatible with the notion of idiolect used in the thesis.

In dealing with communication breakdown, studies of dis-/dys-/mis-communication and works on conflict resolution by John Burton and by others (e.g., De Bono, 1991; Elgin, 1995; Tillett, 1999) provide a useful background. A key point in searching for safe text is that two people rarely use ‘the same’ language, given the variability of (sub-) cultural factors and heteroglossia, and thus conflict can readily arise from messages open to antagonising interpretations. Issues of equity, access and diversity are considered in relation to power and discourse (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1969, 1971, 1972; McHoul & Grace, 1997; Ritzer, 1997), also in transcultural exchanges. Conversely, conflicts where language is only a symptom must be noted as such.119

Studies reviewed so far are mainly about ways to ‘manage’ (in) cultural crossings. The thesis transfers on to the Infobahn many existing approaches to language and culture, with focus on interaction difficulties attributable to text-based differences in transcultural computer-mediated (mis-)communication, and the next pages consider the use of computers and language/s, starting with guidelines and reference works.

Recent work by a linguist “investigates the nature of the impact which the Internet is making on language … to ‘take a view’ about the way in which it is being shaped by and is shaping language and languages” (back cover of Crystal, 2001). This ‘view’ is taken as baseline for my research, as it covers extensive literature, mostly in and on English, from a point of view that is compatible with, but preliminary to, searching for safe text.120 The need to clarify the use of ‘language/s’ when referring specifically to forms of English, ‘electronic’ or otherwise, is a point marked by Snyder (1997) and by participants in CATaC conferences on cultural attitudes towards technology and communication (mentioned later). Hyperlinks (Snyder, 1996) highlight the role of associations, reflecting affective and behavioural (beyond cognitive) responses to text.

---

119 There are cases where ‘effective communication is not enough’ (cf. Tidwell, 1992), noted in Ch.11.

120 Several other works by Crystal (1980, 1987, 1995, 1997) also provide references to terms, concepts, and ‘facts of life and language/s’ (mainly English), including the point of view of a Welsh speaker.
The mnemonic sequence ‘ABC’ points out how the first two (affect and behaviour) are crucial in terms of potentially unsafe aspects or components, which also relate to other views of the ‘origins’ of text, such as works by Freud and others (cf. Ch.4).

Individual and group differences in processing various forms of language range from background linguaculture to age, ability and other health aspects, and while Singh, Gedeon, & Rho (1998) advise on improved accessibility for the latter, Spender (1995) mentions the problem of linguacultural diversity in her study about gender in CMC. Reference to the limits of the “lifeworld” of the Net as “language community” in terms of gender, age and status regarding the use of English is seen as a mandate for the present thesis, in terms of equity and access for ‘diverse’ groups that differ from the dominant and privileged insiders. The similarity of issues and approaches among gender, race and language issues goes beyond the focus of the thesis, but an aspect noted in Ch.10 is that concern for equity includes awareness of discriminatory language, affecting people from non-dominant groups. Here I briefly add that ‘racism’ has become a common term to criticise critical expressions affecting almost any group, while the expression ‘political correctness’ is used with negative overtones, for whatever is seen a rigidly dogmatic attitude, stifling freedom of expression.

One point confirmed by such apparently opposite views is that evaluations of text and discourse are based on the observer’s position, and biased in favour of one’s beliefs. At the level of specific expressions, this leads to extreme displays of linguistic relativism, particularly noticeable (to me) in regard to sexism. Works on the subject (Pauwels, 1987, 1991, 1998; Roman et al., 1994; Rowland, 1994; Spender, 1990; Vaughan, 1991) include a range of aspects and views. Cameron and colleagues (Cameron, 1992; Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 1992) provide a thorough review of frameworks and approaches in linguistic theory, and of method aspects of the relation between researchers and their ‘subjects’. In this respect, like many colleagues at Murdoch University, I am both. As ‘one of them’ I invite others to join the club, since we all are on our own solitary board when surfing the waves of cyberspace.121 On- or off-line, written texts can contribute to this research, and to the many-sided and reflexive process of searching for safe text, as shown by this thesis.

121 This modification of the idiom ‘all in the same boat’, common to several languages, aims to focus on the item being generalised to a ‘club’ (the individuality of idiolect), and on the ultimate uncertainty of who may have what in common with whom, in the virtual context of the Infobahn (cf. Part Two).
The use of computers for communication is far more recent than that of written language, yet both skills appear learned rather than acquired, in contrast to one’s first language (or L1: theories and terminologies in this respect appear open to question). The complex reality of linguacultural diversity, and more generally of heteroglossia (see Ch.4 and others on Bakhtin) is the basis for many forms of transfer, which are vital to learning and coping with new situations, but both can also lead to unsafe text. Recognition of the mechanisms and factors involved helps to sort (out) the problems. Processes of acquisition, instruction, learning and use of language, possibly more than of other skills, also relate to the ABC of interaction, that is, affective, behavioural and cognitive aspects and sciences. Attitudes and anxiety are noted in the specific context of second and foreign language acquisition (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Laine, 1987), while studies of cognitive processing look at implicit and explicit aspects (Kirsner et al., 1998), and bi-linguals are key subjects for research (Harris, 1992; Piper, 1993).

Approaches to language diversity and its management, also as resource (Clyne, 1997; Kelly-Holmes, Clyne, & Wright, 1998; Kipp, Clyne, & Pauwels, 1995), can supplement earlier studies of migrants in Australia, mainly concerned about their English language needs, and categories of proficiency (Gardini & Secombe, 1986; Manton, McKay, & Clyne, 1982, 1983; Mills & DIEA, 1984). While current concerns acknowledge difference/s (Faine, 2001; Mawer, Field, & Herne, 1995), I found it disappointing to see the same handbook (Brassil et al., 2000) labelled “for speakers of …”, but translated in various languages without any change in the text, as an apparent effort to cater for diversity fails to acknowledge background linguacultures, and their specific positions in relation to the English language, beyond the obvious surface.

In contrast, ‘problems’ are seen from the specific ‘overseas’ perspective of the former Crown colony (Dent-Young & Dent-Young, 1988). This relates to the global view of English/es and other languages of Empire/s (Crystal, 1997; Harms, 1973; McArthur, 1998; Parakrama, 1995; Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Platt, Weber, & Lian, 1984). Even the most recent works listed above rarely mention computer-mediated communication (CMC), and conversely, even critical works on the Internet (Cherny & Weise, 1996; Moore, 1995; Stoll, 1995) rarely deal with linguacultural diversity. Early stages of my literature survey included more general sources on CMC (Finney, 1995; Krol, 1994), mainly to compare it with other forms, as done more recently by Muniandy (2002).
The most interesting works on CMC look at educational applications (Jonassen, 1996; Lankshear, Green, & Snyder, 2000; Mason, 1994; Mason & Kaye, 1989; Nix & Spiro, 1990), cultures (Star, 1995) and attitudes in this area, or CATaC (Ess & Sudweeks, 1998; Sudweeks & Ess, 2000, 2001). In tertiary education, issues of equity, access and diversity in computer-mediated communication are only briefly mentioned (Hesketh & DEETYA, 1996), or limited numbers exclude the language variable (Lund & Volet, 1998), while an off-line base-line comparison between native and non-native users of English is found in a thesis (Beasley 1994).

Communication training materials generally include warnings about risks of miscommunication, mainly related to a specific medium, but applicable beyond it. Written instructions on how to use language often give examples of problematic text, usually providing little or no context, and in this respect appear comparable to sources at two opposite extremes of the scholarly spectrum. The largely humorous collections of curious specimens (such as howlers) pinned on paper and screen, used as documents and considered in that section of this chapter, are at least as realistic as the isolated sentences discussed in theoretical works on language, where they often appear to be confused with utterances (cf. Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981:xx, 274-5, 281).

In addition to traditional style guides or manuals, with a business-oriented, academic or journalistic slant, newer ones cover computer-mediated communication, and provide useful pointers for safe text, which could be specific to that medium, in particular when using Text Only. Beyond lists or examples of do’s and don’ts, some authors provide insights into the mechanism of mis-communication, and explain why an ill-considered choice can contribute to confusion and even conflict (cf. Piotrowski, 1996:1; Smith & Bernhardt, 1996; Van Skiver, 1995:4).

The range of attitudes towards language use for communication (cf. McArthur, 1998:113-4, 214-5) affects safe-text practices, since prescriptive and proscriptive approaches, possibly aimed at uncertainty reduction, are likely to increase interaction problems, whereas a description of linguacultural differences (cf. Wierzbicka, 1997, 1999) can improve mutual understanding, promoting equity in access and outcomes.

The use of dictionaries for this research has served several purposes. They are obviously reference works, to supplement, support or redress my own or others’ use, interpretation and explanation of linguistic expressions, specifically in written form.
However, they are also compared, for example to note how Australian usage (Delbridge, 1997) may differ from the British COD (Pearsall, 1999).

Other dictionaries used cover one or more languages (these works include Atkins, Carpenter, & Morcellet, 1996; Flexner, 1987; Godfrey-Smith, 1991; Hawkins & Allen, 1991; Moore, 1999; Stein & Urdang, 1983; Thompson, 1995; Urdang & Flexner, 1968; Zingarelli, Rosiello, & Dogliotti, 1983) and/or varieties (Beckett & Akhurst, 1986; Borghese & Borghese, 1980; Leoni, 1981, 1991; Moss, 1973).

Further dictionaries cover specific domains, from philosophical ‘quiddities’ and psychology (Quine, 1987; Reber, 1995) to classic and foreign phrases and fables (Bently, 1995; Bliss, 1966; Brewer, 1978; Brewer & Evans, 1970; Hammond & Scullard, 1970; Phythian, 1982) and more or less specific items of languages and linguistics (Crystal, 1980; Dalby, 1998), including acronyms (Jones, 1990), pairs (Room, 1988), etymology (Onions, 1966; Partridge, 1966), idioms, slang, and worse (Antill-Rose, 1988; Blackman & Fyfe, 1990; Johansen, 1988, 1991; Long, 1979; Partridge & Beale, 1984; Spears, 1981; Wilkes, 1996). At times, my critical view of specific items confirmed the motto that ‘nobody is perfect, but anybody can be correct/ed’, and more generally, the relative and arbitrary nature of definitions is a useful reminder of the relation between context and meaning of any type of text.

Works relevant to the research in the domains of languages and computers vary from basic reference materials, like the dictionaries noted above or users’ manuals, to philosophical essays, going at least as far as Vico (Del Bello, 1997). Boundaries between language-related disciplines are as arbitrary as those between languages, and the overall issue of labelling, in this and in other respects, is crucial, also for purposes of safe text. In particular, areas of overlap can be variously perceived, and therefore the following summary of scholarly and other approaches will focus on themes rather than academic or professional ‘jurisdictions’. More specific precedents, like the considerations by Wiener (1965; 1968), are discussed in the next chapter.

Issues of language use (Aitchison, 1997; Clark, 1996) range from problems of meaning and understanding (Parret, 1980; Parret, 1981) to reactions that label language as ‘bad’ or ‘mangled’ (Andersson & Trudgill, 1992; Scruby, 1989).

---


An aspect relevant to un/safe text is the use of x-phemisms (Adams, 1985; Allan & Burridge, 1991; Enright, 1985; Green, 1996; Neaman & Silver, 1990).124

Ongoing disputes about rules and theories (cf. Searle, Parret, & Verschueren, 1992) discourage the selection of a single approach. Rather, reference can be made to concepts, typologies and terminologies of fairly wide use and acceptance, such as the notions of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), or face and face-threatening acts (Brown & Leininson, 1990). Key concepts used in the research include a continuum or ladder of meaning, and the perception of words associated with cultural background (Ruthrof, 1992, 1997, 2000). The latter word appears in Searle (1995), and is used here with reference to background languages, also called ‘linguacultures’.

In searching for safe text, the primary focus is on the potential negative outcomes of mis-communication, and the main cause under scrutiny is the transfer process. Forms of transfer (Odlin, 1989) are found (among others) in conversation, discourse, genre, politeness and pragmatics, thus works analysing the above (e.g. Sacks & Jefferson, 1992; Swales, 1990) contribute to the overall conceptual framework. Functional grammar could not be ignored (Butt, 2000; Gerot, 1995; Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Halliday, 1973, 1978, 1994; Halliday & Martin, 1993), but its use of terms may be confusing, whereas related works by key authors (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Hasan, 1996) cover a broader range of issues, also affecting interactions.

There are various contexts in which to ‘interpret’, in general or professional terms (Cokely, 1992; Eco, 1992; Ginori & Scimone, 1995; Gombrich, 1969; Herbert, 1968; Love, 1994; Ricoeur, 1965; Robinson, 1977; Singleton, 1969). A relevant work on both interpreting and translating deals with developments in the context of new technology for teletranslation (O’Hagan, 1996), linking computer-mediated communication to the language professions. A recent call for papers involves a relevant author (cf. Herring, 1996b) and notes a key gap:

To date, the research literature in English on the features of computer-mediated communication has focused almost exclusively on emergent practices in English, neglecting developments within populations communicating online in other languages. (Herring, 2002)

124 The last is in form of thesaurus, like reference works, but the previous one also provides useful information on origins, although sometimes questionable, particularly about ‘foreign’ idioms.
As input from the computer side of interaction, a forthcoming CHI (HCI) workshop “explores the challenges in the intercultural computer-mediated communication and cooperation environments” and discusses “empirical insights into the … barriers”, with the aim of overcoming them through “new designs, tools and architectures”.\footnote{See the message “CfP: CHI 2003 Workshop: Intercultural CMC”. The workshop is to be held on 6 April 2003 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA. CHI is a synonymous anagram of HCI, although the relative position of ‘human’ and ‘computer’ may reflect complementary views of their interaction.}

In addition to the comment on languages, and more broadly cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) on-line, other aspects of the gap can be noted here, to summarise the range of positions identified in the literature review, and their points of contact in relation to the reserved field where I see or ‘sit’ the thesis.\footnote{This is written self-consciously, as I know it is not ‘seat’, but the choice of metaphor ‘sits awkwardly’ in my perception. The image of a reserved field was presented at the start of this chapter.} Complementary or reciprocal to the neglect noted above is the general absence of computer-mediated aspects in studies of languages and cross-, inter- or transcultural communication, where a wide range of factors could be considered for a transfer on to the Infobahn, well beyond the narrow point of Text Only. This approach could be further extended to many other aspects of studies and documents, to help identify ‘feworries’ which may loom larger on-line, and more generally in CMC and HCI /CHI (cf. Part Two).

Concern for outcomes also seems rare in sources, as mentions of potentially serious consequences of mis-communication are rarely supported by specific examples. Conversely, collections of assorted errors or other faulty messages seldom include a link between interaction-related outputs and linguistic inputs of text, even when the latter are the subject of investigation. The following chapter considers precedents to searching for safe text, and relates my research to a range of pioneering studies. In this context, it takes a long and close look at Freud, as a major source of word-based documents, and relates his approach to other possible explanations of unsafe text, to select the variables and steps most suitable for maintaining positive interactions.

Authors and works of specific relevance to the thesis can also be identified through multiple and extensive citations in various chapters, whereas selections for this chapter and the next have a more general value, ranging from a panorama of available sources (here) to a set of ‘guiding lights’ in Ch.4, to use one of the metaphors applied to figures that are far-reaching in impact, but mostly far removed from here and now.
Chapter 4  Precedents

Some major sources are used in this chapter, both as documents (to illustrate points in the thesis with text examples) and as studies (mainly theoretical). In this first part of the thesis, Chapter 1 has presented the broad questions, or what is investigated, and general aspects of method, or how the investigation is carried out, while initial evidence and illustrations of both were provided in Ch.2. Criteria for choice and use of sources were discussed in chapter 3, adding ‘why’ to ‘what’ and ‘how’, and a further selection of authors (‘who’) that give direction/s to my work leads to this chapter, which looks at precedents for the research, related to two types of expertise.

Major figures are seen as guiding lights, as their positions in respect to disciplines and linguacultures help orient the development of the dissertation, and influence the views of its author. They are placed over distance in time, going back to Freudian views on slips and humour (which are highly relevant to various parts of the thesis), and even to the Enlightenment. Other authors and works used are more recent, but also invite transfer on to the Infobahn of crucial points made about off-line interactions. The aim is better understanding, through useful theoretical frameworks, as well as in practical and more literal terms, by promoting safer text-based exchanges.

To illustrate attitudes and positions about moving forward with respect to guiding lights, some complementary images are introduced in the following paragraphs. A well-known and well-worn metaphor for the progress in intellectual work goes back to the times of ‘ipse dixit’ (‘he said so himself’), when the established author/ity went largely unchallenged. The giant/s of the past could not be surpassed, yet even a dwarf could go higher, after climbing on their shoulders. This would not imply disrespect, but promote continuity and gradual advances along existing lines of thought.

A related consideration is the number of directions, dimensions or variables involved. Given the range of disciplines to be covered in approaching safe text, the available theoretical background is unlikely to be structured as a single framework, and several lines or areas have to be pursued, covered or scanned.

127 These range from general social semiotic approaches (as Hodge & Kress, 1988, 1993; Kress, 1985) to specific face-to-face contexts (cf. Hutcheson & Laver, 1972) and forms of talk (Goffman, 1981), or related issues like stigma (Goffman, 1968), humour (Mulkay, 1988) and ‘creation’ (Koestler, 1976).
128 The multiplicity of intersecting planes is part of the ongoing metaphor of an hourglass shape.
This process is greatly helped by referring to a review by a compatible author, so as to
cover indirectly a lot of ground, or at least map out positions, without dealing with too
many partial views. A few well-chosen works can also supplement and support the
limited and skewed knowledge of the thesis author, promoting shared understanding
with interpreters. Thus guidance for my work can derive from the clarity of a wide
overview, or a position of pre-eminence of authors as founders, pioneers or giants.

Rather than climb on such honoured shoulders, I would transfer the metaphor from a
vertical to a horizontal movement, picturing the relation as a relay race, along the time
distance. In terms of information technology, specifically computer-mediated
communication (CMC) and human-computer interaction (HCI), I am tempted to see
this operation as a ‘50 yrs relay’ (years, not yards), as key works by Wiener provide
the background of the first half of the twentieth century, and set the stage for key
developments of the second half, which I have experienced in the first person.129 His
reflections on language might be amateurish, compared to his views on cybernetics,
but they represent the perceptions of an interested user, like mine, and his thoughts
remain valid as document, including “All philosophers and all sociologists draw their
scientific ideas from the sources available at their time” (Wiener, 1968: 36).

Although forms and terms used for hardware and software become rapidly obsolete,
like Wiener’s (1968) ‘taping’ to mean ‘programming’, basic functional aspects and
their relation to human beings appear to change much less. About the spirit of the
times (Zeitgeist) or “software of the mind”130, Wiener offers a further ‘50 yrs relay’
back to the beginning of the twentieth century and to a major guiding light for the
thesis, as “The idea of a contingent universe” marks “a real change of point of view”.

A further mention of “Freud’s intuitive but somewhat discursive method ... close to
the tradition of St. Augustine” (ibid.) is a useful reminder of the much longer time
frame of cultural references, in particular those from the ‘classical’ world and its
successors, where use of Latin was comparable to the use of written English today.

129 The human use of human beings, subtitled cybernetics and society, was cited in Ch.2 about control
and communication. While several other points deserve consideration, they cannot be detailed here.

130 The subtitle chosen by Hofstede (1991) can apply to all aspects of culture/s, including languages.
This also affects Freud, and his two works used in this research: *The psychopathology of everyday life* (PEL), of particular relevance to my thesis, and *Der Witz* ...(Wit/z). The relation between them and searching for safe text is considered in a later section, but the following note fits within the temporal framework outlined above, as the history of PEL shows a basic development between 1898 and 1901, while this thesis was started in 1998, and I read Freud’s lectures on parapraxes in 2001.

In revisiting PEL and associated works one century after their first publication, the current context plays a role. The steps and channels involved in CMC and HCI lead to consideration of ‘faulty function’ in relation to ‘faulty action’ (*Fehlleistung* or parapraxis), while the notion of default settings can relate computer processing to less conscious aspects of text, such as types of context and linguacultural background.

‘KANT’, the only written word within a large and complex canvas (Bennett, 1994), refers to “the sunlit enlightenment” (McLean & Bennett, 1996:112) in the European ‘background’. Kant’s importance in ‘our’ reasoning is not always easy to notice, but even a brief look at the “transcendental doctrine of method” reveals items relevant to the thesis. “Examples are contagious”, and the hope or tendency to extend the successful method of mathematics into philosophy illustrates transfer applied to ‘pure’ reasoning as the default setting (Kant, 1929:576-7, CPR A 712-3). Another aspect of transfer applies to the difficulties of translating Kant. In the translator’s preface, Kemp Smith notes how the original text, “even when judged by German standards”, appears to offer a rich variety of unsafe text options, simply due to Kant’s “manner of writing. He crowds so much into each sentence, that he is constrained to make undue use of parentheses, and … to rely upon particles, pronouns and genders to indicate the connections…” (1929:vi). This refers to standard explanations of deixis (from the Greek word for ‘pointing’, hence called ‘indication’ in Peirce’s writing), and the outcome of interaction with difficult texts presents risks in proportion to their opacity, associated mainly with aspects of such connections.

---

131 Notes in the section on “Freudian bliss” give details of the title and abbreviations used here.
132 See also p.584, CPR A724-5. I chose a redundant reference, as I found the English abbreviation unclear as to whether the Critique was of pure or practical reason. Kant’s observations contrast mathematical to philosophical knowledge, and therefore I have corrected my use of ‘necessary and sufficient’ for non-mathematical expressions. A pet peeve (or shibboleth?) can be noted here about the not infrequent mis-spelling of Kant’s first name as ‘Emanuel’, but this default appears related to the phonetic confusion between ‘E’ as in ‘England’ and ‘I’ as in ‘Italy’ (‘Italian’ is an unsafe example, as I heard it often pronounced ‘Eyetalian’). Immanuel is less common, thus can show who is in the know.
Ruthrof (2000: 48-9) also discusses “implicit or concealed deixis”, a prime suspect for unsafe text outcomes, linked to linguaculture. It “appears as natural knowledge to those who speak the language. But nothing could be more unnatural, since such implicit knowledge is not accessible to the outsider.” It is “deeply cultural” and “the result of pedagogy”, and contributes to the constellation that creates an idiolect, within the broader framework of schemata or schemas (another Kantian concept, cf. Malcolm & Sharifian, 2002).

This concern is explored further, as it should be (made) clear where the thesis stands in relation to views of and on words. A crucial point is the focus on interactions and thus language-in-use, related to text-based computer-mediated systems, and transcultural communication contexts. As noted at the end of Ch.3, there is a gap in this area concerning linguacultural diversity, and a more general comment about computer-mediated discourse found it had “as yet received little serious attention from language-focused scholars, including those from my own discipline, linguistics.” Among the reasons “is the current fashion within the linguistics discipline for analyzing invented, decontextualized sentences, a trend which has tended to marginalize research on actual language use.” (Herring, 1996a) This ignores deixis, but in searching for safe text, context is crucial, and even invented sentences or words are analysed in terms of likely outcomes of unsafe use in interactive situations.

Concern for outcomes leads to a common approach for many cases, superficially related to different linguistic inputs, but with comparable results on interaction. Thus ‘tales’ of unsafe text range from various typing errors to transfers at deeper levels of linguacultural diversity, linked to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of relativism. The difference associated with languages is most noticeable between markedly different groups, but the thesis includes examples at a much finer level of distinction. People who do not share these basic beliefs include Pinker (1995), whose exclusive use of English language references elicit comments like those by Wierzbicka (1999:28-9), exposing the linguacultural bias often associated with ethno- (here Anglo-) centrism.

---

133 “Consequently, much of the work that has been published on computer-mediated language … has been done by scholars on the margins of, or entirely outside of, mainstream linguistics.” See also Ch.3 on sentences vs utterances, with reference to Bakhtin, whose ideas are briefly discussed further on.

134 As the limitations of the grammarian’s approach extend to the dialogic (cf. Goffman, 1981: 30-34), the issue is of wider disciplinary and methodological concern, far beyond this dissertation.

135 Being from Montreal could be a reason to play down any difference between language groups.
The works of the previous main authors have definite dates of publication, even with multiple editions and translations, so that their context of origin and impact on others are relatively contiguous in time, and usually in linguacultural space. In the case of Bakhtin, another important figure for this research, matters are complicated by politics, history, geography and language, creating some dating difficulties. However, in searching for safe text, Bakhtin need not be discussed in terms of potentially controversial dates, sources and contexts, as the basic notion of heteroglossia, echoed in the works of others, appears both fundamental and obvious, at least to me. Who did not grow up with a Church language other than their ‘everyday’ one/s? Even atheists can notice the difference between the lyrics of songs and those of anthems, and even illiterates are aware of that between official and private forms of communication, written or not, yet “traditional linguistics has taken little heed of … alterity in language” (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981: xxi).

The difference between natural (that is, cultural) languages and machine-based word processing is particularly relevant today in computer-mediated communication, but it also has a long and illustrious lineage in philosophical texts. Language and meaning constructions are open to interpretation for social and other reasons, whether the roots of the latter are in the ‘nature’ of language or its use. In searching for safe text and for ‘feworries’, there are thresholds below which distinctions appear as ‘philosophisms’, but the principles need to be kept in mind, as they also apply in serious cases. The problem of incomplete analysis of any concept has important semantic-pragmatic consequences, related to the ‘usual suspects’ found in anecdotes,136 and transcultural communication multiplies the potential for unanticipated outcomes, also in view of the “babel of tongues” noted by Kant (1929:573, CPR A707).

The prominent place of French within my linguacultural background is reflected to some extent in the thesis, which also aims to add some Romance to the generally Germanic (and somewhat Slavic) slant of major sources, from Freud and Bakhtin to Australian authors like Clyne, Pauwels and Wierzbicka. ‘Foucault round’ sounds like an appealing option, but indulging in it would lead the dissertation too far astray.

---

136 At the semantic-pragmatic level, language is “tricky” (HR, p.c., 2002) in many ways, and a safe-text approach needs to acknowledge and deal with the traps and trip-wires, instead of postulating consistence and correspondence in a simplified, mechanical or ‘mathematical’ fashion.
Mention can be made of Lyotard (cf. Ch.8), as the preface of his major work could be readily transferred on to the Infobahn, under the electronic name “L’e-différend”.

A comparison between original (1983) and translation (1988) further illustrates the potential for “phrases in dispute” (subtitle added to the English version), also when other authors are cited and discussed. “Notices” from Kant (but also Hegel, Plato, Aristotle and others) include the German or Greek terms next to the author’s French, which in turn is often added in the English version, to help readers ‘get’ the point as intended. To offer just one example relevant to searching for safe text, I quote below from the “Anthistenes notice” in the second chapter, “The Referent, The Name”.

We will see that the misunderstanding (and the scorn) … stems form the amphibology of the Greek verb legein: to say something, to talk about something, to name something? (p.36)

The French original begins with “On va voir que la méprise (et le mépris)” (p.61), one of the many untranslatable plays on words, which could be chosen to summarise the risks of unsafe text. The link mépris/e corresponds to the ‘causeffectway’ that leads back from the negative reaction of scorn, unwanted and unwarranted, to a ‘mis-’ form of communication, similar to ‘mis-take’ in its link to ‘pris/e’ (‘taken’ / ‘grasp’). One way to “clear up the paradox” leads to an approach that fits searching for safe text:

If then, you disagree with someone while thinking you’re talking about the same thing, it is because you … are speaking about two different things. (ibid.)

Specific comments on translation, involving regimens and genres besides languages, focus on syntax (points 78-9), but the above demonstrates that lexicon is crucial.

**Freudian bliss**

A recent (re-)reading of two works by Freud has indeed been a Freude, or joy. One is *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (PEL), first published in German in 1901, the other *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*, first published in 1905. The short title ‘Wit/z’ is used here, to match the usual abbreviation ‘PEL’ and to mark the polysemy across languages of the key term (wit/ticism or joke/s). 137

---

137 The full title includes the relation of wit or jokes to the unconscious. In the thesis, unmarked references to PEL and Wit/z are to the standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, vol.6 (PEL) and vol.8 (Wit/z). When Brill’s translation has been used, the single volume is cited (Freud & Brill, 1938).
Below is a brief outline of the relation between these two books and the thesis.

The linguacultural background and position of authors and interpreters in regard to
text is a major constraint in determining a safe choice, also for translations. Risks are
most marked with the outcome of ‘tricks played by words’, given linguacultural
variations in the availability and acceptability of comparable forms or formulas, even
for intentional play on words. PEL and Wit/z are rich sources as both documents and
studies, and also relevant to the thesis in terms of method, in more than one way.

Several lessons applicable to this dissertation can be learned from the Editor’s
Introduction to PEL (Freud, 1966), concerning the number and function of illustrative
materials used, and the problem/s of their translation, related to risks of transcultural
interaction. On the first point, the genesis and evolution of PEL can be for the thesis
both a model and a warning about combining examples with argument, as the Editor
describes what may become an embarrassment of riches. There is a danger of
shortcomings, or rather of excesses, in following the Freudian process, since fitting
illustrations could go on and on, in every sense of this ambiguous sentence. The
abundance of new examples could interrupt and even confuse the flow of reasoning,
as sometimes happens in PEL (p.x), and thus the dissertation includes a very limited
number of the examples collected, closely related to the argument they illustrate.

On the second point, the two works by Freud under consideration deal respectively
with a range of ‘parapraxies’ (PEL) and with jokes or other forms of ‘wit’ (Wit/z),
where the effect under discussion is largely based on the form of words, and therefore
both categories are unlikely to translate directly and safely into another language.
Headlines and other titles often use such word play, mostly in popular text genres,
both on- and off-line, and therefore their accessibility by linguistic outsiders, or
transferability to other languages, may be severely limited by the complex psycho-
linguistic mechanisms involved. Cultural differences also extend beyond language,
with successive steps that include the value attributed to word play and taboo terms.

Among the unwanted and negative outcomes of mis-communication between parties
with different linguacultural backgrounds, we note two complementary situations.

---

138 The latter expression may apply to all kinds of jokes and slips that involve unsafe text, and it has
been chosen as general label for the concepts common to Freud’s two books.

139 The model of structural ambiguity is ‘flying airplanes can be dangerous’ (cf.Goffman, 1981: 30,
n.19), where ‘V-ing N-s’ can be plural, as adjectival phrase, or singular, as verb and object.
These relate more to affect and behaviour than to cognition, as text can be unsafe if someone ‘does not get’ a specific point, but also if text ‘gets’ someone, causing strong and negative emotional responses. Once such reactions are triggered, it is hard to explain that they are unfounded, or at least that what caused them was unintended. While these risks apply in any language, to original or translated text, they are more likely in the latter case, as discussed with specific reference to Freud’s works.

The role of different languages in searching for safe text is related to issues of equity, access and diversity, including those affecting computer-mediated communication (CMC). Choices of editorial policy for the English version of Freud’s works can be readily transferred on to the Infobahn, where localisation of Web pages responds to forms and degrees of CaLD (cultural and linguistic diversity), and thus needs to go a step further than translation.140 Two main options are the replacement of ‘too hard’ cases with suitable items, as done by Brill to facilitate diffusion of the work, and the more scholarly and faithful inclusion of the original with added explanations, which reduces the amusing effect of examples but ensures the integrity of the argument.

The above helps illustrate the difficulty of transcultural communication, where the parties could be translating text, more or less literally (in every sense), thus re/producing a version to fit their linguacultural background. These types of transfers, mostly done implicitly and in good faith (cf. Ch.5), are a key item in the thesis, but a complementary aspect of risk has to do with the nature and depth of reactions to the outcome of play on words, or more generally tricks played by words.

Freud’s importance as a pioneer and an authority in matters of the mind has made his concepts familiar, although in some respects controversy continues. PEL and Wit/z are mercifully far more palatable than other works, being largely free of what I call ‘neurotica’, and PEL “is of an entirely popular character” (p.272, n.1, added in 1924). Parapraxes are indeed related to “everyday life”, and their analysis reveals how ‘sane’ people can have ‘problems’ with words that trigger unpleasant or unacceptable associations. Freud illustrates the effort made by the mind to avoid them in one’s own expressions,141 and the thesis moves beyond his work, to look at how transcultural communication may inadvertently lead to such problems in the mind and expressions

---

140 See Keniston (2001) for a discussion of localisation, including references to other works.
141 I make a recurrent error /slip in citing the full title of PEL, using ‘parapsychology’ (with a transfer from the key term ‘parapraxis’) instead of the more disturbing and unfamiliar ‘psychopathology’.
of ‘others’. The risks associated with unsafe text include the (mis-)perception of the ‘guilty’ party as socially, professionally, and even mentally incompetent. Discrimination are not always associated with text, but there are multiple risks. In an autobiographical passage, Freud notes his refusal to feel inferior because he was a Jew, but rather developing a certain independence of judgment, as he could never see why his descent, or race, as they began to say, should cause him shame. (Freud, 1946:14-15). Both reaction and treatment can be associated, even today, with migrant status or ethnic origin, as well (or as badly) as with gender and sexuality. Linguistic diversity creates a more complex and subtle range of disadvantages, also in relation to academic writing in the dominant (English) language, in contrast with the “cognitive advantage” in polyglot conditions of an early awareness of linguistic relativity (Comrie, Matthews, & Polinsky, 1996:31), which contributes to safety in text use. Differences in such aspects of people’s background, also related to identity and values, may lead to difficulties in text-based interactions. The dissertation aims to alert users of such risks, thus promoting better understanding of messages, but it also highlights equity issues of access and diversity in CMC. The Freudian approach to parapraxes, jokes or wit has multiple links with the method and process of searching for safe text, from the “everyday” nature of what he calls “psychopathology” to the interactive functions of humour, and some items are explored in the following pages. Both theoretical aspects and examples found in his works include a wide range of elements, only partly overlapping with the thesis focus. To clarify the specific nature of the latter, common elements and divergences from the former are mentioned next. Three main criteria for the class of phenomena fit for Freudian explanations are given in Ch.XII of PEL, the volume on ‘faulty’ actions in everyday life. What has been called in translation “a psychical parapraxis” includes types of ‘slips’, and must be:

---

142 The perception of people and linguacultures as more or less ‘other’ is a complex aspect of our ‘default settings’, and the thesis aims to improve equity by promoting a more open view of diversity.

143 The latter unsafe outcome (cf. Ch.8) points to the specialised use in English of ‘sane’, similar to words meaning ‘healthy’ in Latin and Romance languages. This form of x-phemism may relate to the higher taboo loading of labels associated with mental (ill-)health or deficiency (an even worse stigma).

144 Several are illustrated in the discussion of relevant aspects of stigma (Goffman, 1968).

145 The summary below combines paraphrases of the two translations used. Most key terms appear in both, except “accident” (Brill) and “chance” (Tyson). Single (or ‘scare’) quotes mainly apply to the relativity of terms, sometimes marked also in the sources.
(a) not exceeding ‘normal’ limits, presumably defined by cultural norms of behaviour, intended as psychomotor performance. Freud notes that it is based on judgment.

(b) brief in duration, both of incidents (momentary) and of conditions (temporary). This fits the common metaphor of ‘slip’, and the established ability to perform ‘more’ correctly is linked to the readiness to make or accept correction, recognising our ‘fault’. The relative measures of ‘correctness’, again linked to arbitrary linguacultural conventions, refers to a higher level of (presumed) competence than what is shown in performance. This distinction is found in linguistics but applies beyond it, and a key point is that the former can only be reflected in the latter, often with a range of distortions, which relate to Freud’s ‘faulty actions’. The immediate perception of ‘the rightness of the correction’, specified as typical of parapraxes, is thus based on ‘superficial’ input variables. However, Freudian explanations look at the unintended output, in order to find its deeper, hidden sources, as noted in the last criterion:

(c) authors must not find any cause in themselves, but in lack of attention, or in “accident” or “chance”. In the thesis, the cause is more generally seen as ‘transfer’, often facilitated by carelessness. Freudian motives can be included, but not always.

**What slips show**

The options presented in this section, related to searching for safe text, show many parallels with a 1919 article (Roback, 1957) which I have read only recently, and thus are an instance of ‘pareri di Perpetua’. The expression derives from the reaction of Don Abbondio, a parish priest, when criticism received from his superior, Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, resembles one of the ‘opinions’ (pareri) expressed by Perpetua, his servant, and it refers to views shared at the opposite extremes of a hierarchy (which in this case includes time), and thus to be considered rather than dismissed.

The focus on negative outcomes, chosen for the thesis, leads to a selection among the many examples found in most sources of documents, cases and anecdotes, including works by and about Freud. A key point made by the latter confirms the view that this aspect of effects is largely independent of inputs: “In my judgment serious parapraxes … are brought about in exactly the same way as the innocent ones” (PEL, p.125).

---

146 Warning: risky false cognate, as ‘slip’ in French and Italian refers to ‘unmentionables’ (underwear).

147 *I promessi sposi*, Ch.26. The academic formula is ‘this was already noted by …’ (K.M. p.c., 2002).
Cases with significance “far beyond the practical importance of ordinary parapraxes” involve “a doctor who is writing a prescription”, with health risks, even of death. Loss of life, and concern for the body, are high priorities in searching for safe text, and a century after Freud wrote, these and other aspects of risky text are comparable.

In Freud’s judgment above, “exactly the same way” need not imply a single cause for slips. PEL notes various aspects, in the context of each type of ‘faulty action’, which relate to safe text practices applicable to computer-mediated communication. Freudian explanations that “arise out of elements which are not intended to be uttered” are not the only ones, but “a second kind” (PEL, p.53), as noted in regard to misreadings (cf. below), and their applicability is open to discussion when searching for safe text.

“I do not … deny the existence of unconscious motives which sometimes do operate in the form of speech and writing lapses, but let us be careful”. Roback’s warning is appropriate to the aims of the thesis, and invites “to examine the context first before we jump to dynamic conclusions of a highly speculative nature.” (1957: 161-2)

In particular, the risk of negatively affecting interactions discourages ‘speculations’ that may prove offensive or embarrassing, so as to limit or prevent damage to ‘face’. Freud appears more cautious than some of his followers, as noted by linguists who “consider the extent to which depth-analytic explanations are needed in addition to the mechanical-psycholinguistic explanations” of speech errors (Ellis, 1979:123).

In linguistic research, slips of the tongue have a place even along with other “phenomena … characteristic solely of performance”, as “they shed light on the process of language change, as well as on some of the psychological aspects of speech performance.” (Greenberg, 1968:48) For safe text purposes, both factors can help to sort out the difficulties arising from linguistic difference, although cases “irrelevant to the content of the specific messages” (ibid.) need not become ‘worries’ about text.

The concern for seriously negative unintended outcomes leaves out of the search for safe text such ‘purely’ linguistic errors, which are the majority in sources like Meringer and Meyer, known to Freud and still used by Celce-Murcia (1973, 1979). The thesis shares Freud’s focus on expressions that convey some meaning, usually through “lexical substitution, that is replacing an intended word by an error word” (Ellis, 1979:124), and further selection leaves out ‘harmless’ slips, where no confusion, offence or embarrassment can be noted. Misreadings are considered first, before the production of unsafe text in writing (often linked to speech, cf. Ch.5).
Freud sees “virtually the whole theory of misreading” comprised in a remark: ‘He had read Homer so much that he always read “Agamemnon” instead of “angenommen”.’\(^{148}\)

In this group of text-related faulty actions, only the interpreter ‘slips’, and usually notices the error through introspection and a reality check with outcomes. Texts containing “something which rouses the reader’s defences” represent “a second group of cases”, while “in a very large number of cases it is the reader’s preparedness that alters the text” into something which is expected, or occupies the mind of the (mis-) reader (PEL pp.112-113). Thus “some sort of resemblance in the verbal image, which the reader can alter in the sense he requires”, is “the only contribution towards a misreading which the text itself need make” (p. 113).\(^{149}\) In this first group of cases, Freud adds conditions related to physical variables, like speed and sight, which promote assorted interferences, as do also viewing conditions on-line and on screen.

The safety or risk of misreadings, in comparison with the original (‘correct’) text, depends on interaction outcomes, which are often noted by comments in the source, or can be imagined from the situation. Two misreadings of signs “in a strange town” reflect inner desires and lead to frustration, but one is just “irritating and laughable”:

> on my holidays … I read every shop sign that resembles the word in any way as ‘Antiquities’. This betrays the questing spirit of the collector. (PEL, p.110)

In the other, “a course of medical treatment” has potentially painful results:

> just when the action of his bowels was timed to occur … read the words ‘Closet-House’ … . His satisfaction … was mixed with a certain surprise that the obliging establishment should be in such an unusual place. The next moment, however, his satisfaction vanished: … the sign was ‘Corset-House’. (pp.113-114)

Cyberspace and the Infobahn are metaphoric equivalents of “the streets of a strange town”, along which unfamiliar sights, sites and signs require extra effort, compared to familiar contexts, and e-commerce may provide equivalents of off-line examples.\(^{150}\) Risks of misreadings can therefore be linked to both internal and external controls on text outcome, which range from general to individual, from known to unconscious.

---

\(^{148}\) The German word means ‘supposed’. Example 8, added in 1910 (p.112, Note 1), derives from a work by Lichtenberg dated 1853, and Freud used it also in Wit/z and at the end of a lecture (p.112 n.2).

\(^{149}\) Text plays a much larger part in the other group of cases, potentially distressing, thus riskier (p.114).

\(^{150}\) As in the misreading “steak and tomatoes for $2” instead of “Tomato stakes, $2” on a sign down the road, by a “13-year-old MM son”, as reported by Vera Scott, Tauranga, NZ (NI991009MM, 1999)
Sources of misreadings include transfers from linguacultural backgrounds, which can be shared by large groups and thus lead to forewarnings, as those about ‘false friends’. At a progressively specific level, not only idiolects but also context and associations can drive perception into misguided directions. This is illustrated in various anecdotes gathered in my research, not only when a ‘wrong’ reading is reported, but also when a biased perception is presented in response to supposedly ‘funny’ text (cf. Ch.5).

Not every category discussed in PEL relates directly to this dissertation, but the effort to explain what may go wrong, why, how and for (or rather against) whom, represents a shared belief in the “application of determinism to mental events.” (pp.xiii-xiv).

In searching for safe text, an equivalent process of analysis may apply to linguistic processes involving mis-communication. The absence of intention to harm, and the nature of linguistic conventions, more easily recognised as such than other cultural factors, can facilitate remedial and preventive action, through safe/r text practices.

In addition to PEL, the thesis uses Wit/z, which deals with jokes or other forms of witty, humorous and comic expression. Freud shows how the above mechanisms help achieve various goals with some degree of social acceptability, but may not always be safe. The wider problem that humour ‘does not travel’ goes beyond language into (trans)cultural aspects, and Freud notes as uncommon the role of Jews in creating Jewish jokes. In searching for safe text, there is a great difference between stories, or labels, used by a minority group and directed against their own characteristics, and the jokes and names about them made by “foreigners” or strangers / outsiders (Fremde), usually a dominant group (cf. p.111). Any potentially derogatory word has to come from group insiders, or it would be high-risk text (cf. Goffman, 1968:42).

Conversely, the group may not be homogeneous and harmonious, as differences and difficulties create conditions for criticism, but the demands of solidarity override them. Again, Goffman provides relevant comments on ambivalence, hierarchies and reactions. In addition, external forms of advocacy provide further control measures in searching for safe text, including sanctions by authority and society (cf. Ch.10).

Freudian motives of slips are, by definition, unknown to their author (the ‘slipper’), as the third criterion excludes awareness of any internal causes of one’s own slips.

151 See more recent discussions of humour and its role in society in Mulkay (1988) and Davies (1998).
152 “I do not know whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of its own character.”(p.112). As an Italian citizen of Australia today, I note that ‘wogs’ do it successfully.
It also marks the futility of blaming absent-mindedness, accident or chance, but the latter exists, and Freud discusses it, along with superstition and determinism, in the last chapter of PEL, after listing the three conditions for parapraxes already examined. This dissertation presents safe text practices resembling Freudian analysis, at least in retracing what goes on in the slipper’s mind, and thus some of his points are considered, in relation to the method and aims of the thesis, along with a response (originally published in 1919) to the “doctrine of lapses” (Roback, 1957).

The principle of determinism ... is sound ... per se. No scientist would deny that the writing lapse is conditioned by certain physiological or psychological antecedents. But what right has one to create a cause when the direct antecedent is in most cases apparent.

(Roback, 1957: 160)

Attention, or lack thereof, has to do with what is in or on one’s mind, and interfering factors can be more or less conscious or intentional, within or beyond text or context. Roback focuses on speech and writing lapses, where the slip is in text production rather than perception, but many of the factors are comparable with those mentioned about misreadings. For both physical and psychological components of faulty actions, ‘chance’ can also mean ‘probability’ of a particular type of item, event or accident. Thus use of descriptive categories of linguistic surface errors can help to identify their frequency, and to recognise some of the steps involved in the ‘causeeffectway’ of unsafe text. To this end, Roback provides useful comments on Freudian sources: “We seldom notice a slip unless it assumes the proportions of a blunder” (p.137). This comment supports the outcome-oriented approach in searching for safe text, and “Cause vs motive” is a key distinction in the approach. Thus Roback posits:

As a methodological principle in the study of lapses, the writer would lay down the rule that first the word, sentence, or sentences preceding or following are to be examined, then we must look into possible associations that may have determined the mistake; only in default of such clues, would it be legitimate to hunt for a new principle of explanation. (Roback, 1957: 158)

Under the heading “An important oversight”, Occam’s principle (or razor) is invoked: “entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem”. In contrast, the “introduction of as many factors as possible” by Freud/ians is such a multiplication beyond necessity, and “to no purpose; for, entertaining as the stories and anecdotes are, … they do not tell us anything about the mechanism of the lapse” (pp. 140-1).
Instead, emphasis should be “on the actual association in the speaker’s or writer’s mind between the word intended and the misexpression” (p. 144).

In the thesis, the overall notion of transfer is general enough to apply in most cases, from mechanical explanations, like the slip of a finger on the keyboard, to physio-psychological ones, like frustrated appetite/s in “a square meal” instead of ‘deal’.

All the parties involved in searching for safe text are at risk of mis-representing the process of text production and interpretation, particularly when personal recollections are involved. A note on the stories and anecdotes offers a lesson for introspection in searching for safe text, as some allusions are self-incriminatory, and this is so striking as to make them “manifestations of a sublimated exhibitionism” (p.140, n.5).

The complex attitudes and emotions involved in un/safe text production, perception, assessing and redressing are highly relevant to the search as topic, process and outcome, and thus their recognition by all involved is important. As repeatedly stressed in the dissertation, nobody is perfect, and ‘correcting’ others may involve further blunders, while the competitive, critical and even conflictive tone of such interactions can increase the difficulties associated with text-based differences.

Blaming others, or external factors, helps maintain (self-)esteem, while cognitive congruence is protected by ignoring or distorting ‘odd’ evidence (cf. Earley & Erez, 1997:18,20). The latter mechanism can also redress discrepancies, thus reduce the distraction caused by text errors, and in most cases (banal ones) it contributes to no-worries interaction. Recognising errors and attributing them to factors external to the individual, or at least beyond their intention, is recommended as safe text practice, while attributing ‘fault’ (malice or incompetence) to others has the opposite effect.

**Paths**

Some safety criteria are discussed in this section in terms of outcomes, which take precedence over specific inputs and processes. In reconstructing the ‘causeffectway’ that leads back from the consequences of unsafe text to its original conception, a safe approach should search for steps that help repair the interaction, rather than worsen it. The key points in searching for safe text, when the difficulty is associated with a difference, are what could have caused it, and how it could be smoothed or solved.

---

153 This is one of the “two or three accounts ... in Freud’s (Brill)” PEL which Roback “can become reconciled to, but only after definite qualification.” (Roback, 1957: 143-44)
Aspects linked to a problematic interpretation of text, seen as risky or unacceptable, may not correspond to those found in its production, or to the intention of the author, and are best avoided in favour of more neutral explanations.

The benefit of doubt, and of educational corrective action, appears preferable to the accusation implied in most ‘unconscious’ motivations. For example, sexist forms are unacceptable (cf. Ch.10), but if their use is not associated with the intention to offend, the problem is one of ignorance, rather than malice. Blame and criticism for faults and failures could be irreparably damaging to relations if a person is seen as ‘guilty’.

Judgments of incompetence, or even being considered as ‘funny’, also affect self-esteem, whereas awareness that some things can happen to anyone, often through external causes, helps understanding in every sense. As PEL discusses ‘slips’, it is useful to see how far they are attributable to mind or matter. What are the chances?

In his “Epilogue in 1956”, Roback expresses a safe open-mindedness about slips of the tongue, where “the mechanism is more complicated” than in writing, “yet some, doubtless, follow the Freudian pattern.” He uses “clown prince” as example, adding parenthetically “Of course, just how much deliberateness might enter into such assumed lapses, we can scarcely know.” The final point is also relevant to safe text:

It is, however, in the sector of writing lapses that the theory encounters its chief stumbling block, precisely because the graphic mechanism is so complex and covers such a wide context. (Roback, 1957: 162)

Error analysis works, such as those found in edited volumes (Baars, 1992; Fromkin, 1973, 1979; Richards, 1974), include lapses in written form, and provide a range of labels for the processes involved in linguistic errors. While the latter do not necessarily lead to unsafe text, awareness of the mechanisms involved can help retrace the ‘causeeffectway’ for text outcomes of varying risk or seriousness.

Problems may also originate in more or less serious disadvantages, including physical and mental differences that can be difficult to separate from linguacultural ones (on Dr. Spooner, cf. Potter, 1979). Several aspects of human-computer interaction (HCI) could be considered in this context, from the lowest step on the ladder of meaning (cf. Ch.2 and Ruthrof, 1992, ch.8) associated with digital code, to the ease of ‘passing’ in any direction, also thanks to technological options for people with disabilities.
As most of those issues exceed the scope of the present dissertation, they offer possible lines of further investigation (Ch.11), keeping linguacultures in mind.

Roback considers “Freud’s doctrine of lapses” as “the only one ... amenable to experimental investigation” (Roback & Freud, 1957:138), and the empirical approach he suggests is suitable to contemporary technology. For example, the adjacent position of letters on keyboards can help recognise the mechanism behind some lapses, and the following comparisons between different explanations refer to material or mind-based sources of error. To illustrate the use of introspection, anyone can produce and observe on-screen mistakes marked by spell-checkers without automatic correction, where the mechanics involved may be just a slip of the finger, or a ‘sound’ in the head (cf. Ch.5) that leads us to the wrong key. When the resulting word has a meaning, spell-checkers usually mark no mistake, and while this case is most likely to cause confusion, especially if the resulting message could be interpreted ‘as is’, the lexical substitution need not have any deeper (so-called Freudian) causes.

For example, when I typed ‘closet’ for ‘closer to’ in a context about gays, both keyboard and text led to an obvious ‘wordprocerror’, or error in word processing, which happened to have a relevant semantic association. However, interpreters are free to perceive and process text as they see fit, as long as no damage is done to any party, as safety concerns focus on (mis-)interpretation, rather than just over-interpretation (cf. Eco, 1992), of text and its motivations.

As a critical reader, I can agree with Roback and “suspect that certain ... traits are occasionally read into the poor patients ex post facto” (p.140). His rhetorical questions, like “has it ever occurred…?” or “why not look into…?” are a useful checklist for linguistic superficial features, mainly “the formation of the word misspelled”. Linguistic classifications can help identify “less important words” which, like particles, are omitted “in haste, excitement, embarrassment, and so on.” (p.141)

“The upshot” is that “attaching a hidden meaning to such lapses on the strength of uncritical and one-sided observations” is unwarranted (Roback & Freud, 1957:142). Use of the “mechanisms described” in PEL may create more difficulties than it solves, as they claim to reveal a default setting from which meaning is transferred into text.

In terms of safety, accusations involving unacceptable motives can be a risk for either party or both, depending on power and other factors, as in sexually charged situations.
The conventions of correspondence, particularly in Freud’s times, may account for the “paucity of writing slips” questioned by Roback (p.145), and explanations related to intimate feelings can be risky, even without ‘offensive’ lexical items. The context of interaction makes a difference, and the claim that ‘Edithel’ for ‘Epithel’ (‘little Edith’ and ‘epithelium’, also spelt with a capital initial, as is still the case with nouns in German) showed the author’s still “unconscious attraction” (PEL:126-7) might be less strong, if the ‘little Edith’ in question had been engaged to his best friend. Should the latter have made the discovery and claim, the author would probably have chosen the tack taken by Roback (p.152-3), focusing on the “mere substitution of a d for a p” and the shape of those letters, to defuse risks through a safer mechanism of explanation.

In general, ‘reasons’ or sources for text that appears unsafe should not be chosen in the direction of further offence or embarrassment to any of the participants, but if this is evident and unavoidable, humorous features of the text or interaction can be a saving grace, as in the case noted earlier, where “a square meal” instead of ‘deal’ caused mutual embarrassment to author and host, but relaxed the tension for most participants. When “a slight substitution of one letter not only uncovers the real truth, but also provokes mirth”, the mutual and fluid relation between slips and humour is evident, as “a slip of the tongue can approximate a joke”(PEL, p.77). Brill’s story resembles several items in Wit/z, and the following technological metaphor applies:

Wit is the best safety valve modern man has evolved; the more civilization, the more repression, the more need there is for wit. (Freud & Brill, 1938:21)

Both the linguistic cause and the psychological functions of wit are among the reasons for the selection of ‘funny’ anecdotes as the main corpora in searching for safe text, as well as for considering Freud (and others) among the guiding lights in these matters.

Other safety measures, taken more or less unconsciously, appear to reflect social censorship. The latter can be eliminated by ‘the naïve’, something “between jokes and the comic” (Wit/z, p.185). Thus the production and outcome of ‘risky’ or risqué text may be a regrettable incident, a surprise, or a deliberate choice. Respective examples are found mostly in PEL or in Wit/z, and often matched by contemporary anecdotes in other sources used for the thesis, also related to everyday life and wit.

---

154 Mulkay notes laughter as censorship, to cover the re/production of taboo words, specifically in jokes (1988:112), comparable to the use of ‘***’ in written text (cf. Ch.5 on the link between the channels).
Reactions by interpreters to potentially unsafe text depend on the perception of the author’s intentions, and the presumption of innocence promotes amused acceptance. In both the naïve and jokes, “the pleasure arises through the lifting of internal inhibitions.” This, however, “might be endangered ... for example, at hearing a naïve piece of smut.” (Wit/z, pp.185-6)

We might react to this at once with the same indignation that might be felt against a real piece of smut, if it were not that... the internal inhibition is absent in the producing person. Only when this is certain do we laugh instead of being indignant. Thus we take the producing person’s psychical state into consideration (ibid.)

Searching for safe text involves consideration of many aspects of “psychical state”, and the author is not the only person whose affective conditions affect the outcome of interaction, usually far more strongly than do ‘purely’ cognitive aspects. In linguistic terms, the relation of performance to the level of competence provides an important variable in assessing potentially unsafe text, and indignation is particularly damaging to interaction, as someone could be wrongly wronged (even falsely accused) on the basis of an utterance that may appear ‘wrong’, but be innocent. Laughter could be associated with the adversarial form of “severe ridicule” (cf. Pauwels, 1991:11), while the safer end of re/actions includes shared relief, with acceptance of explanations.

In my Italian slogan based on ‘nobody is perfect’, the additional point is central to searching for safe text. It reminds that ‘anybody can be correct/ed’, since the correct (intended) form might be recognised behind a mistake, as in most ‘slips’, but it may also be found in an apparent blunder, usually depending on the context. Sub-editors are at risk, and text processing with automatic spell-checkers can mindlessly duplicate such ‘howlers’ as the very frequent Beethoven’s “Erotica”. Indeed, no one is perfect, but anyone can be correct/ed, in word and deed. Acts, actions and interactions are part of behaviour, as is word-based communication, and Ch.2 has shown dramatic consequences of ‘speech acts’ and their written equivalents.

---

155 See the second criterion for Freudian parapraxes (PEL, p. 239), noted in the previous section.
156 A basic rule of journalism is “that you do not assume anything and [if] there is any doubt you ask.” The example is “a dead infant” in the title of Ravel’s “Pavane For a Dead Infanta” (Mead, 1990:20)
Background linguacultures make a difference in how we do things with words, but also in what words do to us, which includes affective reactions, linked to cognitive processing and assorted associations that resemble electronic hyperlinks. Stress on interactions, in every sense, is a feature of searching for safe text, as the focus on outcomes places emphasis (stress) on the interactional aspect of text, particularly when there is a risk of tension (stress) through unsafe text use. Remedial practices aim at defusing the latter, but the steps required also involve some risk of friction.

**The ‘right’ thing**

A key aspect of safe text skills is the search for a positive outcome in the interaction, and the choice between different approaches, of varying relative safety, depends on the circumstances of each case. Off-line, interpersonal factors affect the dynamics of ‘correct/ive’ interactions, and there is a delicate balance between suggesting redress and implying incompetence, plus the risk of displaying one’s own ignorance of what is ‘correct’ in a specific case. Asking for clarification of text is compatible with most situations, even when power distance is high. The Infobahn should make such exchanges easier, given the probability of dealing with text from diverse and distant linguacultural backgrounds, and the more impersonal forms of interaction.

Awareness can best contribute to safe text if there is an overall attitude of open-minded co-operation involving author, interpreter, and anyone in between. Authors can provide information that helps others recognise the sources of the original text, comparable to what is done in this thesis, or interpreters may have to attempt such an exercise without help or reference points. These two positions or roles correspond to Freud’s “receptive person” and “the productive one”, and in relation to unsafe text either of them could be the ‘slipper’, while the observant ‘redresser’ notices and corrects the error. Some do not perceive it at all, or do not appear to respond, increasing the risk of repetition of the same mistake, which could lead to a *faux pas*. The identification of who has a ‘right’, or even duty, to expose something ‘wrong’ in whose text, beyond what it is, affects equity in terms of access and diversity, and the position or relation between others and self, in the various roles of text authors,

---

158 The role of emotions in “an interchange” (Goffman, 1972: 328 ff) is relevant to safe text. Most aspects of Goffman’s typology, such as face-work, can be transferred to on-line use of Text Only.

159 In the “mediated kind” of encounters, “the interaction is likely to be more attenuated, with each participant’s line being gleaned from such things as written statements” (Goffman, 1972:337-8).

160 See Neustupný (1985) for a typology of stages in the correction process of trans-cultural text.
interpreters, observers, critics, judges or advocates. The end makes a difference, as it
could be to set ‘right’ the problem or the person, and even to make ‘fun’ of either.

The thesis focuses on background differences as the main source of explanation of
apparently unsafe text, and the two main approaches may be called presumption of
(a) innocence and (b) ignorance.

The presumption of ignorance for author, interpreter and others contributes to the
presumption of innocence in cases where text may seem offensive or confusing.
While sources used for the thesis vary in this respect, as shown in the views of and on
Freudians, the thesis posits that everyone has a right to be presumed innocent (in a
sense, ‘right’), and to comment on any text. Everyone has a chance to be ‘right’, or at
least to have a reason,\footnote{The English ‘to be right’ translates as ‘to have reason’ in Italian and other Romance languages.} about a given text production, perception and interpretation,
and at the same time everyone should be prepared to consider the positions of other
people, and to identify the many possible de/faults, particularly in one’s own settings.
Introspection is useful, as we may find the sources of our own errors and recognise
them in the text written by others, without attributing to them any negative intent or
characteristic, even when text elicits strong immediate re/actions.

In human-computer interaction (HCI), ‘errors’ marked on screen can show ‘slips’ that
we may easily recognise as unintended and incorrect, or be caused by interference of
different spelling conventions.\footnote{The context in which we write may override the computer’s default setting, and our linguacultural
background (or transcribed quotations) may be ‘right’ after all. Kress (2000: xii) also comments on the
constraint caused by the spell-checker, related to pressure on learners for orthographic conformity.} Conversely, superficially meaningful but unintended
text can prove unsafe, and therefore both authors and interpreters must be aware of
possible options in the process, ranging from the boa constructor, prone to reckless
overinterpretation, to the paralysed centipede, unable to track its own steps (cf. Ch.1).

In searching for safe text, it is important to monitor various reactions, ‘hear oneself
think’ (or hyperthink), and also attempt to follow the mental steps of the other parties.

In the myth of Aegeus (cf. Ch.2), the code for bad news, as it appears from a distance,
is received unquestioningly and acted upon precipitously. It is far from safe to be thus
moved, and literally swept away, by sudden emotions, and analogous processes can be
identified in many other examples, from fable and fiction to facts.
“Brush up your Shakespeare” (with a wink to Cole Porter’s witty lyrics) is an invitation to review the role of mis-communication in theatrical plots, be it tragedy or farce, but the news and everyday experience provide a wide range of equivalents.

Beyond slips, the sources of unsafe text include transfers from linguacultural background and related default settings, where mutual clarification can lead to understanding. This is one possible classification, even if those two broad types overlap in many ways. In addition, intentionally humorous versions of either may be naïvely taken as ‘straight’, with outcomes ranging from cute to confusing or worse.

The safer end mostly involves children, who are expected to be naïve, while the opposite is often the case with migrants, even though newcomers to a linguaculture are also learners, necessarily ignorant in many ways, and most probably innocent.

A more immediate risk is when an error in good faith is taken seriously ‘as is’, or at face value, and the (de)fault in the product is attributed to the author, rather than to the process.163 The distinction among matters of fact and matters of manners or face, mainly related to outcomes of unsafe text, corresponds to negative traits attributed to the other party, presumed guilty of incompetence, deceit or rudeness, if mis-communication is not recognised as a possible source of confusion or offence.

Unsafe text practices may lead to unfair criticism of people who can also be at a disadvantage, in terms of language proficiency matches, power and interpersonal relationships of interactants (cf. Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001). Conversely, the attribution of any failure to a specific difference, ignoring common causes like slips, reinforces the discrimination of stereotyped perceptions of deficiency.164 In terms of equity, this thesis associates responsibility for text safety with positions of authority, associated with any role in the interaction, as illustrated in a court case (cf. Ch.8).

Thus, if the lapse originates from “masters of the language”,165 aspects of ‘duty of care’ include the role as models of language use, since uncritical reproduction, as noted, multiplies the risk of unsafe text use, with outcomes that vary with context.

---

163 An example about intonation and emotion is discussed in Ch.9 (cf. Kirkpatrick, 1995).

164 See Goffman (1968:26-7) about mental and physical conditions, like falls when the skater has only one leg. To avoid unwarranted perceptions of dis- or inability, the protagonist of the film “Dance me to my song” (1998) spells carefully on the computer, the only communication option available to her as character (Julia), but also as person (Heather Rose, actor and co-writer).

165 The translation of an Italian title (Sobrero, 1978) transfers and extends the polysemy (cf. Ch.9), as ‘padrone’ is a master with ownership and control (e.g. of slaves or servants), not a teacher (maestro).
A key term under discussion here is eminently suitable to illustrate the philosophical points of view noted before, regarding the arbitrary nature of words, since ‘right’ is particularly unsafe, within and across languages. For example, an indication of which is the right side of the road for drivers may create dissonance (and death), if it refers to the left one. When giving direction to drivers in English, the ambiguity of ‘right’ limits its use to indicate the opposite of ‘left’, directly relating the basic safe-text practice of disambiguation to physical safety on the road. This has text-only equivalents on the Infobahn, also aimed to prevent clashes, or even crashes.\textsuperscript{166} Going from life to liberty, or at least parliamentary politics, I see dangers in the English use of ‘right’ to refer to one of two sides which have presumably equal rights, as the same word is the opposite of ‘wrong’, not only of ‘left’. Leaving aside geometrical and political uses, the notion of ‘right’ as ‘correct/ed’ or ‘exact/ed’ also carries the dangers of ‘righteousness’ and authoritarian views, or simple- and narrow-minded ones. Beyond the polar opposition of adjectives, and their often overlapping continuum regarding something or somewhere to be, or not, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ can be nouns. To have a right, or to suffer a wrong, are important factors in human interaction, crucial to justice, thus to issues of equity, access and diversity, which I see in terms of ensuring equal rights, specifically through redressing or preventing wrongs.

In this chapter, Freudian approaches to unsafe text in PEL and Wit/z have been considered as part of linguacultural background,\textsuperscript{167} to raise awareness of their use beyond a default setting and promote a critical view of their mode of interpretation. Safe-text approaches involve efforts to retrace the steps involved in processes of mis-communication, which may look at the mental life of participants in different ways.\textsuperscript{168} This dissertation is particularly concerned with negative outcomes associated with differences in linguistic expressions, mainly attributable to forms of transfer from the linguacultural background, rather than the unconscious, of authors and interpreters. The difference between implicit and unconscious reasons for text production and interpretation can be illustrated by the use of ‘negative’ above, and elsewhere in the

\textsuperscript{166} Part Two discusses the risks associated with codes, specifically ASCII and the Y2K ‘bug’.

\textsuperscript{167} Even a most superficial acquaintance with Freud commonly associates the name with ‘slips’ (A. Main, p.c.2003), thus the influence is likely to extend beyond my own background, to a shared one.

\textsuperscript{168} Comments by Roback (1957) are an early model used in this respect (the original article, as repeatedly indicted, dates back to 1919), but works on error analysis also consider Freudian examples in the light of alternative or complementary approaches and explanations, found in several essays in Fromkin (1973) and other collections (Birnbaum & Collins, 1992; Ellis, 1979; Motley, 1979).
thesis, to mean ‘bad’ (in the sense of ‘unwanted’ rather than ‘unacceptable’). This
convention does not appear language-specific, but there is a context of situation where
‘positive’ is used with a literal reference (to the outcome of AIDS tests), and implicit
overtones of acceptance (as in ‘positive living’) of an otherwise ‘bad’ thing. Such uses
can extend to deliberate and arbitrary forms of contradiction, as in anti-languages.169

Some recognition of the transcultural factor appears in Freud and in comments on his
work. Several types of text, particularly in cases with serious and unintended negative
outcomes, need not be seen as results of unacceptable or inappropriate unconscious
mental activity, but primarily of transfer from default options that authors considered
acceptable. As repeatedly noted, the latter are different from ‘slips’, and rather than
delving in deeply and dangerously Freudian motives, requests for clarification can be
in order. These can confirm or supplement the search for a positive interpretation, or a
cause for the mis-communication as simple and safe as possible, close to the linguistic
surface. Negative interpretations, even when they seem obvious, are potentially risky
to either party, or both. As noted in Ch.2, the ‘black sail’ deaths of Aegeus and Tristan
are regretted by those who caused them (respectively the son and wife), although the
former did it unintentionally or accidentally, while the latter had deliberately lied.

The various precedents considered in this chapter supplement considerations of
method (Ch.1) and sources (Ch.3), and the illustrations of unsafe text (Ch.2),
presented in this first part of the dissertation as the evidence under investigation.
The search for safe text continues in Part Two, with focus on the process involved in
transfers on to the Infobahn, specifically involving linguacultural differences, their
perception and possible accommodation, both off- and on-line.

---
169 For example, someone ‘wise’ (cf. Goffman, 1968) had to explain the ‘good’ sense of terms like
‘wicked’ and ‘sick’ in teenage slang, which a worried adult had overheard in a high-risk context.
Part Two  Process

The purpose of safe text practices is to reduce interaction difficulties associated with differences in linguistic expression. Evidence of such problems has been the subject of the first part of this dissertation, where exemplary cases of mis-communication have been presented in relation to approaches, positions, method and sources used for their identification and investigation, noting and using key works as precedents.

The central process of transfer, explored in this second part of the thesis, is seen as the mechanism behind unsafe text, and thus as the object of search to solve the problems. The closely interrelated issues of linguistic diversity and transfer are considered in the transcultural context of computer-mediated communication (CMC), particularly on the Infobahn and WWW (World-Wide Web). Users of text tend to make transfers and distinctions between languages and forms of expression in relation to their idiolect and background. What appears as unmarked choice, generally involving implicit knowledge or deixis, operates like a default setting or option, and guides perceptions of what is other and different, often judged as faulty or ‘just plain wrong’.

Attention to both transfer and cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) is crucial in recognising the risks of unsafe text. The focus of the thesis is on situations of potential disadvantage and unfair treatment, and the aim is to promote mutual awareness of what a text may mean for each of the users, on the basis of their lingua-cultural backgrounds. Recognising where messages and people come from can explain the choices and perceptions of linguistic expressions made by authors and interpreters, even when they appear at first incomprehensible, or even reprehensible. The aim of the process of analysis and clarification proposed here is to improve communication, specifically – but not exclusively – in the context of new(er) information technologies.

A key value and belief is that equity in transcultural communication can increase through awareness of language-related processes and their link to interaction troubles. This informs the aim to promote safe text practices, which are not seen just as stylistic prescriptions or proscriptions, but as procedures for substantive processing of text, directed to (re)construct and understand meaning as originally intended, preferably with outcomes acceptable to all involved.
If equity, access and diversity in this domain are the goal, each element of the principle needs to be applied by text users to the relevant variables. While the thesis focuses on written language as a specific element of culture, many findings can be transferred to a wider range of text types and cultural manifestations of diversity.

Access to communication, in any form, is linked to the code/s used for the exchange of messages, such as languages, however defined and distinguished from each other. Differences between them can lead to disadvantage, through lack of access to dominant codes, or other forms of inequity. Computer use represents for many people an important situation of language contact, and provides a fast-growing arena for transcultural communication, using mainly written text (even if not just Text Only).

In computer-mediated communication (CMC), uncertainty extends even to the identities of participants, and control over who has access to a given text is far more limited than with other media. This increases hidden dangers of mis-communication, and creates a wide and strong need for safe text, particularly on-line, if the aim is effective and appropriate communication, for and from all the parties involved.

A key concern is that non-native users of a ‘common’ text language can be at a disadvantage through higher risk of errors and misunderstanding, related to processes of linguistic interference and transfer that may take place on both sides. This applies to other non-dominant groups, including a wide range of ‘native’ and even monoglot users of any language. In respect to English, the situation in Australia is particularly relevant, as the local variety is the dominant language in its multicultural society, but displays varying ‘degrees of separation’ from the UK versions imported over two centuries, and possibly even more divergence from the USA form. On-line, the latter is likely to be dominant, even on the quantitative basis of (user) population size.\textsuperscript{170}

While the physical constraints of a printed volume require separate chapters in sequence, with the appearance of a linear structure, it should be clear that their topics link with each other. Chapter 5 presents transfer from ‘background’, comparable to a default setting in computer use, with an equity concern for the risk that only a narrow range of linguacultures can appear as (unmarked) options in a particular context. Chapter 6 covers cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) and its on-line perception, and Chapter 7 relates CaLD and transfer to the Infobahn.

\textsuperscript{170} The area of Australia is similar to the 48 contiguous United States, the population to New York.
Chapter 5  Transfer

Along with the following two chapters, this one looks at transfer on to the Infobahn, and illustrates difficulties in interaction related to linguacultural differences, which can apply to CMC, HCI and IT. In particular, the on-line invisibility of diversity is linked to the risk of default settings, from those found in ‘software of the mind’ to forms of ‘code’, including its literal and technical sense. The metaphor of transport, commonly found in relation to communication on- and off-line, is used in this part of the thesis to describe what is ‘transfer/red’, to and from which ‘points’ or areas.

Linguistic transfer, and its role in (un)safe text, are explored as a specific instance of a process central to human learning and action, which applies to life skills in general, beyond language and communication. Problems likely to take place in the particular case of transcultural computer-mediated communication based on written text may partly resemble those found in other media, using English or any code / language.

The importance of the transfer process includes affective, behavioural and cognitive (‘ABC’) factors along with issues of power and responsibility, particularly to ensure equity in interaction, with priority concern for those at risk of disadvantage in access because of cultural and linguistic diversity from the ‘mainstream’. A key point in this respect is that positions of dominance affect the choice, perception and expectation of linguistic forms as ‘standard/s’ in specific contexts of situation, but contexts of culture entail great diversity. In other words, there can be more than one text option, and this leads to a complementary aspect of transfer, as the range of factors influencing any linguistic choice in production or perception leads to variation, even for one person.

The role of transfer in searching for safe text goes beyond this chapter, and relates to various types of mis-communication, as highlighted elsewhere in the thesis. References to specific forms of the process mainly concern background or default settings that can be identified by those searching for safe text, contributing to positive clarification of the intended message. Examples in this chapter illustrate where, when and how transfer can take place and cause trouble in text-based interactions.

171 Computer-mediated communication, human-computer interaction and information technology. See note 38 in Ch.1, and later use of other initials in the thesis, illustrating several concerns for text safety.

172 This includes cases recognised as ‘deviance’ once the ‘intended’ outcome is clarified, as in ‘slips’.
To discuss the role of transfer, it is useful to consider what it is, and to start with the specific aspect of linguistic transfer, which has been the object of few specific studies, such as Eppert (1983) and Odlin (1989). The latter uses the concept of language transfer as cross-linguistic influence in the context of language learning, but beyond interlanguage interference there are also intra-language errors, linked to expectations based on the acquired but incomplete knowledge of the (new) language. Both children and non-native language users are novices, thus more likely than ‘expert’ adults to produce noticeably ‘wrong’ texts in this way, and also to misunderstand ‘correct’ text, mainly when they do not share the linguacultural background it presupposes. The thesis labels these processes as ‘transfer’ in broader terms, as they go beyond formal language learning, and this wider approach reflects the attention given in more recent years to transfer of cultural aspects, such as learning or skills.

A general model of transfer refers to several aspects of lifelong learning processes, as we apply or transfer to a new area the information, skills and tools already acquired in a related area. These form a baggage or background, and we tend to take them for granted, as we often perceive such options as unmarked and thus ‘normal’. Anything that we know is likely to be used at the start of an unknown development, and it can be useful, but when an adjustment is needed, we may not find it easy to make. The capacity to adapt promptly, in contrast to a persistent (and faulty) ‘default’ pattern of use, may depend on personal characteristics, including age and ability, and possible disadvantages need to be taken into account by all parties, in order to improve equity. Issues of access and diversity have many facets, as noted introducing Part Two.

The ‘masters’ of a language tend to be part of an elite, which appears doubly privileged, as its native dialect has to be learned by other users in addition to their own, and its choices regarding new developments are likely to be accepted as standard or default settings. There is a serious risk of ignoring others who are different, or even the existence of diversity and disadvantage, specifically in linguaculture.
Thus, one of the key points of the thesis is the need to associate responsibility about safe text practices with positions of authority and power, briefly stated as ‘noblesse oblige’, as a means of redressing the above-noted inequities.177

Transfer processes take place mainly at the intra-personal level, where what is known helps to deal with what is still unknown, but the issues investigated here also apply to interpersonal transfer, through example and instruction(s). Someone who is more knowing imparts and shares something, thus transferring it to the less knowing party. What we are taught by others is very limited, and within it, the share included in formal training or education varies among cultures, yet humans have to learn nearly everything they do, largely by trial and error. Communication and languages are a good example of this iceberg-like structure, as only some ‘standard’ forms and formulas are explicitly taught, others demonstrated, but most are just imitated or even (re)constructed and created, with the risk of such errors and blunders as inappropriate use or hypercorrection. Much of the transfer thus includes implicit or unspoken knowledge (cf. also deixis in Ch.4), along with what others have taught, and it also goes beyond cognitive aspects, to include affective and behavioural values and rules. The latter are mostly culture-specific, and known as risk factors leading to unsafe text.

A key to safer text use is awareness of transfer from one’s background language(s) and culture(s), comparable to a default or unmarked option. Thus when interpreters of text find a message problematic, a safe approach is to consider whether and how it could reflect a discrepancy in background linguaculture/s between them and authors.178 Like a computer’s default setting, acquired knowledge is often tacit or implicit, and represents a modus operandi that requires deliberate modification when it may not suit the context, so that assumptions about a ‘common’ sense (in every sense) or understanding are not safe, at any step of the communication process.

When perception and acceptance of expressions as ‘correct’ is not shared, text can cause misunderstandings, and searching for safe text involves the pursuit or tracking of ‘causeffectways’, to see where paths and choices diverge in the exchange between authors and interpreters, in relation to the many steps involved in text processing.

177 This fits the intercultural guideline “Be aware that the service deliverer usually has greater social power in interactions with clients – use this power to help the client” (Gallois & Callan, 1997:145).
178 The need to “make allowances for text-level problems just as we do for sentence-level errors in texts written in a foreign language” is also noted in regard to academic writing (Mauranen, 1996:195).
Users of a ‘natural’ and supposedly ‘common’ language often display cultural variations in many elements of communication, but since such noticeable aspects are like the visible tip of an iceberg, in comparison to the mass of implicit knowledge, the search for safe text aims to dive further, in pursuit of hidden differences.

The word ‘transfer’ is commonly used in non-linguistic contexts, including transport. As the latter is a recurrent metaphor in discussing or describing communication, and the term ‘metaphor’ derives from the Greek equivalent of ‘transfer’, images related to transport appear particularly appropriate in discussing aspects of the transfer process.

The view of linguacultural background (source of transfer) as carry-on baggage relates to the notion of travel on the Infobahn or ‘information superhighway’, elaborated in Ch.7, and metaphors about (un-)packing relate to the same image.\footnote{They also lead to measures of lexical density (or denseness) when referring to forms of text (Ventola, 1996), which provide a tactile and visual equivalent to the notion of ‘coding’.
}

We all have at least one language (L1) as we acquire our first, native or mother tongue during our formative years.\footnote{The convention of numbering L1, L2 etc. is useful, but potentially misleading. There are no measures, bounds or boundaries for the quantity and quality of ‘language/s’ we may have or ‘know’, and I question terms like ‘native’ or ‘mother’, even without ‘scare quotes’. The polysemy of ‘tongue/s’ also makes ‘counting’ them confusing (Piper 1993:9-10) or worse (Ciccotosto & Bosworth, 1990).} We may have more, and we cannot divest ourselves of the capital – or the burden – of accumulated linguistic experience, practice, skill, habits, and knowledge (much of it implicit, as noted). We take or carry our language/s with us, wherever we go, as a mental luggage or baggage, loaded with words and texts. These are in turn containers of meanings, which authors choose to convey to interpreters through various types (or genres) of discourses, utterances and messages.

The cultural specificity associated with many elements, including metaphors, is largely mediated through particular languages, as noted also about translation.

If baggage is a backpack, it is out of sight behind (and yet on) one’s back.\footnote{The image relates to a metaphor in a Latin fable by Phaedrus, used to describe how Jupiter gave us dual saddlebags, to carry in front of us the defects of others, while ours are behind, out of sight.}

Languages are a powerful vehicle (receptacle, carrier) of cultural bias in perception and processing, description and prescription, also for (meta-)linguistic text use.\footnote{This is generally noted in the context of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, but extends to others. For example, “Attitudes and views of the world identify languages” (Morson & Emerson, 1990:141) shows how works of Bakhtin and related authors emphasise the mutual relation of world and word, discourse and language/s.}
Users attach values to patterns that become ‘rules’, and the established codification of language encourages priority attention to it, within the overall cultural baggage. The thesis argues that languages should be called ‘cultural’ rather than ‘natural’, and regularly refers to ‘linguaculture’, to mark the close link between the two aspects or factors. While idiolects mean that one person never uses quite the same language as another, the range of conventions associated with specific uses leads to expectations of conformity, and to the readiness to label as ‘deviant’ any usage that does not fit the supposedly common pattern or ‘standard’.

Difficulties associated with differences of this nature relate to types of unsafe text for which the linguistic notion of ‘transference’ is more appropriate than in most previous examples, which dealt with code and instructions (in Ch.2) and with ‘Freudian’ slips (in Ch.4). However, the more general metaphor of movement or transfer is used in the thesis to cover all these categories, as anything which appears out of place must come from somewhere, usually near enough to the intended text or ‘target’.

The key factor discussed in this chapter is transfer from one’s background language and culture, compared here to a default setting. Negative effects of transfer are called ‘interference’, and include mis-matches between possible readings, interpretations and translations of text. These are the main objects of investigation in the thesis, with specific focus on unintended outcomes that are negative, whether comic or tragic.

Given the ubiquity of (mis-)communication, across species and technologies, the ‘funnel’ approach (Ch.1) points to the use of written language as a specifically human habit, which only dates back a few thousands of years, compared to about a hundred thousand for language, and is restricted to those with literacy skills. Communication with and through computers has developed within my lifetime, and its most common form has been (type)written text, based on some code, and used for various types of electronic exchanges. However, text is only one of the options currently available, and developments increase the overlap of CMC with other forms of communication.

183 Linguistic ‘grammars’ and ‘dictionaries’ can be open to discussion, but have no ‘cultural’ equivalent (cf. Gallois & Callan, 1997:21, cited under Sources).
184 Heteroglossia is opposed to a unitary language, which “is not something given dan, but is always in essence posited zadun” (cf. Bakhtin, 1981: 270; Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981).
185 On these questionable terms, see comments in Part Three.
186 See note 115 on p.62, Ch.3, for a reference to Pauwels, 1995 and various types of transference.
Thus the narrow research focus pursued in the thesis, likened to the mid-point of an hourglass, is a link between the wide-ranging process of off-line communication, which continues from the past, and the expanding on-line possibilities of the future.

The special attention given to mechanisms compatible with computer-mediated communication (CMC) makes most thesis findings applicable ‘on to the Infobahn’. While this reading of the dissertation subtitle is a positive outcome of the process, transfer between the different channels is also a possible risk factor, involving a variety of linguacultural aspects and default settings. This study covers a transitional period, for the author and the world, when patterns of communication are likely to be transferred from other modes, previously used and familiar, to their CMC equivalents. This aspect of searching for safe text may contribute to a future archaeology of discourse,\(^{187}\) and some aspects are noted in Ch.7. Amusing examples, from anecdotes and humour over the past few years, show evidence of an increasing tendency (mainly by children) to use the on-line option as default, whereas it used to be the reverse.

The chosen focus on language also represents a practical restriction among the manifestations of cultural differences as a cause of difficulties. One advantage is a long-established and dynamically evolving tradition of labels for its elements, which allow it to be viewed systematically, both for research purposes (as in the thesis) and for the general study of language/s associated with teaching and learning.\(^{188}\)

The process and outcome of acquisition or learning of our own ‘original’ language (L1), or of any other, appear related to the central element of transfer. As the hourglass widens beyond the narrow point of written text, findings may apply to ‘body language’ or other forms of culture-based (mis-)communication. A crucial factor in searching for safe text is recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD), and to this end the thesis uses ‘language’ in the singular when referring to the general human function, while its many forms are noted as ‘languagES’.\(^{189}\)

In the thesis, the notion of specific differences and general diversity in linguistic background applies not just to languages commonly seen as ‘other’, but to specific

\(^{187}\) Some concepts proposed by Foucault three decades ago, looking back over past centuries and millennia, can be reviewed in relation to current and future uses of technology for communication.

\(^{188}\) The variety of angles and approaches offer both choice and conflict, and ‘transfer’ can cause trouble. Latin concepts were apparently forced onto English, as in the prohibition of ‘split infinitives’. I find it hard to believe, but attitudes of ‘cultural cringe’ can lead to such absurdly biased perceptions.

\(^{189}\) The emphasis on the plural comes from Whorf (cf. reference to 1937c or LTR:67 in Lee, 1996:217).
constellations of individual and situational circumstances. These include both idiolects and heteroglossia, which are the source of specific transfers and can help explain the intention of the resulting ‘unsafe’ text.\textsuperscript{190}

**Channels**

The narrow point of the hourglass addressed in the thesis has to do with Text Only as word-based means of transcultural computer-mediated communication, and thus with difficulties in interaction that are associated with differences in linguistic expression. The preference given to written language helps reduce the field of investigation, but as in many apparent polarities, the relation between spoken and written forms of language represents a continuum, as it is not easy to separate the role of speaking and writing, given the link between the sound and look of a language like English.

To generate meaning, all written language tends to be ‘spoken’, including ‘silent’ forms of intonation.\textsuperscript{191} The signs for exclamation, question, asides, suspension or ellipsis, and various forms of quotation (cf. earlier reference to Quine, 1987: 231-5) are the most usual and obvious, while other types of punctuation are subtler, and further items are less common,\textsuperscript{192} in terms of frequency and of shared conventions. Formatting adds layers of refinement, often specific to machine-printed media.

Meaning determines the places where we pause for breathing in speech, marked in writing mainly through punctuation, and links between semantics and the body include posture and facial expression.\textsuperscript{193} The latter are codified through the former in one of the safety features of computer-mediated texts, as ‘emoticons’ used to represent the tone of a message in Text Only are combinations of typed characters, generally punctuation marks, to suggest a smile, frown or wink (like ;-).\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{190} Idiolect is the language used specifically by an individual, and it may include inputs from that person’s heteroglossia, or range of ‘different’ languages used, further discussed in Ch.6.

\textsuperscript{191} What are they? These! (to start with, as – undoubtedly – there are more ‘marks’…).

\textsuperscript{192} Examples are *** or &@#% for taboo terms and expletives, that in speech can be euphemistically distorted (cf. Quine, 1987:53), disguised by laughter (cf. Mulkay, 1988:112), or otherwise m/uttered. Experience as polyglot suggests links between phonetic form and function of ways to vent emotions, whether ‘meaningless’ or codified in various x-phemistic forms, suitable for transcultural research.

\textsuperscript{193} These also relate to cultural conventions, but are less readily codified than linguistic forms.

\textsuperscript{194} Sources of such information tend to include extensive lists of elaborations on the theme, but studies of use note their limits (cf. Muniandy, 2002).
Elements of communication available through a computer interface (cf. Ch.7) generally lack the context of face-to-face encounters, thus increasing safety risks through uncertainty. Electronic conventions that add some extra-linguistic factors in Text Only use also include initials like ‘LOL’ (laughing out loud), with the limits associated with short ‘code’ forms. Conversely, the simple option of ALL capital letters (preferred by some as easier to type) is known to cause interaction difficulties, as those using them may not realise that such text is read as SHOUTING (not here;:-). Paradoxically, a further use of all capitals can be safer than alternatives, when e-mail replies interspersed in the original text need to be differentiated from it, as it avoids interference in transmission, unlike more elaborate options, such as text in colour.

The above measures aim to orient interpreters in relation to the intentions of authors, and to replace para-verbal and non-verbal cues, which use of written text leaves out. Comparable concerns were voiced about the limits of the telephone (cf. Pryce & Booker, 2001), as “the message cannot be intelligible” if some of the “many delicate vibrations” of “every spoken word” get lost (Ronell, 1989:262). “The Conversation”, a film by Francis Ford Coppola from the early 1970s, shows this type of unsafe text, as dramatic risks and outcomes are linked to the interpretation of few spoken words that were clandestinely recorded, and prove difficult to reproduce “perfectly”.

Goffman’s note (8 on p. 211) on differences between speech and writing faults, along with functional equivalents, can apply (be transferred on) to the Infobahn. “Speakers can’t misspell, writers can’t mispronounce”, but spelling errors in typing are said to “correspond precisely to phonological disturbance”, so the continuum from spoken to written text is more immediate through keyboards than handwriting. “Interestingly,” as in CMC, “typing exhibits kinds of faults that are more commonly found in speech than in handwritten texts, perhaps because of the speed of production”.

The importance of the body in language can be tracked in many cases of unsafe text. Specifically, the role of hearing and sight as channels for meaning is at the origin of writing (cf. Ruthrof, 1997; Ruthrof, 2000), and the impact of sound on spelling is a key component of problems. Although it is often hidden by conventions and control, also involving computers, it is pervasive among the sources of text errors and risks.

195 BTW, used in place of ‘by the way’ in an e-mail I sent, was criticised by a correspondent who felt there was no saving to justify such ‘shorthand’, but Muniandy (2002) mentions time and money.
The thesis considers the interference of ‘sound in the head’ as a form of transfer, where modes or channels based on hearing and sight also interact with linguacultural background. For example, monitoring my own typing errors to find their source, I note some on which the Italian transcription of sounds could have more influence than the more tangible and visible proximity between keys, inducing slips of the finger. A clear case of multi-modal cross-linguistic auto-confusion was my mental repetition of a library call number as ‘808.5’ for a book, which I was unable to find on the shelf. Returning to the catalogue, I saw ‘808 FAI’, and recognised that the Italian sound of the letters in my mind was like the English number 5, compatible with the context.

The same process of association with Italian phonetic reading applies to perception of written text, as what I see on the page or screen becomes something I hear in my head, and is compared with recollections or expectations of how words are written in the appropriate language, according to the ‘standard/s’ I have been taught. This habit may also explain why it is easier for me to spot ‘course language’, and other meaningful lexical mistakes, which spell-checkers ignore.196 Given this aptitude, my attitude to (mis-)spelling and typing errors tends to be critical, as is that of a fellow language professional (Klein, 1998), quoted in Ch.7 in the context of machine translation.

Different phonetic perceptions and conventions associated with languages are compounded by variations in educational levels and familiarity with specific terms, and the latter help explain meaningful errors like malapropisms,197 that predominate in students’ output. “The First World War, cause by the assignation of the Arch-Duck by a surf, ushered in a new error in the anals of human history” ends a world history collated from “certifiably genuine student bloopers collected by teachers throughout the United States, from eight grade through college level” (Ledere, 1994).198

The source acknowledges their value: “One of the fringe benefits of being an English or History teacher is receiving the occasional jewel of a student bloop in an essay”, and the term ‘howler’ appears to imply loud laughter on the part of the reader.

196 Of course, it should be noted that “par for the coarse” can be apropos, as it appears as subtitle to an interview with Rodney Rude (Tompkin, 2003).

197 Or “the introduction of a whole, meaningful word that is unrelated in meaning to the one apparently intended but sounds somewhat like it (Fay and Cutler, 1977:505)”, as noted by Goffman (1981:210, n.6) with reference to Fay, David and Cutler, Anne. 1977. “Malapropism and the structure of the mental lexicon.” Linguistic Inquiry 8: 505-20. See further discussion of ‘boners’ in Ch.6, and Ch.9.

198 The site has the author’s name as ‘Richard Ledere, St. Paul’s School’, but it could be Lederer.
Another collector compares a good howler to an oasis, refreshing the teacher who goes through large amounts of student work (Rolfe, 1980). Any discipline can provide what Freud calls “comic nonsense, as it is produced by ignorant candidates in an examination” (Wit/zu, p.194), but the approach is not always related to malapropisms or other linguistic forms. Ignorance can lead to errors that do not appear on the linguistic surface and do not count as unsafe text, as recognition of substantive confusion requires specific knowledge of the discipline. On the other hand, both students and teachers can slip on surface matters, and the feedback “I liked some of your errors” to Education students of literacy applies to cases like the following.

Children have a difficult time learning to spell these words (their and they’re) in there right order.

This spelling mistake accurse because the children were spelling the word how it sounds … (Tripp, 2000a)

In considering transfer from linguacultural background, it helps to remember that nobody is a ‘native’ writer of any language, and use of additional languages relies on the original one. What we ‘hear’ in our head affects many processes, and may relate to how we spell, write and read. Noting our own faults can reveal default settings, as well as external circumstances, which lead or drive us to the ‘wrong’ outcome, and help us recognise a similar process in unsafe text produced by others, thus reducing in two ways the risk of rapid responses that are negative, unwanted and unwarranted. This is particularly useful when text appears offensive and can trigger emotional re/actions, as discussed in Part Three about various types of ‘bad’ language.

While the difficulties associated with substantive offence are not the focus of searching for unsafe text, a transfer of skills can be useful for such problems as the inadvertent use of stereotypes that are in ‘common’ use. Critical analysis of discourses that appear formally correct and functionally unproblematic can reveal sexism, racism and colonialism, presumably through negative transfers of values rather than terms.199

(Meta-)linguistic and cultural awareness, promoted within the narrow focus of this study, could also facilitate recognition of other forms of problematic communication, and developing such skills may well lead to closer attention to the use, study, teaching and classification of linguistic forms and functions, with complementary advantages.

199 Studies of the above (such as Pennycook, 1998; Spender, 1990, 1995) offer insights into the perception and use of English, relevant to this research. See also Mellor, Patterson, & O’Neill (1991), and wider critical approaches to social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kirshner & Whitson, 1997).
By “investigating the grammatical patterns in an objective way we can see how users of language create meanings and achieve intended effects” (Butt, 2000:204), while the thesis deals with effects and meanings that are NOT intended. Unlike a grammar of a language, which “purports to be a description of the ideal speaker-hearer’s intrinsic competence” (Chomsky, 1965:6), the focus here is on specific problems, which can be solved with a limited range of communication tools.

In searching for safe text, the approach may be likened to emergency repair skills, for example to a motor vehicle, since users does not need to know how every piece functions, as long as the most common and dangerous malfunctions can be recognised and remedied with the tools at hand. In this respect, CMC could be a source of problems and solutions, and the thesis considers the on-line situation by comparison with (and transfer from) examples mainly found in off-line contexts.

**Twin terms**

‘(Trans)-fero, -fers, -tuli, -latum, -ferre’ is something committed to memory during my formative school years, which comes reliably out of the long-term store, confirming the close relation between ‘transfer’ and ‘translation’ (from *transferre* and *translatum* respectively). The structure of what I learnt as paradigm of irregular verbs in Latin is analogous to that of English ones, and ‘bring, brought, brought’, or ‘take, took, taken’, could provide specific translations for what is expressed by one basic verb in Latin (‘fero… ferre’). Focus on the two different directions for ‘carrying’ meaning is useful in discussing translation and transfer, particularly in the negative form (interference) that is of crucial importance in searching for safe text.

‘Bring’ and ‘take’ differentiate between two directions of movement, applicable to negative transfer in text production, or in perception and processing. In the first case, something can be ‘lost in translation’, as it falls through when it is brought across. The unintended outcome of this failure to translate may be even worse than loss, when the ‘wrong’ choice can “cause to come… to the mind or knowledge” of recipients an apparently meaningful but unsafe text, that can be inadequate, inappropriate, etc. In the other direction, the “mis-take” occurs as part of the process of understanding or comprehension, associated with bodily action metaphors like catch, capture, grasp.

---

200 This often applies to language-specific effects, in particular word play (cf. ‘Freudian bliss’ in Ch.4).

201 The third edition of the Macquarie Dictionary (M3) is used in the explanations of the three verbs.
The interpreter of a message aims “to get or obtain from a source; derive” the meaning intended by the author, but fails to do so.\textsuperscript{202} In either direction, lack of understanding is less risky than mis-understanding, which often involves unsafe text. Transfer is likely to take place in both production and interpretation of text, with a combined outcome. It seems appropriate to use examples involving translation to illustrate, and possibly get across, the key role of transfer in searching for safe text, as the twin terms refer to processes similar to two-way train (or tram) tracks. Thus in the following pages I discuss two items, obtained through electronic means, and also available in published printed form (the Review) or as informal written humour.

The first of these transnational examples is in English, with possible transfer in text production, through supposed translation from Swedish.\textsuperscript{203} The other case focuses on a German word, with transfer in multi-lingual text perception and processing, related to colloquial use in a variety familiar to English-speakers (Yiddish or Yinglish).

In searching for safe options, it is crucial to consider the context and process/ing involved, particularly to evaluate the risk and seriousness of negative outcomes. The sender or compiler of a list with “some very funny sayings” (not their author) introduces them with the following comment on the level of reasoning of producers (and consumers?) of the items and instructions in question. “In case you needed further proof that the human race is doomed through stupidity, here are some actual label instructions on consumer goods.”

On a Swedish chainsaw -

Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands or genitals.

So far, common reactions to this (the last item in the list) have ranged from ‘ouch!’ to chuckles, as there is obviously something wrong with the last word in the quotation. My response was to ask if it could be a typo or mistranslation, and if so, of what term. The context pointed to parts of the body, specifically ‘limbs’ or ‘members’, and the original term may have been ‘\textit{extremiteter}’,\textsuperscript{204} indicating any part extending out of the torso, other than the head. Discussion included the possibility of intentional humour in the supposed original, with a\textit{double entendre} lost in translation, since the chosen

\textsuperscript{202} Chomsky (1996) offers “some reflections on venerable themes”, such as relations of language with thought and nature, including the key point of “comprehension being a ‘more or less’ affair” (p.14)

\textsuperscript{203} The hedges relate to the lack of detail or definite sources for this type of on-line ‘document’.

\textsuperscript{204} A Swedish male dancer (Stefan Karlsson) was consulted as expert in both language and subject.
English version appeared too coarse in substance and scientific in form. But this ‘old saw’ in a ‘chain letter’ could be an urban legend, funny story, joke or witticism,\textsuperscript{205} like those in Wit/z, as it can be developed from dictionary entries within English.\textsuperscript{206} At least one English term (‘member’) can convey all the possible intended meanings of the ‘instructions’ text, which raises doubts about its derivation and authenticity.

Even a direct transfer would have provided suitable outcomes, using a true cognate, as illustrated by the following suggestive use of ‘extremity’, which appeared prominently in the local weekly paper. Wanting “to kneel at the feet of whoever … and kiss whatever extremity presents itself” (Cornes, 2001) may lead to interpretations fit for other publications, and goes out on a limb, with anatomical references comparable in extent and intent to the supposed Swedish original.

Freud provides a relevant example of a slip of the tongue (PEL, Ch.V) in German, where the outcome is readily rendered in English as ‘five straight limbs’, using the third lexical option. The phrase could be a funny line or slip, depending whether there is “conscious or unconscious intention”, but (unlike the above choice by a female writer) the speaker’s behaviour “certainly” excluded the conscious intention of wit/z.

Both text examples can appear risqué, mainly as a matter of manners, but are not risky, as they do not carry the serious danger to life and limb (plus legal and economic sequels) of the supposed instructions on how NOT to attempt to stop a chainsaw.

The latter are considered here as a (possible) matter of fact, to assess text outcomes. How is the text unsafe? If it mentions hands, but not legs or feet, users could try to stop the chain by putting their foot in, in more than one sense. In my view, this would give them a legal right to claim compensation from a careless manufacturer. Thus, the omission of an item in a matter of fact has potential outcomes far more serious than the possible offence from a rude term (the above matter of manners) or from the apparently superfluous warning, as if to ‘stupid’ users (a matter of face). The ‘horror story’ discussed in Ch.2, involving the deliberate action of Magsipoc in response to a warning and teaching, could also provide parallels and contrasts.

\textsuperscript{205} The ‘final’ source (E.R.) e-mailed “You don't need to cite me! The quotation is an old saw (to try to be witty!).” It took me a while to get the point, and to complete it with the notion of a chain letter.

\textsuperscript{206} The Macquarie Dictionary (third edition, or M3) has three related definitions: “extremity 2. a limb…”, “limb 1. a part or member … as a leg, …”, “member 3. … as a leg, … 4. a penis”.

110
The “stupidity” involved in this possible cause of offence can be compared with other specific warnings in the list of “very funny sayings”. Linguistic form is clearly involved in “Warning keep out of children”, supposedly “on a Korean kitchen knife”, which may appear literally and linguistically correct, but omission or confusion regarding prepositions leads to a functionally inadequate outcome, similar to the Swedish case. The instructions are to keep the knife ‘away from’, or ‘out of reach of’ children, and not put it (or let it be) near them. Contravention to the intended (but missing) warning could take place unwittingly, with dangerous results and possible liability for the knife manufacturer or text author.

The two cases have substantive and formal parallels. Cutting tools of foreign origin have instructions intended to prevent accidents, but linguistic distortion of a crucial lexical element fails to convey the safety message, through misleading omissions. These can be briefly classified in grammatical terms, or analysed in more detail. Lexical choice in translation applies to the noun ‘extremities’, mistakenly limited to one specific ‘member’, and a similar form of negative transfer involving prepositions, notoriously unsafe, may have occurred in the shortened formula ‘keep out of’.207

A third example from the same list involves syntax rather than lexicon. “Do not use while sleeping” seems a fair warning, even “on Sears hairdryer”, but the linguistic expression should better reflect the logic of functional and temporal sequence, as the risk is associated with going to sleep when one is already using a hairdryer. There is no indication of a foreign source, but aspects of globalisation may play a part in the distortion of meaning from the intended “do not fall asleep while using”.208

Thus comparable unsafe text outcomes can be associated with several types of linguistic inputs, even within the narrow range of the ‘label instructions’ genre. Part Three also notes similar warnings, with focus on the body. Various items of this kind are included in the specific genre of anecdotes, in particular the “Mere Male” column of New Idea, where instructions considered inadequate reveal implicit knowledge needed for ‘normal’ domestic operations, and further linguacultural differences appear in many anecdotes of “Travellers’ Tales” (TT).

207 This may also echo (or ‘transfer’ from) ‘keep out’ The repeated ‘of’ in the full expression (‘out of reach of’) may also have facilitated the omission of the central two words, while equal length may have made ‘out of’ seem equivalent to ‘away from’, possibly through linguistic interference.

208 Here the danger comes from electricity and heat, as in other examples in the same list.
The importance of Nury Vittachi’s column as a source of examples (cf. Ch.3) relates to its transnational coverage of various linguacultural contexts and views. Transfer processes can be traced more easily when comments and explanations are provided, and various interactions between editor and readers / contributors illustrate a range of possible perceptions and processing of the same text, found in two related examples. Linguistic expression, specifically one precious lexical item, is central to their joint discussion, although some paralinguistic factors are involved, also in visual terms.

The first traveller’s tale appears under a photograph of a trilingual sign with the words ‘JEWELLERY - SCHMUCK - BIJOUX’. The heading provided by Nury Vittachi hints at spelling options: “SCHOCKING: this jewellery shop (above) was spotted in Kusadasi, Turkey, by Fred Eychaner”. The mock-outraged perception by the sender includes an explanation, which in turn is open to criticism. “Schmuck, originally a Yiddish word, means ‘foolish or contemptible person.’” (TT 9904_22/p28) Two weeks later, a follow-up provides a collective corrigendum, under an idiomatic heading which is appropriate to the substantive item, but also to funny mistakes in language use.

The precious ‘gem’ corresponds to the Italian use of ‘perle’ or ‘pearls’, also implying that an accidental intrusion can result in something of interest and possible value. ‘Virtuous errors’ of learners are another example of creative variations, where transfer shows the extent of understanding and recognition of underlying patterns, even when idiomatic use does not follow the general ‘rule’, much less a clear logic (cf. Ch.8).

LITTLE GEM: Thank you to the large number of readers who wrote to me, e-mailed me, or grabbed me on public transport, to tell me that “schmuck” means “fool” in Yiddish slang and “jewellery” in German. (TT 9905_06/p36tales)

This further processing qualifies the “originally Yiddish” word as “Yiddish slang”, differentiated by semantic decline from the German word, and ‘meaning’ in each case is more clearly identifiable as translation from a specific language. The page displays a photograph with ‘Jewels’ written large on top of a shop awning, and three words along the flap below: ‘SCHMUCK’, ‘MUJAWHARAT’ (in Arabic script), ‘JEWELRY’.

The comment and credit is “John Thorpe sent me this picture (above) of ‘Schmuck Jewelry’ of Syria”, a reading which prompts a comparison between interpretations of the two shop signs, noting how transfer may also apply to basic literacy and syntax.
The temptation to label the shop ‘Schmuck Jewelry’ appears to have led John Thorpe into two sins of linguistic chauvinism, as he also ignores the central Arabic word, although it carries the same meaning as ‘bijoux’ in the vertically staggered display of the previous tri-lingual sign, and as the German and English terms it separates. The script is unfamiliar to the visiting foreigner, whose literacy (in Italian ‘alfabetismo’) contributes to bias and de/fault in perception, like other types of ‘-ism’.

It is important to note how ‘funny’ outcomes, whether peculiar, comical, or both, can override linguistic objections, which could be ‘serious’ in every sense, as here.

A concept relevant to (un-)safe text is X-phemism (cf. Allan and Burridge, 1991:29). While “a euphemistic formation can easily turn into its opposite”, as noted by Adams (1985), it is worse when ‘innocent’ use of the original term may be tainted, which has apparently happened to this (little?) gem. What is precious? Who is contemptible?

None of the people involved in these multiple linguistic exchanges seemed to note, or even think about, any connection between the two meanings of the one crucial word, yet something akin to the ‘shocking’ effect could be achieved by adding ‘Crown’ as shop name before ‘jewels’.209 The link is explained by a scholarly source (Allan & Burridge, 1991): “the crown jewels, the family jewels, the family treasure, and so on” are lexical items for tabooed body-parts that “mostly apply to male genitalia”, listed under “Genealogical importance”, and an example is the “Yinglish shmuck” (p.101).

The thesis also considers what would be the equivalent conditions in cyberspace.

When messages are ‘posted’ on a potentially world-wide scale, there is virtually no control on their possible interpretations, and awareness of the kinds of comments found in Travellers’ Tales can help avoid some pitfalls from either side. Apparently ‘clever’ remarks may reveal deep (or deliberate) ignorance of other linguacultures, and interpreters should control knee-jerk reactions,210 like authors should check text.

The next chapters discuss on-line conditions that affect searching for safe text, from the perception of cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) to the effect of code limits, like those associated with the ‘Y2K bug’ and the ‘American Standard’ or ASCII.

209 ‘Crown Jewellers’, the name of more than one shop in Australia, may not have the same effect.

210 My original draft was “(knee-)jerk reactions”, combining ‘knee-jerk’, to indicate reactions similar to an automatic reflex, with the attribute ‘jerk’, slang term for “1. Fool; idiot; dolt. 2. Disliked person.” (Johansen, 1996). Typographic conventions make the option uncertain, thus possibly unsafe.
Attention progressively concentrates (or transfers) on to the Infobahn, noting technological and linguistic fallacies concerning world-wide communication, and the risks associated with uncritical views of such text processes as translation. Like the latter, extensively considered in this chapter, metaphor and transport are relevant synonyms of transfer, discussed together in general terms, but also in a more detailed review of the notion of *Infobahn*.\(^{211}\) A metaphor or paradigm for linguistic transfer is computer use by novices, also affecting text choices in relation to available genres, and the topics are closely interrelated, as noted in the introduction to Part Two, reflecting the thesis subtitle, “transfers on to the Infobahn”.

\(^{211}\) The term is only italicised where it is identified as a German compound word (cf. Ch.7).
Chapter 6  Diversity

The diversity considered in this chapter is cultural and linguistic, specifically aspects of CaLD as perceived in computer-mediated transcultural communication. The aim, in searching for safe text, is to help recognise which aspects of background can explain difficulties, mainly in terms of transfer (cf. Ch.5). Diversity can be much higher on-than off-line, yet it is paradoxically harder to recognise on (or through) the Net.

If computer-mediated communication (CMC) is indeed taking place over a world-wide network of electronic links, and interactive exchanges using text transcend the boundaries of linguistic and cultural groups, variations in the range of authors and interpreters are potentially endless. What types of obstacles can be encountered in the process of safe text production and reception for all, everywhere around the globe? Are some population groups at higher risk of unsafe text? What are the remedies?

It is important to clarify what is linguacultural ‘diversity’, here seen as worthwhile and requiring recognition and promotion. The identification of CaLD as a positive value, related to equity within and across societies, aims to redress the negative outcomes of dominance, often unquestioned, by a restricted group (however defined) over computer-mediated and other communication, which leads to ‘standards’, ‘rules’ and tools that disadvantage many people, and increase risks for all or most text users.

Among the many issues of ‘netiquette’, some are particularly relevant to this study, in terms of power and choice over which text forms are seen as safe or appropriate. Beyond problems of equity in access to the Infobahn, ‘groups’ on it (in every sense) may be more or less diverse in (their use of) cultural and linguistic terms, and at the same time, much of this diversity is virtually invisible, reinforcing one’s default settings and ‘blind spots’.212 This leads to transfer by authors and interpreters of text, with risk of unwanted negative outcomes. In addition, authors of ‘texts’ in the sense of books and scholarly essays, particularly textbooks, and other materials aimed at providing information and education, seem to have largely overlooked the relevant issues affecting perception and consideration of diversity on the Infobahn.

212 The term is considered technical, and thus should not count as ‘ableist’ text, which is illustrated by the pejorative use of ‘blind’ as unwilling to notice, rather than physically incapable of seeing. Such use has been avoided in the thesis, following the advice of Ellis (2002), who refers (p.c., 2003) to “Simi Linton Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity (New York University Press, 1998), 9.”
The unmarked status of the dominant options has gone largely unremarked, and this type of fault in the supposedly world-wide tool represents a default on the promise or premise of a ‘global village’, that is still largely reflected in texts about the Net, on- and off-line. Some commentators on computer-mediated communication (CMC) mention the issue of non-native users of English in terms of access and equity (Snyder, 1997; Spender, 1995:155), while some researchers in inter-cultural communication, like Clyne (1994), add e-mail and computers among the new channels in use. Most recently, Crystal has briefly looked at languages on the Web, noting how much still needs to be done in many respects (2001; 2002). Computer-mediated transcultural communication represents the overlap between these areas, and is a privileged context in searching for safe text, but appears to be still vastly under-explored, and efforts to integrate linguistic, social, cross-cultural and technological perspectives of CMC are called for, as noted at the end of Ch.3.

Who or what is perceived as ‘different’ by whom, and from which reference point? A personal default setting is often taken as the norm, and transfers from the individual background affect both text production and interpretation (cf. Ch.5). This often includes negative judgment of text choices seen as ‘deviant’, and thus awareness of this type of default needs to include self-reflective language use. In the thesis, I use personal examples and potentially interactive considerations to call attention to the issue, and to promote perception of diversity on the Infobahn.

Cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) and transfer, two key issues of this study, are closely interrelated. The functional link between these two main topics is presented at the start of this chapter, to clarify and complete the considerations on background as default option, made in the previous one (Ch.5). Here CaLD is considered as the spatial aspect of the transport metaphor, by asking ‘what is transferred where?’ Text ‘comes from’ the individual background of both authors and interpreters, which affects both form and meaning of linguistic expressions. These, and other aspects used to describe and classify communication, represent the ‘object’ of transfer, and their identification is one of the basic means of sorting (out) the problems, further discussed in Part Three.

---

213 The section “Languages on the Web” concludes his Ch.7, and most issues extend to the Net (about the difference, cf. Crystal, 2001: 13, n.16 and Webopedia, as cited in my note 28 in Ch.1).
The main questions addressed in this chapter are about the presence and perception of CaLD on the Net, related to labels currently utilised off-line. Possible definitions of who or what is ‘diverse’, ‘other’ or ‘not’ range from simplistic binary notions to much finer consideration of language diversity or heteroglossia at the individual level.214

A useful reference, given my own background and the position of the dissertation, is ‘EAL’, used for ‘English as an additional language’, as the notion of ‘added’ use and skills can extend to ‘e-discourse’ and other computer-mediated aspects of text.215 ‘Another’ (could be a) reading of the central letter, going beyond the ‘additional’ aspect, (and) puts the ‘other’ label on the English ‘default’. ‘An/other language’ is also one among many ‘other’ languages, seen in relation to one’s own.216 A key point, repeatedly noted in the thesis, is that linguacultural otherness is a general condition, and total commonality of language is as unlikely as perfect safety (of text or any other ‘vehicle’), or complete understanding (cf. Goffman, 1981:11). Comments in Part One about being ‘in the same boat’ extend to the unavoidable individuality of position, but also relate the perception of equality, or sameness, to the issue of equity, or fairness.

A basic aspect of CaLD on the WWW concerns equity in linguacultural status and access to communication.217 The risk of unsafe text, and broader issues of power, dominance and exclusion, go beyond the obvious case of English use. The latter is the medium of this study, and thus part of its topic for practical reasons, but the points about transfer involving linguacultural diversity apply to other contexts as well.

The role of CaLD and transfer relates to the overall thesis question/s: what can go wrong, at which ‘point’, on the Net? What can we learn from off-line experience? The relevance of the issues for transcultural computer-mediated communication is seen in terms of additional risks or specific problems. For example, concerns caused by the limits of ASCII are compared with the Y2K bug, to show how technical choices can lead to unintended negative outcomes in CMC (see the last section).

214 At the ‘gross’ end are ethnocentric dichotomies like LOTE (language/s other than English) or NESB (non-English-speaking background). At the opposite end are works by Clyne (and others, cf. Ch.3), and the ideas of Bakhtin, noted in Ch.4 among ‘Precedents’ and also discussed later in this chapter.

215 The ‘additional’ aspect is a valid counterpart to ‘native’ notions of language use, particularly in view of the current ‘transitional’ status of CMC skills as a later or successive acquisition, noted in Ch.5.

216 This notion had suggested the general initials ‘SLOTY’ for ‘speakers of languages other than yours’. A loftier use of the same key term/s is in the expression “we know an Other” (Ess, 2001).

217 Use of the acronyms (cf. the last section) does not exclude aspects of the Internet beyond the WWW.
The previous chapter focused on transfer as a general process, and on its role in searching for safe text. Among the many parallels between transfer and translation, the concept of the latter as a ‘paradigm shift’ provides an additional metaphor of movement, briefly pursued here. A shift implies that something (a paradigm, or more abstractly X) goes ‘from A to B’. For the purposes of the thesis, X generally represents some aspect of communication that is reflected or recognizable in text.

This chapter looks at the diversity of languages / cultures, symbolised by ‘A’ and ‘B’. In general terms, compatible with the usual view of translation, this involves different languages, however defined, but in specific instances CaLD is far subtler, like its risks, as illustrated in the next section. On a continuum of diversity, one extreme would be total mutual unintelligibility, seen as a barrier to direct communication, while the opposite would be identity in linguacultural conventions and expressions (homoglossia). Both appear unlikely, and even intermediate degrees of separation (forms of heteroglossia) are based on distinctions subject to change and criticism.

Examining what is thought of (or taught) as ‘languages’ points to power relations, linked to “the notion of a language” (Pennycook, 1994:26) as different, for example, from a ‘dialect’, in the common or specialist use of these terms. In turn, these ‘discriminating’ thoughts (in more than one sense) about language(s) lead to actions, and to attitudes, feelings and emotions, which are also key areas of linguacultural difference (cf. Wierzbicka, 1999), further discussed in Ch.9. Awareness of the affective factors involved in verbal communication, therefore, helps recognise problems in text-based interaction. A study of affective factors as ‘filter’ influencing foreign language learning (Laine, 1987) could apply to the labelling of languages and their users, and we should question our negative attitudes about linguacultures (as recommended by Dodd, 1998:29). Asking which positions and emotions are displayed in communication, computer-mediated or not, regarding the quantity and quality of the language/s in use, is a complementary aspect in searching for safe text.

Within CMC, can we recognise any transfers from off-line contexts? How far is the software in use on the Infobahn “transcultural”? Conversely, who or what is CaLD?

---

As briefly illustrated below, the perception of CaLD is subject to a range of biases and limits, which can contribute to unsafe text outcomes. For example, in multicultural Australia, which is also a focus of this study, the common perception of ‘CaLD’ as adjective for ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ people is likely to involve the use of so-called ‘migrant’ or ‘community’ languages, rather than ‘foreign’ ones, presumably found ‘overseas’. How would this affect access to communication? Are there equity issues, also involving the status of persons and groups? The efforts of migrants in Australia to establish Saturday schools for their languages included bringing to them their own offspring, who found it was “not cool” (N.A., p.c.), at least in an era of assimilation, even in the case of a major language (cf. Pauwels, 1986).

In contrast, after school I studied German (and French) in Genoese palaces where the respective cultural institutes offered courses, and practised them during holiday visits to neighbouring countries. Yet in Switzerland I also heard a language that has always remained foreign and unknown to me, as it was a Swiss German dialect, or ‘Schwytzer Dütsch’220, important for local identity but not for wider use. I cannot speak the Veneto ‘dialetto’ used by my parents and their siblings, who chose to speak standard Italian with their offspring, thus I have no ‘mother tongue’, and my accent changed with moves among regions in my formative years. Adolescence is the borderline for native-like language acquisition, and peer pressure is crucial for maintenance or shift, so differences within diversity also relate to dis/advantage and mis-/perception in this area, at the level of the individual, family and wider reference groups or models.

Each of us (not only polyglots) can master, or at least display, forms of linguistic and cultural diversity. This ‘normal’ and common condition corresponds to the extensive heteroglossia (raznorecie) found even in an illiterate peasant (Bakhtin, 1981:295-6), as worship, song, leisure, family, work and bureaucracy are not in one (and/or the same) language, in any period and place, and the range of situations on the Net should be at least comparable to that found in both spoken and written use.

---

219 This is compatible with the definition of transformation “as a structural change, from structure A to structure B” (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 168), which uses a three-dimensional and more static metaphor.

220 Difficulty with dieresis or Umlaut leads to the addition of ‘e’ following vowels, but in this case ‘Dquetsch’ can be confused with ‘Deutsch’, the ‘standard’ word for ‘German’ (also ‘Hochdeutsch’, ‘High German’). This option illustrates the high risk involved in attempts to ‘spell out’ diversity.
As the acronym CaLD replaces or improves upon the limiting formula of ‘NESB’ or ‘non-English-speaking background’, perception of diversity should shift from the Anglo-centric focus as default setting for ‘language’. Still, the label ‘LOTE’ marks languages as ‘other than English’, and their difference from the default option as collectively complementary to it. This dichotomous view ignores variations within and among ‘Englishes’, just as ‘NESB’ ignores many backgrounds where (some) English is used, both conditions mainly linked to forms or aspects of Empire/s.

The thesis includes the author’s personal perspectives, specifically in discussing the diversity of linguacultural backgrounds, and it gives priority attention to non-native users of English. Thus it should be made clear that its author is (I am) one of them, and we represent the world majority. Here the first- and third-person plural pronouns refer to the same group, and are not in inverted commas, as in the common di-vision or opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’, reflected in such labels as NESB, LOTE or TESOL/D. Our non-native relation to English is associated with a statistical majority, a useful term to put the default setting in perspective, even referring to an English language environment (cf. Fox, 1994:10 and Ch.7). This can provide an effective counterpart to a dominant language, ‘global’ or not, and since the world minority of native (English) speakers is only apparently unilingual, much less united, it shares in some ways our CaLD status, both at the level of groups and individuals.

The above considerations extend across time and space to users of various ‘languages of Empire/s’, and at increasingly fine levels to national and other ‘standard’ versions of any instance of what has been called “a dialect with an army and a navy behind it” (cf. Comrie, Matthews, & Polinsky, 1996:23). As the “native speaker” is a figure “tied to the monolingual belief”, the conflation of language’s roles in communication and in social identification has implications of language as inherited, with automatic high proficiency in all domains, plus “a rigid and clear distinction between being a native speaker and not being so” (Pennycook, 1994:175-6). Those who are “tend to be dismissive” and label as ‘not English’ what is “unfamiliar to them” (ibid., p,176).

---

221 An apology about such terms, which appear to increase divisions, is in Goodacre & Follers (1987:8).
222 Beyond “Teaching of English to speakers of other languages”, listed along with T/ESL (“as a second language”) in an Australian source (Jones, 1990), labels with ‘other’ include unspecified ‘dialects’ in T/ESOD and T/ESOLD, found in a specialised international one (Jung, 1985).
The thesis needs to deal with such beliefs, and to disprove them I offer familial evidence of the reverse condition. My parents, like most of their contemporaries, were non-native but proficient users of standard Italian, which they had learnt in school. Both sides of the family included teachers, aware of local linguistic diversity, as in the mismatch between words and pictures illustrating letters of the alphabet. Aunt M. was able to use five verbs for ‘erase’ (or ‘clean’ and ‘wipe’) until the pupil recognised the rustic ‘stroza’, and understood the request to ‘remove traces’ from the blackboard.

In dealing with languages and cultures, rather than attempt any typologies or other forms of distinction and classification, the thesis takes as unit of reference the individual idiolect, a term indicating a person’s own range of expressions, with components linked to a person’s background ‘languages’, however defined or differentiated. Besides previous acquisition, learning or exposure to a particular language, a factor affecting language use and shift among immigrant groups and individuals in Australia is diversity of “vintages”. Thus, endless possible combinations are a key feature of diversity, as linguacultural differences between individuals and groups are multidimensional, particularly in the wide, varied and virtual on-line ‘community’, beyond the focus on English users.

**Where is risk?**

The risk of ‘errors’ in on-line messages, caused by interference, may disadvantage their senders or recipients, or both, including ‘native’ users of the ‘same’ language, so their situation is not always or only an advantage. In other words, safe text is not only a concern for groups in a recognised position, often seen as marginal. This general concern is ‘mapped out’ below, since accidents can happen to anyone on the Net, as well as they are known (and shown here) to happen in other text-based media.

---

224 An English equivalent of ‘esse come ... carega’ can be ‘c’ for chair or couch vs. seat, settee or sofa.

225 A recent Australian newspaper article (Wajnryb, 2002) explains it, as do more scholarly sources.


228 I chose not to use the word ‘compunity’ (Jones, 2001), as I associate it with ‘impunity’. This personal view is unrelated to objections concerning ‘micropolii’ as plural of ‘micropolis’ (ibid., p.56).
In this multidimensional context of diversity, searching for safe text focuses on the hidden dangers of a presumed ‘common’ language, which are compared to traps, gaps and trip-wires, rather than on major obstacles or barriers, easier to identify, that are mainly encountered when there is no shared language.

The situations represented by the metaphors can be visualised on a continuum of diversity, articulated along a series of dimensions, or possibly directions, within the area or sphere of communicative and linguistic competence and conventions. Such spatial and geometric similes relate to the movement metaphor of ‘shift’ or transfer of X from A to B. The two are not the same ‘point’, like the geometric units, which are separate, and determine a line, along which their distance can be measured in space.

When discussing other entities, how do we identify any linear or other ‘dimensions’ along which to evaluate, if not measure numerically, their degree/s of separation? How do we map in space the movement involved in a paradigm shift? Just how far does a shift take us, or X, from the starting point, seen as our default setting?

A complementary question applies directly to safety, linking consequences to causes. Is the risk involved in a shift directly proportional to distance and difference?

The basic point is that visibility of obstacles, linked to linguistic differences, and vulnerability to their negative effects, or interaction difficulties, are inversely related. In terms of safety, what cannot be seen is usually a risk. Concerning text, the problem relates to implicit aspects of communication, like deixis (Ch.4) or expectations of conformity with a complex range of largely unspoken conventions, and making such features explicit, as the etymological metaphor says, explains what happens. The extent to which an item needs to be ‘unfolded’ (explicated) depends on its level of risk, which also relates to conditions on the Infobahn, as discussed further on.

Implicit knowledge plays an important role in default settings, and thus in transfer processes, as the danger lies in the ‘blind spots’ where dangers, or even ‘simple’ differences, are not expected. Expectancy violation theory provides a caveat regarding such unmarked options, and Guirdham notes that “the expectations of the person’s own (sub)culture are likely to prevail” (1999:205) where knowledge of the (different) other’s group is missing or inadequate. That is often is the case on the Infobahn, and such transfers without mindfulness “are particularly likely to be

---

229 Compare the technical terms ‘blind spots’ (cf. note at the start of this chapter) and ‘black spots’, specifically with reference to dangers and accidents linked to aspects of transport.
violated” (pp.262-3, with a notable choice of verb), while awareness of such ‘vulnerability’ encourages caution before reacting (pp.269, 234).\(^{230}\)

An examination of attitudes and expectations is thus crucial on-line. On the Infobahn, the mutual invisibility of authors and interpreters of text can be an advantage in promoting a (more) level playing field, but also brings additional risks. Therefore the thesis projects onto computer screens, or transfers on to the Infobahn, relevant issues associated with difficulties from differences, such as those found in transcultural communication involving written text, mainly off-line, in a range of situations.

This chapter aims to combine a view of “dialects”, defined “as linguistic variants … that allow mutually intelligible intergroup conversation” (Hopper, 1986:127),\(^{231}\) with a focus on the communication problem of foreigners, studied by Sanders (1986). As these two works, like other sources of ‘pareri di Perpetua’ (cf. Ch.4), make points close to what I had previously formulated independently, such supportive parallels cause mixed emotions, but the added stimulus of relating older studies to the current and future context of transcultural CMC makes the process a ‘cross and delight’.\(^{232}\) Sanders takes “contact … between members of different speech communities, and certainly different language communities” as “paradigm cases”, and asks questions resembling those in Ch 1 of this dissertation.

How do people with different rules and conventions of expression, and different background knowledge, make themselves understood to each other? And do their efforts in that regard limit or channel their interactions? (Sanders, 1986: 137)

The Infobahn requires such efforts, yet conceals many of the differences between the people involved. Does the risk that linguistic variants may “have unequal social value”, and “a role in social discrimination”, as well (or as badly) as “in issues of social justice, educational policy, and intergroup attitudes” apply on-line?


\(^{231}\) “Bypassing important linguistic issues” in his definition, Hopper also provides a criterion for “a common language” based on exchanges of directions, trade and friendships, as noted in Ch.2.

\(^{232}\) ‘Croce e delizia’ is a quaint idiom about ambivalence in the context of deep attachments, suitable to describing the affective effect of PhD research work.
The above refers to their identification with “social groups who differ in privilege” (Hopper, 1986:127), a notion that can be applied to written CMC. Text Only transmits messages in the ‘purest’ linguistic form (hence the need for emoticons, noted in Ch.5). Competence in the linguistic code used is often evaluated in comparison with ‘native’ levels, and is facilitated by familiarity with it as ‘mother tongue’, which in turn leads to expectations of (sub-)cultural prevalence, as noted.

In CMC, ‘getting a message across’ (in the sense of transmission, as well as successful communicative outcome) depends on ‘mastery’, control or command of linguistic code, both as power to choose and ability to use the specific variety of language, so this ‘purely linguistic’ variable reflects privilege in other respects.

Differences in these terms relate to what Goffman (1981:209) calls “doesn’t know better” faults, specifically those ‘boners’ (cf. Ch.9) involving “language capacity in its own right”, such as “general vocabulary, pronunciation, the fine points of grammar, and the like.” Even not-so-fine points of language use are matters of convention, and loss of face through failure affects equity, access and diversity goals, when requirements for competence go beyond ‘competency’ (cf. discussion in Ch.9).

The difficulties involved are noted in terms of any complex society, where “it turns out that subgroups… may among themselves employ a speech practice (or fail to) which they ordinarily never attend to as a fault”. To me, this would require acknowledgment that they know ‘other’ (if not ‘better’), for example ‘another’ language (possibly including English, as noted above about EAL), “yet in the face of a cultivated hearer’s remarks, are vulnerable to criticism regarding it” (ibid.). The issue of acceptance for cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD), including the prohibition of using a specific language, applies over a range of contexts.

Attention and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) are expressed in idioms like ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’ and equivalents in other languages. How can this approach be transferred on to cyberspace? Who are the Internetans? What can be safely done on the Net by, to, and with, whom? Why is there a problem?

Another idiom comes to mind: ‘as you make your bed, so you lie on it’, or in German “wie man sich bettet, so liegt man” (cf. Brecht, Mahagonny, scene 11). This leads to a key question: who is making the world-wide Net bed? More and more of us will lie, or at least spend hours (not to mention money) on it, often interacting with each other.
Which are the risks of unwanted negative outcomes of on-line written verbal intercourse? In the literature, cultural diversity is occasional mentioned among the general concerns of CMC, but the focus of the thesis is on specific problems, chosen on the basis of seriousness of outcome, plus frequency of related contexts and inputs. It is not safe to trust blindly the ‘experts’ in charge of technology, as short-sighted decisions on the matter may have far-ranging consequences.

Many of the risks are far more subtle and hidden than the example of the Y2K ‘bug’, compared to a text-related ‘standard’ in the next section. Both cases involve non-perception of intrinsic bias and limitations, but the date format had a clear use-by boundary, at least within the ‘common era’, while letters of the Latin alphabet in the American Standard Code for Information Interchange can overlap to a varying extent with those of languages based on the same ingredients. This can be a barrier for very different scripts (like Japanese), becomes a gap when just some items are missing, or a trap when distortions can occur, also through other forms of incompatibility.

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) is used to analyse the dynamics of language-based communication zones. To what extent can such zones be identified in cyberspace? Their main variables relate to the linguacultural competence of the interacting individuals, but their diversity extends to relative positions and power. Thus, many factors can lead to modification of linguistic and related behaviours, in order “to become more similar to (convergence) or different from (divergence) their interactional partners”. But how can there be accommodation, if the characteristics of the partners are not known, leading by the default to expectation of similarity?

“On the Internet, nobody knows you are a dog”. In this chapter, perceptions of diversity through the Net are discussed in relation to aspects shown (or hidden) in that expression, related to the limits of CMC, and specifically of Text Only. Written words on-line allow ignorance or even deception, concerning audio-visual and other aspects linked to identity, including linguacultural background. Perception, re/presentation, control and verification have many technological aspects, and innovations associated


234 This idiomatic ‘truism’ is difficult to credit. I saw it in print, as the caption of a cartoon showing two canines at a computer, but the idiom appears sexist, as in the film “Shallow Hal” by B. and P. Farrelly.
with computer use are likely to create both problems and solutions. In particular, issues of identity and origin of people and messages take a new slant in CMC, and transfers from older familiar modes may not be safe in their on-line outcomes. Written text, on the Infobahn or a printed page, can at best include a name and address, which could be as unreliable as (self) descriptions using the same means.

Convergence strategies, linked to positive attitudes, and divergence strategies, which “accentuate the differences between interactants (Giles et al., 1987)”, are based on perception or assumptions. These dynamics involve affective components, also linked to behavioural aspects, whereas cognitive factors may become unreliable, as noted. Text outcomes could be unsafe in many ways, leaving aside intentionally misleading use, as diversity can be either ignored or erroneously presumed, leading to exchanges that do not make appropriate allowances for transfer. In CMC, misunderstandings based on text can develop into an erroneous and damaging view of the person/s behind the words, with few other options or channels for corrective measures.

To paraphrase the ‘dog’ notion, who can tell (from written text) whether I am a wog? Would my choice of this “vulgarly offensive name for a foreigner” (Green, 1996: 34) be any indication? Said of humans, ‘dog’ is also an uncomplimentary term, apparently based on physical features, while ‘wog’ refers to cultural aspects, and in both cases, denigration is associated with deviance from the ‘norm/al’ or ideal standard. A ‘wog’, or foreigner, is defined as outsider, other, and disadvantage comes from difference in relation to some default option, seen as dominant and presumably faultless. In respect to language, such views apply to standardisation and purism, but also to short-sighted, ethnocentric, and even egocentric views of what is ‘right’.

‘Others’ can be perceived as ‘funny’, in both meanings of ‘peculiar’ and ‘amusing’. In my research work for the thesis, I have considered many funny examples, also in relation to the mention of “severe ridicule” in anti-discrimination legislation (cf. Pauwels, 1991:11) and to the definition of comedy as “the tragedy of others”.

235 Babcock and Du-Babcock (2001), citing the source already noted in detail.

236 “Ideal  Standard” is a brand name for sanitary ware, hence joining the terms is a ‘private’ joke.

237 There are Australian examples of humour about and by ‘wogs’ in film, theatre and cartoons, compared in Ch.4 to Freud’s comments on Jewish jokes in Wit/z. (Cf. also Hung, 1997).

238 Attributed to Sartre, like several comparable formulations, without reference to a specific work.
The aim is to recognise the source of supposed discrepancies from the standard, involving ‘slips’ or other types of transfer, and to remind communicators that ‘nobody is perfect, but anybody can be correct/ed’. Promoting easier acceptance in interactions limits negative reactions, and helps focus prevention or prepare on ‘feworries’, where risks of mis-communication involve outcomes that are serious, or frequent, or both.

Electronic conditions have progressively extended risks of unintended and unwanted outcomes “from faults to faultables … to the risibly interpretable”, as interpreters “seem primed for and oriented to alternative readings”, particularly in mediated exchanges, where potential diversity shifts the issue from “what offends” the interpreter to what the same “assumes might offend” someone. (Goffman, 1981:244)

While this encourages the careful awareness associated with safe text practices, it also lends itself to inequitable forms of criticism and even censorship, as illustrated by reports from Nazi Germany (Freud & Brill, 1938:91-2). One case involved a misprint of ‘Heil Hitler’ as ‘Heilt Hitler,’ meaning ‘Heal Hitler’ instead of ‘Hail Hitler’, which led the typesetter to prison, but could have been an accidental, ‘honest’ mistake.239 Here the suspected cultural difference, seen as guilt, was in terms of ideology rather than language, but overlap between such aspects is as common as it is dangerous.

“It seems that the Nazis who burned Freud’s works, nevertheless, recognize the truth of Freud’s teachings.” (ibid., p.91) These contrasting beliefs, judgments and actions relate to a ‘gallery of mirrors’ (like a ‘comedy of errors’) involving layers of possible simulation and suspicion. The un/safety threshold for ambiguity could be set “when interpretive uncertainties and discrepancies exceed certain limits or are intentionally induced and sustained (or thought to be by hearers)” (Goffman, 1981:11).

Even if “there is the incompetency sometimes engineered (and more often thought to be) by an actor himself as a cover for insubordinate intent,” (ibid., p.200) interaction outcomes seem better protected by the presumption of innocence and ignorance, already recommended in Ch.4, since “failures as such are not standard, full-fledged offenses” (p.201). A specific reference to Freudian views applies to radio announcers, but could extend to other text use(r)s, particularly when interpreters are unknown.

Perhaps a psychoanalytical argument is sometimes warranted here, namely, that what the announcer would

239 The possible transfer or anticipation of ‘t’ from ‘Hitler’ creates the partial anagram ‘Heilt’. See Ch.4, sharing Roback’s criticism, in contrast to Brill’s report and comments on “The writer’s devil”.

127
be most embarrassed to say he somehow feels compelled to say in spite of himself. Certainly some members of the audience are alive to this “overdetermination” interpretation of slips (whether believing it or not), and having it in mind leave the announcer needful of having it in mind, too. (p.247)

This view complements the point made in Ch.4 about the dangers of attributing ‘unconscious’ motives to unsafe text, and consideration of CaLD in this chapter alerts to the risk of mis-reading a linguacultural transfer as a ‘slip’, where the unconscious is suspected of making use of text in ways which are beyond the author’s linguistic knowledge. Naivety can be just pretended, as noted by Freud about children, but at least in appearance, “no wicked intent, no malice, is to be found. Actus non facit reum nisi mens sit rea” (Goffman, 1981:201). 240 On-line, it is hard to prove a mind guilty.

The previous mention of ‘dog’ links with CAT, the initials used for ‘communication accommodation theory’, which could also be read in relation to cultural aspects. The default setting in CAT is maintenance by interactants of their own styles, also when they simply do not know any other style (better or not). Accommodation size and direction depend on exposure (cultural, temporal, and spatial), beyond linguistic proficiency. As this chapter illustrates, there are many ways to perceive, describe and evaluate diversity, even in the apparently narrow and clearly demarcated arena of ‘languages’, and risky text is more likely when such diversity is ignored. On the Infobahn, it tends to be invisible, compounding the danger of traps, gaps and trip-wires that can be hidden, also in non-computer-mediated forms of communication.

Where do we stand in cyberspace? My ‘wog’ position on the issue is noted below.

In keeping with the spatial metaphors, the imaginary place name ‘Calais-sur-toile’ has been constructed by adding the common French form ‘sur’ (’on’) and the literal translation of Web (’toile’), which I also heard used for the WWW. The phrase ‘wogs begin at Calais’ (apparently pronounced like ‘kellys’, to stress insular parochialism) is a “dearly-held British belief” (Green, 1996: 35). What is the equivalent of Calais on the Infobahn? In other words, is there a point or ‘place’ where people start to be ‘outsiders’? As the word ‘channel’ has specific and non-geographic meanings in media and communication, I choose the (European) continental name for the English Channel, which (at least in French, German and Italian) is called ‘the Sleeve’.

240 ‘An act/ion does not make a person guilty unless the mind is guilty’ (my translation).
The point is not about the geographic limits of England and its language, but about interpersonal CaLD. To perceive our own sleeve (in the literal meaning) as the limit or boundary of the language we use would be a basic safe-text choice, as even those who ‘rub elbows’ with us cannot completely match our background linguaculture/s.

**CaLD + WWW: ASCII = Y2K?**

Acronyms, initials and abbreviations are far from safe text options, but in the above heading their accumulation is deliberate, and their combination imitates a formula. The immediate aim is to illustrate how rapidly such forms can proliferate, particularly in computer contexts, and how easily they can give the impression of a nearly secret ‘code’ (in more than one sense), to make a point about the substantive risk of codes.

This section reviews in some detail the parallel between codes for letters and numbers that have caused complications in computer-mediated communication and human-computer interaction in recent years. Cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) is the preferred label for a social and psychological situation, considered in the thesis as a key factor associated with (un)safe text outcomes. As this chapter focuses on its perception, specifically in relation to the World-Wide Web (WWW), CaLD + WWW can be an abbreviation of the overall topic. ASCII is the American Standard Code for Information Interchange, and Y2K corresponds to ‘year 2000’. The last item is rapidly vanishing from the collective consciousness, yet for a period there was widespread concern for the ‘Y2K bug’ and risks of negative effects of the change from (19)99 to (20)00 on many types of date-sensitive computer-based functions.

Electronic text, and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in general, can also be affected by equivalents of the Y2K bug, and it is never too soon to look for remedies. The shorter code for the year provides a useful analogy to limited computer codes for characters, like the early ASCII system of only 128 characters. Even doubled to 256, it falls short, but is not yet replaced by Unicode with 256² (Keniston, 2001:286). These options are noted below, in relation to searching for safe text on the World-Wide Web (WWW) for computer-mediated communication (CMC) among culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) people, using a variety of hardware and software (e.g., PC and MS). Problems with ASCII vary in degree, as it hampers the use of languages other than English (Pargman, 1998). A first-hand account ends with a
summary of the “frustrating difficulties with the electronic transfer of text”, where ‘transfer’ is used differently from the thesis (cf. Ch.5), to mean ‘transmission’:

… computer-to-computer communication, especially that involving the transfer of text which uses non-ASCII encoded scripts, is fraught with potential incompatibility problems. (O’Hagan, 1996:98)

In evaluating a range of difficulties, from minor distortions to total lack of access to communication, the latter is noted as equity issue, but risks of unsafe text outcomes can be higher for the former, which may affect the meaning of text and its outcomes.

“Two too few” could sum up the limited size, as parallel between ASCII and Y2K. The choice of a two-digit format for the year in computer dates was originally based on the need to save characters, when capacity was limited, and later two-digit dates largely remained as a virtual default setting, being transferred from old to new setups, without regard for options and needs. This short-sightedness led to serious anxiety as the year 2000 (Y2K) approached, with extensive and expensive efforts to adjust computer systems. Tales like “Quick service” (TT 9910_21/p36tales) and “Quick fix” (TT 9906_03/p36tales) report a surprising attitude and a possible typing error, as little time or money appeared to be spent on the problem, while cults that saw 2000 as the end of the world (“Judgment day’, TT 9909_02/p31tales) resembled older millenarian traditions, from a time when literacy was far rarer than computer use is now.

Uncertainty among the public led to fear of the ‘millennium bug’, an idiomatic use that entered everyday discourse around the world. This is illustrated by various anecdotes about peculiar forms of confusion, including childish use of the term for insects, while adults saw it as an illness and fell for scams involving cures for it. Within the appropriate domain of computer functions, this ‘big bugbear’ led to rumours that going from ‘99’ to ‘00’ would not simply bring the date back to the initial year (1900), but convey a command to delete everything, or at least cancel and stop operations, as it would be taken as signal of malfunction. This version appears compatible with the binary digit system of opposites (0/1), while the more common default reading of ‘00’ as ‘1900’ illustrates the mechanism at the basis of transfer.

241 Thus in code, as in text, size does matter, and redundancy is a safety measure.

242 Cf. respectively ‘21st century bug-fest’ (NI990821 CW p. 95), ‘tapping in’ (NI990410 MM p. 85) and ‘a bitter pill’ (TT 9910_21/p36tales). Like those previously cited, the anecdotes date from 1999.
Both of the feared outcomes of the date change from ‘99’ to ‘00’ reflect the limitations of ‘artificial intelligence’. Both qualify as unsafe text, in the category of matters of fact, more specifically f/action (as mis-/instructions, cf. Ch.2).

The difference is that (mis)reading the date as 1900 is a factual error with indirect effects, such as closure of accounts or other inappropriate date-sensitive responses, while reading ‘00’ as a direct command, potentially leading to serious and unwanted consequences, is a more fundamental misperception of text or code for time (date).

The format of a date appears relatively simple, at least to a computer user ignorant of the inner workings of hardware and software, but remedial measures for the Y2K bug were costly. To show how technical choices in computer-mediated communication (CMC) can lead to unintended negative outcomes affecting various inter/actions, ASCII is discussed below as a text-related parallel to Y2K.

Like the two-digit format for dates, the 128-character ASCII was limited in size and thus in applicability, not in time but in linguistic and cultural terms. As noted, ASCII as a default setting still causes problems at various levels, and a range of unwanted outcomes can be shown to occur, unlike the feared Y2K disasters. Costs can be hard to quantify, but O’Hagan (1996) points to several relevant aspects and related issues. Replacement of ASCII by a new standard (Unicode) is not a simple or rapid process, and while its adoption is hailed as one of the success stories of the internationalisation movement, in order to be useful the standard needs to be supported. Information on ‘What is Unicode?’ from the Unicode Consortium site points out the limits of previous systems, such as lack of adequate representation, which is as risky for letters and symbols as for terms, names, concepts and ideas.

Another problem is conflict deriving from multiple associations: “two encodings can use the same number for two different characters, or use different numbers for the same character.” Polysemy, or many meanings, including characters, for a single item of ‘code’ or text, generates ambiguity, and an example is the use of ‘code’ regarding encoding systems (ASCII, Unicode), or for abbreviations (as used in ISO). The

243 I prefer to consider it ‘artificial obedience’ to commands, as well as ‘artificial patience’ and speed.

244 Benefits are elusive, in the absence of major mishaps, but the approach can be compared to ‘prepair’ and ‘provention’, as the risk was identified and dealt with (shortly) before damages could develop.

reverse can be called polymorphy, and may cause confusion, when the equivalence in outcomes or meanings linked to different inputs is not evident to users, particularly those not equally familiar with all the options, as in the case of initials or acronyms. Both problems affect equity, access and diversity, as outcomes are linked to proficiency in the specific code/s, and to wider linguacultural background factors.

One approach to “Defining Languages” includes the following caveat.

The whole concept of languages on the Web certainly opens a big can of worms that I’m only going to lightly touch upon in this article. (Heinicke, 2000:6)

This chapter can only make indirect reference to the languages appearing among electronic resources, and changes in the labels of those listed under ‘tools’ highlight the problematic use of ‘standard’ for a particular variety. The International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) Code for the representation of the names of languages (Cover, 1989) shows awareness of their broad range world-wide:

… whereas ISO 639 supplies codes for only about 136 languages, the Ethnologue published by the Summer Institute of Linguistics identifies over 6100 languages.

The passage through and between different ‘channels’ is a transport metaphor, like ‘Infobahn’, commonly used in the communication process (cf. Ch.7). Equating data corruption in the process with loss of information focuses on the negative aspect of less matter or fewer items than intended, but there are more seriously negative cases of text corruption as modification of the message, potentially resulting in unsafe text. Thus channel noise may be linked to disastrous outcomes, comparable to those of Gallipoli or air crashes discussed in Ch.2. A safe-text simulation exercise is to think of superficial distortions, even apparently minor, which can seriously alter the meaning of text, in situations involving high risk, like the ‘grave’ example concerning someone in hospital (also noted in Ch.2), which is authentic, personal and recent.

---

246 A polysemic or polymorphic ‘item’ can be a number, phoneme, morpheme, sentence or discourse.

247 This was noticeable when comparing Word 97 and 2000 versions available to me in Australia, as was the skewed representation of language families, also for languages listed in the Unicode site.


250 Note the expression “il serio rischio di perdere informazioni” (“the serious risk of losing information”) used in the Italian version. (Unicode Consortium, 2001)
The problem of characters on computer screens, which can limit or distort access to communication even within one language, is an example of the narrow point of the hourglass in terms of the scope of this study. Consideration of widening circles of diversity would go beyond languages and literacy to the intrinsic visual and verbal bias of written text. The use of other forms (mainly aural and non-verbal) in CMC may solve some of the problems, but can create others in terms of cultural diversity. Findings like the above may extend to ‘accents’ in speech (from different placement of stress to overall sound), and to visual symbols and gestures. More details appear in Ch.7, but a generally safe approach is to note that “there is no gesture of the human hand which is not obscene in some language” (Keniston, 2001:284). As for the colour red (ibid.), some versions of the Theseus legend about black or white sails mention red ones. Which of the two opposite option would they be more likely to replace?

The discussion in this chapter has pointed out several types of ‘gap’, associated with the topic of CaLD as perceived on the Net. There is a technological gap, between the relative ease of communication in an English-language environment and the delays in accommodating characters beyond the American Standard (ASCII) set. There is also a gap between the idea of a world-wide network, providing equitable and safe access to communication in a context of linguacultural diversity, and perceptions that reflect transfer from narrowly parochial positions (cf. Crystal 2001:59-61).

The problem is illustrated by a “horrendous list posting” emphatically declaring “but we DO live in the United States”. On-line, who knows where or who are ‘we’? How can ‘we’ be sure of shared boundaries, in computer-mediated communication? An effective repartee could be “World Wide Web?” but the medium turns it into a delayed and distant response, and this “alternative to replying” can have little result in discouraging such obvious and obnoxious displays of ethnocentrism. Asking the above questions leads to various perceptions of linguacultural diversity on the Infobahn, and the continuum could range between extremes like “a headline in The New York Times in 1996 which said … ‘World, Wide, Web: 3 English Words’”, and a Panglossian optimism of total equity, access and diversity on- and off-line.

---

251 See Graves (1960). Frazer adds a footnote to Apollodorus, explaining the reasons (1921: 135, n. 2).

252 Source: “the MajorDomo Virtual Punch Bag, the alternative to replying to horrendous list postings” (http://www.wump.com/majordomo/ accessed on 24 Sept 1999)

Pangloss, the preceptor of Candide in Voltaire’s satirical novel, insisted that ‘all is for
the best in the best of all possible worlds’, a phrase that could be extended to some
views of the net and WWW. It is fortunate (not just fortuitous) that his name means
‘all tongue’ and thus can extend to ‘all languages’ and CaLD.

Statistics and studies show a shift, which reduces the “gap between English and the
other languages” (Crystal, 2001:216), but the difficulties caused by linguacultural
differences in expression can lead to unsafe text at any point of linguistic contact,
whatever the language/s in use and the supposed similarity in people’s backgrounds.

Whenever a gap (or mis-match) is not perceived, and neither party can be forewarned
and forearmed, negative outcomes can fall into the unintended category. Like traps
and trip-wires, they do not require great distances to cause damage, but awareness of
causes and effects can help to sort (out) problems, as illustrated in the dissertation. In
particular, a ‘tool kit’ of skills or steps useful in searching for safe text is presented in
Ch.11 as a “way out” of dangerous situations.
Chapter 7 Infobahn

Searching for safe text focuses on transfer on to / onto the Infobahn, and the aspect covered in this chapter is how computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be affected by something previously existing.\(^{254}\) The study of interaction difficulties aims to promote their active prevention, or ‘provention’, and considers the role of computers in creating and solving problems associated with unsafe text.

Exchanges based on Text Only (or mainly on text) are a recent and fast-evolving form of interpersonal communication, playing a role in various interactive multimedia, including major areas like e-commerce and on-line education.\(^{255}\) They represent a new use of written language, which has potential similarities and differences in relation to other word-based media, like earlier forms of written and spoken exchanges.\(^{256}\)

Computer use currently provides an example of the transfer process, and possibly a paradigm or metaphor with respect to linguistic transfer. As users, we learn new or different steps and keystrokes associated with each form of human-computer interaction (HCI) and computer-mediated communication (CMC). While many of us have little or no direct experience or skills in information technology (IT), most considerations apply to people with any amount of competence and confidence.

Factors orienting the choice of conventions and protocols made by users at various levels include their linguistic and socio-cultural background, which may differ between individuals and groups, and affect form and content of communication.\(^{257}\)

When something new has no established usage rules, the gap between novices and experts is relatively small, as everyone has a tendency to follow whatever ‘feels right’, in the absence of clearly established and recognised norms, until the development of agreements about what is acceptable or appropriate in form, procedure and etiquette.

---

\(^{254}\) Or even vice-versa, since new generations are growing up as ‘native’ users of the Infobahn, as illustrated in an emblematic cartoon caption: “No, you were not downloaded, you were born”.

\(^{255}\) In a media interview around 1999, Nicholas Negroponte highlighted marketing and education as two key areas for CMC. I see the phrase ‘marketing education’, in every sense, as a multiple link between the two, which would further encourages priority attention to both in searching for safe text.

\(^{256}\) These comparisons have been under investigation in several works, e.g. Snyder (1996) on hypertext, various essays in Herring (1996b), and most recently Muniandy (2002), besides Crystal (2001).

\(^{257}\) See Henze (1992) for literacy aspects of transfer, in three examples of letter opening / salutation, provided by members of the same family, different in generation and experience of correspondence.
Such issues as Netiquette and copyright are still relatively fluid and subject to rapid changes. There could be a mixture of inputs progressively approximating each other, similar to the development of pidgins in the linguistic arena, and a ‘pidgiNet’ could become creolised into ‘creolectronic’ when new generations grow up as native users. The process involves communication and information technology, with ready access to ‘help’ and answers to frequently asked questions, which should help monitor, control and guide choices more easily. In more ‘natural’ language developments like pidgins and Creoles or migrant dialects, risks of misunderstanding are frequent, particularly when they resemble the source language/s in form, but not in meaning.

In the recent period of rapid expansion of computer use, the proportion of novices has been increasing, with a transitory ‘cohort effect’ at the turn of the millennium, as groups with common characteristics are sharing historical conditions. Projections of the profile of computer users in demographic terms may show the progress of such transitional cohorts, and help raise awareness of other aspects of equity, access and diversity in computer-mediated communication and human-computer interaction.

Today most people have learnt and used mainly earlier forms, including typing, handwriting and spoken exchanges, which are increasingly finding computer-mediated equivalents. My direct experience fits the pattern, and within the ranks of current computer users I qualify as ‘middle of the road’ in many respects. I am middle-aged, and my computer skills have developed mainly in word- and text-processing. I recall the programmes available on older, slower and more expensive machines, and I have seen the cost of computers decline and their ‘power’ increase, along with user-friendliness. While some people of my age and gender already have a long career in information technology, I see a predominance of younger people and males in this field, and studies of gender issues in CMC provide a pointer for other aspects of diversity, from age to linguaculture.

258 This is not quite the common bias of self-perception as ‘average’ or ‘normal’, which I acknowledge. I can only report from my personal perspective that ‘things like this happen’, as far as I can perceive, without any claims for distant times and places, or general statements that ‘things happen like this’.

259 It is not clear whether filtering down will take place (cf. Stewart et al, 2001: 181), or a “leapfrog effect, adopting the newest, cheapest, best technology rather than settling for obsolete junk”. (Schwartz and Leyden 1997: 129, cited in Wheeler 2001:209, n.6) Either way, it seems safer to remain sceptical about claims of benefits for the less privileged groups, noted by Wheeler (ibid.) also in other sources.

I heard from an older acquaintance, who teaches seniors how to use computers, that most men over sixty have no keyboard skills, unlike many women, but technology now lets them communicate by e-mail without need to type, as voice messages can be saved and sent as files. Thus safe-text issues extend again from the written to the spoken mode, including the associated forms of ‘channel noise’ that may well include transfer from diverse background linguacultures. Problems go beyond the narrow focus of written text ‘only’, as they can be found on either side of the ‘hourglass’ of word-based communication, and apply to both old and new technologies.

In addition, the extensive transfer of established procedures (or default settings) into computer-mediated communication (CMC) at the turn of the millennium, noted above in terms of cohorts of novice computer users, also applies to pioneers in any field. The first ‘masters’ of a new technology, discipline, or fashion often orient, and even determine, the selection of what becomes a ‘common standard’. However, their ‘new’ choices are based on implicit knowledge, usually related to previous developments.261 For example, the short messaging service (SMS) on mobile telephones is a very recent development that resembles telegraphic text, recycling an outmoded textual mode with a newer code, including abbreviations, which in turn “may seem like a foreign language” (Bryden-Brown, 2001), thus require glossaries for the non-initiated.

Focus on written text, without strict size limitations, leads to e-mail messages and other word-based forms of CMC, which tend to resemble typed letters, memos, essays or reports. The software has paper-related icons and terminology like envelopes, folder, file, (Web) page, mailbox,262 while actions range from the familiar ‘cut and paste’ to the iconic but archaic ‘scrolling’ on screen, and thus widen the notion of text from the domain of words to visuals, moving beyond content to ‘interface’.263 In relation to the latter, relevant examples illustrate one of the risks of allowing the dominant group’s default to ‘set’ the system world-wide, through inappropriate and inconsiderate transfer of communicative elements from a specific linguaculture. Translated versions (usually ‘direct’ and literal) compound the problem, when “terminology is not necessarily derived from word usage in natural language.”

261 See Goffman (1990) concerning the limited choice of settings available for new roles.
262 “You don’t need a password, you just open it” is another caption, in a cartoon where a parent and child stand next to a mailbox of the traditional ‘off-line’ type, used for paper-based ‘snail’ mail.
263 See Hornby (1999:18-22) for explanations, references and specific considerations on culture.
This view comes from a polyglot IT expert, who knew the Chinese characters but could not readily recognise the terms, then found that familiarity with the software and layout of menu items allowed their identification (Hiew, p.c., 6 February 2003). This positive transfer is comparable with steps in the acquisition and extension of language/s and literacy, but reliance on apparent similarities to what is known (in text and / or context) also leads to assumptions, and thus increases risks of unsafe text.

Possible offence through interface design links human-computer interaction (HCI) with the notion of face and face-threatening actions (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1990). Linguistic and other aspects of politeness clearly apply to computer-mediated communication, but also affect the human body and physical face, as highlighted by the use of concepts and expressions like ‘inter/face’. This reminds us that texts often have a physiological impact on our body, through psycho-physical re/actions associated with interaction through communication, ranging from reflexes (like salivation triggered by the word ‘lemon’) or ‘gut reactions’ (cf. menu items in Ch.10) to more complex and social ones, like embarrassment or anger (cf. Ch.9).

The following example deals with matters of life and death, where any type of misunderstanding could have serious consequences. It may involve other aspects of transcultural interactions and perceptions, but here the basic point is that visual stylization to ‘simple’ forms may complicate communication. This also applies to word-based text, where size does matter, as redundancy is a basic safety measure.

The image on an emergency exit sign, apparently interpreted by a Zulu as “don’t run that way or you will get your head, hands and feet chopped off” (Andrews, 1994 cited in Hornby, 1999:19), could be questionable in several ways (cf. Ch.10), but is used to illustrate the point that graphic literacy may affect navigation in human-computer interaction (HCI). More generally, “what may be assumed as universal symbols may not be known to everyone”. The advice “not to make assumptions … as they may have undesirable consequences” is a basic safety rule in text and life (as often noted in the thesis), which applies beyond the specific context of Internet marketing.

---

264 Their investigation of politeness has broad (inter-)disciplinary relevance for the thesis. See also the use of ‘face’ and related terms in many works by Goffman, mainly on off-line, non-written interactions.

265 The sign referred to may have been in separate segments, probably geometric in shape.

266 Assumptions can negatively affect all participants in transcultural inter/action, as in most communication situations, including intra-personal re/actions, such as misreading one’s writing.
A second point is that “a user’s interpretation of metaphors is based largely on the user’s past and current knowledge”, confirming transfer from lingua-cultural default settings and assumptions. The same source points to “more subtle differences” even within supposedly similar lingua-cultural settings. Ambivalent superstitions, like the number 13, can lead to opposite outcomes, and are examples of unsafe text, applicable on line and comparable to the contrastive schema of formulaic routines (Clyne, 1985:14). Besides the existence or not of a rule, the range of mis-matches in formulae for a speech act concerns their structure and intention, considered key aspects of safe text.

The above considerations illustrate aspects of the context studied in the thesis, from the transitional period of familiarisation with computer-mediated communication, to specific examples of transcultural difficulties associated with differences in text use, including visual conventions. The chosen focus on ‘transfer on to the Infobahn’ shows the range of aspects that can be found both on- and off-line, and the following pages look more closely at the key terms themselves, to see how ideas are conveyed through mental and physical images. Thus icons are considered along with metaphors, noting how far the latter penetrate in most language uses, particularly the terminology chosen for new technological developments like the Infobahn. Critical consideration of what we say and see extends to text ‘on’ the Infobahn, either as channel or subject. This is also the object of a metalinguistic exercise, illustrating how ‘size matters’ when text is to be grasped, and why length is likely to improve safety in operations.

Ways

This section examines commonly used metaphors regarding electronic media of communication, to recognise influences and differences associated with languages and cultures, in particular historical, political and socio-economic circumstances. In addition, an expansion of metaphorical concepts may facilitate the identification of key variables and their interrelations, along the lines of “ways of saying, ways of meaning” (Hasan, 1996). To this end, the images of travel and transport associated with (or transferred to) other forms of communication seem especially useful.

---


268 This expands the “brief review of the main terms used in the title” in the Introduction to the thesis.
The rationale for associating the two fields is based on their relation to the spatial concept of distance and to the technical concept of structure or infrastructure, including means or instruments. The first point is verifiable also in literal terms, as there are recognizable locations set in space at variable distances, while a more figurative parallel involves the physical notion of movement in sending and receiving. What, if anything, moves, and how? The answer necessarily includes technical aspects, as communication uses various vehicles and ‘channels’.269 Before noting how some other notions could be transferred to electronic text, it is useful to observe the context and implications of the commonly used ‘channel’ metaphor of ‘information superhighway’, presumably derived from the German compound word Infobahn, which follows the same model as Strassenbahn for streetcar or tramway. Suburban and underground rail services (subway) are known as S-bahn or U-bahn, related to the Eisenbahn (‘iron-’, as in several languages, or rail-way) of the nineteenth century more than to the Autobahn of the twentieth. Infobahn could thus be a further ‘way’, added to the series, and does not necessarily convey the image of automotive traffic, which I see as inseparable from ‘superhighway’, noting that the difference between the English and German terms has more to do with ideology than with technology. 270

What a metaphor implies may remain hidden, but carries weight and transfers to text. A more neutral term, such as ‘information rapid transit system’, would also allow to ask which (among people, machines, languages, words) count as freight, passenger, driver, infrastructure, fuel and vehicle on the Infobahn. An elaboration of some options for each, and of their possible relations, helps highlight terms and concepts, and the importance of transfer in electronic and mental processing of words and text.

Information in computers may take several forms, including various audio-visual components besides written text, which is the main focus here. Words may be part of each of the above, but not exclusively or necessarily. Communication channels using Text Only, depending on how the written text is downloaded and processed, may also display a number of elements that do not look or function like words, but belong to computer languages, rather than to any natural (or rather cultural) language.

269 In Italian and other languages, the term ‘canale’ indicates both ‘channel’ and ‘canal’, and thus (in my mind at least) it refers to one of the earliest technologies for transport infrastructure.

270 Jones (2001:53-4) refers to his earlier work about such “unfortunate but telling metaphors”.
This factor is not simply technological, but often reflects the priorities of dominant users.\textsuperscript{271} Terms and metaphors are often ‘loaded’, and at least one implies the notion of freight. In turn, the form or way in which the (down-)loading function is carried out may involve something like a vehicle, tool, or container. Information, in text form or any other, appears to be the ‘load’ that is transported, or at least sent and received through the communication channels or infrastructures. Are there also passengers, or generally travellers, including self-drivers? If so, is there a destination they want to reach? How would it relate to the ‘site’ or place where these people would usually be? To ensure that the load of information-freight is received and used in all safety, what distance can / must be covered, by what / whom, and how?\textsuperscript{272} These last elements of the metaphor are most relevant to this study, as spatial distance is commonly equated with difference, particularly concerning linguacultural options, also called ‘code/s’.

What is different is perceived as difficult to deal with, as the chances of positive transfer appear reduced. Risks can be even higher when a gap exists but is hidden, and traps or trip-wires are spatial metaphors for invisible dangers, worse than obstacles.

The reference to passengers and drivers indicates two of the possible roles of people in the context of the Infobahn, seen as ‘information mass transit system’. These roles, and others, can be related to levels of competence and of control over what happens. For example, if the procedure to post news on a site is comparable with that of finding a station, obtaining a means of entry, boarding a vehicle and reaching a destination by train, the user-traveller is a passenger on a facility created and run by others.\textsuperscript{273}

It is possible to drive with very limited knowledge of motors (or engines). To reach a destination, all one needs is to know how to start, stop, slow down and accelerate, turn and back up, make and follow the appropriate signals, in accordance with the rules. Passengers also need to respect rules and warnings, usually aimed to protect safety. The Infobahn has even more user-friendly requirements, as the invisible technology is incomprehensible to most users, but this is no obstacle to communication.

\textsuperscript{271} Thus default settings tend to be (only) compatible with a version of English, and messages in ‘other’ languages (cf. Ch.6) risk far more interference, to use a term suitable in more than one sense.

\textsuperscript{272} Hiew confirms that everything is downloaded, and (technically speaking) no one really ‘travels’ in the on-line world, although that is the way it is portrayed, adding “I personally believe it is this illusion that makes the internet such a unique medium” (p.c., 6 February 2003). My discussion is metaphorical.

\textsuperscript{273} Hiew’s invitation to “compare this to the pre-1990s way where only text terminals were used” (ibid.) points to the layers or ladders of illusion involved in CMC, going beyond the narrow Text Only.
Extending the consideration of skill and knowledge to communication in general, we note that concerns for safety put a high priority on awareness of what could go wrong, and ways to find remedies. Thus safe-text practices involve meta-linguistic sensitivity to who and what may ‘look out of place’, or ‘sound funny’, rather than familiarity with each piece and process of linguistic construction and use. Context determines the level of risk associated with failure, and similes for genres could go from Formula 1 circuits to bicycle / pedestrian paths, subway networks or bus routes. Each form of transport, and its equivalent in communication, has specific skill and safety requirements, limits to access, protective measures, and assistance in cases of trouble.

The roles of driver, of passengers, and of those travellers who may drive themselves, are not the only ones involved. To design and programme the functions of computer systems at various levels, more skilled people are required, who must have specialized knowledge, like that of transport planners and engineers, as there are policy decisions involved. A similar range of roles and responsibilities, with attendant skills and knowledge, applies to the field of languages and their ‘interface’ with forms of communication, where concern for transcultural safety and efficiency needs to be developed at all levels. ‘Common’ users are mainly expected to notice what appears to go ‘wrong’, while people and institutions in positions of higher power often determine what counts as ‘right’. Equity, access and diversity concerns raise the issue of ‘rights’ of users to be protected from serious interaction problems, which at times overlap with apparently ridiculous outcomes of mis-communication.

The metaphoric notion of ‘cyberspace’ creates a potential (or virtual?) confusion. What follows attempts to illustrate the spatial aspects of transcultural computer-mediated communication, but may also point out some difficulties and risky aspects of text based on such images, where space-based metaphors are associated with paper-based ones. Web ‘pages’ are not found or collected in volumes but at sites, and user-travellers are ideally, or rather virtually, transported there to visit. Sites are also seen as points of departure for the information contained in pages, documents and files.

274 An example of very high skills is the toast “let’s drink to life not getting any better” (“Davaite vypiem za to, chtoby luchshe ne bylo”, literally “Let’s drink to it not getting any better”) in the 1997 documentary “The War Symphonies: Shostakovich Against Stalin” (translator: Bobbie Ganev).

275 The ambiguity of the comparative form is deliberate, as ‘more’ is quantitative and refers to additional people and roles, while ‘more skilled’ points to their qualitative superiority in that respect.

276 A.k.a. normal, correct, appropriate, functional, suitable, acceptable, etc. (cf. last section of Ch.4).
These arrive where the information-seeking user resides, as people sit at their home (or office) like traders, rather than travellers, and arrange to have the goods delivered from many distant Internet ‘sites’. The chosen terms relate to the geographic reality of places, and in many cases traffic goes both ways, as does trade. Such exchange/s and interaction/s are central in the thesis, as a key risk of transcultural communication is failure to recognise where text ‘comes from’, in terms of linguacultural conventions that can be distant indeed. Some differences are so strong that messages appear alien, but it is worse when misleading similarities are alienating (as when language appears offensive), or divergence is seen as deviance (even mental alienation).277

Means

The effort to picture the Infobahn includes some view of means of transport, and how information travels on or in a vehicle, in the general sense of ‘something that carries’. Natural and computer languages are important in terms of where information is contained, and how is it packaged. There is no simple definition of what ‘information’ is,278 and the similes refer to what appears on the computer screen, with focus on text. The first level of packaging is usually called ‘file’,279 a traditional term and image. When accessing the content of files, direct users hardly notice the computer language, as what matters is whether and how they ‘get’ the information, in terms of being able to acquire and understand it.280 In the case of Text Only, the chief tool required is a natural (or cultural) language, and parallels with computer systems and languages can be useful in order to notice aspects of human ones. For both categories, in-depth knowledge may be limited to specialists and require extensive studies, but the ability to make use of the relevant functions is fairly easy to acquire. Once trained to use one of the languages (or systems), however, switching to another creates some difficulties, as users need to unlearn habits that have become automatic or default settings.281

277 See Part Three for examples and discussion of risks when language use is judged as ‘bad’ or ‘mad’.

278 A recent discussion paper (ABS 1375.0) provides working definitions in relation to ‘knowledge’, such as the distinction of the latter from “data (signals which can be sent from an originator to a recipient) and information (data which are intelligible to the recipient)”. Trewin (2002:1) cites Alan Burton-Jones (1999) Knowledge Capitalism: Business, work and learning in the new economy OUP.

279 Hiew notes that the computing concept of file brings a whole set of implications, which are beyond the limits of this thesis. My reference to packaging applies to text (data?) rather than information in it.

280 Programs are increasingly designed to make things appear ‘natural’, or at least user-friendly.

281 These unmarked ways are similar to certain habits in driving a vehicle or using public transport.
To complement the metaphoric picture, some contrasts between forms of transport and communication may also be noted. Information traffic has a more modest spatial, visual and environmental impact, when compared with most means of transport, and the expectation is that contact through electronic means will reduce the need for travel in ‘real’ (physical, or off-line) space. While ‘volume’ involves a visible thickness in paper-based text, electronic versions become thin, like magnetic diskettes, or even invisible like thin air. The metaphoric continuum between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ relates also to ‘layers’ of meaning, and the various means used to convey them (cf. Ch.2).

Sometimes the equivalents of a passport, customs control or quarantine are required, each representing a safety measure or means to control access and reduce risks. Some aspects of communication behaviour are explicitly set as ‘netiquette’ rules, but even those are difficult to enforce, while many more are part of the implicit knowledge unmarked forms and default setting linked to deixis (Ch.4). Such ‘rules’ can cause problems when participants do not share them, yet are unaware of their differences.

There are conventions and rules that people internalise and follow in the relevant circumstances, rarely realizing that they may not be appropriate beyond the original system. The above can be generally applied to interactions involving just humans, as well as those with non-human elements, as anything new or different, compared with what one is used to, brings the risk of inappropriate choices, through a combination of lack and transfer of previous knowledge, skills or habits. Interactions across cultures, particularly involving languages, can be considered in the above terms, and thus difficulties arising from differences need to be analysed, to identify the sources of failure and find means to remedy their outcomes. A key point in this study is the risk of ignoring transfer from background factors that can lead to unsafe text outcomes.

The unmarked status of default settings reflects the implicit knowledge that is assumed as given (cf. note on Bakhtin in Ch.5), as if shared by all parties.

Making explicit the expectations involved in each type of communication, with specific attention to linguacultural aspects, is a priority concern. This approach is best applied proactively, and the development of computer-mediated communication, with forms still relatively new, provides a rare chance for action along several fronts.

---

282 Trewin (2002:1) refers to the description of ‘codified knowledge as being able to be reduced to information (the know-what) and tacit knowledge as including skills such as insight, creativity and judgment (the know-how)’, citing Stevens, C. (1998) ‘The knowledge-driven economy’ in *The knowledge economy* ed D. Neef Butterworth-Heinemann Boston. This fits the use of language/s.
Existing conventions need to be expressed and explained in simple and accessible form to all users, to reduce the gap between novices and experts, but must be reviewed in terms of their sources and context, critically noting possible biases. Consideration of transcultural communication needs, and solutions of potential problems, could be incorporated in the rules of ‘netiquette’ to be generally accepted and applied, and diffused through the medium itself, making them clear and explicit.

The guiding metaphor of transport can be extended to the use of text safety measures. For example, the importance of barriers as protection, and of warning signals in danger situations, could be illustrated through one means of keeping text safe, which alerts users in advance about possible risks, and the ‘mood watch’ currently available on an e-mail program is outlined in the following paragraphs, suggesting some improvements for its shortcomings on the linguacultural and interaction fronts. The feature “monitors incoming and outgoing messages for offensive text” and “works similarly to a spell checker”, with obvious limitations, demonstrating the importance of context in evaluating text, even beyond any culturally specific choices.

At the highest risk level, the warning provided by the ‘watch’ appears really severe, but not quite serious or compelling, and such a flexible approach, including some humour, makes it more acceptable, in view of the high probability of ‘innocent’ text being scanned and judged out of context. The risk of ‘misfire’ can be linked to the default linguaculture of the list of offensive items, and these should be individually recognisable when they trigger the warning, so as to facilitate an informed response to the options, which include ‘send anyway’. As the choice of a risky term may be unintentional or accidental, text users who wish to edit the message deserve help, enabling them to put their finger (or cursor) on the problematic item/s, to verify their meanings before editing and / or sending text deemed offensive by the ‘watch’.

The ‘mood watch’ feature provides an iconic warning of red chilli peppers, which could also, as suggested above, lead text users to the ‘peppery’ word/s in messages, and help them learn about the linguacultural context where such judgments are made. Mutual awareness of background languages appears still limited in relation to computer-mediated communication, but electronic means can facilitate the search.

---

283 I had similarly visualised a computer screen ‘blushing’ when risky text appeared on it. Limitations include words like ‘Idiot’ in the title of creative works, where the end justifies the means of expression.
Hyperlinks provide ready access to specific sources of information and clarification about risky areas or unintended negative outcomes, and users cold contribute data on relevant sites, as well as direct explanations and suggestions about terms or reactions. Beyond the automatic spell-checker, successive steps would help interpreters pinpoint and sort out expressions they perceived as offensive, to see whether and how the author may have meant to use them. Specific focus on linguistic form would promote the necessary detachment from the content, to help defuse conflictive reactions.

Some Web sites list and explain idiomatic and slang expressions, and the most useful ones alert about the occasional confusions, for example between ‘English’ words used in Australia and the USA with different meanings (Goeldner, 1998). IMHO (to use the on-line acronym for ‘in my humble opinion’, developed as a safety ‘hedge’ for text), the availability of lists and dictionaries of offensive words could be a constructive input to safe text, without promoting or expanding their use for negative purposes. Awareness of established risky words, at least within a specific linguaculture, helps orient outsiders in their interactions, so a list of ‘words you will hear, but not say’ is a protective barrier against uncontrolled acquisition and use of unsafe text elements.

More generally, safety measures include functions variously labelled, according to language and context, as ‘verification’, ‘control/s’, or ‘revision’.

English has a short word, ‘check’, which is not easy to translate, but broadly relevant to safe text. “Check, mate!” is an invitation or lead-in text, where the content provides safety advice, complementing the form that illustrates a type of risk. The aim of the following paragraphs is an introspective metalinguistic exercise, related to my own background and to the limits associated with ‘alien’ conventions in text production. As the thesis uses anecdotes where examples of mis-communication are given short headings, usually with play on words, the practice is transferred into the main text.

‘Mate’ is an almost stereotypical form of Australian English, associated with male usage, thus removed from my background by several steps. ‘Check’ is a polysemic term, further explored below, and its association with ‘mate’ comes from the domain of chess, a game I cannot play, although I know in general the phrase and its uses.

284 Information on Mood Watch is found in http://www.eudora.com/techsupport/kb/2104hq.html.
286 I heard that such a category was used in Peace Corps language instruction.
Extending one’s skills is a worthwhile risk, but requires safety measures, also beyond everyday linguistic performance. Learning a language, even acquiring our ‘native’ or first one (L1), is a never-ending process of extension, in many ways, and transcultural communication on line is almost by definition an extension of skills acquired (so far) mostly off line, and within a more limited or specified cultural context.

This thesis studies interaction difficulties, found in various forms of text-based exchange, to help identify and prevent or repair their electronic equivalents, and here the discussion of the crucial need to ‘check’ moves from general to specific safety measures, by progressively adding words. Text interpreters are warned not to rush to conclusions, but to explore possible meanings, at every step and level, and in every area and direction, and the focus here is on what comes next in a text.

A relatively simple and common factor in making meaning is the sequence of words and their cumulative impact. Aside from word order or syntax, which can differ notably between languages, the amount of words (text size) makes a difference. Thus size matters, as the basic information can be progressively refined by additions, which also tend to resolve potential ambiguities. The general process of text interpretation is comparable to the specific work of language professionals (called interpreters and translators) and illustrates the difference between ‘natural’ language processing by human minds (cf. also Ch.11) and attempts to reproduce it through computers, for example machine translation (MT), discussed in O’Hagan (1996).

The basic form of the former can be recognised in the following exercise, which relies on deeply ingrained old-fashioned ‘parsing’ skills. ‘Check’ can be a noun or verb, and both can refer to forms of control or verification, vital for safety in any domain. Adding an adverb or object, such as ‘always’ or ‘everything’, shows that the word is used as verb. Here, the imperative form ‘check!’ is the first basic point, addressed to ‘mates’ and beyond. In ‘check what you read’, a specific object narrows the focus.

Checking may refer to both form and content, and implies some reference to what is ‘right’ or ‘correct’. In searching for safe text, the advice is to check from every

---

287 Goffman (1990) uses extensively the ‘stage’ metaphor to analyse most interactions.
288 I remember homework of ‘analisi grammaticale’, based on the morphology of each word, as more boring than ‘analisi logica’, which looked at longer ‘strings’ of text in relation to syntax.
possible point of view, in an effort to identify the meaning intended by the author. The next step is ‘check what you read on the Infobahn’, which is meant in two ways. The added words limit focus to the Infobahn, but this could apply to the form, or rather means of communication, as well as to the content, topic or subject.

The first is a valid warning, as the present fluid or transitional stage, state or status of this new channel does not have the same quality controls that have long been established in others, and the first interpretation is ‘verify on-line sources with care’. It can be taken as the default meaning of the sentence, unless otherwise indicated.

When we move to ‘check what you read on the Infobahn, even off-line’, the second meaning is brought into focus, and the message is no longer ‘check what you read on-line’ but ‘check what you read, on- or off-line, on the subject of the Infobahn’. The next section explains why it is wise to check what is written on the Infobahn.289

**Fallacies**

The currently common notion of a world-wide web leads to the assumption, or even just the hope, that the potential of universal access with equal and equitable conditions is not beyond reach, but ‘just around the corner’, or not too far ‘down the road’.290

These metaphors imply that such an outcome can be achieved on the basis of present approaches and inputs, but ignore a range of considerable limitations. Besides basic obstacles, linked to material disadvantage, many layers and angles of diversity stand in the way of reaching this goal, which is relevant to safe text. Therefore, when reading about the global reach of the Infobahn, it is crucial to question the range of assumptions, held by authors but also by interpreters, about the range of Net users.

The overlap between communication studies which have a cross-/inter-/transcultural focus and those on computer-mediated forms is still minimal (cf. Ch.3),291 particularly in noting the difficulties associated with differences, and proposing practical solutions. Thus the danger of inertia, of letting the current default become ‘standard’, is present, and needs to be made clearer.

---

289 ‘Wise’ rather than ‘safe’, as the latter might imply absence of risks in performing the action (as in “it is safe to switch off your computer”) rather than the aim to verify whether any risks are to be found.

290 Hiew alerts me that “no one in the technical community holds this belief”, but their problem is in getting computers, not users, to ‘understand’ each other (p.c., 6 February 2003). Neither seems easy.

291 The plural form ‘communications’ is not used here, being associated with ‘telecommunications’.
The concern extends beyond the search for safe text, but awareness of the variety of linguacultures can help promote equity, access and diversity in communication on an increasingly global scale. A double fallacy seems to cloud the perception of diversity, even in the most obvious linguacultural aspects, through the linguistic and technological illusion that people and / or machines will send us text in ‘our’ language, or at least in one we can safely understand. The thesis considers just how much understanding is needed, by looking at the opposite situations, where unsafe text leads to unwanted negative outcomes. Here the focus is on of problems that have on-line equivalents, and specifically on risks that can be created or exacerbated by computer use, by investigating and checking what can be written, read and translated with the available electronic means.

A crucial technological fallacy or illusion concerns machine translation (MT), which is part of futuristic scenarios. As a language professional, I see instantaneous translation (or interpretation) through any machine as an idea/l, comparable to transmission of thought by electronic means. In this respect, the phrase ‘on the Infobahn’ would mean ‘on-line’, its more common sense, and ‘check what you read’ expands into the fuller warning ‘check whether text can be safely written and transmitted electronically, without loss or distortion of the message through de/faults in the mechanical processes of encoding and decoding’.

As long as ‘natural’ languages are used, whether verbal (word-based) or not, the model of encoding and decoding represents a crude simplification, but even within its limits, the range and seriousness of potential errors and other problems is notable. Machine translation provides adequate understanding in some cases, but most are beyond the capabilities of current computer technology (O’Hagan 1996:23), and it is not safe, at least for now, to assume that technology can turn any message into something we can understand, much less into text that we cannot misunderstand.

There are two opposite views about the chances of it happening, as some still expect it shortly, other insist it won’t ever. In 2000 the President of the American Translators Association corrected a point in the “State of the Union” address where the President of the USA had said that “soon researchers will bring us devices that can translate foreign languages as fast as you can speak”, like gadgets found in science-fiction.292

The following discussion attempts to evaluate the safety of machine translation, and
refers to two 1988 articles, one largely critical (Klein, 1998), the other more positive
(Futrelle, 1998). The first author, a translator, notes (with clear valuations) that “We
think in terms of good English, style, and high quality, publication-type translations.”
However, such thinking must be radically changed, to accept a different approach, and
I can identify with the following interactive introspection of a reflex or default setting.

Each time I find a mistranslation or typo I jump; it has become a reflex. But we deal with a different product to be judged by other standards. The first time I saw the strange result, I jumped and rejected it. You may do the same, but I suggest that you test and test again at random. Think of it as cheap, instant international (mis)information. (Klein, 1998)

The following question may not be entirely rhetorical, and the answer gives a useful terminological option, to illustrate what machines can do to ‘natural language’ texts.

Is AltaVista’s real-time MT a ridiculous, flawed experiment? I do not think so. It brings a new dimension to international information transfer, NOT to translation. It is a new niche, something impossible until now. It is application-driven and limited to specific purposes. (Klein, 1998)

Thus “no professional translator needs to feel threatened by this type of ‘translation’ … results are completely unpredictable.”

The sales point of AltaVista and Systran is the word “translation”. If we could define it as “international information transfer”, I would be more satisfied. Moreover, a disclaimer should be added automatically to each “translation”, that “a computer translates everything without any human intervention.” (ibid)

AltaVista does offer a needed disclaimer, but there is no pre- or post-editing, and the text is called a “suggestion”. The other author is not a linguist, and has other views.

In an industry habitually given over to hype, the AltaVista people have been …modest …
“Computerized translations often miss subtle meanings of words and don’t accurately present many common sayings,” a sort of disclaimer on the AltaVista Web site explains. “The AltaVista Translation Assistant provides

---

293 Hiew notes that (machine) translation is still close to the old ‘cut and paste’ concept, while most ‘translation’ used in computing refers to data, transformed from one format to another. I presume that notions of syntax and context are less relevant on the lower rungs of the ladder of discourse (cf. Ch.2).

150
you with a tool to translate a grammatically correct document into something comprehensible, but not perfect.” (Futrelle, 1998)

On “What Can You Expect from Real-time, Online Translation?” Klein appears strict:

Which type of text is suitable for real-time MT? Web pages, abstracts, headings. Systran suggests newspapers or magazines. My previous experience in “classical” MT tells me that “running text” is not suitable, but then I was thinking of “translation” instead of “information transfer”. We are presented with “suggestions”; take it or leave it. If you cannot take the “junk”, real-time MT is not for you. (Klein, 1998)

This relates to the linguistic fallacy, i.e. the expectations that, as long as text is in English, which everybody is expected to use directly or in translation, there is no risk of difficulties caused by differences in linguistic expressions. On the contrary, the combined Anglo(-American) ‘blind spot’ for the diverse character/s of languages has enforced a ‘standard code for information interchange’ (ASCII) which can only work for English, Latin, and Swahili (Margolin, 1997:2), as discussed in the previous chapter when comparing its limits and problems of with those of the Y2K ‘bug’. Unsafe outcomes of both ‘code’ and other limitations of machine translation are illustrated in an example of MT, which has recently received media attention.

It comes from the site of the Italian Government, and biographies of its members in English show several kinds of defaults. Diacritics, like accents and apostrophes, cause problems with code recognition, as in many of the words left untranslated. Conversely, proper names have been translated, as gleefully pointed out in some comments added in bold by the newspaper source, to ensure that even non-English-reading Italians could see the ‘funny’ result of this automated approach to text. Thus “Augusto Of the Walnut” is back-translated as Della Noce (original name), adding “nel senso del frutto” to specify that it refers to the fruit. Inappropriate versions of proper names appear disrespectful of people’s identity, a key matter of manners and ‘face’, whereas the formal and mechanical incompatibility of Italian characters with machine translation and electronic transmission of text, seems a very small point .

---

294 E.g., trent’anni (thirty years) become “trent’ years”. Some accents or apostrophes turned into full stops, at least on the computer I used, as in the syntactic twist “between Soviet l.Unione and l.Italia”.

295 Among organizations, “Forehead of the Youth” should be ‘Front’, but receives no comment.

296 ‘Punto’ (literally ‘point’) is the Italian name for the mark of full stop or ‘dot’.
The level of irritation caused by items that interfere with smooth communication varies, and punctuation usually remains at the lower end. However, even this marginal problem can create risk in crossing languages, mainly in matters of fact, as noted in the ‘grave’ example of e-mail from Italy (cf. Ch.2).

One key issue is safety in terms of limiting access to on-line text, as this case was exposed not only in Italy where it originated, but as far as Australia.297 The material in question “was from a machine-translated web page with restricted access and not for public consumption”, as “also pointed out in la Repubblica, the Italian mainstream newspaper that originally broke the story.” Whether or not this was made clear in the Radio National item, as it should have been, the “bungle has been given a lot of space, both virtual and real, all over the world it seems.”298 If a Web site produced by a Government risks presenting (exposing?) its members to the world, respect of linguistic form seems a prerequisite for respecting the people and institution behind it.

A key exception confirms the importance of such texts for the image of politicians, as “Berlusconi himself seems OK, but look at the other biographies”. The one with the highest responsibility (and means, since the head of government, elected in 2001, is considered Italy’s richest man, and has a media empire) did not simply use a machine-translated text, and thus avoided problems of the kind noted above.

The risk of people ‘getting’ text or not, in various senses (cf. Ch.4), can be linked to a further aspect of who can ‘get’ what, in terms of access. Whether and how technology can be used by anybody, anywhere on this globe and even beyond, has to do with aspects related to the medium, but communication is about the message, and the various forms of language-related obstacles need to be taken into account.299 Thus to ‘get’ (in the sense of ‘receive’) what is transmitted is necessary, but not sufficient to ‘get’ (in the sense of ‘understand’ or ‘comprehend’) what is intended by the sender. To ensure that what people ‘get’ is also safe text, the combined technological and linguistic fallacies need to be explored and exploded, from the broadest (global) level down to fine but potentially fatal danger points, associated with life and meaning.


Here the experience of multicultural societies like Australia is relevant in several respects, and a common element with the Infobahn is the dominant position of English, linked to a far from perfect perception of linguacultural diversity. While aspects of the on-line situation are changing, the thesis considers un/safe text in terms applicable to any linguistic context, and inequality is pervasive between and within most linguacultural groups, as discussed further in Part Three of the thesis.

Consideration of problems in ‘natural’ language/s complements the technological aspects noted above, as computer-mediated communication is likely to retain most of the existing ones, adding new ones, but may also be used to reduce and solve some in both groups. The risk of unsafe text, understood as the statistical chance of some miscommunication, increases rapidly with the ‘climb’ from formal and technical signification towards culturally saturated speech and literary experimentation with language, as there are many more answers to ‘how is it risky?’ (Ch.1). However, focus on outcome and the quantitative measure ‘how risky is it?’ leads to concern for context, as disasters can occur on any step of the ladder of discourse (Ch.2).

The linguistic fallacy is formulated in a non-linguistic source (Schwartz, 2001) as “Well, they all speak my language, so we’ll all communicate in my language”. To make things worse, there is no such thing as an exact translation, and there are risks involved, as “a technically illiterate translator (even if he/she is fluent in both languages) will have the potential to create significant mischief.” The anecdote illustrating the latter point includes a range of options to promote transcultural communication, including a conflict-defusing bonus. When ‘ducks in the plants’ became ‘ducks in the garden’ through the translator, participants managed to find a shared second language, so “they were both at an equal disadvantage.” On potentially touchy issues, mention of “ducks in their garden” would make both laugh, and agree.

Even if the story is not true, it is well constructed (se non è vera, è ben trovata), and it seems compatible with use of translating assistance for exchanges on the Infobahn.

---

299 This basic point is repeatedly made by O’Hagan (1996: xii, 1, 3-4, 8, 11, 70), who updates the famous phrase ‘the medium is the message’, as well as the prediction in The Gutenberg Galaxy of a ‘global village’ (McLuhan 1967: 31, cited in O’Hagan, 1996: 3).

300 ‘While’ is a hedge, or text safety measure, to limit the previous claim of commonality with the Australian situation. It also literally refers to the process taking place (cf. Crystal, 2001, 2002).
If the latter is to be a source of solutions, the advice to ‘check’ includes the option of accessing on-line tools of linguistic and substantive verification. These supports range from such traditional reference works as dictionaries and glossaries to various levels of personalised assistance, involving subject experts and language professionals, and are considered below in terms of complementary alternatives.

A further aspect linked to computer use has to do with the discussion of ‘flickering signifiers’ by Katherine N. Hayles, critiqued in Ruthrof 2000, pp. 160-1. In my view, the ease of changing font on-line affects messages in several ways, from the ‘silent’ forms of ‘intonation’ noted in Ch.4 to readability, hierarchy of text and assorted visual associations. The most obvious safety issue is the risk of confusion between characters, and I remember when signs in German (even in Italy, mainly for tourists) were routinely in Gothic letters, and ‘s’ looked like ‘f’. The option of changing ‘small print’ into large is a clear advantage when reading, as is ‘copy and paste’ when writing, e.g. an URL, as “a computer is never indulgent” (cf. McAllister, 2002:10-11).

The latter advice comes from the hard-copy booklet, provided at a training section in computer use for language professionals, which summarises the channels available for sharing and improving knowledge, experience and confidence (cognition, behaviour and affect) in transcultural computer-mediated communication. The options made possible by new technologies, as noted above, provide on-line supplements to face-to-face and paper-mediated forms of advice, support, training and education. Humorous lists of ‘funny’ texts include examples associated with translation, useful for general practice in dealing with un/safe text, and sources used for the thesis (cf. Ch.3) provide a range of items to cover a diversity of access preferences.

This central part of the dissertation has concentrated on transfers, diversity and the Infobahn, to facilitate recognition of these key factors when searching for safe text. Their importance is specifically investigated when retracing the steps involved in problematic interactions, which is the aspect of searching for safe text covered in the next part of the thesis. In the following chapters, a variety of cases and ‘samples’ lead to a ‘way out’ of difficulties, including a ‘tool kit’, conclusions and recommendations.

---

301 The two are linked, as in advice about using **bold** and *italics* rather than CAPS AND *underline*.

302 Thus ‘flicker’ could be a misreading of ‘slicker’; what about FLICK?
Part Three    Tracking

The substantive focus of the thesis is on difficulties in interaction associated with differences in background languages, specifically in written text-based exchanges. Attention to such problems should reduce their incidence and consequences, thus responding to the growing need for safe transcultural text practices, on- or off-line. These can be promoted through awareness of diverse forms of language use, mainly in areas where conflict potential can be identified on the basis of pragmatics, socio- and psycho-linguistics, and more generally cognitive science and conflict resolution.

The varied disciplinary contexts relevant to this study were considered in Part One, while Part Two discussed the interrelated issues of transfer (Ch. 5) as key process, linguacultural diversity (Ch. 6), and the Infobahn (Ch. 7), to help recognise which aspects of background can explain problematic text. Part Three now focuses on such problems, mainly on the basis of case studies, and pursues suitable avenues, to explain and possibly resolve the difficulties linked to unsafe text. The chosen metaphor of ‘tracking’ refers to a type of search/ing related to tracks or marks of movement, particularly those left by suspects. Tracks of a more permanent kind are associated with (rail) crossings, and the overall process resembles mapping (out) a territory, to use a current metaphor about mental, linguistic and scientific processes.

The analysis of examples considers a continuum or chain of possible causes/effects, and this ‘spatial’ sequence is reflected in the metaphor of a ‘causeffectway’, again associating transport with communication. The process of (mis-)communication in case studies is considered in both directions, with priority to interpreter’s responses, based on perception of text at reception, and related to text production by the author. Either way, the initial concern is for negative outcomes, to be prevented or prepared.

Levels of text safety are evaluated in terms of communicative outcomes affecting the interaction. This brings the point of departure, used for tracking or retracing the many steps of a ‘causeffectway’, close to the ‘terminal’ stage: a (negative) reaction, interpretation, doubt or puzzle, pointing out problematic perceptions of text. Evidence preferably includes, as noted, comments by participants on any aspects of the above.

In searching for safe text, past and hypothetical negative outcomes are useful as models for analysis, and therefore all sorts of legends can be used as case studies.
In practice, safe-text approaches are most effective in situations with immediate risk of developing in undesirable ways, and thus ‘forewarned is forearmed’.

This introduction to Part Three refers to the ‘black sail’ cases in Ch.2 for a more detailed review of the approaches, means and ends of the tracking process. An ideal list of problem components could be associated with various points or steps on a path, identified along a continuum, like links on a chain, which can be labelled in short, and in turn, as (text) consequences, effects, outputs, inputs. To keep track of their position and roles, steps are identified and related to a range of categories, and the idiom ‘sorting (out)’ can be useful here, for its various references to processes of putting (back) in place, from classification and ranking to corrective and remedial action.

The legendary deaths of Aegeus and Tristan investigated in Ch.2 are the final outcome, as consequence of miscommunication, and their heartbreak is the effect of the message received, while a black sail on the horizon is the direct or indirect output of processing an item of code (the sail) or text (the tale or lie told by a jealous wife). Even in the first and simpler case, the input leading to the black sail is complex in its possible origin, while in the second the intentional mis-representation of the sail actually on the horizon follows the unintended ‘leaking’ of the agreed code. The most relevant aspects for the thesis are the causal relation associating unsafe text (black sails) with death, and the remedial options which could have avoided the latter.

Can a first cause be identified? If so, is it in the text or context? In practical terms, who or what, and where, are the usual or top suspects? The last term applies loosely, from specific participants to general factors of text and context, including possible categories of incidents that represent ‘feworries’ about text safety.

Priorities in choosing worries also apply to cases for in-depth study. In summary, the criteria combine seriousness of outcomes with frequency of inputs, and life-or-death situations are clear priority cases, as in the ‘black sail’ tales. One label for these, and other examples in Ch. 2, would be ‘matters of fact’, since checking whether the loved one was alive on board, or not, as implied by the message, would have been safer than jumping to conclusions and giving up the ghost, along with hope.

---

303 The complementary category is variously called ‘matters of manners / face’. There is considerable overlap with ‘fact’, when the negative outcomes involve perceiving others or self as being wrong or wronged, often wrongly, and set in motion unintended chain reactions.
Interaction problems are mainly perceived in human terms, and human-computer interaction (HCI) is also relevant, as compatibility with computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an additional factor in selecting cases and discussing their applicability. Conversely, the categories of problems noted here can also find wider application in other types of texts and modes of communication, which have been included among examples (cf. points on method and sources in Chapters 1 and 3).

The main approaches used in Part Three reflect the means and ends of the study. The multi-faceted analysis of cases aims to uncover dangers to interaction, coming from and affecting the various participants, and is motivated by concern for possible negative and unwanted consequences. It also seeks probable causes and remedies in all directions, with focus on language, but keeping in mind many other factors of text interactions. Awareness and reflection, including introspection, help in the search for an understanding of the process, and are better than knowledge of its mechanisms.

In safe text ‘it all depends’, and there are no simple recipes based on set ingredients, but rather a set of skills or steps, presented in the final chapter as a ‘tool kit’.

Affective and behavioural elements are important in human interaction, and intrinsic to the linguacultural background from which re/actions originate, even when apparently cognitive aspects are involved, such the use of ‘correct’ linguistic forms. Thus, safe text practices are not a matter of knowing what is right and doing it, as if there were univocal rules and simple ‘specification’ standards. Feeling and flexibility about what may appear in/appropriate, and why, contribute to safer behaviour by both authors and interpreters of text, and also apply to movement in unknown territory.

On-line conditions make this care indispensable, as diversity is to be expected, but is difficult to identify. On one hand, the background linguaculture of participants, their current context and even their identity can be hidden, and on the other hand, Text Only removes many complementary components of communication. This research looks mainly at written text, both on- and off-line, also to narrow down the focus of investigation. It should be noted that additional or alternative modes or channels, such as audio-visual communication, may complicate misunderstandings, as they multiply the range of cultural conventions where a mismatch can cause a mishap.

304 This is mainly related to the growing importance of CMC, and the still uncertain status of conventions for text-only use. Another reason for this limiting criterion is that there are already too many examples of unsafe text to allow their full coverage, or even statistical forms of re/presentation.
The search for safe text can be visualised, as noted, along a ‘causeffectway’ of connections. These are not necessarily in one ‘line’, as it should not be assumed that human re/actions have a single determinant, in communication or other contexts. Literature on inter- or cross-cultural communication deals with a wide and variable range of aspects, and among the manifestations of cultural differences as a cause of difficulties, the chosen focus on language represents a practical restriction.

It is necessary to limit the range of inputs and outputs under consideration in any study, without underestimating the complexity of causes and effects, and the focus here is on linguistic forms of expression, compatible with the use of Text Only. Compared to the broader concept of culture, language has available classifications, as noted in Ch. 5, which can fit the aims of this study on what makes text safe, and thus labels like ‘idioms’ and ‘false cognates’, along with more grammar-based terms, are used in the process of tracking and sorting out problems and their components.

This research mainly involves utterances, which are composed (in Text Only, the online form privileged here) of written characters, words, sentences and paragraphs.\textsuperscript{305} Labels associated with such common terms, and familiar categories like misreading, ‘literal’ typing errors,\textsuperscript{306} ‘odd’ syntax or interlanguage, facilitate analysis of what may have gone wrong, not as outcome but near the opposite (author’s) end of the ‘causeffectway’. However, focus on ‘few worries’ leads to (dis)regarding most ‘errors’ or misunderstandings as banal in their consequences for interaction, thus irrelevant to the analysis of text in terms of safety for interaction purposes. The idiolect, chosen as the level of (linguistic) code investigation, is a very personal variable, but the components of this default setting are partly shared, along the lines of increasingly large linguacultural groups, as well as increasingly fine distinctions of heteroglossia.

Technical terminology is kept to a minimum in the thesis,\textsuperscript{307} to facilitate recognition and application of points beyond the boundaries of specific disciplines. This effort reflects the focus on language use as part of dynamic interaction within multi-faceted contexts and discourses, and the general use of ‘text’, noted in the Introduction to the dissertation, is a central example of the approach.

\textsuperscript{305} The use of ‘utterance’ goes beyond “reference to a spoken unit” (Goffman, 1981: 22).
\textsuperscript{306} This label for one-letter mistakes applied to ‘typos’ (typographical errors), but technological changes have eliminated manual intermediaries between keyboard and printing actions.
\textsuperscript{307} Explanations of the terms used are provided, usually in footnotes or parentheses.
A basic research assumption is that unsafe text, as defined in the Introduction, can be identified and dealt with, using the approaches and methods noted in Ch.1, and the sources and precedents presented in Chs 3 and 4, as illustrated first in Ch.2 (Part One of the thesis). The issues highlighted in Part Two are the process of transfer, in particular from the linguacultural background of each participant, and the diversity found within and among individuals and groups, both seen in relation to the Infobahn.

This concluding part of the thesis summarises and highlights the components of searching for safe text, starting with a line-up of suspects in the investigation of a main ‘case’ and some other texts in Ch. 8. This approach to safe text checks a range of text items, in relation to their authors and interpreters, as ‘nobody is perfect’ and anyone can display ignorance in interaction, even if presumed innocent and expert.

The ‘ABC’ factors add depth to the selection criteria, based on seriousness of outcome and frequency of occurrence, and the key narrative illustrates the second part of the motto that ‘nobody is perfect, but anyone can be correct/ed’ in transcultural communication. Further examples look at ‘feworries’ that illustrate priorities for prevention and prepair, based on the importance of ‘understanding’ as empathy or ‘feeling’ more than knowledge, with focus on identity-related aspects of interaction.

The following chapter 9 looks at “Crossings”, with particular attention to attitudes, as affective factors influence the development of interactions. Deep-seated linguacultural differences in the perception, classification and evaluation of ‘emotions’ are a sensitive area of hidden ethnocentrism (cf. Wierzbicka, 1999), and a key example of default settings for text and discourse, which need to be recognised and redressed. The focus on affective, behavioural and cognitive factors, in that order (ABC), leads to comparative and introspective considerations about diversity in values, criteria and conventions reflected in text, and the label of ‘bad’ language includes ‘double standards’, form and substance of text. Their enforcement is related to ‘sanctions’, as noted in Ch. 10. History and etymology add surprising layers to a consideration of ‘Frank language’, in relation to what is called a ‘lingua franca’, and more samples of anecdotes illustrate the complexity of linguacultural re/actions and criticism.

Part Three also includes Ch. 11, where the ‘way out’ or re/solution of problems is associated mainly with a series of steps or skills, assembled in a ‘tool kit’ that revisits considerations made in previous parts and chapters of the dissertation.
Chapter 8  Suspects

In looking for suspects associated with evidence of un/safe text, a key question is ‘who or what tells which story?’ To illustrate the process of searching for causes and effects of unsafe text, a specific case from official sources is studied in detail.308 Courtroom dramas and detective stories are often about texts, full of powerful and risky words: evidence, questions, sentences. The following is a detective story about a courtroom drama, and it questions evidence about a sentence.309 The unsafe text under investigation has undergone multiple manipulations, possibly involving corruption.

Five cases illustrated the injustices of denial of full translation in a luncheon address titled “The right to an interpreter - a Damascus road conversion”, showing a ‘sea-change’ in the understanding of language and translation. The speaker was a Justice, and some of the cases had already been used by a Minister,310 at the same Sydney conference “Interpreting and the law” in 1988, when multiculturalism was young, and the Justice had noted its implication, as relevant “change, even since 1963”.311

The problem requiring further sleuth work has to do with “the God of Gotz” or “god of gotz”. As these are different written versions of the same words312, the acronym GOG is used, also as a general label for this ‘case’, which is summarised below.

When the magistrate asked a defendant how he felt, the latter used an expression which was literally translated as ‘I am GOG’, leading the magistrate to commit him to a psychiatric institution for observation. The decision was ‘not surprising’, but later became the object of criticism as an injustice. What went wrong? Who was wrong/ed?

308 The short ‘code’, initial or acronym ‘GOG’ is used for the main case, supported by other examples.
309 The choice of term was inspired by the slogan “Cancer is a word, not a sentence”, untranslatable in my other languages, and it is intended to bring attention to the deliberate use of ambiguities in my text.
310 Respectively the (then) NSW Acting Chief Justice and President of the Court of Appeal, and the (then) Attorney-General and Minister for Ethnic Affairs of SA (Martin, Moore, & Appelkamp, 1991:45-46, 32-33). Both speakers refer to a common source (Re, Smith, & Mason, 1982:95), and their names are omitted here, to mark the general functions of Justice and Minister over the specific persons.
311 The 1963 Acquolina case had left the use of interpreters at the discretion of the trial judge. Experience in the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) had also contributed to the dramatic conversion, and some of the cases used derive from an inquiry of some years before by the ALRC.
312 The Editor’s Note (p.iii) specifies that “Editorial changes have been confined to the adoption of uniform typographical conventions regarding … the use of initial capital letters for certain terms”. Those above are not ‘certain’, in the other sense of the term, and the discussion below does not include the initial detail (capital or not), but looks at the ending of the last of the three words. Should that be considered ‘nit-picking’, my reply is that it helps avoid lousy outcomes, as noted in Ch.1.
The version presented by the two speakers differs in a key detail, requiring further examination. Was the defendant Polish, as the Minister claimed? The earlier source has no details, but the Justice hinted at another Slavic language in the Latin alphabet.

Perhaps if, in Croatia, that expression, ‘I am on top of the world’, were translated directly into the native language, the view may be taken that an English speaker was suffering from delusions. (p.46)

A Polish polyglot told me that GOG could not represent a colloquialism in that language, but a Croatian interpreter remembered using ‘bog bogova’, or ‘god of gods’, as a positive phrase, popular among youth in the 1940s. As later confirmed by a more recent arrival, the form was restricted to a specific time and generation. (An English parallel could be ‘divine’, used as adjective in secular, everyday situations.) As I recall, my queries were in spoken form, but specified the final ‘tz’ spelling. This did not interfere with recognition by the Croatian interpreter, who could back-translate ‘god of gods’ into the source language, while my Polish-Australian friend associated it, as I did, with the German character of Go(e)tz from Berlichingen, from a linguaculture which had been largely dominant in ‘our’ parts of Europe.

There are many elements of text and context, which contributed to the events, yet cannot be identified at this stage, and it is possible at best to infer causes of the outcome, but not undo the actions and their effects. Thus the following examination, based on the text after its publication, can be called a post-mortem, although there is no record of loss of life. It is unfortunately possible that unsafe text of a comparable nature would result in miscarriage of justice with deadly effects, more or less direct, including a violent end, inflicted by self or others, against or even within the law. On the latter case, I need to state my view that capital punishment as a ‘legal’ measure sits uncomfortably with any declaration promoting ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’, chosen here as priority concerns for safe text practices.

Correlations can be at least suspected between executions and non-dominant class, and possibly language, often visible through ‘race’ and ethnicity. Even natural death can be accelerated by distressing conditions, from incarceration to unfair accusations, including suspicion, or just ‘observation’, regarding mental illness (as in the GOG case) or other forms of social unfitness, as judged by those in power.

---

313 Also an interpreter, using again the term to indicate a language professional.
There are many possible forms of différend (discursive injustice: see Lyotard, 1983 and 1988), and the use of interpreters complicates “the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes … a victim”.\textsuperscript{314} As it is “in the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong” (ibid., p.8, No.9), issues of access and equity in courts are crucial for justice. An example is when the conflict is dealt with “in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom” (Lyotard, 1988:9, No.12). More generally, it happens when the case is conducted in a language not his/her own, and using ‘idiom’ and ‘tongue’ as synonyms links the linguistic typology of ‘GOG’ with the physical function of the (court) interpreter, a person who speaks but is not the author. 

As the phrase used by the defendant meant ‘I feel on top of the world’, the GOG case illustrates “coping with colloquial expressions”, noted as one of the problems about “the very difficult processes involved in translation”.\textsuperscript{315} The conclusion is that

\[\ldots\text{it will often be necessary for the interpreter and witness to interpolate questions and explanations and for the interpreter to give the ‘effect’ of the evidence.}\]

(Re et al., 1982:95)

The ‘effect’ could be obtained through back-translation, done by an expert informant, as in my follow-up. This is compatible with “the fact that all the transcript ever records is the question in English and the interpreter’s answer in English”, linked to “another major problem … challenging the accuracy of the interpretation given” (ibid.). Taking this extra step would have been safer than simply acting on the literal English version given in court by a language professional. How qualified was the latter? Was there any chance to intervene at any point, to redress the outcome of a mistake? If so, who could or should have spoken or acted, and in whose behalf?

What documents, studies or precedents can be used in search of relevant answers?

More recent collections of essays consider aspects of cross-cultural communication in legal settings (Eades, 1995; Pauwels, 1992). They focus on Australia, and themes include communication between professionals and clients, police interviews, and offensive language, as well as the role of interpreters and (academic) linguists.

\textsuperscript{314} My reading of “devient de ce fait une victime” (Lyotard, 1983:24) perceives the cause as “from this fact” rather than “for that reason”. Similarly, in the later sentence about conflict, its ‘règlement’ (in quotation marks in the text) is for me ‘settlement’ (as for accounts) rather than ‘regulation’.

The latter had a role in a landmark case in South Australia before 1960, as shown in the film “Black and white” (2001), where the major problems appear linked to the default settings in the power structure, specifically of most law-enforcement figures. Even well-intentioned legal professionals usually lack linguistic competence and awareness, particularly in relation to marginal linguacultural groups. The crucial issue had been noted earlier, in an essay dealing with court transcripts (Lane, 1985:211), and also applies in health situations, as an instance of “suspicions regarding outgroup competence and integrity” (Hewstone & Giles, 1986:25) instead of doubts about the communication process.

The difficulty some physicians may experience in dealing with working-class and immigrant patients may be attributed negatively to malingering and other outgroup stereotypes rather than to different dialects, inadequate proficiency in the host language, and/or stress experienced in this ‘strange’ context. (ibid.)

Life and liberty, along with health and happiness, are key arenas for equity, access and diversity, thus the serious GOG case is worth studying. The presence of different languages was acknowledged, as an interpreter was provided, yet the magistrate did not question what was heard, although it was considered unacceptable as an answer.

The major outcome of such unsafe text practices was the magistrate’s discretionary decision to commit the defendant to an institution for psychiatric observation, thus apparently depriving the Croatian-speaker of liberty, however briefly. In my evaluation, this is the main negative aspect, although I gather (mainly from fiction) that such a step could be to the advantage of defendants in the legal process. If so, there would still be a delay, contributing to a potential denial of justice, and in either case the magistrate ends up looking like a fool, or at least appearing far from wise. Responsibility should be commensurate with authority, and damaging action should not be taken lightly. In my view, the defendant was wronged, as the repercussions of the implication of insanity could last longer than the committal period. Reasons include both social stigma and the damage to self-esteem, linked to doubts about the quality (insanity, i.e fault) or level (idiocy, i.e. inadequacy) of one’s mental functions.

As Lyotard (1988:8, No.9) notes about ‘perfect crime’, to make the victims pass for mad, if they persist in invoking wrongs as if they existed, is easy for “the others (addressor, addressee, expert commentator on the testimony).”
The GOG case of unsafe text use is in reverse, as passing for mad is the wrong. I see the magistrate as the most guilty party, but there are many levels of unsafe handling of text, both in court and in subsequent reports. The motto ‘nobody is perfect, but anyone can be correct/ed’ applies beyond the author, to every level of interpretation, including this one (my reconstruction of what may have induced each of the ‘suspects’ to act or react, as I understand it to have been the case).

The first problem has to do with the initial question, as it is not clear to me why the magistrate “asked the defendant how he felt”. Situational and cultural variations range from the irritating (for me) interaction imposed by performers who demand audience response, to motivated concern for health conditions that are known to be difficult. In this respect, conventions can be at odds with intentions, as a local researcher studying very ill people commented that asking how they were (feeling) would still elicit the polite formulaic reply ‘fine’. Conversely, when the formulaic query receives a response that takes it literally, and includes assorted details of one’s (ill) health, this “organ recital” (Keesing & Roberts, 1982) is unwelcome by most Anglo-Australians. In bicultural encounters, with mutual knowledge of options, a safe approach would be to check about the ‘rules’ that apply. For example, marking in Spanish ‘hora inglesa’ (English / Anglo time/hour) implies more punctuality than the alternative, ‘hora latina’, often unspoken and unmarked in Latin (American) contexts.

Sources focus attention on the GOG answer, produced by its author and translated by the interpreter. The choice of an idiomatic expression, in response to an apparently conventional formula of social exchange, may have seemed ‘natural’ to the text author (the defendant), thus implying the unsafe assumption that anyone who understood Croatian would ‘get’ it, and that a professional interpreter would always get it right. The expectation of a ‘common’ language as a shared linguaculture ignores the many forms of heteroglossia, present within and between individuals and groups. While the burden of clarification should be mainly shouldered by those most competent, authors are the first source of text, and can profit most from awareness of un/safe options.

Idioms and other forms of ‘in-group’ language are risky, and most sources of advice for successful trans-cultural communication discourage them, along with jargon, slang, etc. (e.g., Farrington, 1992). They are also notoriously difficult to translate.

---

316 ‘Pun’ intended, or ambiguity deliberate, in relation to the GOG ‘case’, both legal and ‘case study’.
These factors affect the next step in the ‘causeffectway’ of the GOG case. Professional interpreters have an ethical obligation to ensure that the original message is not distorted. In the case of the GOG idiom, a substantive equivalent may not have been readily available, as the figurative value of the idiom may have escaped the interpreter, possibly through age difference, or it may have appeared self-evident. Even in good faith, a mistaken notion of ‘faithful rendition’ of text could have led to an outcome of ‘traduttore, traditore’,\(^{317}\) hence *caveat emptor* (buyer / client beware).

Guidelines on working with interpreters (Roberts-Smith, Frey, Bessell-Browne, & De Pieri Tentori, 1990) note the importance of matching the specific language as closely as possible, including cultural aspects, which vary with geo-historical and socio-demographic factors. The risks of negative outcomes from a mismatch between interpreters and clients go beyond accidental misunderstandings (i.e., unsafe text), particularly in situation of ethnic conflict, and unethical behaviour cannot be excluded, as appears from the unfortunate outcome reported about refugees. Men left their families behind, as interpreters belonging to an ‘enemy’ group had misinformed them, saying they had to leave immediately for Australia, thus distorting the original message (A. Main, p.c.). A measure of control before, during and after interpreting should double-check understanding, possibly helping even in cases of bad faith.

The more superficially linguistic confusion of the GOG case could have been easily avoided or repaired, simply by taking an open, rather than biased, questioning attitude to the unexpected response. Moving on to the transcription, an additional minor point has to do with spelling, as whoever transcribed the literal version should at least have made an effort to keep the meaning (gods, plural of god), with or without article or initial capital letters. Access to the original written version may be needed to identify this marginally guilty party, as the Conference proceedings are close enough to the ALRC source. In view of the negative outcome, which all sources call ‘not surprising’, either ‘gods’ or ‘gotz’ would have sounded similar, and similarly crazy.

This seems the main point in the sources, as a difficulty for interpreters and the law. However, evaluation of the text and its safety or acceptability may depend on the presence of a meaning, which can be most easily recognised in the written form, through shared spelling conventions.

---

\(^{317}\) The Italian pun meaning ‘translator, traitor’ has gained international currency. “The words … might appropriately be emblazoned on the title-page of the present volume.” (Wit/z: 6-7; cf. also Ch. 4.)
As the case is repeatedly mentioned in the Conference proceedings, presumably to teach a lesson, its further reporting by authority figures deserves scrutiny.

Beyond the details of GOG, subsequent comments on the case include the inaccurate detail (‘Polish’), which shows little respect for ‘truth’ or ‘fact’ regarding the national and linguacultural identity of the defendant. A case involving Polish people, cited earlier in the same Conference speech by the Minister of Ethnic Affairs, could be a source of transfer triggering a ‘false memory’, but someone with that title and responsibility should have avoided or corrected this addition, as a point of ‘noblesse oblige’, at least for the permanent record in print.

In the following sections, unsafe text aspects of the GOG case are considered in relation to other situations, noting factors increasing risks of undesirable outcomes, serious or ridiculous, which rarely depend on inputs, whereas context is crucial.

**Comparable contexts**

This section discusses some features of the GOG case, from types of variation in form and substance to the idiosyncratic nature of ‘ready made’ expressions, noting their presence in other contexts and comparing the pattern of ‘causeffectways’. When multiple sources make repeated references to a ‘story’, as in the GOG case, it becomes similar to an anecdote, and the brevity of such a genre makes it suitable for this research, as linguistic components are fewer in number. In most anecdotal narratives, legal or scholarly precision is not paramount, but GOG is a court case, an exception which highlights the importance of context in evaluating text safety levels.

Story-telling conventions often lead to the addition of details for interest or ‘colour’, such as a range of setting for the same anecdotes or legends, urban or otherwise. The latter are considered later (Ch. 10), noting how ‘fun’ is made through unsafe text, while a much older tragic example is the similar ‘black sail’ death of Aegeus and Tristan, discussed in Ch. 2. Jokes are routinely modified to suit audiences, and now ‘funny’ texts e-mailed to groups are often transposed from the default version. An example is a long list of items presented as signs in hotels and restaurants.

---

318 In Russian, ‘anekdot’ (anecdote, story) also refers to what is called ‘barzelletta’ in Italian and ‘chiste’ in Spanish, i.e. a ‘funny story’ or ‘joke’, like the German ‘Witz’, that also refers to ‘wit’.

It came to me in a European and in a Chinese-based version, and Shanghai replaced Paris, presumably as an amoral city (“Please leave your values at the front desk”). Such adaptations can represent successful transfers, but in the GOG case the ethnic identity of the defendant is a relevant and delicate issue, not open to ‘free variation’, and the authoritative position of the sources increases the seriousness of unsafe text.

This applies to another factor discussed above, regarding the effect of (mis-)spelling on the perceived meaning of the text, as well as on views of the mental ability of the source. In the GOG case, such problems occur mainly through (mis-)interpretation of an idiom, and the matter is discussed in the next section, in relation to other text forms which are limited to a specific group of users, whereas the aspects under consideration below relate specifically to deviations from ‘proper’ usage, mainly concerning names.

Within the category of matters of manners, form and face, outcomes linked to failures affecting proper names can be worse than those involving other spelling conventions. The complementary category of matters of fact has a similarly wide range of effects, depending on the difference in resulting meanings, and difficulty in identifying the intended one. Some consideration is given to the sources of error, with reference to the literature that analyses input conditions, rather than unsafe outcomes of text.

“We all make spelling mistakes, but…” is a recurrent comment at the start of items flagging mistakes, like the following two. As the first refers to text on a banner, synonymous of ‘flag’ or ‘standard’, the notion of ‘flagging standards’ refers more generally to fading attention to the quality of text. Factors increasing the seriousness of outcomes, besides the authority and responsibility of sources, include the visibility, size, numbers and circulation of unsafe text, as illustrated in the next two examples.

SILLY DILLY: We all make spelling mistakes. But few of us get the name of our own city wrong on massive banners hanging over the street, as did the Hello Mister supermarket in Dili, East Timor, photographed by Chris Pritchard. (TT 2001/0110_25/p079tales)

The banner reads ‘Dill’s favorite supermarket’, and the problem could be related to the visual similarity between i/I/l (cf.Ch. IB), particularly with the added apostrophe. However, the geographic name does not seem to change from English to the local languages, and the comment refers to the expectation of familiarity with “our own” context. When I learned that it is an Australian supermarket chain, the presumption of ignorance increased, as those responsible were likely to be (Anglophone) outsiders.
On the other hand, the presumption of innocence would favour accident as the cause, since the appearance of arrogance by those outsiders, if they were not bothering to learn and use the proper name of the place, would add insult to injury. Matters of face along such delicate lines could be part of the picture, also in the next anecdote or tale.

NAMING OF PARTS: We all make spelling mistakes, but some make bigger ones than others, a reader reports. British author Timothy Ash travelled to Taiwan for the launch of his book The File – only to find that the publisher had spelled his name wrongly (he had become Timorthy) on the cover of every single copy. (TT 0006_08/p85tales)

Book production involves human responsibility for checking details, at a higher level of professionalism than for more ephemeral writing, such as on banners. When text recognition and correction tasks are delegated to a machine, safety is further reduced.

YELLOW JOURNALISM: Beware of choosing a company name that gets “corrected” by spell-checking software. Thus you can avoid the fate of Bahana Securities of Indonesia, which is featured in Harvest International’s Journal for Decision Makers as Banana Securities. (TT 9901_14/p28tales)

Nury Vittachi provides a warning about risks of unsafe text, specifically within CMC. Computers are usually strict in their acceptance of text for their own communication functions, and require proper names and correct addresses for e-mail and Internet sites (URL). Some computer contexts are also ‘case-sensitive’, just like the (non) use of capitals can affect individual and cultural sensitivities, for example in the naming of groups like Aboriginal or Deaf people. Since conventions in this area differ across languages, as in ‘italiano’, it is safer to suppose that no ‘capital’ offence is intended, and ideally none should be taken. However, authors who commit such faux pas should be told about the risk, so they can avoid such negative transfers in future text use.

The proper names of companies, people and places are the focus of many Travellers’ Tales like those above, and identity-based crises are discussed below, in relation to one of the rare sources of blunders in autobiographical contexts, where ‘clangers’ of noted personalities are collected for charity in a book (Spastic Centres of SA, 1984). They often include mistakes concerning someone else’s identity, from the proper name to the correct place of origin (the latter relating closely to the GOG case), and failures of memory or confusing information may involve very similar words.
Sir Charles Moses (p. 16) thought he was introduced to ‘Mr. Torbeshian from Iraq’, and after mentioning their new French bombers, he was told the man was from Iran. Even without being at war, representatives of different countries may object to superficial confusions, as illustrated by the author Nancy Cato (p. 111). The exchange, following her mention of Tanzania and Uganda, included

‘And what … do I have to do with Uganda?’ ‘Oh dear – I meant, of course, Ghana. I mean, all these nations with names ending in “A”, they do sound rather the same.’ ‘Indeed? But surely not Australia?’

By failing to specify in detail the phonetic similarity between ‘Ghana’ and ‘Uganda’, which in some English pronunciations would involve a string of several letters, the speaker was ‘asking for’ such a pointed retort, which brought home the faux pas.

Parochial loyalties can be fierce, even within peaceful federations. A French host had mentioned of South Australian vineyards in the presence of Len Evans, wine authority based in the Hunter valley in New South Wales, and asked if he said the wrong thing, to which Evans replied ‘Yes. What is French for faux pas!’ (sic, p. 90). The final and minor typo can derive from the visual similarity between ‘?’ and ‘!’, particularly if the manuscript was literally hand-written. Such confusion can be a sort of transfer, while in another form of shift, an exclamation mark could apply to the first part of the answer, and presumably override the question mark at the end. There could also be an unconscious re/action by the author (or editor / compiler) to stress the blunder, as failure to recognise the source language (a case of linguistic double standards) put the shoe on the other foot, and the faux pas changed sides. Suspects are the focus of this chapter, and the suspicious attitude recommended in searching for safe text could be marked with the combination ‘?!’ to reflect both doubt and surprise. Evans appears as ‘raconteur’ in the collection of ‘bloomers’, and his choice of story may deliberately give the impression that he was being ironic.

Preaching and practice have a complex relationship when language use is concerned. Texts coming from schools, mainly those offering English language teaching, reflect the language standards of the institutional source, and thus affect its reputation.

---

320 Awareness of ethnic names can help, as I was told long ago that endings in -ian are often Armenian, and I later learned that they are more likely to be found in Iran than in Arab countries like Iraq.

321 Australian slang for “an embarrassing, laughable mistake, person or situation” (Johansen, 1996).

322 See Goffman (1981) for ways to exploit on radio such options, linking slips and humour (Ch.4).
Similarly, educational textbooks are expected to model form as well as teach through content, and the impact of ‘errors’ on readers is negative in two ways, as those who recognise deviations from the conventions will regret such lack of respect, while those who do not, including the many still uncertain, may be led into confusion.

A crucial case is the use in a Web site for adult literacy of something like “it’s contents”. I view such problems with the apostrophe as equivalent to the effect of spittle sprayed by a speaker, which encourages others to keep their distance, and this goes with my point that ‘bad language’, in the formal sense, is like bad breath, as both spoil the effect of even the best-intentioned words. However, the above use in the possessive has become so frequent that I wonder about possible language change, as it’s a regularisation of ‘its’ along the lines (patterns, rather than rules) of what I learned to call ‘Saxon genitive’, as the Latin case (one may write “as in Latin’s case”).

Other tricky texts are easier to assess, and some examples illustrate the principle.

IT’S URGENT: Classified advertisement in the Brisbane Courier-Mail, Australia: “DIRECTOR OF STUDIES: Nudgee International College wishes to appoint a Director of Studies whose principle [sic] responsibilities are the English for High School Preparation Courses and Study Tour Programs.” Reader Peter Nunan said: “Not a moment too soon, eh?” (TT0003_09/p37tales)

The school may have been without a Director of Studies, if not without a principal, and the responsibility may rest with office staff that drafted the advertisement, but even established academics fall in the same trap. For example, the Preface to the first edition of a book on intercultural communication, faithfully reproduced in the second, refers to “the principle foundation upon which we write” (Scollon & Scollon, 2001:xiv). The above could be seen as deliberately casual style, as in the authors’ view “most miscommunication does not arise through mispronunciation or through poor use of grammar, important as those aspects of language learning are” (p.xiii).

Another option is to pursue the safe text path, checking what may have been intended, giving the benefit of the doubt, and reconstructing possible cases of ‘wordprocerrors’.

323 In English, it’s rarely in its place. She’s usually ‘right’, but he’s at risk of misplacing his, and you’re likely to find to your dismay they’re not there in their expected place, or vice-versa. Plural’s at risk, as when Goodacre & Follers (1987:8) mention ‘our’s’ (sic) and ‘their’s’ (sic), along with ‘us’ and ‘them’.
This is recommended for both doubters and critics, noting that “ability to return to the original statement” is attributed by the authors to “careful attention” at the “higher level of discourse analysis” (ibid.), and such a process corresponds in substance to the search for safe text undertaken in the thesis, although presumably lower levels of communication are subjected to analysis here, and the focus is on written text.

When manuscripts were literally hand-written, the presence of corrections could be noticed, alerting readers or copyists to possible imperfections in the revised text. Even typescripts used to be corrected by hand, but successive technological improvements have made the ‘palimpsest’ harder to reconstruct. Goffman (1981:11, n.8) notes that typing mistakes “seem easier studied” compared to handwriting, mainly thanks to records clearer than “sloppy penmanship”, but “invisible mending” is far more successful with mechanical and electronic means of recording text, spoken or written. In my view of the Scollon example, an intended switch between ‘the principle upon which’ and ‘the foundation upon which’ resulted in ‘the principle foundation’, easily confused with ‘the principal foundation’. In addition to the notorious homophony (cf. O'Neill, Fountaine, & Sligo, 2002), a contributing factor in oversight is familiarity with text, which promotes expectations of fit between the actual and intended form. More generally, this ‘prediction’ applies to reading for substance, which is the ‘normal’ approach to text, but interferes with proof-reading (and vice-versa), thus reducing the safety of text-processing conditions for authors as well as interpreters. Proof, or evidence, of negative outcomes is provided below.

Text safety depends on the match between the interpreted meaning and the intended one. Many anecdotes about ‘uncommon’ spelling mistakes are matters of principle, face and manners, where lack of attention or respect for conventions, standards and identities creates problems along the lines of ‘noblesse oblige’, as repeatedly noted. In such cases, knowing the ‘correct’ version of the intended word is a prerequisite for noticing the mis-match, and there is no misunderstanding in matters of fact.\footnote{The problem of shibboleths, noted in Ch.1, will be further pursued in the next chapter (Ch. 9).}

The latter can lead to more serious problems of mis-communication, and derive from apparently minor mistakes of a similar nature. An example appeared in a local paper to advertise financial support for women students, where the need to demonstrate “an ability to attend full-time” was the opposite of the intended “inability to attend”.

324
Here the homophony led to ‘an ability’, possibly expected as the default option among the requirements for academic selection, but the support offered was made necessary by the practical inability to fulfil the usual attendance conditions. The corrected version had ‘an inability’, thus removing the phonetic similarity by adding a syllable, and illustrating one of the guidelines for safe text, which should be not simply possible to understand, but impossible to misunderstand (Kroehnert, 1990:135).

When a distorted meaning has an impact on interpreters, even though they can recognise the one originally intended, the problematic outcome falls into an additional or intermediate category, open to a range of safety-based evaluations. Matters of form, fact, face and manners can be mixed, just like authors and interpreters can be ‘mixed up’, and react on the basis of affective, behavioural and cognitive default settings. The following example begins like two previously mentioned ‘tales’, and the ‘traveller’ is also a learner (either in/of the first /’native’ language or an additional one), which confirms that metalinguistic awareness is best developed when young.

FRANK TALK: We all make spelling mistakes, but some are more unfortunate than others. Joshua Frank, one of the REVIEW’s many school-age readers, took this picture at the Shangri-La Hotel in Shenzhen. Where one might have expected compote (stewed fruit), one found compost (decaying vegetable matter). (TT 0001_13/p28tales)

There is no doubt about the word to be expected in one of the most commonly reported menu mistakes, yet somehow ‘crab’ becomes less appetising as ‘crap’. Many senses, in every sense, are involved in taste-based text samples (cf. Ch.10).

Confusion in using the homophone ‘Gotz’ for ‘gods’ may only play a minor part in the GOG case, but the limitations of transcription as input should be pointed out, in view of its importance for communication outcomes, in situations where ‘evidence’ is conveyed through spoken words. A similar problem could derive from interference and other sound-based difficulties in the production of written text (cf. Ch. 5), and context does not always help, as illustrated in two examples from free magazines.

In “M.R. does not seem phased at all by the attention” (Hype, issue 66, 16.11.00, p.15), ‘fazed’ is clearly intended, but what about film characters who “can all speak at least three different languages, diffuse bombs, …”? (X-Press issue 719, 23.11.00)

---

325 This appears in so many ‘tales’ that specific references are not appropriate.
I recall seeing them defuse a bomb, but other readers may wonder which of the
opposite actions was referred to, either removing a danger, or spreading it around.
These two alternatives can also illustrate the contrast between the outcomes of safe
text practices, which aim at defusing tensions by clarifying misunderstandings, and
those of immediate re/actions involving (and even diffusing) risky text options.

**Idiot or idiom?**
The courtroom drama of the GOG case provides a memorable example of what can go
wrong, when “knowledge of linguistic and cultural arbitrariness” is not adequate or
not valued (cf. Rowland, 1994: 81). As shown in discussing previous examples, there
are many points in the ‘causeffectway’, not necessarily in linear sequence, and any
single categorisation of the mis-communication involved is just a simplification. The
following considerations look at the apparent ‘first cause’, an idiomatic expression, in
relation to outcome: explicit doubts about the author’s mental competence or sanity.

In terms of linguistic categories, idioms may be compared to jargon, as they refer to
usage by an identifiable group, and both professional and everyday expressions of this
type can be confusing as matters of fact, just like acronyms and abbreviations. The
crucial variable is the specific context, and the position of insider or outsider occupied
by interpreters. Authors presumably know what they are talking about, and do not
realise that the intended meaning may be unknown to interpreters, leading to non-
communication, or open to different interpretations, thus to misunderstanding. The
people involved may feel or appear ignorant, or even incompetent, but the issue
largely remains in the cognitive realm, unless ‘crossings’ are involved (cf. Ch. 9) and
parties find themselves moved into emotional territory, with riskier interactions.

Affective effects are prominent in a recollection in French involving ‘false friends’,
by a laboratory worker whose boss asked for an *éprouvette*, but was given a *tube*, and
criticised the apparent inability to tell one from the other. The worker explains that the
humiliating confusion was not substantive but linguistic, caused by transfer from a
background language of a word similar to *éprouvette*, apparently applied to a *tube*.326
In other types of situations, authors may realise (as do interpreters) that jargon is out
of place in behavioural terms, and reduces the effectiveness of communication.

---

326 I would similarly translate the Italian *provetta* into English as ‘test tube’. since without laboratory
experience it is difficult to imagine different forms of the object and of the word/s.
The heading above asks ‘idiom or idiot?’, to stress the relation between the terms, and
the specific nature of such idiosyncratic expressions. This was also noted by Quine,
who discusses “Idiotisms”, or ‘idioms’ in the sense of “linguistic singularity”, in
relation to the distinctive French word idiotisme, which avoids confusion with idiome,
or idiom in the sense of “a whole language or dialect.” Three beautiful examples are
“j’ai beau faire, … le bel âge … un bel âge”, leading a “beginner in French … to
find the word idiotisme wryly appropriate.” Because the difference in use is not
clearly related to a specific domain, failure to communicate is seen as failure to/of
reason, rather than just lack of knowledge, as in specialist forms like jargon.
Idioms use everyday words for everyday meanings, but in combinations that appear
unusual, if they are taken literally and compared with the intended sense. Beyond “a
turn of phrase whose mode of use is not evident from broader regularities of the
language nor from the use of its component words in other contexts”, idiomatic usage
or idiotism “just reflects a point of view different from our own.” In themselves, the
expressions may look ‘crazy’, as in the GOG case, or be variously labelled as ‘stupid’
or ‘silly’, and the risk of extending the negative perception to the author is inversely
proportional to mutual knowledge and shared background. Quine also compares items
which “come to the same thing and are equally straightforward”, but are still at risk of
unsafe text use by being “put down by the other speaker as impenetrably idiotistic”

At a more general level of trans-cultural communication, I must believe (but find it
shocking) that “personal experience” informs the “perception that in Australia ‘broken
english’ implies a lack of intelligence or understanding because of a commonsense
belief that ‘the way people speak is the way people think’.” This rough version of
the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativism counts as unsafe text at a deep
level of reasoning, as it omits reference to different levels of proficiency in various
languages. In my opinion, this thought/less view (criticised in the source) could be
rephrased as ‘the way people speak in a specific context is the way they manage to
express what they think in the language they use for that interaction’.

---

327 I translate the first ‘no matter how much I do’, and “le bel âge is youth, while un bel âge is old age”.
328 “Granted, … idiocy is fortuitous: idiosyncrasy is the … model. In Greek … an idiotes was just … a
population unit, whose distinctive trait was the lack of distinctive traits … the word gradually acquired
its harshness by the grim process of euphemism, q.v.” (Quine, 1987:92, with ref. to pp.53-4).
329 Small ‘e’ for English intentional in the original (Rowland, 1994:60), not transferred from i/Italian/i/.
Implications for justice are complex, and serious issues of equity, access and diversity go beyond the safety of text (cf. Eades, 1995; specifically Gibbons, 1995). To reduce and control such risks, language-teaching materials pointing out the ‘funny’ (peculiar, thus humorous) side of idioms help promote awareness of the arbitrary nature of linguistic conventions, and encourage a more confident handling by learners of such ‘unnatural’ language. Another useful source are ‘errors’ by first language learners, as found for example in Children’s World. These are in some ways comparable to those of adult learners or non-native language users, and help explain cases where transfer, as used in the thesis, goes beyond the strict definition as (inter-)linguistic process.

Besides idioms, syntax or other aspects of ‘grammar’ can create ambiguous forms, or confusion through similarity, as in the contrast between “must and must’ve” (Chanock, 1986:66). Most anecdotes in the latter source are apparently based on true stories, and include the interpretation of instructions in reverse, because of ‘before’ and ‘after’ (p.16), and of “See you later”, the local formula used for finishing a conversation, as an invitation (p.73). In a similar context, “you must come...” formulates a vague desire as a ‘must’, which can be seen as hypocritical, if not absurd (on the oddities of ‘must’, cf. also Quine, 1987:139, 142). Searching for safe text is particularly interested in naïve views of such ‘ready made’ linguistic expressions, and the following example deals with a form related to a similar substantive sense.

An idiom comparable to ‘cliché’, but apparently limited to the USA, is ‘boilerplate’, informally used in the context of word-processing (Flexner, 1987). The term can still be found in the index of manuals on library shelves (Catapult Inc., 1994; Microsoft, 1993), but not in newer guides and references (e.g., Weverka & Poremsky, 2001). The importance of safe text for instructions and manuals encourages the recognition of potential problems, and this one has been remedied over the years, but the ‘step by step’ book (Catapult Inc., 1994) is of comparable vintage to works ‘for dummies’ or ‘complete idiots’, not using the idiom (Bobola, 1996; Gookin, 1994).

---

330 An example is the implicit contrast olive oil / baby oil in reading labels, discussed in Ch. 9.
331 The person answering my phone inquiry in the relevant institution called them ‘truisms’: the malapropism might be an attempt to transfer the ending from linguistic jargon heard in the office.
332 The Italian ‘(ready-)made phrase’ (‘frase fatta’), source of the transfer above, matches ‘ready-made blocks of words’ Futrelle (1998), and the corresponding literal approach of MT (machine translation).
This interesting difference applies or transfers the question ‘idiots or idioms?’ also to teaching and learning situations, where levels of text safety take into account the expected (lack of) expertise of interpreters. Unfortunately, a ‘catch 22’ or no-win situation applies to linguistic accommodation, which can become offensive through either lack or excess of ‘consideration’ (as careful thought and being ‘considerate’).

The opacity of a localised idiom is a problem of linguacultural difference, not one of mental ability, linguistic competence or even lower levels of substantive expertise. Power differences in the relation between authors and interpreters contribute to the difference in outcomes between the manuals and the GOG case, pointing out how those with higher authority should take responsibility for ensuring text safety.

The default setting of authors in the court case (the defendant and the interpreter from the original language) appears comparable to that of manual writers, editors and publishers, but the latter deal with paying customers who ‘are always right’, and the commercial system provides immediate incentives to correct any expression that may detract from text safety, effective communication and customer satisfaction.

The defendant, as ‘client’ of the justice system, is to be presumed innocent, but in the GOG case the author of unsafe text is suspected to be insane. The Australian magistrate interpreting the reply (in the general sense used in this study) failed to deal appropriately with the difficulty arising from the linguistic difference between the (professional) interpreter’s version and the intended meaning of the text in question, which would also have matched the one expected in such a context. Instead, the inadequacy of channels of communication was projected onto the defendant’s mental competence or sanity, with a negative outcome.

In milder forms, many ‘tales’, anecdotes and legends show the comical effect of ‘meanings’ recognisable in literal or ‘mechanical’ translations. This relates to the discussion of computer-mediated MT (machine translation) among the fallacies noted in the previous chapter, where an unsafe example involved proper names and identity. Views of MT, with specific reference to idioms, are noted in the next section.

---

333 It derives from journalism, with reference to “syndicated columns in the form of stereotype plates” (cf. Urdang & Flexner, 1968), but is absent from Australian usage and dictionaries, while the corresponding concept of ‘template’ is used in relation to language learning (Tripp, 2000b:31).
Online equivalence

The GOG case has been selected in view of its serious outcome, and of the sequence of risky steps, beyond the author’s choice of an idiomatic expression. It is also compatible or comparable with online situations, or at least relevant to computer-mediated communication, as discussed below in relation to apparent differences.

The original GOG text, like many of its subsequent uses noted here, appears to have been spoken rather than written. This may have affected perception and interpretation, including transcription, and possibly recall, also at the 1988 Conference. Prima facie, this would not seem closely related to on-line Text Only, but there is a range of factors involved, which would narrow the apparent gap in mode. One has to do with the special nature of the legal context, where text is dealt with in (more) official ways, and is generally linked to some form of record, leading to written text, which has complex relations with oral/aural forms of (mis-)communication (cf. Ch. 5.)

The conditions of text exchanges online are generally informal, unlike those in court, where words often have great importance and serious consequences. However, spoken text is also used in legal setting, and orality combined with formality, paradoxically, approximates computer-mediated communication, which is often considered similar to spoken exchanges, rather than just written ones.  With reference to the GOG case, the imprecise spelling ‘gotz’ for ‘gods’ is more likely on-line than in more traditional (off-line) forms of writing, where the expected levels of competence and care in spelling and typing lead to a reduced tolerance for variations. Another factor is the electronic reproduction of existing text, as in e-mail replies, which extends the ‘life’ and visibility of ‘deviant’ versions, subjecting them to layers of (mis-)interpretations.

In the GOG case, as previously noted, it is not clear who heard or understood what in court, or even what word (or language) the critics see as the cause of a ‘bad’ outcome, but the crucial element of miscommunication has to do with a literal translation of an unfamiliar idiom. In this, machine translation (MT) is the obvious computer-mediated equivalent, but whether and how machines can translate is still unclear (cf. Ch.7).

When I accessed a free online translation service in mid-1998, it provided a clever and ‘safe’ indication of its limits, along with more conventional disclaimers.

---

334 The notion of a new hybrid (cf. Munyandy, 2002) acknowledges the mixture and transfers.
335 ‘Tolerance’ is used here in the technical or engineering sense of permissible or ‘safe’ margin.
Two forms of ‘Cheap Entertainment’ involved “Idioms and slang … notoriously hard to translate well…. Try a few for some good laughs” and a translation equivalent of “the old game Gossip”,336 where “everyone has a good laugh about what comes out at the end”. The instructions recommended to just start with one language, then translate that to another, then another, then another, then back to the original. Years later, a search for “AltaVista’s Translation Assistant” found on the 2002 page (AltaVista: translations) the provision of “a free language translation service with Babel Fish.”337

… the Web’s first Internet machine translation service that can translate words, phrases or entire Web sites to and from English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian and Russian.

While no mention was made of the ‘gossip’ game, the tool allowed the gradual transformation of the Justice’s text quoted earlier into versions like the following:

Perhaps, if in Croatia this printout in the surface at the world it were translates directly into the language nut/mother, can being consider that from English printout under delusions suffered.

Perhaps if in Croatia this matter in surface in the world printed, it is directly translated the language with the mother /, more too bemuttern, the tin which is considered that English printed by the matter, suffered delusions from him.

Other links from the search led to the 1998 articles noted in Ch.7, with comments on the earlier AltaVista site. Some additional views on literal versions of idioms enrich the perspective on MT and the treatment of suspects in searching for safe text.

Sure, the software mangles a lot of what it gets its hands on. Some of what it delivers, of course, is utter gibberish: “It would leave his fall in the edge for a minute or two.” “I am funker in a room of assembly and I licked film.” But as Dr. Johnson might have said, the wonder is that it works at all—and that so much of the machine’s output, however garbled, is at least roughly understandable. (Futrelle, 1998)

336 A.k.a. ‘Chinese whispers’, showing a bias linking linguistic difference to exotic Orientalism.

This author points to the practical value, the other (Klein) to the limits of quality, and their two views are comparable to those about a glass as half empty or half full. In the search for safe text, these evaluations of MT can be noted also in their complementary attitudes toward its humorous potential. “Systran also suggests you may have lots of fun with the mistranslation. Maybe - but you should still be able to use it.” (Klein, 1998). Besides colourful examples like ‘pot stickers’, Futrelle notes:

The strangest thing about the AltaVista translation is that the ones that are not too awfully bungled often seem not to have lost, but to have gained from the translation.

Considering the self-professed status of non-linguist, either in terms of academic discipline or practical profession, the view of the process expressed by Futrelle is surprisingly perceptive, and can contribute to safe text practices. The first point has to do with equity, access and diversity, with an appraisal of the ratio of potential users:

… The AltaVista Translation Assistant gives us all a glimpse into a world beyond English – and, perhaps even more importantly, can give non-English speakers access to the 70 percent of the Web that’s in English.

The next point encourages introspection and metalinguistics awareness, as “it can teach us something even more fundamental about the art of communication.”

The Translation Assistant, with its stubborn literalness, forces us to look again at the roots of our own language. Most of the time, we skate across its surface, building our sentences not from individual words but from ready-made blocks of words – common phrases, simple noun-verb combinations, clichés. Our speech, in short, is prefab. The translator, not understanding our clichés, puts words together in its own original way – and thus is able to infuse the most banal of utterances with a certain poetry. As the Translation Assistant itself might put it: That’s some flavorful pies! (Futrelle, 1998)

The final words derive from the idiomatic ‘tasty pastry’, an example of how “pick-up lines go through the translation grinder”, used before with the comment “the original English … might be no more effective” than the MT outcome. If the magistrate in the GOG case had taken a similar approach, the poetic ‘god of gods’ would have been perceived as loftier than ‘on top of the world’ (or ‘in surface’, after Babel-fishing around), with no delusions or suffering caused by an idiom, nor the embarrassment of ‘being an idiot’, which could fairly apply to most of the parties involved in the case.
Chapter 9    Crossings

The metaphor of movement, along the Infobahn or a ‘causeeffectway’, is compatible with the notion of ‘crossing’ in the spatial sense, and many related uses of the term. “Do not cross while light is flashing” seems a clear warning at level rail crossing, yet ‘while’ in the instruction detail was apparently read as ‘until’ in an English region.338 While the above example of unsafe text includes the material context of the chapter title, both aim to prefigure some substantive points discussed here, mainly about affective aspects of interaction difficulties associated with linguacultural diversity.339 Where lines of transport cross each other, there is both danger and opportunity,340 and the polysemy of the English term ‘cross’ also highlights factors relevant to safe text. Difficult or problematic aspects like contradiction, opposing or thwarting, coexist with constructive and creative ones, from the architectural intersection of nave and transept to biological crossbreeding. The last meaning and the first (the spatial one) are also shared by the Italian word ‘incrocio’, facilitating my own hybrid thinking, which is (about) a ‘crossing’ of and between two languages, or more.

The following consideration of the key word ‘cross’ supplements references to it and other prefixes in ‘a/cross/inter/trans - mission statement’ (Ch.1), and relates to the use by Gumperz (1979) of ‘Crosstalk’ as title in a similar research context. In addition to the use as verb and noun, ‘cross’ in English can be an adjective, with such ‘adverse and unfavourable’ connotations as ‘illegal, dishonest, ill-humoured, snappish’.

A ‘cross word’ is a risky factor in text, which can lead to ‘reciprocal’ exchanges, even when the ‘contrary’ (as ‘opposite’, thus positive) intention was present at the start. Such ‘cross’ words can ‘cross’ or antagonise people, but this negative outcome may derive from transfer, when specific forms of linguistic expression cross the boundaries of different conventions,341 following any of the paths noted in the thesis (cf. Ch. 5).

---

338 A. McHoul (p.c., 2002) specified that it was ‘country’ Yorkshire, but when I checked the story with a young woman from Yorkshire, she dismissed it as an urban legend, and I retain some safety ‘hedges’.

339 While in this case miscommunication has a material risk, attitudes in relation to the local identity and linguacultural use could be explored in further detail, as done for other cases in this chapter and thesis.

340 This challenging combination appears in the two Chinese characters used for ‘crisis’, as often mentioned in conflict resolution books, and confirmed by Yingchi Chu (p.c., 2002).

341 Sanders (1986) looks “across the borders of … communities”, and provides a relevant typology of ‘foreign interpreters’, including the potential for errors, which supplements the “shibboleth schema” discussed by Hopper (1986), as both focus on interpretation as a key function (cf. Ch.6).
A combination of the above features and factors is likely to apply in many points of the ‘causeffectway’ involved in (mis-)communication. In positive terms, these could afford a ‘crossing’ as the place where safe passage is possible, as the recognition of transfer and its unintended outcomes can repair the breach or even prevent it. To this end, this chapter investigates the danger of ‘crossing people’ in relation to expressions that may be classified as ‘cross/ing words’, and thus as unsafe text. The focus is on matters of manners and face, rather than fact or f/action (cf. Ch. 2), and the search includes terms used to describe or evaluate the process, such as ‘affect/ive’.

**Emotions**

The mnemonic acronym ‘ABC’ is variously used in this study and stands primarily for Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive aspects of communication. The same three terms are applied to communication resourcefulness (Guirdham, 1999:198), and ‘affective’ is glossed as ‘emotional’. Is that a ‘good’ quality, or is it ‘embarrassing’?

The words in quotes, and the related concepts, tend to elicit affective reactions, which vary with culture and context, and thus the safety of text is affected by affect in a complex network of causeffectways. Diversity in linguacultures extends to values and feelings, including their expression, and evaluating communication outcomes requires sensitivity to such variations, as does interpreting inputs, from written Text Only to paralinguistic components. Another ABC formula for safe text practices is ‘awareness of background and culture’, applicable to the socio-cultural value judgment requested above, in relation to the linguistic item ‘emotional’: is it good or embarrassing?

Wierzbicka (1999:112) considers embarrassment “one of the most important emotion concepts in the modern Anglo world”, and notes its extraordinary ascent “at the expense of shame and also guilt”. In the thesis, it is seen as the most common element in unsafe text exchanges, which is likely to affect authors or interpreters, or both.

---

342 The terms ‘prepair’ and ‘provent’ derive from ‘remedial’ approaches (cf. note in Introduction and Glossary), while ‘breach’ is a reference to Garfinkel’s (1967) “examples of the break-down of conversation in which an experimenting student deliberately displayed inability to understand another’s ‘perfectly ordinary utterances’ …But this posture of ‘you know what I mean’ cannot always be adopted in regard to children’s questions” (Hasan, 1996#:135), or with other novices to a linguaculture.

343 The choice was used also in several related presentations. From my talk to volunteer adult literacy tutors resulted two non-academic publications: “The ABC of safe text”. *Literacy Link*, 21, 8-9 (August 2001) and “Safe text and gestures: an ABC for fellow guides”. *AGWA Voluntary Gallery Guides Newsletter*, 2-3 (October 2001).
The same source asks whether “Emotions” are “disruptive episodes or vital forces that moulds our lives”, with illustrations of the culture-specific “Anglo” attitude (mostly hostile) compared with those of other cultures, mainly Russian and German (pp.17-24). Thus a recent study reinforces my critical views (‘pareri di Perpetua’)\(^\text{344}\), which come from an Alpine-Mediterranean perspective, illustrated in the ‘spirited’ examples below, where comparison of cultural attitudes towards the effects of drink, based on my own perceptions, may also include dynamics concerning ‘high spirits’ in general. Australian sources dealing with matters of body and spirit include advice for young women on alcohol, a depressant, listing some “bad or risky” consequences of its use.

You are also more likely to become emotional and have arguments… to do something embarrassing (or worse) that you may regret … (Archell & Kinear, 2001:18)

James Panichi, a bicultural commentator on the Italian programme of SBS radio, had explained that ‘tired and emotional’ is an Australian euphemism for drunken behaviour of public figures. Just what appears (more) embarrassing, in a society where displays of emotion are strongly inhibited, but drunkenness is trivialised? An Australian woman, of neither Italian nor Anglo background, remembers pointing out years ago to other members of her privileged social class that what they referred to in euphemistic terms was a serious problem with alcohol, which many of them had.

Idioms, x-phemisms and ‘words apart’ about intoxication can help to recognise a range of cultural perceptions, from more or less ‘moral’ values to stereotypes,\(^\text{345}\) to be kept in mind when different positions and conventions clash, in fact or text.

On the matter of arguments, appearing ‘high-strung’ is also a matter of linguaculture. Within English-speaking culture/s, repression of ‘emotion’ in Australia seems to go beyond stereotypical differentiation in gender roles and ‘emotional’ behaviour.\(^\text{346}\) My (Italian) background linguaculture is considered close to the opposite end of the continuum, as I remember being told to ‘calm down’ by a young female officer, when I rephrased my enquiries at a police station (not about any offence), and spoke with somewhat impatient speed. Neither of us recognised the linguacultural difference.

\(^{344}\) ‘Opinions of Perpetua’, the priest’s servant in *The Betrothed*, like those of the Cardinal (cf. Ch.4).

\(^{345}\) A comparative review of terms for ‘hangover’ found it difficult (as I do) to find an Italian equivalent. In many languages, comparisons for states of high intoxication involve reference to some ethnic group, presumably expected to get more ‘tired and emotional’ than the one using the term.

\(^{346}\) A counsellor from the USA had to treat Australian women as she treated (Anglo-) American men.
The concept of relativity to a ‘default’ setting, central to this study, is illustrated in a tutorial on intonation, where the contrast focused on the pitch range, as Italians “sound emotional” and English speakers appear “unfeeling, dull and boring” (Kirkpatrick, 1995:18). Such (mis-)perceptions and symmetrical reactions can have Text Only equivalents, aside from the CMC-specific use of items like emoticons.347

The explanation of the mechanism notes two aspects relevant to the thesis, concerning the perception and evaluation of a ‘mistake’. As in other cases, “the speakers are judged against the norms of the culture in which they are moving,” an ethnocentric bias which runs into trouble on the Infobahn. The view that native users “will not realise that a mistake has been made” (ibid.) presumably refers to a mis-match between expectations of acceptable form. Who or what is ‘mistaken’?

Use of the passive verb, in the original and paraphrase, leaves two options open.

The mistake can be attributed to (native) interpreters, who use inappropriate criteria in judging performance, 348 or to (transcultural) authors, whose choice of pitch follows inappropriate norms. Subsequent tutorial advice goes beyond intonation and refers more generally to “speech styles”, which influence written text, particularly in the newer on-line forms, more similar to spoken ones. Learning “that their speech style norms are not universal norms” (ibid. p.19) is crucial for safe text, also on the Net.

What interpreters have to do is independent of their views of “the primary obligation to solve the communication problem as being mutual, or as falling primarily on outgroup members or primarily on themselves”, although such attitudes guide efforts to acquire the latter’s rules and conventions of expression (Sanders, 1986:146).

The concern about affect and appearing “emotional – embarrassingly emotional” (Kirkpatrick, 1995:18) shows an unintended negative outcome of unsafe text, which presumably affects all the parties. This is also an emotional reaction to mis-perception of communication, and it is important to ‘calm it down’, as counterpart to the point that English speakers using an Italian pitch range “would be considered hysterical – and people would urge them to calm down or, in a telling phrase, to cool it”.

The last metaphor leads to its opposite, a high temper/ature, and to questions about what is perceived as ‘hot’, and how, in the area of emotions and feelings.

347 See the explanation of the term among other ‘silent’ forms of ‘intonation’ in Ch.5.
348 As in the mis-perception of people in court as fluent in English, but unreliable (Lane, 1985:211).
The positive term ‘exciting’ is a false cognate, which corresponds to ‘emozionante’ in Italian, whereas ‘eccitante’ means ‘arousing’, mainly in sexual terms. Which of the two could be labelled ‘cool’, in the widespread slang sense of ‘good’? Are the/se present participles very different from the past forms? To be excited seems more positive than to be aroused, in spite of the parallel Latin / Vernacular etymologies (cf. McArthur, 1998: 188-196). How far would the metaphorical label ‘hot’ apply, and be perceived as positive here? In Italian, ‘eccitato’ would have the un-cool connotations of the English use of ‘emotional’ above, illustrating how both substance and form of affective terms can be risky in trans-cultural communication, where good intentions can lead to outcomes that are embarrassing, or worse.

A feeling for feelings is a crucial factor of safe text practices, and the choice of ABC for ‘affective, behavioural and cognitive’, in that order, aims to highlight the primary importance of the feeling (affect) component in language use, even in contexts that appear dominated by knowing (cognition), such as learning (cf. Laine, 1987). There is a continuum in re/actions, including the behavioural aspect of ‘speech acts’, where mis-matches in the structure and intention of formulae (Clyne, 1985:14) highlight the ‘routine’ nature (in every sense) of most linguacultural de/faults. Consideration of the effects of affects in and on communication extends to attitudes towards language/s and their use(r)s, discussed in the next section, also in relation to aspects of spatial (and social) mobility associated with forms of crossing, and their metaphorical equivalents on the Infobahn (cf. Ch. 7).

**Attitudes**

“Kinship of words” reveals that “*attitude* is a mere corruption of *aptitude*” (Quine, 1987:107). In my experience, the link between linguistic aptitudes and attitudes goes both ways, as inclination and readiness in learning can affect dis/position, as well as vice-versa (cf. Laine, 1987). Personal and social contexts have an impact, as Wiener apparently suffered language anxiety with respect to the high standards set by his father, in spite of being a prodigy (1964), while in general “middle-class speakers are not likely to be penalized for utilizing non-standard … features.” (Hopper, 1986:130).

“How likely is one to suspect that a male’s speech is powerless?” (*ibid.*) is a pointed reminder of a widespread sociolinguistic condition/ing. Efforts to improve equity,

---

349 The technical reference to substances like coffee is far less common.
access and diversity in respect to linguacultures, also related to class and gender, need
to take into account a wide range of aspects, far beyond those noted in the thesis.

Languages themselves, including ‘dialects’, are a crucial source and channel for views
and feelings which can have damaging impacts on people’s self-esteem. \(^{350}\) “Underdog
group members frequently share the full range of negative attitudes toward their own
mother-dialect features.” (ibid., p.132). \(^{351}\) Hopper’s view that “many educational
institutions and most employment interviewers remain little affected by changes from
a ‘deficit’ to a ‘difference’ perspective” (p.128) was expressed half-way between
1970 (date of the first works credited for the change) and the present, but may retain
some validity. He also notes that the problem is defined in terms of text authors (“a
speaking problem”), and the proposed solution is paraphrased below.

In this chapter, consideration of language-related attitudes leads to describing
linguacultural text discrimination as a set of reading habits, \(^{352}\) and supports appeals
for a change in such habits. In searching for safe text, aspects of the set can be
compared to what Hopper calls the shibboleth schema, and some costs can be
associated with it. To practise what is preached (cf. Dodd, 1998:29), an introspective
exercise is added, concerning my own attitudes and affects in areas relevant to
transcultural text safety. In general, my feelings can be described as ambivalent in
many respects, also because my specific positions may depend on the aspect
considered. However, a key element is my outsider status in any linguacultural
context, as I cannot really claim ‘native’ status even in my language, having no
‘mother tongue’.

This personal investigation is also an example that others may follow, regarding
attitudes to text and languagES (plural), including English(es). \(^{353}\) Autoethnographic
exposure aims to highlight the role of circumstances and choices in the development
of linguistic attitudes, as well as behaviour and cognition (related to aptitude).
This chapter also includes examples of unsafe text from long-term memory, which
illustrate the genesis of the thesis research, associated with mobility and diversity.

---


\(^{351}\) The choice of ‘language policy’ in my family may relate to this, and a sort of ‘shibboleth schema’
could be read retrospectively into previous autobiographical comments (cf. Ch. 6).

\(^{352}\) This follows the integration of findings into a heuristic (Hopper, 1986:128), with reference to the
seminar on 18 Nov 2002 at Murdoch and essay on fiction as knowledge by Lorri Neilsen (2002).
Both relate to cyberspace, as the experiential reference for it tends to be spatial mobility, but several aspects are new, including perception of diversity (cf. Part Two). Hence the differences from our various default settings create difficulties on-line, at least until we can settle on equitable ‘rules’ for Infobahn ‘traffic’ and even access.

Language instruction and use, and the overall cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) I knew in various parts of Italy and Europe when growing up, differ from those found in Australia today, yet they did prepare me for life in various parts of the world,354 and do contribute to my appreciation of contemporary conditions, including those found in computer-mediated communication. The context and nature of my early experiences have been formative, as is the case for everyone, and this applies to the position and perception of self and others in respect to linguacultural identity and competence.

The status and attitude of tourists or other visitors relative to the host country (and vice-versa) is different from that of migrants, as is their use of language/s, and my condition in this regard has been privileged and safe, right from the start.355 ‘Visit’ is also the expression used for ‘sites’ in cyberspace, but the person who accesses one or more sites does not change location (cf. Ch. 7). On-line, some of the pressures to follow ‘local’ linguacultural conventions may be comparable to those found off-line, but the host also needs to facilitate access, and my experience and expectations as both ‘local’ and ‘expatriate’ can be readily transferred on to the Infobahn and CMC. Besides comparisons between more and less recent years, the situation in Italy relates to that of other multicultural societies over time, and to trans-cultural communication.

In the mid-twentieth century, Italy was multicultural, mainly in terms of the many varieties of the national language. International migration involved Italians going abroad and returning (even commuting to and from neighbouring countries), and most foreigners coming in were tourists, catered for by signs and staff that communicated in their linguaculture. This relates to the basic rule to ‘sell in the language of the customer’, which is often mentioned in relation to e-commerce, and more generally in terms of globalisation, also as a reminder to complacent (English) monoglots.

353 Another way to indicate this wide-ranging category is to write ‘english’ (cf. Rowland, 1994)
354 I have lived and worked in almost every ‘continent’, a questionable geo-cultural term.
355 See the ‘cool’ comment in Ch.6 and Pasqualini (1994) for aspects of such difference.
The need to get across to foreign visitors texts related to the local linguaculture, mainly for economic reasons, modifies the position of interpreters studied by Sanders (1986), because ‘the customer is always right’, and therefore ignorance tends to be attributed to text authors and/or translators. This attitude is partly reflected in reactions to the previous (and ‘precious’) examples in Ch. 5, where ‘foreign interpreters with maximum ignorance’ disregard local and international languages in order to share a laugh, whereas some domestic examples noted below help focus on implicit knowledge, and on the dynamics of pragmatically unsafe text.

Many of the Travellers’ Tales and other corpora of “Near-English” aim at “getting things done – somehow” (McArthur, 1998:18-22) in business contexts with visitors and outsiders. They often involve food, which is one of the most readily identified areas of cultural difference; this extends to communicative competence across age and gender, as shown in many examples from the “Children’s World” and “Mere Male” (CW and MM) columns of New Idea (NI). Master Four’s choice of ‘quiet peanut butter’ is explained as the opposite of ‘crunchy’, but many other requests are recipes for disaster, leading to practical failures before their text is recognised as unsafe. Blame on the source of incomplete information, and its expectation of competence by the user as de/fault, can lead to conflict, also when text is available in writing, as in the anecdotes below, which have similar titles (“Egg head” and “Pumpkin head”).

Every day I would leave my husband lunch. One day I decided to mix eggs and milk in a plastic bowl, ready for him to make scrambled eggs. I left a note: Heat eggs and put on toast. When I returned home that night I found that the plastic bowl had a hole in it. ‘You didn’t instruct me to tip the mixture into a saucepan,’ MM complained. Helen, Numurkah, V. (NI920516 MM p.92)356

MM decided to try his hand at pumpkin scones. The recipe called for half a cup of mashed pumpkin. Upon hearing a thumping noise coming from the kitchen, I went to investigate and found MM, meat tenderiser in hand, trying to mash uncooked pumpkin. His explanation? ‘The recipe didn’t say you had to cook it first.’ D.M., Townsville, Q. (NI921212 MM p. 51)357


357 As with the leaf in the Book (cf. Ch. 2), a friendlier companion piece can be found. I recall that a child of expatriates from Germany, precociously proficient in English, asked for ‘smashed potatoes’.
Many other cases involve recipes and labels. Spoken advice in “Not half bad” has a doubly negative outcome, with embarrassment through ridicule, besides blame.

While busy cooking the barbecue, MM found that the steak was cooked long before the thick sausages. I suggested he cut them in half so they would cook faster. We all had a laugh when MM’s sausages were served up merely cut in half instead of being sliced horizontally. Of course, MM said it was all my fault for not explaining which way I wanted them dissected.

D.P., Thorneside, Q. (NI970719 MM pp. 80-81)

In each case, the problematic item of code relates to a command, and mis-instructions on handling assorted items can have more dangerous outcomes, as discussed in previous chapters (2 and 5). Linguistic labels used for food can be confusing, even among native English speakers, as shown for an apparently simple and common item like ‘tomato sauce’ (cf. FitzGerald, 1998:48). Within Italy, regional differences apply, but the international diffusion over time of Italian people and dishes further complicates the matter, including the choice and use of tomato products.358

As noted, aspects of my background can be compared with other contexts, including the use of language/s to communicate trans-culturally on the Infobahn. Within the domestic sphere, diglossia in the family required a safe-text approach, and I clearly recall an example about dishwashing, which could apply to a situation of paid work, and be extended to written text with instructions for the use of a machine.

When my mother told me that dishes used for fruit could be cleaned without soap, she added that they were not ‘dirty’ (sporchi), but I recognised the transfer from the dialect word onti, meaning both sporchi and unti (‘dirty’ and ‘greasy’).

If the exchange had been between household help and employer from different regions, the lexical confusion would have cast doubt on the professional competence and hygiene of the dishwasher. Negative stereotypes can be linked to linguistic expressions that differ in regard to agency, as I read about Hispanic domestics in the United States, where transfer would turn ‘dropping a plate’ into ‘a plate falling’ (from one’s hands), leading to negative perception of character, even more than behaviour.

358 Complementary to ‘ketchup’ poured over pasta with pesto by expatriates at the FAO canteen in Rome, ‘braciole’ were served by third-generation migrants in the middle of the USA and made like meatballs, rather than meat chops, as expected by the Italian visitors from another region (and time).
Power differences in such situations mean that responsibility for safe text needs to be associated with authority, and both should promote (meta-)linguistic competence. Hopper finds efforts in the reverse direction futile, and “concrete harm in arguing that underdogs may bootstrap themselves past oppression by talking better” (1986:135):

… certain members of US Blacks try to speak a bit more like Caucasians in order to get ahead. Does this learning really help them much? I say not, because the most biased listeners, the ones they are really trying to accommodate, will be able to find some shibboleth (Hopper, 1986:130-1)

To remain in the North American context, the following version of the Biblical tale (Judges 12, 5-6, as cited by Hopper)\(^{359}\) refers to hearsay dating to the war in Vietnam.

It was so, that when those young men who were evading the draft tried to go over to Canada, the men on the border said unto him, ‘Art thou a draft dodger?’ If he said, Nay; then said they unto him, say now the name of the last letter of the alphabet: and he said ‘Zee’: for he could not change frame to pronounce it ‘Zed’, which counted as right in Canada. Then they took him, and possibly slammed him in jail.

In trans-cultural situations, narrowly ethnocentric views cannot be justified, particularly when a ‘shibboleth schema’ leads to supposedly ‘substantive’ criticism of text, besides personality or intention.\(^{360}\) As repeatedly noted, consequences can be most serious in legal settings (cf. Eades, 1995; Lane, 1985; Pauwels, 1992), where the ‘default’ favours the most powerful groups in several ways. I see this as a problem of equity, access and diversity in communication, and my question about the use of a dominant language, on- and off-line, is ‘who does a favour to whom?’

The question applies at any level of discourse, as a most negative reaction to Foucault (Nola, 1994) appears based on the form of translation/s rather than content of text. Deeply ingrained preferences, based on cultural expectations, make the work of translators even harder, as the processes affecting the interpretation by English-language readers of French (and more generally foreign) philosophers may contribute to the ‘Continental’ divide from Anglo-American schools or traditions.

\(^{359}\) The “New International” version of the original story seems less impressive, but provided me with the correct spelling of ‘Ephraim’, as I had failed to recognise the error in Hopper’s “Ephriamites”.

\(^{360}\) Negative assessment and interaction outcomes are imputed to authors’ defects, rather than to problems in language competence (cf. Neustupný, 1985:54).
There are different conventions about the (linguistic) form of discourse, but such reactions are a major risk in academic settings, where knowledge to be imparted and demonstrated includes mastery of conventions and forms, but also recognition of their arbitrary nature and linguacultural relativity. Spizzica notes “our own misconceptions and ethnocentrism in the evaluation of non-Anglo-Western education” (1997). As the comparison involves Australia and Italy, her aim to modify ‘our’ positions is relevant to my own, particularly since I was born in Padova, seat of a very old University.

The cross-cultural study of written discourse by Clyne (1994) includes “Hedging in texts by English and German-speaking academics” (5.1.1), which could be usefully related to gender-based comparisons, such as Holmes (1985). The latter is critical of stereotypical views, thus confirming a perceptive perspective on the matter.

In recent years, another dialectal mole-hill has generated mountains of hastily-conceived scholarship: ‘dialect differences between men and women’. … these researches have erupted in an age of male-female agitation and political contention. (Hopper, 1986:133)

Hopper also notes that misunderstandings are frequent in “communication among members of a common group, even a family” (p.131), thus supporting the use for this thesis of text-based anecdotes, ranging in contexts from familial and familiar exchanges to ‘far Eastern’ economic and other pursuits (cf. Ch. 3). Whether ‘foreign’ or not, interpreters and authors are at risk of unsafe text, thus the choice of focusing “attention to the resources for communication that cut across the borders of speech and language communities,” down to individual idiolects, can be recommended, as there will be at least two useful results: first, it can be made explicit what is most likely to be lost in communication with outgroup members; second, it can be made explicit what it is necessary to do to make themselves understood in the face of differences in their rules and conventions of expression, and their background knowledge. (Sanders, 1986:137-8)

---

Lyotard discusses conflict between traditions, rather than differend, in paragraph 227, noting that it does not result from a language problem, as any (or every, p.157) language is translatable (or all…are, cf. toute, p.226), yet language differences occasionally contribute to exacerbating conflict. In the thesis, such occasions are acknowledged (cf. Ch. 3, and the final chapter 11), but priority goes to the complementary situations, where linguacultural differences cause differend, and wrong rather than damage (cf. Ch.8). This mechanism may also lead to conflict without other clear motives or ‘reasons’.
In terms of “social attitudes towards outgroup members, and personal relations with them”, Sanders sees “what people must do to communicate and what they are able to accomplish during intergroup contact” as “a key influence” on their formation (137). Thus instances of mis-communication affect perception of ‘mere males’, as well as attitudes revealed in most “Travellers’ Tales”, and power relations affect the above in complex ways, related to the ‘shibboleth schema’ discussed by Hopper (1986). In addition, a criterion applicable to identify ‘feworries’ would relate risk thresholds to the view that “differences need to threaten neither intelligibility nor identity” (p.135). Hopper has a conclusion compatible with safe-text practices, as “the emotions that spark intergroup conflict may come to seem less threatening” when the approach to “problems of intelligibility or value” uses communication called “alignment-talk”.

The invitation is to “try to resolve the problems as they emerge”, and seeing “life’s and communicative difficulties … as ordinary parts of talking”, instead of “blaming members of competing groups” (p.135-6), even indirectly through ridicule. ‘Noblesse oblige’ includes recognition of privileged status, both in ‘mastery’ of the language/s used and in the power of obtaining text in such language/s in almost any situation.

**Lessons**

Searching for safe text focuses on negative impacts of mis-communication, with concern for access and equity, in the contemporary context of linguacultural diversity. The aim of promoting awareness and understanding of what seems (un)acceptable, on- and off-line, includes recognition and rejection of linguistic ‘double standards’. 362

The previous section has considered attitudes to language/s and their use/r/s, and this one looks at the strong emotional and ideological baggage, affecting perceptions and evaluations of language use or text as deviant, deficient or otherwise ‘bad’, which reveals more about the judge than the judged (Andersson & Trudgill, 1992). 363

In searching for safe text, awareness of bias and values (cf. Ch. 1) provides insights into the kinds and degrees of reactions or consequences associated with risky options, to guide the choice of safety levels appropriate for a given type of communication.

362 This includes the many and problematic meanings of the latter term (cf. ch. 5 of McArthur, 1998).

363 In spite of efforts to practice the open-minded acceptance of diversity that I preach, I note how easily I am irritated by many kinds of ‘deviant’ uses (on this term, cf. Rowland, 1994). The expression of this intolerant attitude on my part is a necessary confession, but its explanation would go beyond the thesis.
Below I analyse some aspects of my own response, and suggest ways to deal with their causes and effects, with reference to Hopper (1986) and Goffman (1981).

A first distinction has to do with the (non-)dominant status of the language used and of the groups or individuals using it, as both combine along a range of continua, affecting both inputs and outcomes of (mis-)communication. Equity, access and diversity concerns include the different linguacultural skills related to status (above), and the effects of affective and behavioural elements of interaction, beyond cognitive evaluations, which compound the number of ‘weights and measures’ involved.364

“The ‘standards’ are applied arbitrarily and may be changed. That’s the real meaning of ‘native-like’ competency in a second language or dialect.” (Hopper, 1986:131)

I share the critical and often conservative view expressed by many non-native users, who complain about change, as noted for example by Aitchison (1997) about English, and I think we have reason/s,365 given the unequal requisites of linguistic ‘mastery’.

Our efforts to learn through study and practice should promote us from apprentices to masters in terms of competency, but external acquisition does not allow the kind of ownership, command and control linked to possession, which involves some form of domination. Our investment is devalued by shifts in language use, especially over time, which pull the rug from under the feet of those who have mostly studied rules, coped with exceptions, and often adapted to local versions of sound and spelling.366

I see ‘native’ users as unfairly privileged, since so many elements of the language come ‘natural’ in their culture, yet some lazy, sloppy people, even if well educated, seem to just let anything go, and expect to get away with it, or claim it’s ‘right’.367

Hopper (1986:132) cites Labov (1970)368 as suggesting that “US schoolteachers, who are primary first-hand shibboleth enforcers, use their profession to attain increased

---

364 Here I transfer from the Italian idiom ‘due pesi e due misure’ (‘two weights and two measures’), which specifies the meaning of the equivalent English expression ‘double standards’.

365 In Italian, ‘to have reason’ means ‘to be (in the) right’, as noted in discussing such terms in Ch.4.

366 Variations based on place usually require adjustment (when in Perth, check if it is Scotland or Western Australia). This may cause resentment, mainly if corrections toward the established use switch direction, and spell-checkers on computers are an already noted instance of such irritating switches.

367 Not always knowing the background of each author, it may be unfair to have such reactions, but I believe I am not alone. For me, snobbish claims about being the world’s worst speller reinforce them, and relate to power hierarchies among native users, also linked to earlier forms of text processing.

socio-economic status.” In addition, “people who take this route frequently show strong advocacy of use of dialect forms they have incompletely mastered and also some tendency toward hypercorrection.” This type of language anxiety has cultural equivalents, also affecting newcomers, and the issue is complex and delicate, as there are many ways in which ‘others’ can be damned if they do and damned if they don’t.

One is asked to do on purpose something normally done by accident. Even without double-standards for enforcement and biased learning opportunities, the underdog faces a double bind. (1986:135)

Hopper’s conclusion is that both listeners and speakers create ‘dialect’ differences, and problems related to intergroup hostility must be treated as issues of interpretation, not just on the level of enforcing so-called standard varieties (1986:134). However, the latter are the reference for the two main kinds of “doesn’t know better” faults, called by Goffman ‘boners’ and ‘gaffes’, which relate to the thesis labels of ‘matters of fact, face and manners’, and relevant in terms of transfers, access and equity. While gaffes are “unintended and unknowing breaches” of “some norm of ‘good’ conduct”, boners are “evidence of some failing in the intellectual grasp and achievement”, below the requirements of certain “circles” (Goffman, 1981: 209-10), and include language use (cf. also Ch.6). To what extent are these matters of ‘fact’?

The illusion of language ‘rules’ as facts rather than patterns is also linked to language anxiety, and thus matters of face, affect and behaviour are more important here than cognitive efforts. These aspects of un/safe text are emphasised in the dissertation.

Attitudes and ‘fetishism’ about language include values and “notions of ‘proper’ English” (or any other language). Given the “shaming power of prestigeful speech” (ibid.), matters of manners appear involved, but in a perverse direction, by making marginality and disadvantage appear ‘offensive’, which is opposed by Hopper:

369 My view of ‘primary first-hand’ as redundant may confirm this. See Ch. 1 about ‘assymetry’ (sic), where the misplaced double consonants have (in my perception), a pseudo-etymological effect of a measurement (-metry) of the quality (-y) associated with the initial word (ass-). The issue of locally applicable conventions would only concern the meaning of the first three letters, which are unflattering on either side of the Atlantic, and I find humour in a ‘stupidity measure’. Or is the joke on me?

370 While ‘gaffe’ seems an internationally recognised term, at least in English and Italian, ‘boner’ is a more limited slang term. Johansen (1988) glosses it as “1. a glaring mistake 2. an erection of the penis”.

One is sometimes asked to view the underdog as somewhat deficient or disadvantaged in language behaviour. ... To call the underdog’s code defective or useless is a species of blaming the victim, of scapegoating. (1986:132)

Like Hopper (ibid.), “I prefer to view underdogs as interpretively oppressed rather than as linguistically different or deficient.” Reactions to oppression vary, but risks remain. Moral issues relate to covering or passing, in turn linked to perceptions of difference from one side as deficit, incurring stigma, and from the other as privilege,372 eliciting imitation, for example through ‘malapropisms’, very frequent sources of unsafe text.

Goffman considers “the ‘incorrect’ use of a word (especially a ‘long’ one carrying tacit claims to the user’s learnedness” (1981: 209-10) as an extreme case of vulnerability to criticism, but the thesis includes at least one case where the critic also displays linguistic ignorance of ‘hyster-’ words (cf. Ch.11). Besides phonetic similarity (cf. note in Ch.4), a more complex point in such use is “the impression that the speaker is attempting to rise above his (sic) lexical station”, as failure appears thus doubly criticised (p.210, note 6). This extends to malapropistic interpreting, i.e., a “reply that patently indicates a failure to understand ... a ‘difficult’ word” (p.210).

Nationwide schooling and media-inspired sophistication have given such faults a coercive force in wide populations, in the sense that almost anyone breaching the standards in question can be made to feel ashamed for having done so. (p.210)

The remedy is “to ask candidly for clarification” (p.210, note.7), suitable in searching for safe text. While authors cannot recognise their own error/s, in some cases a precise identification, ‘proof’ and explanation may require linguistic specialists.

The issues are clearer in respect to gaffes, which involve “indiscretion, tactlessness, indelicacy, irreverence, immodesty, intrusiveness etc.” However, although “the rules of politeness function for speech and action alike”,373 the forms considered acceptable

372 Hopper (1986: 134) lists persons with polarized language attitude. In the favoured group, language teachers are joined by those who feel most threatened by competition from underdogs. In the latter group, some strongly identify with the non-standard variant, and see limited opportunity to enter the favoured group, which result in speech divergence, rather than the attempted imitation noted above.

vary between cultures, as illustrated *i.a.* by discussion of directness (cf. Ch.10), and
customs of written texts, specifically for academic purposes, can diverge widely.

Returning to malapropisms, the label used in English for this type of lexical
substitution is related to several aspects of unsafe text. It is specifically ‘ludicrous’
(COD), comes from ‘malapropos’, which applies more generally to anything
inopportune said, done or happening, and apparently refers to a comic character in a
play (Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan’s *Rivals*). This ancestry confirms the entertainment
value of unsafe text, since if it did not exist, it would have to be invented, as a vital
ingredient in a wide range of artistic creations. The importance and prestige of French
in European society also plays a role in the choice of term, as unsuccessful attempts to
follow lexical fashions are recognised and commented on by those ‘in the know’,
usually from privileged (and presumably polyglot) groups.

Comparable failures often involve terms of Latin or Greek origin, found in technical
and educational contexts, where incomplete mastery leads to anxiety among
apprentices and newcomers, who are often apologetic about their de/faults.
Paradoxically, ‘pardon my French’ is an apology for inappropriate expressions,
reflecting a doubly uncomplimentary perception of diversity (cf. Ch.6). I had literally
interpreted the idiom as apologising for ‘bad’ or linguistically inadequate language,
most innocently applying it to the imperfect use of French for interaction or
interjection. Otherwise, ‘French’ would require apologies as a foreign intrusion,
caused by inadequacy in the common language, in this case English, seen as the
standard and enforced as default, regardless of the participants’ background.

In my view, the apologies could extend x-phemistically to other offensive text, as ‘my
/the French’ would leave others out, which is considered impolite. Concern about
including everyone present in any text exchange is the open justification for objecting
to the use of any language not shared by all potential participants in communication, a
‘rule’ apparently related to the fear of ‘bad’ things being communicated over one’s
head, which is as bad or worse than having it happen *in absentia*, behind one’s

---

374 “Pardon my French” appears as “a guyed apology that is probably more stereotyped in its unserious
ironic form than in the literal”, when it follows “*Waltzes Noble* and *Sentimental*”. As both adjectives
appear identical in French and English, this “translation played straight” could just be ‘Anglicization’.

375 I am not aware of equivalent idioms in other languages, as in the situation described, people would
apologise in terms appropriate to the specific circumstance, possibly adding reasons for the choice.
back. This risk of difficulties in interaction, associated with differences in linguistic access, has affective, behavioural and cognitive components relevant to safe text.

Both failure to communicate and offensive messages, even if only feared as potential, are socially undesirable outcomes of text use. The safety rating of the first can be around zero, as text yields no communicative result, but in the second case there can be a negative value that undermines interaction. This is increased by a sense of inadequacy for not knowing the language, or not ‘getting’ at least the gist of the text. Cultural and personal diversity in such aspects as uncertainty avoidance, power distance, self-esteem and linguacultural anxiety also affect the outcomes.

There can be many (cross-)cultural reasons why anything French would appear ‘naughty’, and vice-versa, to the English and other non-Gallic or ‘Frank’ peoples. For me, French was the first foreign language, and is unforgettable like a first love. Remote recollections of ‘unsafe text’ warnings stand out most vividly after many decades, confirming my thesis and approach concerning awareness of risks.

Friends told me about a taboo French word resembling an Italian one, though neither sounds nor functions matched, while a teacher related first-hand the experience of a problem caused by a false cognate. The word did not have the usual Latin origin, but came from the North, and in the process the sound had skidded in two different directions. To say ‘I am going to ski’, my teacher naïvely produced a sibilant version of the verb ‘skier’, transforming it into another, with the literal sense of a (taboo) bodily function, and figurative uses referring to assorted unpleasantness.

‘Innocents abroad’ could also describe a comparable episode, where the unsafe text could have been in writing, for example in a school report or letter in French, and is apparently “a classic” (comment by M-E. Ritz, 2002). The use of ‘je suis pleine’,

---

376 A third option is to keep risky messages below the detection threshold, with small print as the text-only equivalents of whispers. Other means include obfuscating syntax and unfamiliar lexicon, with the possible advantage of discouraging reactions for fear of malapropism. Encryption is a related issue, linked to various stages and aspects of computer development, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

377 Safety risks refer to unintended negative outcomes, excluding deliberate use of incomprehensible forms of the shared language, as in the previous note. A request for clearer forms is a protective measure, also to prevent malapropistic hearing, but power differences may discourage it. The Roman idiom ‘parla come magni’ (‘speak like you eat-a’) brings pompously unclear authors down to earth.

378 The image of ‘slippery slopes’ would suit the original Alpine context, but in Australia the idiom resembles a racial slur (from ‘slope-eyed’), with the added offence of moral criticism in the adjective.

379 She said “je vais chier” (more like ‘sheer’ than ‘cheer’), that is “I am going to sh*t”.
which means ‘I am pregnant’ rather than ‘full’, fits the context of refusing more food at the end of a meal, thus shocked the French family hosting an Australian schoolgirl. Here prominent factors are attitudes and emotions regarding behaviour, rather than knowledge or cognition, and the undesirable outcome is embarrassment associated with a re/action which appears out of place in some way, affecting all sides involved. Through a linguistic misunderstanding, the girl was both ‘wrong’ and ‘wronged’. These French examples put ‘the shoe on the other foot’, and can help all sides to recognise the risks of unsafe text by innocent, non-native users of the language of interaction, since all should be ready to acknowledge and accommodate disparities and limits in linguistic proficiency. The above cases also refer to the body, a major source of taboos and x-phemisms, so it is appropriate to focus on body and mind in searching for safe text, as illustrated in other chapters, particularly the next.

With an organic metaphor, we may compare the effects of text components on our mind, and hence on communication, with those of chemical components on our body and life. We are mostly made of water, cannot live without it, and ‘bad’ water can be bad for us, but we are neither water containers nor water filters, although our bodies perform to some extent comparable functions. ‘Bad’ water can be a metaphor for ‘bad’ language use, in every sense of the term, by any participant, and the qualitative judgment has to be related to text outcomes, noting that negative perceptions affect human interaction, even more than in the case of psychosomatic ailments. While pure water is more easily identifiable than ‘pure’ language, in each case additions are not necessarily ‘pollution’, as they may well be safe, and even serve vital purposes. Yet most users rely on their own taste rather than a thorough analysis of what is presented, and in general it is easier for people to accept what they can expect and find ‘normal’.

Considering others as unavoidably different from us in terms of linguacultural background, and thus use of language/s, is a ‘safe’ option (cf. Ch.6). This feature of individuals can be compared to genetic diversity (based on ‘nature’, as organically present form birth), as well as to developmental differentiation based on nurture (or environment / context). The resulting pervasive heteroglossia, seen as a multiplicity of

380 When the group leader was called and managed to sort out the problem, the student sobbed ‘but you told us to always speak French!’ (E.S., personal communication, 2002).

381 The ‘mind’ is our personalised brain, where connections have been established on the basis of our own personal life. (Cf. Greenfield, 2002).
options and combinations within and across individuals, coexists with ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ similarities in language as function and in languages as its forms. These allow communication, but also mis-communication, often through careless assumptions of identity between the perceptions of authors and interpreters.

The next chapter provides illustrations of further kinds of interaction difficulties involving differences in linguacultural default settings, again ranging from values in discourse to superficial distortions and translation problems (as in Ch. 2), but focusing on matters of manners and face, specifically in relation to the kinds of criticism or sanctions (rather than f/actual negative outcomes such as death) that are associated with unsafe text use. A crucial aspect, reiterated in the dissertation, is that anyone is at risk of faux pas, including critics of other people’s shortcomings, and thus attitudes towards diversity need to be cooperative instead of censorious. More details on positive steps to safe/r text are provided in the last chapter, ‘Way out’.
Chapter 10     Sanctions

The headings chosen for Part Three, “Tracking”, and for chapter 9, “Crossings”, refer to metaphors of space and movement, in relation to “Suspects” like those considered in chapter 8. The overall aim is to ‘sort (out)’ problems associated with unsafe text, also recognising the range closest to the thesis focus. As the latter is on the unintended outcomes of linguacultural diversity, with a priority concern for equity and access, it is important to note the partial overlap with discriminatory language, from various points of view. As discussed in the previous chapter, attitudes include bias based on linguacultural features, and the labelling of linguistic variants seen as ‘sub-’ or ‘non-standard’ often leads to more disparaging terms, applied even by their users, and further influencing negative (self-) perception.

In addition to language-related labels, there are many stereotypes that can be offensive to people culturally and linguistically different from the speakers, and therefore safe text may also help reduce the incidence of such ethnocentric blunders, including cases where novices or learners may naïvely follow the example of supposed experts. A continuum is involved here, with degrees of competence, consciousness, diversity and power, and there are borderline cases, especially in trans-cultural settings. Critical awareness of sensitive areas of linguistic use, here promoted as a safe text practice, can extend to issues related to discriminatory language.

Recommendations for remedial, preventive or proventive action are not intended as prescriptions or proscriptions, but as approaches to awareness and control in situations of potential danger. For example, the phrase ‘what did I say’ can involve a range of tones, and asking the question plainly and openly can be a step to repairing mistakes. The perception of text as unsafe, like that of superficial errors, is very difficult for authors, who project their own intended meaning. In the case of discriminatory language, authors fail to see the negative bias built in their well-intentioned position, and the principle of ‘noblesse oblige’ should be applied, through monitoring of tainted forms, particularly when preaching their avoidance.

---

382 An example concerns sexist forms, studied across languages by Pauwels (1998).
383 In the absence of intonation, written text requires additional words to clarify the intended meaning.
384 As noted by Iain Walker (p.c., 2002) in the context of a research on prejudice, with the example of ‘protective’ attitudes towards women, displayed in the Victorian era by men who felt ‘superior’.
A notable example of looking at the speck in the other’s eye, without considering the plank in one’s own eye (cf. Matthew 7:1-5) comes from a Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and provides a fitting companion piece to the Polish gaffe by a Minister for Ethnic Affairs, discussed in Ch. 8 among the suspects in the GOG case. To illustrate how “changes ... in our society ... need to be recognised and reflected in our language”, Peter Vaughan (1991:iii) states

Women are marrying and bearing children later, and increasingly have only a temporary absence from the workforce while their children are very young.

To me, the comment implies that all women do the above, and thus the Foreword contradicts one of the points in the same AGPS publication (Pauwels, 1991:9):

For example, the continual stereotyping of women as primarily ‘wives’ and ‘mothers’ slows down their recognition as individuals in their own right.

A more acceptable version, in my view, would be “women who marry and bear children tend to do so later, and to have…”, with a relative pronoun and phrase, and a modifying verb, as hedges to the statement. Was there an editor? If so, did the latter not notice the gender issue? Was it an oversight, or a problem of institutional power?

“Experiencing discrimination on a regular basis is a sad fact of life for many people around the world” (Pauwels, 1991.ix). The Director of OMA may never have been subjected to discrimination, nor see himself as the author of discrimination, through authoritative text that supposedly encouraged non-discriminatory language. World-wide, how many people with (potential) access to the Infobahn are in any of the above conditions? On-line, what could be (to quote again Vaughan, 1991:iv) the “sanction of the law that can be called upon to enforce non-discriminatory practices”?

The term ‘sanction’ itself is an example of extreme ambiguity, as it can be positive or negative, always in relation to serious actions and powerful authorities. Safe text practices rely on intra-and inter-personal monitoring and clarification, rather than ‘force’ or ‘law’, but the dynamics of interaction need to be acknowledged, in view of improving equity in communicative outcomes, as well as access and diversity.

385 In Ch. XII of PEL, Freud provides introspective evidence that is unavoidably one-sided, attributing a mistake to a coachman, whereas in Ch. II he helps analyse ‘forgetting’ by someone of his own class.

386 Quine (1987: 52) includes it, along with “enjoin: 1. order, 2. forbid”, among several cases for the identity of opposites, discussed in Quiddities under “etymology” (pp.49-53).
While discriminatory use can be evaluated in relation to a specific ideology, mainly affecting groups, as noted, there is a more general category of offensive language, open and flexible in terms of idiolects and backgrounds. Given the relativity of socio-cultural perceptions, just like beauty is in the eye of the beholder, here offence is in the mind of the interpreter, and outcomes are evaluated on the basis of reactions.387

Authors who inadvertently offend need to learn about the unsafe elements of their text, and can be given the benefit of doubt by interpreters. The latter should provide explanations of possible differences before giving an openly negative response, as it could be unjustified, not only in cases where acceptable text was misperceived, but even where it was unintentionally mis-produced. The severity of problems, and of judgment by observers, should be commensurate to the relative ‘mastery’ of the linguacultural conventions in use, as in the case of sexism noted above.

This reiterates the universal condition of vulnerability to unsafe text, as nobody is perfect, but anyone could be correct/ed, depending on the background of participants and of the text itself. The relativity of ‘rules’, conventions and manners in text use extends from superficial and pernicious shibboleths to deeper problems of text intelligibility, and more importantly of value, involving communicative behaviour and affecting emotions, as noted.388 Frank language is discussed next, to illustrate issues of linguacultural differences, branching widely from deep and hidden roots.

“To be Frank (or Colin) is laughable. Really ridiculous. Stupid even.” (O'Donovan, 2002).389 This is not presented here as an example of unsafe text, but aims to introduce a risky language type. What is involved in being frank, or Frank? The pun involving a personal name remains proper, and even acts as ‘hedge’ in relation to criticism that may appear ‘unpalatable’.390 Italian offers a close match to this word-play, and a range of related words can be found in translation/s, with surprising relevance to issues of equity, access, diversity, power, language and ethnicity.

387 The use of offensive terms should be separated from Hopper’s “shibboleth schema” (1986:129), about language forms seen as ‘wrong’, defined as “a set of listening habits involving the use of communication patterns for social discrimination”, and repeatedly discussed in this thesis.

388 See references to Hopper (1986:135-6) in Ch.9 under ‘Attitudes’, with mention of conflict and threat.

389 The citation is a sub-heading following the title of a show, Bruiser, reviewed under the title “Pack a punch”, and the reviewer does not pull any punches. Australian comedians participating in a Fringe festival can be expected to ‘take it on the chin’, to continue the boxing metaphors.

From my years in Italy, when I was part of the “children’s world”, I recall being confused by the feminine adjective ‘franca’, same as the female name. This word is also commonly used in (and for) English, in an expression relevant to transcultural communication. Are the various forms and uses of the word/s related? How? Their review leads to the crucial research question: which text is safe, and for whom?

I was surprised by the complex geo-social history, as ‘lingua franca’ originally meant ‘Frankish language’ (McArthur, 1998:168), and only consultation of several reference works convinced me that the derivation of meanings was the reverse of what I knew about Thailand, ‘land of the free’. Frankly, I was not convinced by sequences of links involving the low Latin francus, free, but apparently “only Franks had full freedom in Frankish Gaul” (NOD). In an Italian dictionary, ‘Lingua franca’ appears twice, first as Frankish language, then as “a mixture of Italian, Spanish, Arabic and grammatically simplified, used for many centuries by European, Arabs and Turks in the eastern Mediterranean trade” (Zingarelli, 1970). Thus awareness of the origin of ‘lingua franca’ can help recognise several feature of the current use of English, from the name based on powerful rulers, to its lasting impact on forms of language, far beyond the ruled areas, including the changes and variations involved.391

The original puzzle of why I should speak under another name (Franca) leads back to the question of who can say what, and how. How far is ‘frank language’ culturally acceptable? Within the English-speaking world, is “speech or writing” expected to be “open, honest and direct” (Pearsall, 1998, abbreviated as NOD, cf. earlier note).

As for most questions of this nature, the answer ‘depends’ (starts, or is, ‘it depends’). Heteroglossia is one of the factors, ranging from broad geo-cultural differences between groups, to situational variations affecting individual re/actions, and in each case, acceptability is rarely dichotomous, but can be evaluated along a continuum, involving affective and behavioural components, far more than cognitive ones.

The common phrase ‘it is not what you say, but how you say it’ applies, beyond paralinguistic and non-verbal components of spoken communication, to linguistic choices in verbal expression, including written text, as in the following example.

391 Such issues are noted in detail by (McArthur, 1998) and summarised by Trudgill (1995:155 ff.). Similarities can be expected online, through transfers from many linguacultural backgrounds. In the extreme, cf. the semi-serious proposal for Europanto, a new language for the new Europe, which is available online http://www.neuropeans.com/topic/europanto/, and originates in the EU.
In an international and multi-organisational bureaucratic context, my hierarchical superior expressed frank views in a very direct letter. To defend them, I suggested to the British recipient that Australians had a reputation for fairness, and the reply was “yes, they call a spade a bloody shovel”, a (stereo) typical contrast between word use seen as appropriately frank, highlighting the difference that such a choice can make.

The above shows how directness appears at the lexical level, and can be affected by transfers of various types. This applies specifically to x-phemisms, from ‘kind words’ to ‘words apart’, mainly as a matter of manners or ‘face’, but in some cases the chosen expressions are so far from open that mis-communication affects matters of fact.\(^{392}\) The issue of in/direct forms in cross-cultural communication is often discussed, mainly regarding syntax and discourse, in various meanings of the latter term.\(^{393}\)

A direct linguistic demonstration of linguacultural default settings is the symmetry in the Chinese and Anglo perception of the other’s discourse as a spiral that goes around in circles (Pennycook, 1998:160-1), in contrast to one’s own direct line.\(^{394}\) Who can see what pattern through this written text, describing Kaplan’s diagrams for various linguacultures? Trompenaars (1993) reconciles the apparent contrast by adding a crucial variable, with directional arrows that show how circles can widen out of a centre, or close in towards it, and marks the relation between context and ‘point’.

As an outsider to the culture and conventions of academic English, who is inclined to hyperthinking (Voysey, 1998) rather than linear thinking, I am not at home with the latter notion. I see the ‘straight line’ idiom and image as a largely idealised default, since ‘getting straight to the point’ is not common (as far as I can perceive the difference from my own approach), yet the term appears to embody a cultural value and virtue like being ‘frank’, as ‘straight’ is also opposed to ‘bent’ or ‘crooked’.

---

\(^{392}\) Keesing (1982:47-8) shows how “Familyspeak” varies, and a child can end up “in a puddle”. Items in single quotes refer to the titles of Neaman, J. S., & Silver, C. G. (1990) and Green, J. (1996).

\(^{393}\) For example, “Be direct” is the first strategy under 5.4, “Negative politeness” for Brown & Levinson (1990); “learn when to be direct and indirect” is a point in Dodd (1998), with advice on English usage; chapter 2. of Fox (1994:12-28) is titled “Worldwide strategies for indirection”, and nearly every chapter of Dunung (1995) states that the people in question “do not like to say ‘No’ directly” (p.72; cf. 31-32, 315, 414, 458, 507, 534, 582), offering alternative forms.

\(^{394}\) Default settings, including paths in space, are often perceived as ‘straight lines’, as demonstrated by many frustrating directions to go ‘straight ahead, you can’t go wrong’. In Venice, a safer formula apparently recommends following ‘the worn-out stones’, to reach the most common destination.
I agree with the Chinese criticism of the expected circular repetition, from topic sentence to conclusion, summarised in the folksy “tell ’em what you’re gonna tell ’em, tell ’em, tell ’em what you told ’em”, and with the comment by an insider:

> This tendency to explain everything, to make points and transitions and beginnings and endings obvious is not, then, a natural feature of “good writing.” (Fox, 1994:20)

Whether obvious explanations by authors are seen as good, or as an insult to the intelligence of the interpreter, depends on many aspects of interaction. A safe text approach would ensure that supportive options can be requested and made readily available, when needed and appreciated, without disparagement or despair for their absence. Conversely, obvious text options that appear obnoxious or stupid could be mandatory for safety reasons, which take priority over style (cf. Chs 4 and 11).

Beyond linearity, values like openness and honesty are subject to deep-seated bias in perspective, comparable to the differential perception of who is a freedom fighter (like my group), a guerrilla (like your group) or a terrorist (like their group). At a more cooperative level of international relations, an episode involving Australians as the offended party shows how linguacultural default settings cannot be overcome, even in order to point out their differences. The true story below “illustrates how subtle and tricky conventions about politeness are to negotiate across cultures” and offers a “clear-cut case of communication at cross-purposes” (Gallois & Callan, 1997:12-13).

Paul, a Dutchman and fluent English speaker, was sojourning in Australia. He was in demand, but often in trouble, for showing “no consideration for anybody’s feelings” when he said exactly what he thought. He meant to be helpful, but Australians found him rude, and his colleague Jane, who was aware of the preference for more direct speech in Dutch than in Australian English, tried to tell him, but couched her negative comments in a lot of qualification and softening. Their dialogue has been re-transcribed from the printed source in the form of an e-mail, a likely alternative in work-related settings, where linguistic style would also have been similar to talk.

---

395 This dissertation doubts that anything linguacultural can be called ‘natural’, and I see its use in the precious => previous quotation as a tongue-in-cheek comment (note the mark for error => correction).
396 Since I used the example in 1996 (paper on names of the enemy, for the Diploma in Conflict Resolution), I see no reason to leave it out after ‘September eleven’ of 2001. As mentioned on the first anniversary (SBS radio, Italian programme), and shown in the Ken Loach segment of the film “11’09’01”, events on the same date in the year 1973 are still remembered, even beyond Chile and Chileans.
From Jane to Paul:
Australians sometimes have rather bad stereotypes about Dutch people, thinking they are rude because they always say exactly what they think - they don’t soften anything down to take account of other people’s feelings. It’s amazing how rude and inconsiderate Aussies think Dutch people are as a result.

From Paul to Jane:
That’s absolutely fascinating - I wonder why they think that.

The source comments that for Jane, being more direct “would have been too rude”, but her polite style, criticising Paul in a very indirect way, meant that he did not recognise the point of the story at all. Thus the attempt to fix the problem “left Jane frustrated and Paul none the wiser – and the stereotypes each held of the other’s culture were only confirmed.” (Gallois & Callan, 1997:13)

The affective and behavioural choice of ‘softening’ text, in view of other people’s feelings, complements the more cognitive aspect of impersonal academic discourse. “Every time I got the thoughts that were natural to me, I had to look for other ones” (Fox, 1994:18) is the comment by one Chilean graduate student on attempts to “go straight to the point”, seen as self-aggression, and appears compatible with Jane’s. The same U.S.A. source has several comments by or about “World Majority” students and their writing, which illustrate factors like “no appreciation here of exaggeration for effect … a very literal culture”(p.6), “the importance of digression in saying everything that needs to be said” (p.8), “subtlety and feeling … proof and specific examples” (p.10). Ch. 2 of that book is about “indirection”, and includes episodes where “simple politeness … requires that he not insult my intelligence by telling me directly what I could figure out for myself” (p. 13), while in the eyes of another student, it is the author who assumes “that the reader has all the knowledge” (p.19). Ch.1 is titled ‘Frustrations’, a mutually relevant affect, and closes with:

because of our country’s long history of ethnocentrism and racism, students may be insulted when we bring up the subject of “difference”, for which they read “deficiency”. We have to tread carefully. But we do have to understand. (Fox, 1994: 10-11)

Feelings and behaviour include “respect for the reader or listener” and sparing them “possible embarrassment or rejection”, in conversation or in academic con/texts.
There is a continuum of relevance of each ‘ABC’ factor in various contexts and types of interaction. The discussion of ‘frank language’, in the sense of “open and unreserved…; candid or outspoken; sincere” or even “undisguised; avowed; downright” (M3), relates to the use of English as lingua franca (see for example McArthur, 1998:42) and to searching for safe text in at least two ways.\(^{397}\)

- Users of English for trans-cultural communication should be prepared to deal with a range of conventions regarding the acceptable level and form of frankness.

- Freedom of expression is associated with status and power, and the perception of one’s own de/fault is limited, particularly when privilege is involved.\(^{398}\)

The choice of language for interaction, including adaptation in communication, is similarly related to rank, not just between and among individual participants but also their respective linguacultures. This bias can go further, limiting intercourse (in the general sense)\(^{399}\) to people linguistically compatible, denying recognition to others.\(^{400}\)

Such problem of access and equity can be illustrated with the following two examples, involving situations of symmetrical seriousness (in both outcome and context) and potential frequency, from ‘X slept with one, X slept with another / as long as they spoke English, it really didn’t matter’ to ‘Anyone been raped and speaks English?’ The source of this multi-layered criticism of the former ‘discriminating’ attitude is uncertain,\(^{401}\) but documents about the latter (cf. Pennycook, 1994: 3) show that even native English-speakers are capable of seeing de/faul ts of their own.

The apparent use of such ‘bad language’ as x-phemisms, or rude expressions,\(^{402}\) can derive from transfers or errors that modify linguistic forms with unintended effects.

\(^{397}\) This is a deliberate effort to provide a structured set of signposts and links, following Anglo ‘rules’.

\(^{398}\) This is deliberately ambiguous: privilege promotes disregard, and is disregarded as default setting.

\(^{399}\) Cf. use of the term to translate “verkehr: communication, system of exchange” (Hodge & Kress, 1988:2) in Marx. I would translate Verkehr as transport or traffic, linked to transfers and the Infobahn. When referring to verbal (i.e. textual) intercourse, I specify that it can be written as well as oral (honi soit qui mal y pense, shame to those who think ill, but I know that a dirty mind is a joy forever).

\(^{400}\) My relatively recent introspection about ‘Language(s) of Empire(s)’ has led to discussion of the issue in the context of African studies and post-coloniality, in a perspective compatible and complementary to the ‘Latin analogy’ pursued by McArthur (1998: 180-196) and noted by many.

\(^{401}\) My gender-neutralised version comes from a song in a LP record, ‘Quiet days in Clichy’, which I recall hearing in Copenhagen in 1970. It was possibly linked to a film version of Henry Miller’s book and life as an American in Paris in the 1930s, thus semi-fiction could involve auto-ethnography.

\(^{402}\) The specific category of coarse words, and other types of taboo, could be the object of specific coursework in searching for safe text, as discussed also in relation to electronic text control (Ch.7).
Mis-matches between verbal form and meaning of colloquialisms, beyond their level of acceptability in various contexts, can negatively affect everyday interactions. This is confirmed by comparisons between the slang of different English-speaking countries, and Web sites can help not only understand unfamiliar terms, but also avoid familiar ones that shift meaning in uncomfortable directions (cf. Goeldner, 1998).

Migrants striving to integrate may misinterpret local idioms, as in “You think I know f*** nothing, but I know f*** all”, and other ridiculous utterances. Here the intended use of strong or coarse language results in a ‘funny’ failure, a ‘bad’ outcome for the author, reinforcing the perception of incompetence, and possibly fuelling conflict. More seriously distressing are situations where rude terms are the unintended outcome of transfer, sometimes in both production and perception. The Italian ‘basta!’ (‘enough’) sounds too similar to an English word, very commonly and confusingly used in Australia, and reports of problems are numerous and varied in outcome. In Dutch, a child called ‘de bakker is hier’ to signal ‘the baker is here’, but the latter thought he was being called ‘bugger’, as the other words uttered were close homophones of their English cognates. A different and complementary mechanism involves the innocent repetition of a rude but common expression by a migrant mother describing her child’s ailing condition, as noted in the early twentieth century by an Italian journalist in Queensland (Sacchi, 1925 in Andreoni & Rando, 1973:376).

Ignorance or doubt about the authors’ intention can be a problem for interpreters, sooner or later. In one memoir, a migrant woman recalls the shock of recognising the offensive meaning of certain words, long after hearing them used in her (dis)respect. This is a serious abuse of the imbalance in ‘mastery’ of the language of interaction, which explains the widespread objection to the use of languages not understood by all participants, discussed in the previous chapter from the dominant side. Conditions online should lessen the temptation to use ‘bad language’ with the assumption of ignorance on the other side, as the disadvantaged party can more easily obtain help, to ensure understanding before replying. In many types of CMC, other competent interpreters are likely to access the text, and can censor it or express their censure.

---

403 The ‘logical’ contrast negative/positive fails, as the rude ‘f*** all’ is synonymous with ‘nothing’. The case is possibly apocryphal, but I saw it attributed to a Hollywood professional from Eastern Europe. Successful expression in social interaction with peers, including witty and osé text choices, is important for self-esteem, as powerfully illustrated by Eva Hoffman (1990).
Samples
Anecdotes often involve ‘funny’ text, which can be humorous, peculiar, or both. Their humour can aim at simple ‘fun’ as amusement, but may include ‘making fun’ of incompetent authors or interpreters, and even teach a lesson. Who or what is fun made of, how and why? In this research, the focus is on messages that illustrate types of problems in communication. Unsafe text has negative outcomes that involve affective responses, and the thesis aims to combine linguistic aspects more easily recognisable, from surface features of performance to implicit background knowledge and competence, with consideration of deeper or less obvious causes and effects of text.404

This section provides several samples, going beyond the two main corpora, in order to illustrate the points about emotions and attitudes, lessons and sanctions involved in potentially unsafe text use, made in this chapter and the previous one.

Variations in matters of manners and face, and in some matters of fact coded in text form, could be compared with matters of taste, where there should be no dispute.405

Many examples of unsafe text relate to food items, where linguacultural diversity becomes obvious, and our perceptions of what is acceptable ‘input’ lead to strong and immediate responses, also exploited for humour. My gut reaction to mis-spellings like ‘leak soup’ goes beyond a dislike for onions, but a fun/ny use of the homophony appears in “Checkout cheek” at the supermarket, where “we noticed a young man in a chef’s uniform, carrying a single vegetable in a plastic bag. Gleefully, my husband said, ‘Look at him, he only came in for a leek!’ Sheila Gillingham, Broadbeach, Q.”406

Additional examples respond in various ways to one of the few remaining taboos, and types of linguistic input bear no specific relation to their common outcome, as all are associated with the same substantive element of risky text. Who is on the food list?407

404 See Ch. 4 for comments on Wit/z, related to the discussion of PEL. Other authors on the topic include Mulkay (1988)and Davies (1998); see also Koestler (1976, mainly Part One: the jester).

405 The Latin ‘de gustibus non est disputandum’ expresses this mutual acceptance of diversity. See also the philosophical considerations on aesthetic judgment in Lyotard (Notice Kant 4, para 5, 241-2)

406 This ‘mere male’ (NI990731 MM p. 95) can use his head and play with food-related words, unlike many others. Deeper feelings appear stirred by items like the label ‘Teste bites’ on a packet of savoury gram, as the reader who found it in Sri Lanka said “Must hurt someone to make these”. Vittachi credits David van Eyck, under the heading “TESTELESS” (TT 0009_28/p86tales).

407 ‘Lista’ was commonly used for ‘menu’ in Italy, but the English expression ‘food list’ is adapted from ‘wine list’, prompting associations with ‘hit list’. I analysed the linguistic source of problems in many tales like the following ones, and found that grapho-phonetic troubles contribute to various forms of potential confusion, mainly in vocabulary aspects, and also involving syntax and morphology.
Items like “‘Live’ Australian Rock Lobsters” and “Roasted Banker and Cream Sauce” elicit such headings and comments as “GIZZARD OF OZ: Cannibalism is alive and well” (TT 9904_08/p34tales), and “FAT AND SUCCULENT: … I hope that this is the beginning of a trend” (TT 9909_30/p30tales) respectively. There are more, and word-processing, on- or off line, appears responsible for most cases, including “WAITING FOR TROUBLE: Dish on offer at Lovina Beach, Bali, spotted by Elizabeth Boesen: ‘Grilled Maitre d’Hotel.’” (TT 0002_24/p31tales).

Further tales involve unusual and un/attractive ingredients, such as “DISHES WITH DISHES”. The unusual nature of the attractions at this restaurant in Herne Bay, Britain, with “friendly food, tasty staff, bandstand”, could be an apparent spoonerism involving whole words, an advanced form of English humour, or just accidental.408 A different context and content includes the same adjective: “INDIGENOUS CUISINE: This unusual dish is from … the Maldives.” (TT 0103_22/p066tales). The multilingual and multicultural menu has “Salad and snacks Yam Ma Kheua Yao Herbed salad of grilled aborigine (Indonesian)”. Although the process of distortion, presumably from ‘aubergine’, is similar to that of ‘chicken’ into ‘children’,409 the outcome and context adds disturbing overtones, related to other anecdotes. There is a country of origin, which may refer to the dish or its supposed ingredient, but the latter term is most often used in reference to the indigenous population of Australia.

Just where, on our mental tourist maps, are head-hunters? What about cannibals? What is their image, particularly in fiction?410 How does it appear in text?

Among risks and values, attitudes to cannibalism would appear to link directly with the focus on life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as key domains, where safe text is a priority. The communicative outcomes in the Travellers’ Tales above tend to be mildly humorous, as are some counterpart texts, like the intentional question asked by the Verbivore and others: “if vegetarians eat vegetables, what do humanitarians eat?

---

408 Credited to reader Robert Coshland (TT 0103_15/p068tales).

409 An example of the latter includes a nod to electronics in the comment, and an awkward apostrophe in the title. “KIDS’ STUFFED: Reader Leo Murray … decided to pass on the ‘Steamed Children’. Q: How do you make steamed children? A: Take away their Game Boys.” (TT 0007_13/p74tales)

410 The shock value of anthropophagy has been recently exploited in films, including dialogue. The final line by ‘Hannibal the cannibal’ in ‘Silence of the lambs’ is about having ‘a friend for dinner’, but in ‘Lumumba’ there is fear that the idiom ‘je me le mange’ (I’ll eat him), used to express anger, could be mis-construed by the European colonial authorities as an indication of the Africans’ anthropophagy.
The Italian phrase ‘vivo e vegeto’ (similar to ‘alive and kicking’) should have alerted me to the positive value of ‘vegetus’. The focus is on the product rather than process, as better health and strength are desirable ends, like a more humane society, and one of the means is the consumption of food that is vivifying (Low Latin ‘vegetabilis’). Paradoxically, there seems to be less worry about ‘human’ items appearing on menus than about (some) animals, as the patent absurdity of the former contrasts with the much higher probability of the latter, and cultural differences in matters of fact explain the (largely Anglo) attitude called ‘petishism’. When I saw ‘pet meat’ on a sign along a bus route around Perth, it was an obvious mistake, although it could raise eyebrows, but mention of dogs elsewhere could literally refer to their use as food, expected or even just suspected by outsiders. In this respect, a play where a young Vietnamese immigrant to Australia fears that meat may come from lambs puts the shoe on the other foot, or the taboo on the other’s food. In other cases, foods can be prohibited by different religions, and text related to what is prepared and served needs to be unequivocal, to prevent substantive offence in matters of f/action.

An investigation of the processes leading to text production and interpretation is crucial to redressing, preparing or preventing problems, and this chapter aims to sort (out) assorted cases of miscommunication, with focus on deefault and fiction, as well as ‘crossings’ of various types. ‘Nobody is perfect, but anyone can be correct/ed’ is a recurrent motto in the thesis, to promote scrutiny of any material. Even critical claims of unsafe text practices, usually attributed to others, are not above suspicion, as bias and inaccuracy can be worse among the ‘critics’ than in the proposed evidence.

---

411 The author’s concern about the last term above adds a more controversial point of view, while the first pair relates to another tale. A voucher from the Cafe Swiss in Bangkok reads “vegetables and children are also well catered for”, and elicits the rather contrived comment: “It is heartening to see that the hotel industry in Thailand caters for minorities with special needs, such as vegetables.” (TT 9904_29/p36tales). The possible association with severely disabled people, through the idiom ‘ending up like a vegetable’, seems unintended, but the use of such dark humour is a linguacultural variable.

412 The attachment to lambs as pets relates to another young person’s view that you cannot eat it if you know its name. In “Black and Tran” (2001), two local comedians (Aboriginal and Vietnamese) put “kelp and kelpie” (seaweed and dog) on the menu of an “AborAsian” restaurant.

413 See a question about serving to Indonesian visitors fillet steak with “small piece of bacon on top of each piece”, after the hotel had been “told not to include pork in the menu” (FitzGerald, 1998:121).

414 Awareness of this risk is one of the reasons why this study includes ‘hedges’ about the limits of my own interpretation, along with a sustained effort to look for ‘reason/s’ behind text judged as unsafe.
This is noted in the following pages, with reference to a sample of ‘urban legends’, like the Chevy Nova and the choice of pictures on jars of baby food, ‘naïvely’ linked to cannibalism and thus related to the previous discussion. Both help illustrate a double bind or ‘Catch 22’, mainly when perceptions of de/fault are open to question. In the supposed marketing failures to adult ‘others’, it is not clear who is being ridiculed. In Freud’s view, “the comic that is found in someone else’s intellectual and mental characteristics is ... the outcome of a comparison between him and my own self.” (Witz, p.195). When discussing ways to make people comic, which are also used to deprive them of any “claim to dignity and authority” (p.189), he refers to “a child or a man from the common people, or a member of certain races” (p.192).

Unsafe text is evaluated in relation to difficulties in interaction, but pointing out differences in linguistic conventions should help resolve or reduce the problem, not increase it through lack of respect and consideration for ‘face’ and feelings of others. In the legend of baby food, the generalisation process attributed to illiterates and ‘savages’, and the thoughtless transfer of marketing tools abroad, are both based on incompetence, and the story can indeed “serve hostile and aggressive purposes” (Witz p.189). In particular, the representation of interpreters “is cultural prejudice at its worst” (Mikkelson, 1995-2001) although the source of ‘text’ is also ridiculed, like in many other ‘marketing’ examples, and the lesson is explicitly directed to them.

Claim: African consumers were horrified by an American baby food company’s product packaging.

Status: False. (Mikkelson, 1995-2001)

…

Perhaps this tale is so popular because it enables us to feel smugly superior to both the should-have-known-better multinational corporation, and the foreign rubes who don’t understand what a jar of baby food is.

Finding “differing details” in “other (preferably earlier) examples and variants of the same type of story” can be the “coup de grace in debunking improbable tales”.

The site classifies urban legends and related items as “true … or … based on an actual occurrence”, “false”, “undetermined veracity or origin” and “unverifiable”. For the thesis, this does not matter, the criterion of ‘se non è vera, è ben trovata’ (if it is not true, it is well invented / devised, lit. ‘found’) refers to their probability and value.

415 The name of the car has been linked to ‘no va’, Spanish for ‘doesn’t go’, while the item on baby food has varied contexts (cf. analysis in Mikkelson, 1995-2001, 1999).
Here the fanciful ‘finding’ has a long history, as demonstrated in the “mother lode”, a “tidbit from a 1958 Reader’s Digest”, which begins “I am in the Mission Supply Store at Madang, New Guinea,” and prompts the following comments:

we’re told straight out that the shocked natives are CANNIBALS and the foreigners are MISSIONARIES!
That’s turning the tables, eh? Irony is so much funnier when you dispense with all that subtlety stuff, isn’t it?

This warning about the dynamics of irony and ‘fun/ny’ text confirms the serious consequences of ridicule, as dramatically shown in the French film by that title. A professional comedian comments in colourful terms on the double edge of irony:

Irony pisses me off. The fact that so many people just don’t get irony pisses me off (it also makes me laugh a bit, because it’s so ironic in itself!) (Shilkin, 2001)

The legend above is based on images, marginal to the thesis, while the following example from “Children’s World” transfers the same issue to written text, pointing out the inconsistencies of syntax, even in a very simple combination of nouns as apposition. When “Master Six picked up the bottle of peanut oil and asked: ‘How do they make this from peanuts?’”, he applied the explanation to “the bottle of olive oil: ‘So they squeeze olives in a machine and get this out?’ I assured him they did.” The next step is also believable: “pointing to the baby oil, he quavered: ‘So where did they get that?’ C.P., Mornington, V.” (‘Peanut ponder’, NI 990619 CW p. 84).416

This, like many similar items, contributes to an open-minded search for safe text, by providing complementary insights on the ‘logical’ chain of reasoning and transfers operated by language learners, and more generally novices to a linguaculture. The ‘no-va’ case is more directly relevant to trans-cultural computer-mediated communication, as it involves the perception of names in different languages.

Claim: The Chevrolet Nova sold poorly in Spanish-speaking countries because its name translates as “doesn’t go” in Spanish.

Status: False. (Mikkelson, 1999)

This critical source provides detailed documentation about the facts, and reasonable explanations about the origin and shortcomings of the legend, “another one of those tales that makes its point so well… that nobody wants to ruin it with a bunch of facts”.

416 The Verbivore also asks “If olive oil is made from olives, what do they make baby oil from?”
Some linguacultural factors, checked with a Mexican, had already occurred to me, but the main unsafe aspect is the very frequent use of the anecdote “to illustrate the perils of failing to do adequate preparation and research” in the international marketplace.

It’s a wicked irony, then, that the people who use this example are engaging in the very thing they’re decrying, because a little preparation and research would have informed them that it isn’t true.

The legend lives on, from marketing textbooks to business seminars, and as “a staple of … columnists who need a pithy example of human folly”.

Perhaps someday this apocryphal tale will become what it should be: an illustration of how easily even “experts” can sometimes fall victim to the very same dangers they warn us about.

The whole story could be titled ‘Anything goes (not)’, and is comparable to some aspects of the GOG case (cf. Ch. 8), but the key point of the legend remains valid, as a reminder that the danger of unsafe text increases through translation. Among “the nominees for the Chevy Nova Award… given out in honor of GM’s fiasco in trying to market this car …”, found in an e-mail list, some appear more risky than others. This ‘hit and miss parade’ lists ten supposed marketing fiascos, which help illustrate the details of linguistic inputs associated with unsafe text output in translation.417 Five of the ten nominees, plus the title, involve Spanish versions of English text,418 and four include references to bodily parts and functions in the resulting ‘pregnant meanings’.

10. When Parker Pen marketed a ball-point pen in Mexico, its ads were supposed to have read, “It won’t leak in your pocket and embarrass you.” The company thought that the word “embarazar” (to impregnate) meant to embarrass, so the ad read: “It won’t leak in your pocket and make you pregnant.”

With minor changes, the slogan could fit the risks of a different product, while an item used for the opposite condition could leak on clothes in a more embarrassing place.419

---

417 Most deal with idiomatic or slang expressions, thus providing a close parallel to the GOG case, but failure in transfers across markedly different languages and cultures are the macroscopic equivalent of misunderstandings that occur within them, often involving learners like children and newcomers.

418 This reflects the bilingual condition of the U.S.A. and the dominance of the pair in the Americas. An attempt is made below to rank them by level of risk, although it is mostly a matter of taste. The item numbers in the original list have been retained, as the sequence may have been deliberate, and also to facilitate their retrieval from on-line sources.

419 Informing the victims of ‘accidents’ can be a delicate matter in most circumstances. I heard a great ‘bloody’ story about the absence of protection, a white dress, and the response ‘really? Thank God!’.
The troublesome word is a ‘false friend’, the kind of specific item that it is better to
learn about in theory than practice, and points to the broader category of x-phemisms,
particularly those associated with reproduction.420 One of the French examples in the
previous chapter relates to a comparable process and context, while the other matches
the substance of the next one, also found in many other documents.421

2. Coors put its slogan, “Turn It Loose,” into Spanish,
where it was read as “Suffer From Diarrhea.”
Even without guarantee that it did or could happen, the term is emblematic of traps in
transcultural text use, which can be more or less risky, as in the examples below.
One item is French, in more than one sense (cf. the ‘pardon’ idiom noted earlier), and
provides a valuable clue in searching for safe text, even if it were a total fabrication.
Following the practice of the main corpora, it could be titled “‘Cue’ with an ‘L’?”

5. Colgate introduced a toothpaste in France called Cue,
the name of a notorious porno magazine.
The title of a publication often concentrates a range of references in a very short text,
providing cues or clues to both content and style, as in this case, where the suggestion
is phonetic, and possibly visual, as ‘e’ could resemble ‘l’ (e/l, cf. Ch.7 on fonts).
In a domain like pornography, which is risqué by definition, safety in text choices is
comparable to that of Formula One driving, and ‘racy’ is another term that comes to
mind, at least in its Australian usage (cf. Johansen, 1996). Just like elegant clothing
was defined as what is admired at Maxim’s but goes unnoticed in the metro, a
successful in-joke depends on not having an obviously peculiar text. How explicit
would be a ‘notorious’ title, and how easily recognisable to those outside the specific
culture and language? Conversely, if something sounds unexpectedly rude, is it likely
to be a deliberate choice? The presumption of innocence implies ignorance (cf. Ch.4).
Noblesse oblige, and international marketing should involve an effort to avoid
blatantly unsafe text. In this case, what should have been the tools for a search?

420 In two additional items on the same list, the Spanish refers to physical conditions related to the one
above, covering bodily fluids and functions of varying taboo loading. The translation of the Dairy
Association’s slogan “Got Milk?” read “Are you lactating?” (item 1) and Frank Perdue’s “It takes a
strong man to make a tender chicken” became “it takes an aroused man to make a chicken affectionate”
(item 9). I guess ‘duro’ (‘hard’) was used for ‘strong’ instead of the more literal ‘fuerte’.
421 See also item 3. on Clairol’s “Mist Stick,” a curling iron, while “mist” is slang for manure in
German, and the wayward ‘crab’ noted in Ch.8.
Supposing that nobody knew that ‘cue’ sounds like a widely used but rude French word, and that no cultural or linguistic expert was available for consultation, the term is short enough to allow for a verification of similar forms in any dictionary, while specialised lists and glossaries of rude terms can be found on and off-line.\footnote{The Australian one ‘compiled by Blind Freddy’ (Antill-Rose, 1988) illustrates a cultural stereotype in its cover cartoon. A bilingual dictionary (Atkins, Carpenter, & Morcellet, 1996) provides convenient ‘style labels’ for both source and target. One to three asterisks mark increasingly vulgar usage (cf. Ch.7 on ‘mood watch’) and they pepper the entry “cul” (pronounced ‘ky’, just like ‘cue’). The highest symbol “means ‘Danger!’ liable to offend in any situation, to be avoided by the non-native”.}

Change in grammatical gender, as in the least risky Spanish item, can cause a more serious outcome, comparable in context to the French s(h)tick noted above.\footnote{‘Shtick’ seems to refer to jokes and stand-up comedy acts in Yinglish, ‘French stick’ is a baguette, and ‘cue’ can be the stick or rod used in billiards etc., from French ‘queue’ or tail (more unsafe text…).} In two cases, which mix the sacred and the profane, some transfer occurs from the visual perception of gender markers and their concordance. Such generalisations or over-corrections can be ‘virtuous errors’, but the outcome may appear less than friendly or respectful. One mild example turns ‘good day’ (‘buenos dias’) into “good God” (“buenos Dios”), apparently puzzling hearers,\footnote{Finer points of grammar and pronunciation would modify the above translation, but any perception of the distorted text would be considered as a deviation, probably more ‘funny’ than offensive.} while the marketing example (with italics added, or restored to on-line Text Only) refers to text on a product.

6. An American T-shirt maker in Miami printed shirts for the Spanish market which promoted the Pope’s visit. Instead of “I Saw the Pope” (el Papa), the shirts read “I Saw the Potato” (la papa).

A Spanish source\footnote{Martinez (2001) told me the authentic anecdote, and followed up by e-mail my draft version of it.} provided a comparable anecdote, which includes misplaced grammatical concerns for the gender of the Spanish noun for chicken (‘pollo’), and is also compatible with written communication, such as online shopping for dinner. University students from Britain were in Spain to perfect their Spanish language skills. One of them, a female, went to buy a chicken, ‘un pollo’, that would serve three people, ‘para tres’. Spanish, Italian and other Romance languages only have two genders, arbitrarily applied to items that appear ‘neuter’ in English. In this case, the notion that a (dead) chicken should be in the feminine would not occur to their native speakers,\footnote{Further thought leads to a possible transfer from gallo / gallina (rooster / hen) to the asexual ‘pollo’.} even those ignorant of the rude meaning of the word ending in –a, which refers (even less logically) to ‘a certain part of the male anatomy’, as put by Martinez.
(2001, paraphrased below). This usage of a polysemic word is limited to Spain, and has troubled other visitors, but the context made this exchange markedly uneven. Hearing an attractive young woman ask if he had such a thing ‘for three’, the man in the shop asked his colleague whether he had one. His mischievous reply, ‘I have one that might serve two’ was delivered with a straight face (if nothing else), knowing the customer had no idea of the “double meaning or allusion, with *double entendre*”. In terms of word play in public and commercial contexts, Australia seems to be more rude than prude, and more free than ‘Latin’ contexts familiar to me. This is exemplified in ads for an “arty farty party”, “balls ’n all” (sports show on community TV in Perth), or the shop sign “get fleeced” I saw in a high-class Sydney suburb.

As the products for sale (mainly sheepskins) seemed to be tourist-oriented, I am not sure about who was supposed to ‘get’ the joke, and what reaction/s would be expected or accepted. In my view, such texts could be unsafe online, with risks increasing with distance from the originating ‘in-group’. Turning off potential clients, who recognise the idiom but not the irony, would only damage the original authors or users of text, as the result of being “too clever for their own good”. A second-degree outcome could be offence or ridicule from inappropriate terms, should novice or naïve readers choose to use them, and thus be embarrassed, or worse, by transfer from unsafe text sources without checking with experts (cf. options noted at the end of Ch.7).

This section has explored several samples, where sanctions appear mostly implicit, or even imaginary, as in the No/va legend. Linguacultural aspects, mainly transfers and deficiencies, have been highlighted along with the context and outcome of interactions. The aim of this chapter, and of the thesis, is to promote concern for the latter, through recognising the relativity of any ‘rules’ or standards for the former. This was discussed also in the previous chapter/s, mainly in terms of attitudes when ‘crossing’ beyond our own idiolect. The next and final chapter proposes a ‘way out’ of unsafe text situations through a series of steps, which have already been noted in the context of cases and anecdotes in the course of the dissertation.

---

427 This exchange took place in the early seventies and wearing a mini skirt (the fashion then) was, to some extent, ‘asking for it’. Verbal and visual associations were obviously congruent, and the repartee may have reflected, perhaps, the Spanish custom of uttering ‘*piropos*’ (verbal compliments) addressed to women, and often loaded with sexual innuendo, even when passing perfect strangers in the street.
Chapter 11  
Way out

Searching for safe text, within the confines of this thesis, is nearing to an end, and this chapter aims to show, or at least suggest, the (or a) way out of unsafe text situations. Other chapters, particularly the previous two in Part Three, have applied ‘tracking’ skills to several cases, in an effort to sort (out) a range of problems in interaction, and the focus here will be on the steps involved in the overall search/ing or process/ing. The set of tools or skills relates to approaches in terms of text-based interactions, and the aim is not to ‘give a fish’, such as a simple checklist of problematic items. Text is seen as a means rather than an end, and therefore the aim is not even to ‘teach how to fish’ in prescriptive or proscriptive terms concerning linguistic use, but to help fish out, or get (hold of) the problematic items of text that appears ‘fishy’, risky or unsafe.

The review of such steps continues the movement metaphor in reverse sequence, used through the thesis, while other points or parallels deserve to be kept in mind. Chapter titles deliberately refer to the complex notion of ‘crossings’ presented in Ch.9, to the almost legal label of ‘suspects’ used in examining a courtroom case in Ch.8, and the more ambiguous ‘sanctions’ of Ch.10. The general focus on ‘evidence’, introduced in Part One with examples, method, sources and precedents, was associated in Part Two with such aspects of the ‘process’ of trans-cultural computer-mediated communication as transfer, diversity and the Infobahn, in order to focus on the narrow point of the metaphorical hourglass. These elements also inform the discussion of skills related to safe text, although the latter are generally applicable to a wide range of con/texts, starting with ‘most unwanted’ items that match the proposed priorities for prevention and prepare, generally called ‘feworries’ and briefly considered below.

The seriousness of negative unwanted text outcomes has been illustrated with loss of life or limb, loss of liberty, but also loss of face, and the classification of contexts as matters of manners or face is complementary to the label ‘matters of fact’, also in view of the complex and vital role of affective, behavioural and cognitive (‘ABC’) factors in text-based interactions.

---

428 Cf. Lane (1985) concerning the large number and complex ‘causeeffectways’ of linguistic aspects involved, specifically in legal situations, with serious risks of miscarriage of justice. This contrasts with the expectation of certainties, noted in Ch. 3 with reference to critical comments by Aveling (2001).
The body is involved in the process in many ways, not only as victim of damage in deadly and bloody outcomes, but as unintentional perpetrator in many cases of ‘slips’, where its role in distorting text can be combined with that of computers and other tools and media of communication. In addition, text items for body parts and functions relate to negative reactions like offence and disgust, plus the ever-present embarrassment and even shame. In many cases, the unwanted outcome of slips or transfers is mainly associated with X-phemisms, a linguacultural category with fine-grained differences, leading to ‘gross’ outcomes and interaction difficulties, which appear with a high level of frequency in the corpora used as sources for the thesis. This input-related variable also contributes to the evaluation of priority concerns, as danger and risk increase with both chances of occurrence and the level of damage.

In other words, the choice to worry becomes a strict obligation in cases where physical safety is at stake, such as movement at great speed and distance, particularly in the absence of direct supports or controls. Space and air travel are prime examples of ‘restricted code’ (or carefully controlled, regulated, conventional language use), and other candidates include surgical or medical procedures, along with the handling of dangerous tools, but also food. As illustrated in several chapters, instructions are a category of text with high safety requirements, but instructions with damaging outcomes may also derive from unsafe text use in contexts like health and the law. The GOG case combines a legal setting and decision with a mis-perception related to mental health, an area of particularly high risk, when linguacultural differences are mistaken for deficits of various and serious types, leading to Lyotardian differends.

It is important to consider ‘face’, in the broad sense of (self-)respect and esteem, as a key value in interactions, associated with the pursuit of happiness and of meaning. In this context, outcomes involving offence and embarrassment, including severe ridicule, are considered negative, particularly if they affect individuals and groups that are disadvantaged by their linguacultural background, among other things.

Issues of equity, access and diversity are mainly linked to the notion of ‘noblesse oblige’, whereby those in a position of power and privilege, who are often (the) ‘masters’ of the language in use, have an obligation to facilitate communication and interaction. The appropriate use of qualified professional interpreters is a related aspect, and should help reduce the risks of unsafe text.
However, as noted in the GOG case, there are human limits in language skills, and therefore authority, rather than authorship, is associated with the responsibility for unsafe text outcomes. Use of the ‘tool kit’ described in this chapter does not require specific linguistic skills, but sensitivity to interaction outcomes, and readiness to seek or search for help, in order to find some (‘a’, if not ‘the’) way out of difficult spots.

The choice of terms for a sequence or set often has a mnemonic purpose, and the chosen labels for items in the tool kit of safe-text steps or skills form an alliterative series, comparable to the five P’s of conflict resolution (cf. Tillett, 1999). Problem, participants, past, projections, and pressures are also relevant to safe text approaches, as illustrated in their application to the ‘black sail’ cases in Ch.2, and those nouns are complemented by actions in the safe-text searching operations considered below.

‘Searching’ is a key term in the main thesis title, as it refers to the overall re/search process and to the computer function, specifically online searches. It can also be considered as a particular stage within a quest for safe text, where it has a central position, linked to the solution of each problem or puzzle. Interaction-related negative outcomes are the focus of attention in the thesis, as the main criterion for evaluating (un)safe text, and as the starting point for the investigations of case studies, which retrace the ‘causeffectway’ to identify linguistic aspects of miscommunication.

The following review of steps or skills in the safe-text tool kit also ‘tracks’ the process in reverse, starting with outcome-based scenarios or scripts. Other items are solving problems and searching for answers, noted above, while the step/s preceding a search can be found near the end of the list, but should be taken first, as spotting (with the closely related action of stopping) is crucial to the outcome of interaction. In other words, the sequence presented and summarised as “scenario/script, solution, search, spot, stop” should in practice be followed in the reverse order.

Taking the search function as pivotal point, the following sections group the steps in terms of their orientation, as some are oriented towards preventive and constructive actions for the future, while others focus on the investigation of previous processes.

---

429 A term used by Duane Varan (p.c., 31 May 2002), linking the final phase of my work with his input in 1998, when he accepted to be the initial supervisor of my research at Murdoch.

430 ‘Safe-text steps’ is chosen as the heading above instead of ‘safe-text tools’, also because of sound.

431 Safety-oriented text practices are the opposite of a modal joke, which “is not a puzzle requiring us to think of some way in which the ‘mistake’ could have happened”. (Mulkay, 1988:34-5)
**Forward steps**

Scenarios are devised to present the consequences likely to arise from unsafe text. The creative consideration of potential negative consequences is an optional and forward-looking step, tool or skill, suitable for raising awareness of the overall process and approach, and the pro-active function of the ‘script’ exercise is complementary to the outcome of a successful search, discussed later in relation to problem solving.

Scenarios of the worst possible text outcomes point out the costs of consequences, compared to the benefits of prevention and prevention. Beginning from the end of the clarification process, scenarios can be scripted after considering the actual outcomes of unsafe text, to see whether anything worse could have taken place, and what (if).

This highlights conditions of particular risk, where extra care in text use is recommended, and helps focus on ‘feworries’. These imaginary elaborations may derive from actual linguistic miscommunication and events associated with them, including the examples found in the thesis and its sources, as illustrated in Ch.5 in relation to the Swedish chainsaw instructions/ warning.

Fictional items can be examples of scenarios, particularly where extreme negative outcomes are presented, and in this respect jokes can be as useful as tragedies. This is shown in a ‘minimal pair’ of examples, heard in my first year as student in the trigger-happy USA. In the joke, a country boy asked a girl: “are you game?” “yes,” she said, and he shot her. In a folk song, a similar outcome relates to unsafe visual text, as Polly Yvonne ‘had her apron wrapped around her, so he took her for a swan’.

A less violent newcomer story I heard, possibly about ‘new Australians’, is from the time when trains had windows and people would lean out and look around. When a train approaches on the nearby rail, someone warns “look out!”, thus prompting the newcomer to lean out even further. No heads are lost, but the idiom is noted as unsafe, as ‘look in’ would appear more logical. (R. Plewright, p.c., 2002)
In the previous chapter, discussion of taboos and innuendos has considered a range of circumstances and roles affecting the outcomes of interaction, and unintended mentions of various bodily functions mostly involved embarrassment and ridicule.

In the previous chapter, discussion of taboos and innuendos has considered a range of circumstances and roles affecting the outcomes of interaction, with unintended text, mainly referring to bodily functions, shown to prompt embarrassment and ridicule.

The scripting operation is comparable to alternative readings and versions of text that appears linguistically safe or ‘correct’, proposed in relation to racism, gender and violence (cf. Mellor, Patterson, & O’Neill, 1991), as the skill of critical reading can be exercised in a range of contexts, and refer to many unsafe (or unsavoury) aspects.

Scenarios could look at the risk of retaliation following default in text exchanges. In communication across power hierarchies, one must be careful when addressing superiors and authorities, besides or beyond any ‘bad’ people who could do more immediately physical harm. In cases defined as unsafe text, the negative outcomes of miscommunication are not intended, thus punishment for such mistakes, taken as verbal offence, appears doubly unfair, if applied to a weaker party by a stronger one. The inequity is even worse if the latter turns out to be in the wrong, as in the fable where the lion accused the lamb of having spoken ill of him in the past year, and since the lamb was unborn then, transferred the accusation to the parents.

The more powerful party should be aware of such risks, and make a deliberate effort to redress the imbalance in terms of communication awareness. This is easier in cross-cultural communication involving direct exchanges, and therefore health and legal professionals have received priority attention (e.g. Pauwels, 1995, 1992; Pride, 1985), as their communicative (in)competence, including text use, can lead to loss of life and liberty for their clients. Inter-cultural exchanges (cf. Clyne, 1994) presuppose some mutuality, and safe-text responsibility should also be apportioned with the aim of general advantage, according to access and equity demands of specific contexts.

A mixed case is bureaucratic bullying, specifically in the form of e-mail (Joseph, 1998).

I recall the lion’s words in the Latin version by Phaedrus: “maledixisti mihi”, “you spoke ill/badly”, relevant to unsafe text. The lamb was first accused of polluting the water, while drinking downstream.

See details of the different terms in the ‘across/inter/trans - mission statement’ in Ch.1.

The complexity of variables can be noted from the model of language-based zones and related cases (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001).
Transcultural conditions, as in computer-mediated exchanges on the Infobahn, rarely provide the information required for such evaluations, and the increased risks should lead to increased care, through the use of safe-text skills, like those discussed here.

The wider danger of discrimination can be insidious and widespread, as it is likely to compound problems of power imbalance, but may arise even among supposed equals, if different linguacultural conventions are perceived as negative behavioural traits, as often noted in Part Three, and attributed to the ‘different / other’ person and group.

Scripts can expose the tradition of representing the linguistic usage of “subordinate groups first as different, then as deviant” (Cameron, 1992:41). The negative effects of such superficial perceptions, which tend to promote and reinforce stereotypes, include such face-related notions as rudeness, as when a default setting involves frequent use of imperative forms, unfavourably compared to the indirect forms used in English.440

One way to expose bias is to show parallel structures, since ‘(please) take a seat’ in English is a polite imperative, like the equivalent (mis-)translated as ‘sit, sir!’, and Kinder (1989) notes other moral values in habitual formulas, with respect to such white lies as “it won’t take a minute” and the equivalent but notorious “mañana”.441

Scenarios also contribute to success in the overall process, creating alternatives and outcomes that may explain what otherwise may appear ‘stupid’, i.e. unnecessary, or even illogical. “On Sainsbury’s peanuts - Warning: contains nuts” may appear silly or ‘nuts’ and therefore humorous, but could be a legal requirement, possibly to protect manufacturers and consumers (at least absent-minded ones), specifically in cases of allergy to nuts, as I heard that even a tiny sesame seed can cause major trouble.442

As a correlate to the principle of noblesse oblige for ‘masters of the language’, sources of high quality (those expected to respect safe text requirements) deserve careful reading, as there is likely to be a very good reason for their text choices. For example, my Italian background made the instruction ‘typed or machine-printed’ appear redundant,443 as ‘printed’ (‘stampato’) is not synonymous with any form of

440 Kirkpatrick (1995:16-19) discusses Polish/Anglo styles and mutual misperceptions of (wh)imperatives, and the perceived ‘emotion’ in intonation (cf. Ch.9), which reinforce stereotypes and cause cross-cultural misunderstandings.

441 My Mexican informant offered the example ‘mañana nos casamos’ (‘tomorrow we get married’), where the literal time-frame of the next day is virtually impossible, but ‘virtuous’, if not ‘honest’.

442 The issue of safety warnings and instructions has been noted in Ch.4 when assessing the outcomes.

443 The assignment guidelines relate to a course with specific focus on safe text for law students.
handwriting (such as ‘stampatello’), but the common English form ula ‘(please) type or print’ reminded me of the ambiguity of the verb. When in doubt, interpreters unable to find a relevant scenario can ask, and authors unable to provide a convincing answer must amend usage. Finding a safety-oriented explanation for problematic text makes it (and the author, source or context) ‘reasonable’ and more acceptable, a function of scenarios that is also part of searching and solving, discussed next.

The specific skill of solving problems applies to misunderstanding, in the sense of the outcome of miscommunication in the ‘cause-effect way’ associated with unsafe text. Case studies of exemplary misunderstandings in the thesis illustrate a range of negative outcomes, combined with inputs and reactions, where each item is more or less amenable to remedial solutions, and scenarios show how problems may develop in several directions, depending on circumstances (cf. the ‘tales of sails’ in Ch.2).

Defusing tension is more difficult and dangerous than avoiding it in the first place. Many problems do not depend on clear and effective communication for their solution (cf. Tidwell, 1992), but require conflict-resolving skills. To allow text-based misunderstandings to develop into disagreements (and worse), needing precious non-linguistic resources to repair them, represents a waste, also of emotional energy. The spiral of mutual offence can be vicious indeed, as language is an important part of identity, and perceived failure in its use affects the sense of (self-)esteem and worth.

When miscommunication is linked to interaction difficulties, it should be removed through clarification of apparent differences, before other factors come into play. Conversely, situations of potential conflict require heightened text safety measures. Computer-mediated communication (CMC), particularly through the use of e-mail, lends itself to such remedial consultation. A case which has been kindly made available (but remains confidential) shows how the author’s ‘tongue in cheek’ had gone unnoticed, until interpreters queried statements that appeared controversial, solving the problem. Risks are higher in print, as claims of humorous intent cannot always remove an offence, and in certain domains constitute unacceptable disrespect.

As illustrated in Part Two, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD) needs to be reflected in CMC, by facilitating recognition of a range of concurrent linguistic forms, even within a supposedly ‘common’ language or code for a given context.

---

444 This wider notion extends from the co-text to the context and background of situation and culture.
Since computer ‘languages’ and codes may also contribute to miscommunication, those responsible for their use should be pro-active in dealing with areas of risk, from world-wide scares like the Y2K ‘bug’ (Ch.6) to the ‘grave’ accident noted in Ch.2, as online equivalent of unsafe text in ‘tales of sails’. Attention to equity, access and diversity in computer-mediated communication involves linguistic, cultural and functional aspects (cf. Singh, Gedeon, & Rho, 1998), often ignored in default settings. Safer text practices in this regard would in turn facilitate the use of computer searches and exchanges as remedial measures, as suggested at the end of Part Two, to solve misunderstanding through clarification of the linguistic surface, after searching for sensible sense. As noted at the start of the Method section (Ch.1), safe text takes searching. The goal is to find effective answers to the puzzle of unsafe text, with a simple reason for what went wrong in terms of process, on one hand, and on the other a clear(ed) version of text as presumably intended. To ensure the prevention of interaction problem, or their solution, both findings should appear suitable to the original circumstances, in the perception of all the parties involved.

It is vital to approach the matter with an open mind, and a ‘cool heart’ is also important, to adopt a Thai idiom that reflects a key cultural value (‘chai yen’, cf. O’Sullivan & Songporn, 1997). This confirms the importance of affective responses or gut reactions, discussed in Ch. 9, and the use of body-oriented metaphors reminds us of the anatomical impact and links of text, illustrated by unsafe “Samples” in Ch.10, and noted in more general terms under “Channels” in Ch.5.

Dangerous consequences of unsafe text come from its perception and interpretation at face value, whereas presumption of innocence leads to seek, or search for, mutually acceptable versions of the problematic message, instead of jumping to conclusions and expressing negative reactions. Searching can also profit from the presumption of shared ignorance, as each party ought to consider, and actively request when possible, explanations concerning the form and content in question, also exposing the process of text production, transmission, reception, perception and interpretation. Several stages may involve interference, or negative transfer associated with cultural and linguistic diversity (CaLD, discussed with transfer and the Infobahn in Part Two). The source of misunderstanding can be in the background or default setting for linguistic expression, and apply to either side of the exchange.
It can also be in the technical medium of communication, and the search for intended meaning may reveal defaults or defects in transmission, or mechanical errors in production, which authors could correct without being made to feel at fault, if the search is carried out before undesirable consequences come into effect.

Access to the author may not be readily available, and sometimes problems arise between interpreters, thus searching skills have to be developed even without direct support from the source of the text in question. Additional channels of information and clarification need to be opened, on- and off-line, along the lines of reference works and sites (cf. Chs 3 and 7).

Among problems that could derive from computer use, ‘wordprocerrors’ (usually linked to unfinished text revisions) appear to transfer or project onto the computer screen types of ‘faulty action’ similar to those noted in earlier writing technologies, and possibly related to ‘slips of the tongue’. Thus explanations provided long ago by Roback, in response to Freudian views (cf. Ch.4), can apply today, with the added ‘escape’ option of computer malfunction or interference, and time constraints of CMC (Muniandy, 2002) lead to speed in keyboard use, with the speech-like faults noted by Goffman, as discussed in Ch.5.

An overall attitude of cooperation is likely to encourage successful searches, overcoming the cultural limitations applicable to the number of requests for clarification that are expected and accepted (cf. Garfinkel, 1967; Harms, 1973:29; Hasan, 1996:135). As recommended in situations of cross-cultural communication, one has to search for the intended function to be performed through a speech act or other type of text, rather than simply expect a direct translation. A safety measure in this regard, widely applicable to a range of idiomatic expressions and linguistic conventions, would be to consider surprising any close match to one’s own forms, and enjoy the positive shock of recognition, rather than expect such correspondence, and be rudely shocked by the many exceptions, many of which involve unsafe text.

445 Goffman (1981:242) notes that “a power failure and a voice failure can equally lead to a breakdown in transmission”, as an example of how “trouble enters from different points”, within “any communication system”, as “reflected in the kind of remedial work that is undertaken”.

446 The term is used in general for a correspondence between codes or idiolects, in parallel with the general use of ‘interpreters’ for the role and function of making meaning.
The main clues to the intended meaning are usually provided by the context, and size does matter in this respect, since very short texts tend to lack contextual clues, and often represent an effort of condensation that reduces redundancy. For example, ‘no standing’ and ‘permit parking’ can be legitimately interpreted as allowing a motor vehicle to be left in the location indicated, and anecdotal reports give some evidence to the successful defence of such interpretations, even after the authority in charge explained the intended meaning and related prohibition.

Sources of anecdotes with the necessary and sufficient context to explain linguistic miscommunication also provide models and scaffolds for the searching process.

**Back tracks**
While searching for safe text is central to solving problems, negative interaction outcomes are not so much the result of failed searches, but of failure to search. To undertake this complex function, some preliminary conditions are required, which may be more or less simple, and appear more or less ‘natural’ to people with different attitudes, background, competence, and values, depending on (con)text and situation. The use of a ‘feeling’ verb (cognate of the Italian ‘sentire’, which also means ‘to hear’) leads to ‘sensing potential danger’, as a label suitable for the recommended re/action/s, seen as prerequisite/s and leading to the central function of searching. The latter, i.e. trying to find what was meant by text (intended as meaning in context), cannot be the first step, if the goal is to identify something other than the default option, and thus to steer clear of the traps and trip-wires posed by unsafe text.

A search is needed only when the perception of a text-based problem does not include a solution, in the sense of a ‘correct(ed)’ version of what the expression had conveyed in a less than ‘perfect’ (or shared conventional) form. Searching also becomes necessary when linguacultural reasons for the discrepancy are sought. The range or category of suspects among such causes is not necessarily related to the main types of dangerous and damaging effects, as repeatedly noted, thus the focus on negative outcomes aims to foster awareness of the possibility of linguistic differences, in order to suspend judgment of ‘bad’ news or language, particularly for shibboleths.

---

447 ‘Default’ or ‘unmarked’ forms are what one expects to find (cf. Cameron, 1992: 94)

448 As the latter are more arbitrary and conventional than ‘meaning’ in context, the process may indeed be compared to examining or feeling over (a person) to find anything concealed (cf. Thompson, 1995).
Evidence of negative factual content, damaging or offensive intent, needs to be adequate and irrefutable, and to result from a thorough search in every direction, after something in a text is perceived as possibly problematic. This also has the advantage of slowing or ‘cooling off’ rash re/actions, and relates to the next safe-text skill/s.

In the sequence leading to safe/r text outcomes, spotting is the most common and easy step (after stopping), but can be carried out at various levels of awareness. The term is used in one of the main sources of examples, where contributors who send in published items are occasionally referred to as ‘spotters’. Here ‘spotting’ is used to indicate the tool, skill and act of noticing linguistic forms that could be unexpected, and would or might lead to unacceptable outcomes through the default / unmarked interpretation available to the spotter, often based on implicit deixis and ‘norm/s’.

Issues of relative power and dominance in linguistic and socio-cultural terms tend to skew the risk of ‘fault’ (and of failure) to the disadvantage of marginal users of the language or code, as noted in terms of equity (cf. Ch.9), but globalisation may also expose locally safe material to wider audiences, increasing the risk of unwanted negative associations or interpretations, such as ‘faultables’ (cf. Goffman 1980:224).

Spotting skills are obviously necessary, and require a somewhat detached perception when authors check their own text, to go beyond what they know to have meant, and to recognise what interpreters may notice. Interpreters who find something ‘wrong’ need detachment in the reverse direction, to spot linguistic expressions that appear to convey unacceptable messages, rather than judging the author as ‘wrong’. Third parties could be the best placed to spot unsafe text, and their skill be needed in order to repair consequences (solve problems), as well as be used for scenario practice.

For both purposes, searching may also be necessary, thus the tools or skills discussed previously are used mainly to supplement spotting, which can be enough to make text safe, if it leads to timely action in terms of correction or clarification. Both of the latter require intervention by the author, or an authorised /authoritative interpreter. The process of spotting and ‘straightening’ can be mutual, and as such it profits from the cooperative attitude noted above, rather than a ‘red-pencil mark’ approach. Misunderstandings could be associated with linguacultural and other inadequacies on either side, but also with those of human and material intermediaries between the

449 Travellers’ Tales, or TT, from the Far Eastern Economic Review or FEER
original author and the final interpreter. In this respect, comments by Nury Vittachi regarding the Travellers’ Tales (TT) column occasionally point out the open-minded and transcultural approach of the spotters, who often include solutions of ‘puzzles’.

The key role of spotting can be seen in relation to the exemplary misunderstandings presented in Ch. 2, as code failure could have been noticed, first of all on the ship of Theseus, and the sails changed in time. The importance of checks, to ensure the functionality and safety of mechanisms, applies to information and communication aspects, and is increasingly important with the delegation of control and commands to computers, as illustrated by the “bad math wrought by metric/English confusion” in figures on the Mars probe’s thrust (cf. Christianson, 1999).

In spotting potential risk in a text, it is important to re/act constructively, through remedies that remove the danger of negative outcomes, so the perverse cycle of ‘wronging’ is stopped before it starts. ‘Fight or flight’ are seen as the natural (animal) reactions in front of a danger or enemy, and each presupposes the identification of risk, presumably through spotting, but cannot precede it. What is the risk of a premature and incorrect judgment, particularly in text-based interactions?

What should happen before something is recognised as ‘wrong’?

Pausing for thought is appropriate at this point, and is also the recommended answer to the last semi-rhetorical question. The previous one clearly refers to the risk of unsafe text, when people jump to conclusions, instead of holding their breath and stopping to check what, if anything, represents a threat requiring appropriate action.

The approach to safe text involves a safe stance before risk, comparable to proverbs like ‘a stitch in time’, and to expressions like ‘stop the rot’, in relation to a negative process in danger of spreading out of control. In a complementary view of the safe-text tool kit, the first place would go to the item noted last, as a fitting conclusion to the ‘reverse’ sequence followed in this discussion, and in many aspects of the thesis.

The approach advocated in this thesis focuses on risks for interaction, to p/repair breakdowns in communication as well as ‘breakups’ between the parties, thus the goal of safe text can be rephrased as to ‘save’ something seen as valuable. One reading would be to move the parties back from the brink and keep them from falling (out), also in physical terms (an outcome found most literally in the case of Aegeus).
A more general interpretation of the ‘saving’ mission is to continue positive exchanges and relations, which means to preserve them. If people stop talking (or writing) to each other, it is usually evaluated as a negative outcome of interaction, and the verb used for ‘conserve’ (keep from ‘going bad’) is not far from ‘converse’. This sheds new light on the pun about UHT milk, called ‘latte a lunga conversazione’ (instead of ‘conservazione’). Safe text practices keep communication from ‘going bad’ and causing trouble, but views about a ‘good’ conversation ‘length’, even as total duration rather than turns, vary with individuals and cultures, as well as contexts.

The first chapter described the re/search cycle as looking at each situation, looking for problems, for explanations and solutions, then looking at the situation resulting from any action, generally following the chronological sequence of the steps described in the tool kit in reverse order, starting from the outcome. At that end, however, scenarios consider the results of unsafe text-based action, specifically ‘scripting’ the worst possible options, whereas the situation following the application of a safe text approach is expected to improve conditions for interaction, thus fulfilling one of the aims of the re/search. To facilitate the acquisition of crucial skills, the process separately examined in detail for each step is summarised below, in terms of the main lesson in searching for safe text, which can be found in most of the examples used in the dissertation, as in many others considered during its preparation.

The notion that prudence is precious can be transferred on to the Infobahn in such terms as ‘ponder before posting’, but also of ‘wet blankets over flames’, to use the label for online reactions that could ‘burn bridges’, and are discouraged by Netiquette. The choice of ‘wet blanket’ is intended to add a positive value to prudent behaviour, not always considered ‘cool’, and to rein in the supposedly sharp wit of critical replies, which may resemble aggression and exhibitionism, but might be even less ‘correct’ than the ‘error’. For example, the following anecdote shows a complex twist in terms of gender-based competence, as this ‘Mere Male’ choice appears closer to the subject than the interpretation of a critical (female?) reporter.

450 A. McHoul, in comments related to conversational analysis (p.c., July 2002).
451 The English view comes also from A. McHoul (p.c., July 2002), while the Italian ‘long-conversation milk’ is part of ‘familiar’ or familial lexicon, as I heard it used by the least talkative of my three nieces.
452 The approximation, with hedges, could also be favourably compared to frequent literal interpretation by males of such expressions as water(s) breaking, and failure to recognise the anatomical implications.
A friend is recovering from a hysterectomy. I doubt that she found it a laughing matter when her MM husband reported to friends: ‘She had one of those hysterical things.’ M. Cormack, Bathurst, NSW. (NI990626MM:93)

Neither party seems to have known the etymological path, but the adjective would be closer to surgery than laughter, if the latter function had not been attached to the organ (uterus), specifically in the context of a disorder.453 A little learning is a dangerous thing, as it invites transfer beyond safe boundaries and leads to loss of face: hence the advice to “stick to the cow”, an English update of a classic/al story.454

I remember the tale of a painting by Apelles, where “a cobbler detected a fault in the shoe-latchet”, which the artist rectified. “The cobbler, thinking himself very wise, next ventured to criticise the legs”, but was reminded not to go above his sphere and level of competence. The Latin phrase provides an object lesson, as it is found in two different forms within the same source (Brewer 1978: 267, 305), neither matching the item cited in an edition “checked for accuracy of content and reference” (Evans, 1970: vi).455 In the explanation “Talking about subjects above one’s metier, meddling and muddling matters of which you know little or nothing” (1978:305), I noticed the absence of accent in the supposedly French word in italics, but then I made a transfer-based mistake, with an anticipation from “accuracy of content and reference”, precisely in transcribing “the text has been accurately => carefully checked”.

In ‘picking up’ and ‘picking on’ examples and authors of unsafe text, the role of humour is suitably multi-faceted, given the definition (cf. Mulkay, 1988:213) opposing serious to humorous discourse. In the thesis, the choice of using corpora with ‘funny’ items has several purposes and advantages, briefly summarised below.

Given the thesis focus on serious negative outcomes, and the use of tragic cases like Aegeus or Gallipoli (Ch.2), other anecdotes provide some relief or balance to the emotional range involved, thanks to the comic intention of most sources. Efforts to ‘get the point’ for an expected laugh draw attention to details of the text.

453 The emotional link reflects a rather misogynist view of body and mind. Ignoring it, by taking as ‘default’ the colloquial sense of ‘extremely funny’, can thus be a mechanism of self-enhancement.

454 About “an extempore imitation”, when Boswell ventured another, but failed (Brewer 1978:1192)

455 “Ne supra crepidam sutor judicaret” is the quote, not in italics, from “Pliny, xxv, x, 85” (Brewer 1970: 240), while the ‘classic edition’ (re)produced in 1978 repeatedly has a short reference to “Ne sutor” (p.880, 1992), in full “Ne sutor ultra crepidam” (p.267), but also “Supra crepidam”(p.305).
This raises awareness of unsafe elements, both in expert or native users who would take them for granted, and in novices or learners who risk taking the unsafe path. As the original ‘slippers’ (or ‘transferrors’) are rarely involved or identified in the re-telling of anecdotes, and the latter are in the public domain, their use does not raise ethical issues of consent, even in cases involving risk of offence or embarrassment.

When text in and of anecdotes is further criticised, as in the ‘Urban legend’ site or Roback’s views of the Freudian doctrine of lapses, the approach supports the safe-text message of looking at the linguistic surface to find simple explanations, while questioning the attitudes and motives of those who ‘make fun’ of others.456

More generally, the availability of a large number of ‘tales’ allows for comparisons involving outcomes, inputs and contexts, which occupy several points in the polarity or continuum between ‘slips’ of mechanical nature (cf. discussion in Ch.4) and transfers from an acceptable equivalent in a different linguaculture (cf. Ch.5).

Difficulties or ridicule concerning the latter, as shown in the discussion of ‘precious items’, often involve the kind of linguistic ethnocentrism which the thesis aims to expose and defuse, possibly through a systematic questioning of what is, or could have been, meant or intended. The previous chapter mentioned ‘what did I say’, to promote introspection, and a complementary operation would ask the question ‘Well what else would you call it?’ literally and openly, instead of the “very puzzled way” in which one Rockhampton girl responded to a mention of “the ‘duchess’ as a peculiarly Queensland usage” (Keesing, 1982:39).457

Such a change could turn around attitudes, leading to the expectation of differences in linguaculture beyond one’s idiolect.458 Languages are great for making conversation, mainly because each person has something to contribute to the exchange, thanks to the rich heteroglossia that is found even within apparently monoglot contexts. On the other hand, the use, possession and even ‘mastery’ of any language does not make us experts or specialists in terms of judging who or what is ‘wrong’ or not.

456 At times, even those who make fun of themselves could have doubtful motives, but in general, self-criticism and self-correction contribute to safer text-based interactions.

457 The exchange is in a note to the punch line of an anecdote: ‘Wake up and help, Blue. Me duchess is losing her drawers’, following the point that “it is chiefly in Queensland that a dressing-table is called a duchess, though nationwide a runner and two flanking small mats is known as a duchess set.” (p.38)

458 This was noted in discussing CaLD, as our ‘sleeve’ is the limit, like the Channel (la Manche) is for Great Britain. It helps if those who ‘rub elbows’ with us are not labelled as ‘wogs’.
There is a parallel with breathing, something which we do all the time, but where any problems are brought to a health professional (Aitchison, 1997), and I would extend the warning to academic linguists, who also risk going ‘above the sandals’ or shoes, like the cobbler with Apelles, mainly in transcultural aspects of their written texts.

The way out of difficulties in text-based interactions has been outlined above in terms of steps, moving forwards and backwards, and even stopping in one’s tracks, from the point of perception of problems. Awareness, attitudes and approaches recommended in this final chapter relate to the central point of the thesis, as safe text takes searching, seen as the pivotal point in the process. Items described as part of the toolkit can also be identified through the dissertation, as shown through references to previous chapters. The next section will provide a conclusion, by looking at the overall argument, and pointing out the most significant aspects, as well as limitations, of my PhD project. It is followed by recommendations, both for practical use of safe text skills, and for additional investigation of this inexhaustible subject.

**Conclusions**

‘Text’, like ‘texture’, comes from the verb for weaving, and the image of a (leading) ‘thread’ is common in regard to thought, reasoning and ideas.\(^{459}\) A recurrent view of concluding steps, also in text-based interactions, includes ‘tying up loose ends’, which to some extent acknowledges the limits of the supposed (uni-)linearity of human processes, and the likelihood of multiple strands being brought or woven together. The spatial image of a web involves threads intersecting from at least two directions, with points of contact or overlap that give shape and structure, and it can be applied in retrospect to this dissertation, to find threads linking points along and across chapters.

In this dissertation I have chosen to focus on outcomes, and use them as a starting point for analytical descriptions, thus it seems fit to choose them as the initial item of this final section, which also represents the outcome/s of the overall research project, expressed in terms of conclusions and recommendations on searching for safe text.

With the aim to prevent or prepare negative unintended outcomes linked to the opposite, or unsafe text, the thesis has recommended steps leading to safer text

\(^{459}\)In computer-mediated communication, ‘threads’ are often identified within series of messages on the basis of the subject line. However, it is not a reliable guide, as technology maintains as default setting the subject of the message being replied to, even when the topic has changed considerably.
practices, which are a desirable intermediate outcome in the process of searching, and can be seen as a product of the research titled “searching for safe text”. Linguistic forms of interference in text-based interaction can be broadly labelled ‘noise’, as in the code model, and when participants recognise them as such, rather than mis-perceiving them as meaningful but unacceptable text, this awareness constitutes a basic safety factor, which can keep communication on track and avoid disasters.

The thesis uses the simple mnemonic ‘ABC’ to summarise several aspects, linked to further investigation of what appears ‘wrong’ or ‘funny’. Awareness of Background and Culture, as part of the recommended attitude, includes special attention to Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive factors in communication. These are noted in their order of importance and risk as triggers of unwanted negative consequences, and relate to matters of fact (also f/action), matters of manners and matters of face.

While factual items are primarily cognitive, usually linked to confusion, and can be identified also in human-computer interaction (HCI), conventions associated with behaviour and politeness involve affective reactions like embarrassment and offence, which damage (self-) esteem, even if interpersonal relations are not seriously soured.

As noted above, recognising the possibility of miscommunication (or ‘noise’) helps reduce the risk of misunderstanding, in the euphemistic sense of conflict or trouble. This removes the difficulty from the affective and behavioural levels, where re/actions are harder to explain and redress, to the cognitive one of linguacultural conventions, where implicit knowledge can be more readily associated with codified forms.

The thesis recommends the presumption of innocence and ignorance, which can bring a shift in the locus of control of text-based interaction, from what is taken to be meant (signified and intended) by participants, and thus internal, to what is used to make meanings, which is external to authors and interpreters, and may show differences.

The slogan or reminder that ‘nobody can be perfect, but anyone can be correct/ed’, adds to the presumption of innocence and ignorance the option of remedial measures. This involves recognising divergences, and the possibility that more than one party could not only have meant no harm, but actually have known what the text meant, within the limits of certain linguacultural conventions. Thus awareness of background and culture helps recognise forms of transfer with deeper sources than surface errors.
or ‘slips’, although the metaphor of movement or shift in space applies to a wide range of the problems and processes investigated in searching for safe text.

In the case of translations, the source language can often explain what was intended, but miscommunication considered in the thesis includes interactions between people within small and close groups like families, where differences in default settings relate mainly to age and gender, and to the status of expert or novice in specific domains.

A major concern, expressed from the perspective of a linguacultural outsider, is that of equity, access and diversity in communication, specifically but not exclusively in the forms chosen as thesis focus (or narrow point of the figurative hourglass) of transcultural computer-mediated communication, using written text ‘only’ or mainly in English. Thus notions of ‘mastery’ over con/text, including both culture and situation, point to power more than proficiency, and alert text users to the risk of injustice, when a differend denies recognition to forms of linguistic expression.

The resulting principle is formulated as noblesse oblige, a reminder of the old regime/s where forms of socio-economic inequality were more evident and expected, and possibly accepted, but not necessarily much worse than those found (yet often hidden) in the world today. Related notions of ownership and command further relate to codes, including both natural and computer languages, in terms of choices that favour already privileged groups. Risks of negative outcomes, presumably unwanted by most participants, can be far-reaching in terms of equity, access and diversity, and even the narrow use of ‘command’ with reference to computer-mediated functions presents risks at many levels, from factual error to mis-interpretation, including problems based on linguacultures.

With reference to a ladder of discourse, the complexity of meanings increases the statistical risk of unsafe text, but the seriousness of consequences appears independent of linguistic types of input, including forms of error in production and interpretation. The above labels of fact, face and manners are a simplified classification of contexts where many aspects can be involved, and (human) interactional aspects are crucial.

---

460 The syntax at the end is deliberately ambiguous, as the two adverbs apply to use of text and English. The intention is to cause interpreters to pause and take notice of both form and content, and this note specifically addresses their own reactions, as the potential discomfort of uncertainty and interruption can be frequent (but rarely serious) components of the negative unwanted consequences of unsafe text.
Thus proper names and correct (forms of) address are important to safe text, from the
‘literal’ sensitivity of computer-based searches, where only matching strings are
accepted, to the delicate issue of personal and group identity and recognition. As the
names of people/s and places often require a linguacultural shift, for example in
spelling, care in their use reflects respect for diversity, and promotes acceptance of
additional conventions, also involving adequate ‘codes’ for characters in CMC.

Sensitivity to personal labels extends from names and titles to a range of forms of
address and discourse preferences, notably concerning the perception of ‘commands’
rather than requests, and the extent to which people expect or accept ‘direct’ or ‘frank’
forms of text. Language use can be considered offensive in many ways, damaging
interactions even when no offence was intended, and a further risk linked to access
and equity has to do with stigma and shibboleths. Although issues of discriminatory
language use exceed the limits of this dissertation, the attitudes and re/actions that are
recommended in cases of unsafe text can be usefully applied to reveal and redress use
that appears common and correct, but conceals objectionable forms of bias.

Sanctions and rules of various types refer to proscriptive and prescriptive approaches
to text use, which in turn reflect both ideological values and historical background.
In searching for safe text, the recommended approach involves open exchange and
cooperation, to identify a mutually acceptable version of the intended meaning, and
the transfer processes likely to explain its distortion. Inputs to unsafe text are sought
first in the form of expression, where the surface may have been modified by a ‘slip’
or malfunction, or differences could be linked to linguistic and cultural background.
Suspecting unconscious and often unacceptable motives is not advisable, as there can
be simpler explanations, useful to redress or avoid damage to personal interactions.461

A complementary aspect to offence is ridicule, and many kinds of humour appear
associated with forms of unsafe text. If the latter did not exist, it would have to be
invented, as an ingredient of comic creations and performance, just as much as of
tragic events, plays, myths and legends. These ‘stories’ have educational purposes,
discouraging unsafe text, particularly in trans-cultural conditions, on- and off-line.
Interpreters who find text laughable may also display their own ignorance, along with
the innocence of text authors, who not only have a right to the chosen expression, but

461 Aside from ‘Freudian’ interpretations, unsafe reactions to differences in text involve negative
judgement of persons or groups in terms of moral, mental and practical (in)competence.
could well be ‘right’ in their use. The relativity of linguacultural conventions and valuations extends to those applied to this dissertation by author and interpreter, but matters of method in research demand that my own values and views be declared as such, to limit the consequences of unavoidable biases in perspective.

In this dissertation, exposure through introspection is important, also to illustrate the mechanisms involved in re/actions linked to un/safe text. The opinions expressed by many sources, both studies and documents, supplement my own, also to reduce bias. Readers of the dissertation are invited to monitor their own interpretation process, and a broader aim is to recommend safer text practices in relation to most interactions. These concluding remarks aim to distil the spirit of the dissertation, and to facilitate the application of its findings through general recommendations about safe text. To resume the chemical version of the hourglass metaphor, those elements would in turn be combined in many more specific formulations,\textsuperscript{462} to suit individuals and groups.

**Recommendations**

Searching for safe text has been proposed and promoted as a positive process, with priorities for application linked to the risk of negative outcomes of interaction, mainly in terms of frequency (the statistical aspect of risk) and seriousness (loss or damage). The latter can be evaluated more readily when life, limb or other tangible components are involved, usually in confusion about matters of fact, but threats to face (often linked to the body, mediated by language and culture) can ‘depend’ or vary widely.

As ‘charity begins at home’, the choice of recommendations focuses on the kinds of environment closest to my position and experience, combining the educational and research function (central to this Ph.D. project) with the domain of language/s and related professions, including both academic and ‘natural’ (but trained) linguists.

Translators and interpreters (T&I), as language professionals, must be aware of the risks of unsafe text. This is a requirement linked to ethics, and thus there is a need to train newcomers, along with the expectation that competence necessarily involves such awareness (to make explicit two potentially confusing meanings of ‘must be’).

---

\textsuperscript{462} Again, the ambiguity is deliberate, as ‘more’ could indicate quantity, reinforced by ‘many’, or qualitative variety, reinforcing ‘specific’. It is safe, since both aspects are conveyed in either case, and can be useful, if alternative interpretations increase the time and attention given to the expression.
Nobody is perfect, but practice improves the chances of finding (more) ‘correct’ ways to deal with text, and the specific T&I work provides a clear paradigm of two main processes, generally applicable to most forms of interaction. The distinction between translators and interpreters is both technical and arbitrary, but reflects the difference between speech and writing, also including a considerable area of overlap. It helps recognise the focus on decoding when oral exchanges are involved, as meaning needs to be made in one’s head before an equivalent message (the translated version) can be produced, with limited possibilities to present alternatives or changes. Thus the term ‘interpreter’ has been chosen in the thesis to indicate the recipient of text, who has to make sense of it, and who may also have little time for reflection and ‘corrections’.

Translators deal with written text, and the focus is on (re-)encoding in a language that the intended text user can recognise. Conditions of work allow the consideration of options, and changes can be made until the outcome appears satisfactory. Revisions often involve a second opinion, and this layered operation differentiates the work of human professionals from machine translation, where interpretation is (still) left to the final user. The above role corresponds closely to that of authors, as the term used in the thesis to indicate (with some simplification) the source/producer/sender of text, who is perceived as responsible for the encoding of what the text is meant to mean.

The recommendation to promote safe text in T&I practice can take many forms, from training in tertiary courses and professional development seminars, to online support through links with reference works and other sources, exchanges of experiences and opinions, and replies to individual queries. The same avenues can be available or adapted to language users, to develop safe-text skills and to assist in potentially risky situations, and to supplement and improve the outcomes of machine translation.

A specific recommendation, addressed in the first place to the academic community, concerns the delicate balance between en/forcing ‘standards’ of language use within each specific context of situation and (sub-)culture, and promoting development and change, along with equity and access for culturally and linguistically diverse people. Future studies on searching for safe text can address the priorities of potential users, and recent calls for papers show an increasing interest in trans-cultural aspects of communication, concerning software for computers, as well as of the mind.

An example of professional shibboleth is objecting to “voice of translator” instead of “interpreter”.

---

463 An example of professional shibboleth is objecting to “voice of translator” instead of “interpreter”.
‘Always be careful’ is a further reading of ‘ABC’, even for those who are ‘good’ at using language, because other participants in trans-cultural communication may have unexpected approaches and re/actions, based on their own default settings. The thesis has used a rich range of sources, mainly including humour among the ingredients, and indicated avenues and fields where searching for safe text can be practised, in preparation for situations where affects are involved in more direct and personal ways. To conclude with a view from the other side, searching for safe text Can Be Amusing.
Bibliographic references


Pauwels, A. (Ed.). (1992). *Cross-cultural communication in legal settings*. Melbourne: Community Languages in the Professions Unit Language and
Society Centre National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia Monash University.


Piper, T. (1993). *And then there were two: children and second language learning*. Markham, Ont.: Pippin Pub.


Robinson, G. L. N. (1977). *Translation and interpretation: some basic concepts and strategies, based on a visit to the Department of Translation and Interpretation, Monetary Institute.* Sydney: Centre for Research in Measurement and Evaluation.


Student Learning, & Division of SSHE. (2002). *The art of completing your thesis: reviewing, rewriting, revising, editing and proofreading*. Unpublished manuscript, Perth, Western Australia.


