

# THE CONCEPT OF POWER IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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**Abstract:** There has been a recent increase of interest in the phenomenon of power amongst linguists and also philosophers. The presented article attempts to consider power and ways in which it is exercised through language of computer-mediated communication (further CMC). This unique environment is determined by the specific conditions of an Internet chat room, such as anonymity and no audio-visual cues. In the theoretical part, Watts's and Diamond's investigations of power in various open and closed groups in oral communication are discussed and the notion of status is presented. The author divides the chat group corpus into individual sub-groups and tries to draw a graphical presentation, a sociogram, to show their complexity and distribution of power. However, the question remains how tight the sub-groups in CMC are or how interrelated they are with one another. In this respect, it is noteworthy to observe how a selected chat participant develops her status in various sub-groups and to analyze the means by which this possible status is achieved. The corpus was collected by the author herself. The main hypothesis is that the status of power changes quickly throughout chatting and it depends to a great extent on other cues such as address, non-verbal action displays, punctuation marks and so on. In other words, there are very few means by which to exercise power and hold it in this continuously changing and anonymous environment.

**Keywords:** computer-mediated communication, sub-group, chat participant, active, non-active, power, status, language in use, address, non-verbal action displays, sociogram

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Synchronous computer-mediated communication (further CMC) has been attracting the attention of various scientists in the fields of linguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics, psychology and other areas (Condon & Cech 1996, Werry 1996, Baron 1998, Jones (ed.) 1998, Crystal 2001, Herring 2001, Yus 2001, Quero 2003) for several decades now. The proliferation of virtual communities in recent years has resulted in the creation of not only new social spaces but also in new forms of interaction, identity formation and new means of expression. The article draws on my previous research where discourse and conversation analysis of synchronous CMC were carried out. The main emphasis was laid on addressing, opening, turn-taking and closing strategies. However, many other queries have still remained unanswered and therefore, I humbly attempt to reveal and investigate some of them. The focus of my investigation here lies mainly in a chat group analysis from the point of view of sub-group division and structure, changing significance of individual chat participants, then topic control, observation of power construction and ways in which it is exercised through language in use, in other words through ongoing discourse represented by synchronous CMC chatting. To the best of my knowledge, so far there has been very limited research into how power is constructed and exercised through discourse in a synchronous CMC chat group, so the purpose of this article is to gain some insight into this topic. The hypothesis going beyond the whole analysis is as follows: the specific conditions of CMC mentioned above alter the techniques of power holding and power construction. At the same time, the different kind of status and power change quickly throughout CMC chatting and it depends on other cues such as address, non-verbal action displays, punctuation marks and so on.

It must be stressed that the above hypothesis is naturally interwoven with and discussed in connection with other findings throughout the article. The research is based on a corpus containing transcripts of chatting from one specific chatroom. First, I will briefly present the corpus. After that, the chat group will be described. The question may arise as to what kind of communication system it presents, i.e. whether it is an open communication system with no common interests and assumptions or whether it may be considered a closed communication system played out against a backdrop of common assumptions, history and interests (Bernstein 1971). Section 3 makes a theoretical insight into language and power, mainly how participants of a discourse negotiate the distribution of power and what the notion of status means in power construction (Diamond, 1996). Section 4 gives a brief analysis of three sub-groups selected from the whole CMC corpus. The sub-groups have one particular chat participant in common and we can see her peripeteia in power and status through chatting from the beginning to the end. A sociogram is also drawn to show her relationship with the other chat participants. Finally, various possibilities are considered and the hypothesis set above is discussed. I mainly draw on the studies of Watts (1991) and Diamond (1996); however, I also take into account other studies such as Ng and Bradac (1993) and Fairclough (1989).

## 2 CORPUS

In this section I briefly describe the corpus I gathered for the purposes of my CMC research from the chatting service provided by hotmail.com. It contains 793 Internet Relay Chat (further IRC) messages from one chatroom with no specific topic name. A room without any subject-matter specification was intentionally selected so that it would simulate a real face-to-face conversation with no determined topic. I define a message as instantly communicated written information sent by one chat participant and delimited by the moment when the text is conveyed to the monitors of the other chat participants. The data are in the form of a numbered transcript of the conversation as can be seen in the following example from the corpus. Each number represents one message:

(1)

158. *Tweakdup1: dont know why i could be sleeping*  
 159. *482TARADO69 has JOINED the conversation.*  
 160. *Tweakdup1: instead of this bullshit*  
 161. *Ralph has LEFT the conversation.*  
 162. *FatalisticHomeRun: mmmm sleep*  
 163. *malone21139 has JOINED the conversation.*  
 164. *482TARADO69 has LEFT the conversation.*  
 165. *Chief3212: there's some life. hello fatal*  
 166. *pavinjohn11 has LEFT the conversation.*  
 167. *FatalisticHomeRun: hey chief*  
 168. *Chief3212: how are you today*  
 169. *malone21139 has LEFT the conversation.*  
 170. *jrbudman08 has LEFT the conversation.*  
 171. *FatalisticHomeRun: are you the same chief i was giving a hard time to a while back?*  
 172. *olivia354 has LEFT the conversation.*  
 173. *Chief3212: yeah, I'm over it though. big shoulders....*  
 174. *manwidaplan45 has JOINED the conversation.*  
 175. *FatalisticHomeRun: good man*  
 176. *dolphinsneedaqb has LEFT the conversation.*  
 177. *Chief3212: how are you today???*  
 178. *FatalisticHomeRun: some people in chat tend to be grudge holders*  
 179. *Chief3212: not me*  
 180. *FatalisticHomeRun: i'm having one of those days*  
 181. *Guest\_coxjames has JOINED the conversation.*  
 182. *Guest\_coxjames: gm*  
 183. *FatalisticHomeRun: my clothes are buggin me*  
 184. *Tweakdup1 has LEFT the conversation.*  
 185. *Chief3212: too bad....clothes are bugging you??*  
 186. *FatalisticHomeRun: yeah*  
 187. *FatalisticHomeRun: uncomfortable*  
 188. *Chief3212: change*  
 189. *FatalisticHomeRun: i'm at work already*  
 190. *Chief3212: ooh...that stinks*

The aim was to capture the speech situation in the chatroom as naturally as possible. No grammar or other corrections were made. Arranging this corpus, ethical issues were also taken into consideration. To respect the privacy, all the nicknames in the chatroom were modified. For the purposes of the present research, the corpus was also divided into several groups according to the conversation topics and chat participants involved in it. There are six core chat sub-groups that either interrelate and overlap or chat separately. In the corpus, 14 topics can be traced in which chat participants are continuously involved, withdrawn or to which they go back, and which also constantly change and overlap. Apart from real and common topics such as job, cooking, the private lives of actors or cosmetic issues, there are numerous small or social talks/exchanges and individual exclamations that have no reference to the ongoing conversation. It must be noted that a majority of sub-groups found in the corpus are not even groups in the real sense of the word. They are rather gatherings of various individuals who appear to have only one thing in common – they are chatting in the same room at the same time. Nevertheless, it will be demonstrated later in the article that there might be some common ground for those gatherings. So, for the purposes of this research they are called sub-groups. Last but not least, three network sociograms were drawn below to show the interconnection of individual chat participants in the three sub-groups. The sub-groups overlap as do the communication channels of the individual chat participants (Diamond 1996). It is also necessary to mention that in the article the tools of discourse analysis are used. Together with pragmatics and sociolinguistics discourse analysis is concerned with language in use and, more specifically, with the study of the structure of spoken discourse and interactions of individual chat participants. More thorough analysis of the three sub-groups is given in Section 4 below.

### **3 POWER IN LANGUAGE**

As Watts (1991) points out no language in use can ever be “neutral” or “objective”. There will always be a point of view, a stance, a hidden or open agenda of assumptions according to which participants will interact verbally. By the same token, therefore, no discourse can ever be free of power and the exercise of power. Diamond (1996) stresses that power is not merely a quality that is assigned or earned, but it is also an interactional skill and process. All discourse members have to contest roles, dispute or disagree on the interpretation of events. A powerful member of a community is not the one who plays the game and wins but the one who sets the rules of the game. As she notes power is never finally or ultimately acquired, but is contested, vied for and negotiated throughout an interaction. Therefore, power is not only a commodity which can be taken by force, but also a role which needs ratification. It is obvious that we must distinguish between the language in use in institutionalized settings, where it tends to be more open to public inspection and highly conventionalized, and the language of a close-knit social network where the questions of status and the exercise of power are more covert.

According to Watts (1991) a close-knit social network is described as a group with a high density of interconnections between the members, a common stock of assumptions

and a higher frequency of social interaction, like a family, workmates or a group of intimate friends. On the other hand, an open-knit social network lacks this common background. The initial question, therefore, arises as to which setting a CMC chat group inclines to more. Leaving aside the obvious features of CMC distinguishing it from face-to-face communication and discussed by many linguists, that is anonymity, exclusively text-based interaction, lack of audio-visual cues and isolation (Spears and Lea 1994), it might seem that an Internet chat group with its loose structure and many participants joining and leaving a chatroom does not have anything in common or does not constitute a unified group. These constraints, nevertheless, do not necessarily limit the functioning of a group as a socially close-knit group. Constraints, according to Diamond (1996) are limitations on behaviour, and form unwritten rules that ensure that an interaction is coherent, appropriate and so, successful. They are the framework of the interaction, providing a structure within which speakers construct meanings. When analyzing the CMC corpus I gathered, it was noteworthy to observe ways of communicating and development of relationships among chat participants that implied they may even know each other from previous chatting or even in person. The following example from the corpus may serve as evidence:

(2)

165. Chief3212: *there's some life. hello fatal*  
 166. pavinjohn11 *has LEFT the conversation.*  
 167. FatalisticHomeRun: *hey chief*  
 168. Chief3212: *how are you today*  
 169. malone21139 *has LEFT the conversation.*  
 170. jrbudman08 *has LEFT the conversation.*  
 171. FatalisticHomeRun: ***are you the same chief i was giving a hard time to a while back?***  
 172. olivia354 *has LEFT the conversation.*  
 173. Chief3212: ***yeah, I'm over it though. big shoulders.***  
 174. manwidaplan45 *has JOINED the conversation.*  
 175. FatalisticHomeRun: ***good man***  
 176. dolphinsneedaqb *has LEFT the conversation.*  
 177. Chief3212: *how are you today???*  
 178. FatalisticHomeRun: *some people in chat tend to be grudge holders*  
 179. Chief3212: *not me*  
 180. FatalisticHomeRun: *i'm having one of those days*

To conclude the theoretical part, the notion of *status* must be explained and clarified. Diamond (1996: 9) distinguishes between *status* and *rank*. She claims that *status* implies social stratification on a vertical scale. *Institutional status* includes among others sex, age, marital status or education and is more or less fixed. Diamond stresses that an individual cannot do much to change these external variables, as she calls them. However, the system does not take into consideration contextual dependency. So when we examine this phenomenon more closely, it is clear that contextually dependent *status* and the fixed *institutional status* are not the same.

Therefore, she proposes another term to highlight these differences, *rank*. On the other hand, Watts (1991), in his study of power in family discourse, works solely with the term *status* without any differentiation or categorization. He notes that certain members of a group will have greater *status* than others. The *status* is always measured, or valued, by group members. It may be said that the participants of CMC discourse negotiate the distribution of power through *status*, which an individual is able to establish during the interaction. For the purpose of this article, I will also use the term *status* in the same way as Watts.

## 4 CHAT GROUP RESEARCH

In the following section, the participants in the chatting interaction are described and investigated in more detail from different points of view. First, the terms *active and non-active participant* must be clarified. After that, the definition of the CMC chat groups is given in order to observe whether the chat group is latent or emergent (Watts 1991). Finally, a sociogram of the three consecutive sub-groups is presented when considering the structure of the network and relationship including status and power inside the sub-groups.

### 4.1 Active and non-active chat participants

In the corpus, there are 19 *active chat participants* out of 108 participants that joined the chatroom through the Automated Joining Signal (further AJS). The following sequence may serve as an example of active participation – AJS → *opening address* → *reply to the opening from another participant or other participants* → *further exchanges of opinion or thoughts* → *possible Automated Leaving Signal (ALS)*, although not necessarily; see the following example from the corpus:

- (3)
198. LINDSAY has JOINED the conversation. **(AJS)**
  199. LINDSAY: Mornin' **(opening address – greeting)**
  200. FatalisticHomeRun: and i HATE these freakin people calling my office this morning
  201. CHAZ4u2c2: hi lidsey **(a reply to a greeting)**
  202. LINDSAY: hey chaz **(a reply to a greeting)**
  203. Chief3212: sounds like fun. I hate f
  204. Chief3212: i hate phone calls too
  205. Teacher\_guy5 has JOINED the conversation.
  206. FatalisticHomeRun: people!
  207. CHAZ4u2c2: how r u today lidsay? **(phatic question – an invitation to a further talk)**
  208. FatalisticHomeRun: this guy just ticked me off
  209. LINDSAY: Lindsay **(correction)**
  210. LINDSAY: and im fine thanks and you? **(response to a phatic question)**
  211. Chief3212: how so
  212. Guest\_coxjames has LEFT the conversation.
  213. CHAZ4u2c2: doing great. just a day off from work to have some work done at my house **(developing a further topic)**
  214. LINDSAY: cool

LINDSAY and CHAZ4u2c2 are both examples of *active chat participants*. They follow a similar pattern of active chatting and attempt to develop further talk up to line 257. Interestingly, IRC with its absence of audio-visual means operates in comparable dimensions to a face-to-face interaction. It is observed that in the majority of cases greetings on IRC serve either as an invitation for further talk or only as a phatic element fulfilling a social function.

However, *non-active participants*, in the present research, are participants that either join the chatroom and after a short time leave using an Automated Leaving Signal (further ALS) as we can see in Example 4, do not contribute to the ongoing discussion, or only use an opening strategy that is not efficient, Example 5. The following sequence, thus, can be seen: *AJS* → *ALS* or *AJS* → *opening address/phatic question/contact advertisement* → *ALS*. It means their opening strategy does not gain any response in the chat room, like in Example 4.

(4)

21. *dolphinsneedaqb* has JOINED the conversation. **(AJS)**
22. *woogywoogywoo* has LEFT the conversation.
23. *Im Trendy: hop!*
24. *woogywoogywoo* has JOINED the conversation.
25. *Im Trendy: hop!*
26. *woogywoogywoo* has LEFT the conversation.
27. *woogywoogywoo* has JOINED the conversation.
28. *dolphinsneedaqb* has LEFT the conversation. **(ALS)**

(5)

494. *Bonafide410* has JOINED the conversation. **(AJS)**
495. *CLS2007* has JOINED the conversation.
496. *james6: so any sane ladies in here?*
497. *watcher\_of\_souls: no fluffer nutter is instant death*
498. *WretchedRapunzel* has LEFT the conversation.
499. *SpecialED: fluffer nutter?*
500. *watcher\_of\_souls: yeah*
501. *SpecialED: im not sane?*
502. *SpecialED: james how old are you?*
503. *Bonafide410: hi room* **(opening question)**
504. *KingKaosh: Could we have a moment for children...who got raped and murdered or trapped in the system who never knew they father never learned to dream...but was guided by drugdealaz killaz an crackpheins, for single mothers who are forced to play mom and dad*
505. *KingKaosh: bustin there ass to give there kids what they never had*
506. *Boyfromdaburbz* has LEFT the conversation.
507. *watcher\_of\_souls: marshmellow fluff and peanut butter* **(an attempt to establish another topic)**
508. *SpecialED: nice depressing song jay*
509. *watcher\_of\_souls* has LEFT the conversation.
510. *USARMY7568* has JOINED the conversation.
511. *blueeyez* has JOINED the conversation.
512. *Bonafide410* has LEFT the conversation. **(ALS)**

There, *Dolphinsneedaqb* joined the chatroom by an AJS and after seven lines *Dolphinsneedaqb* left by an ALS. The participant did not attempt to open any conversation or address any chat participant. On the contrary, in Example 5, after joining the chatroom *Bonafide410* tried to open a conversation with a salutation, but did not receive any response and left the chat room after several lines.

#### 4.2 What kind of network does a CMC chat group represent?

As it was mentioned above, the issue that also needs to be clarified here is what kind of communication system a synchronous CMC chat group presents, i.e. whether it is more an open communication system with no common interests and assumptions or whether it may be considered a closed communication system where chat participants display common assumptions, history and interests (Bernstein 1971). Different views can be found in the literature such as Bernstein's; however, I incline toward the concept introduced by Watts (1991, 2003). He makes use of the concept of social network, where *network* is not understood merely as a potential relationship between the members of a social group, in this case a CMC chat group, which means an abstract social structure, but rather as actual relationships emerging in the socio-communicative verbal interaction. It is a constantly changing social configuration, a dynamic process that Watts (1991: 154) calls an *emergent network*. I will also use this notion in my research for the following reason: it can be observed that one part of the presented CMC chat participants, namely sub-groups 5 and 6 show signs of common ties and experience from either previous chat rooms or even from previous personal contacts.

It follows that a CMC chat group is a continuously changing network: there are constant shifts in the structure of participants, one participant being at the centre of attention and then another being the central focus of other participants. In this respect, Watts (1991: 163–169) works with the terms *resource person*, *peripheral member* and *member as competitor*. *Resource person* refers to one member of a group “from whom relevant information regarding the topic may be sought or who is invested... with the authority to provide relevant information.” *The peripheral member* is a participant of a conversation not in control of events occurring during the chat conversation and who is also denied the position of a powerful and influential chat group participant. In CMC, this is either by not being known to anybody in the chat room, not being so visible, or producing inefficient, unattractive contributions. We will see how chat participants in this position solve this situation in CMC chatting. The *members as competitors* may be considered members that occupy a more central position in the emergent network and it is also likely that there is evidence of a certain amount of competition between them, which can sometimes threaten to develop into open conflict. The three sociograms that I present in the following section may, among other facts, indicate whether or not such types of persons are existent in the corpus.

#### 4.3 Sociograms and their use to describe CMC chat group networks

A sociogram entails a graphic representation of social links that a person has. Sociograms were developed by Jacob L. Moreno (1934, 2014) a Romanian-American psychiatrist, psycho-sociologist, to analyze choices or preferences within a group. They



can diagram the structure and patterns of group interactions. A sociogram can be drawn on the basis of many different criteria such as social relations, channels of influence, lines of communication and so on.

In the article, I use the term *network sociogram* in the way Julia Diamond works with this term in her work (Diamond, 1996). In his research on family discourse Watts (1991: 149) utilizes the expression *interaction format*. He defines it as “the combination of factors within which socio-communicative verbal interaction occurs”. For the current research, however, *network sociogram* seems to embrace the whole set of factors influencing social interaction within the CMC environment. These are mainly observations of how participants relate to one another, how important the position they display within the interaction is, what status they hold and how this factor changes throughout chatting. It may also reveal the distribution of power of individual chat participants, which is directly related to status. The arrows signify the direction of the response: either one way, which means no response, or reciprocal, which signifies various ways the participant interacts. They have different thicknesses signifying the intensity of individual interactions. The thicker the arrow is, the more intensive the interaction between participants. The size of the circles represents the significance of the participants’ roles within the network, which may fluctuate as the network changes, so the size of the circles either increase or decrease in individual sub-groups. I present three network sociograms and their thorough analysis, which reflect the first three sub-groups within the corpus. One of the reasons why I have selected the three consecutive sub-groups is the fact that I attempt to analyze the role of one chat participant called *FatalisticHomeRun* who takes part in all three sub-groups. This chat participant seems to display quite different forms of behaviour and interaction in accordance with the personal composition of the chat group and the tabled topic. *FatalisticHomeRun* is not the only participant in the corpus to display variant patterns of chatting and conduct; however, she actively participates in the three different types of situations and also in three consecutive sub-groups.

### 4.3.1 Sub-group 1

Sub-group 1 ranging from lines 1 to 100 is dominated by one of the strongest, longest and the most meaningful interactions between *Im Trendy* and *volkswagenracing* (VWR) in the whole corpus.

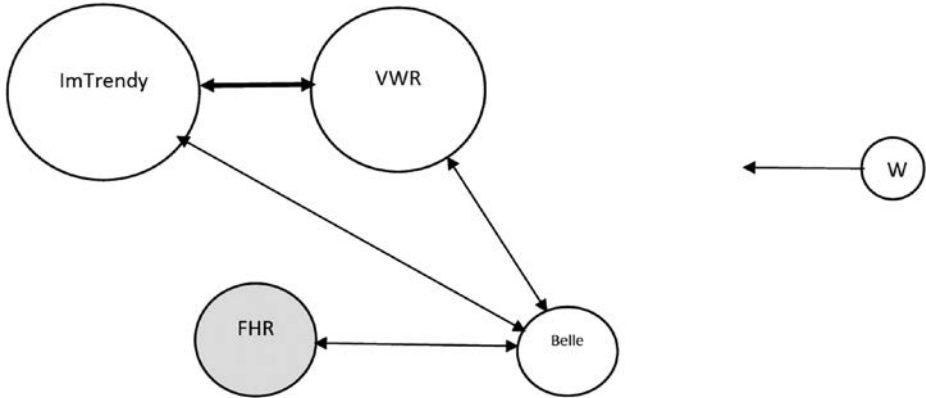


Figure 1: Sociogram – Sub-group 1

They have twelve exchanges in total and their status in the group is equally significant. It seems they know each other from previous chat room interactions. This is the reason why they can control the topic choice and hold the conversation floor. They are, therefore, in a position of power and are able to maintain their conversation topic despite several off-topic interruptions by other participants *Wiky* (*W*), *Belle* and *FatalisticHomeRun* (*FHR*). *Belle* is trying to “break” the room with another topic of a “booty call” and is quite successful as it gains the attention of every active participant of this sub-group apart from *Wiky*. The whole interaction can be followed in Example 6. A booty call is a slang expression the purpose of which is to arrange a meeting to have casual sex via a phone call or a text message. Not surprisingly then, *Belle* receives seven responses in total to the booty call offer as can be seen from three reciprocal interactions (arrows). Interestingly, *Wiky*’s six contributions, lines 6, 7, 20, 29, 37 and 42, stay in fact unresponded to with the exception of *FatalisticHomeRun*’s one-word reactions, or shout-outs to *Wiky*’s statement in line 20. However, it remains only one-way interaction with a very thin arrow. Looking at the structure of Sub-group 1 interactions in the sociogram, *Wiky* and *FatalisticHomeRun* play the role of peripheral members who do not control the main topic and make irrelevant contributions to the ongoing interaction. *Belle* is trying to change the topic, “break” the room, albeit unsuccessfully. So for a short time *Belle* stands in a central position holding the floor and being a dominant chat participant between lines 38 and 52 and moreover, attracting others to respond, which is quite challenging in CMC.

(6)

38. Belle: *do you ppl want a booty call*
39. Belle: *there aint nothin wrong with a booty call*
40. volkswagenracing: *lmfao ali g: ^)*
41. Tonybx2 *has LEFT the conversation.*
42. Wiky: *i foolishly took exception to it rather than walking on*
43. FatalisticHomeRun: *i love the booty call song*
44. Im Trendy: *ok*
45. volkswagenracing: *yeah belle i want a booty call*
46. FatalisticHomeRun: *i can't help it*
47. Im Trendy: *as inspiring as this room is*
48. volkswagenracing: *send the airplane*
49. woogywoogywoo: *I'm going to leave you bitches now*
50. Belle: *everybody needs a booty call*
51. FatalisticHomeRun: *airborne booty call*
52. Belle: *lol*

### 4.3.2 Sub-group 2

Before approaching the analysis of the second sub-group, it is necessary to note that the first and the second sub-groups overlap. The first sub-group ranges from line 1 to 100, the second sub-group begins on line 93 when Tweakdup1 joins the conversation and finishes on line 184 when Tweakdup1 leaves the chatroom. In Sub-group 2, there are only the three following active participants: Tweakdup1, FatalisticHomeRun (FHR) and Chief3212. As it can be noted from the sociogram of Sub-group 2 above, the dominant position is held by Tweakdup1. To describe the status of Tweakdup1, we can use the expression used by Watts (1991), dramatizing the self. Thanks to Tweakdup1's confrontational attitude and lack of interest in maintaining a state of equilibrium in the interpersonal relationships, there are very few attempts by other participants to „break“ the room or change the topic. As we can see from Example 7, during the course of the interaction or better said, monologue exclamations going beyond the appropriate conduct, Tweakdup1 controls access to the conversational floor and does not let anyone take over the dominant status, see the size of the circle in the sociogram. S/he violates the netiquette by using multiple exclamation marks, repetition of words and letters and bad language, as Example 7 indicates. The question may arise as to whether this is a sign of power acceptable in CMC, or only a sign of impoliteness and aggressive behaviour. The arrows are thin in both cases indicating that the interaction is quite weak, not intensive and contains only one meaningless exchange with FatalisticHomeRun and six exchanges concerning work with Chief3212. The chat participant FatalisticHomeRun is in the peripheral position again and rather withdraws from the conversation with Tweakdup1 in line 108 to come back again in line 162. In CMC, it is hard to estimate whether she was escaping from the unpleasant interaction or really had a lot of work. Chief3212 has more exchanges with Tweakdup1, attempting to engage in small talk, but

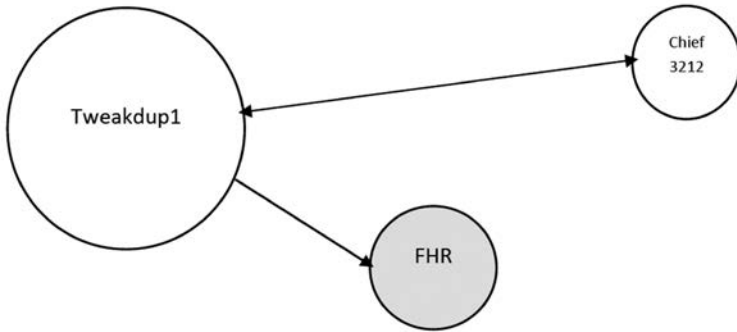


Figure 2: Sociogram – Sub-group 2

eventually stayed in the peripheral position as well. The final part of Sub-group 2, lines 162 to 184, belongs to *FatalisticHomeRun* and *Chief3212* in the dominant position establishing the topic and leaving *Tweakdup1* in a peripheral position until s/he left the chatroom in line 184.

Finally, in Sub-group 3, the position of *FatalisticHomeRun* changes to dominant together with *Chief3212*.

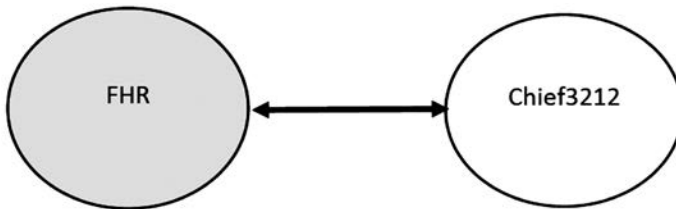
(7)

- 110. *Tweakdup1*: nooooooooooooo
- 111. *Tweakdup1*: really i dont care
- 112. *mustiakmaya\_2* has LEFT the conversation.
- 113. *Tweakdup1*: go work
- 114. *Tweakdup1*: all day
- 115. *Tweakdup1*: and night
- 116. *Tweakdup1*: have fun
- 117. *Tweakdup1*: peace out hommie
- 118. *Tweakdup1*: gets to stepp'n
- 119. *LeeLee5009* has LEFT the conversation.
- 120. *Tweakdup1*: your still here why
- 121. *pavinjohn11* has JOINED the conversation
- 122. *PLAYGENE21* has LEFT the conversation.
- 123. *Leidel1* has LEFT the conversation.
- 124. *Tweakdup1*: go work
- 125. *Tweakdup1*: now
- 126. *Tweakdup1*: now
- 127. *Tweakdup1*: now
- 128. *Tweakdup1*: !!!!!
- 129. *Tweakdup1*: this room is deader than hell
- 130. *Tweakdup1*: this sucks
- 131. *Chief3212*: anything interesting in here today
- 132. *Tweakdup1*: no
- 133. *Debby34c-25yroid* has LEFT the conversation.

134. *VenomousCheetah* has LEFT the conversation.
135. *pavinjohn11* has LEFT the conversation.
136. *Tweakdup1*: noone in here talking but me
137. *mustiakkaya\_2* has JOINED the conversation.
138. *CHAZ4u2c2* has returned.
139. *HARDBODIEDJOHNNY1* has LEFT the conversation.
140. *mustiakkaya\_2* has LEFT the conversation.
141. *Chief3212*: I see.....I guess I'll get back to working then
142. *Tweakdup1*: back to work
143. *Tweakdup1*: now
144. *Tweakdup1*: !!!!!!!!!!!!!
145. *dolphinsneedaqb* has JOINED the conversation.
146. *Chief3212*: kind of boring though
147. *pavinjohn11* has JOINED the conversation.
148. *Tweakdup1*: suck it up

### 4.3.3 Sub-group 3

The last sub-group that is presented within this section overlaps with Sub-groups 2 and 4. It begins in line 162 and continues until line 267 when it mingles with Sub-group 4 from line 198. The two dominating or resource chat participants *FatalisticHomeRun* and *Chief3212* hold the floor and control the topic.



**Figure 3: Sociogram – Sub-group 3**

It appears from their initial conversation that they had already met before, see Example 8. We can also draw from this extract that there was a conflict or exercise of power of *FatalisticHomeRun* over *Chief3212* before and in this interaction it was remedied verbally by the supportive language of *FatalisticHomeRun*. The topic, or series of interactions that develop after that are made up of small talk known from face-to-face exchanges such as job, troubles at work, appearance and so on.

(8)

167. *FatalisticHomeRun*: **hey chief**
168. *Chief3212*: **how are you today**
169. *malone21139* has LEFT the conversation.
170. *jrbdman08* has LEFT the conversation.
171. *FatalisticHomeRun*: **are you the same chief i was giving a hard time to a while back?**

172. *olivia354* has LEFT the conversation.  
 173. *Chief3212*: **yeah, I'm over it though. big shoulders....**  
 174. *manwidaplan45* has JOINED the conversation.  
 175. *FatalisticHomeRun*: **good man**  
 ...  
 217. *FatalisticHomeRun* **calms herself (non-action verbal display)**

A noteworthy conversation method used only in CMC synchronous chatting called non-verbal action display can be found in line 217 indicating present tense actions that are performative in nature and count as acts solely by virtue of having been typed. It also interestingly reveals the gender of *FatalisticHomeRun* which, otherwise, in most cases remains hidden or unknown. It thus explains the use of the feminine gender for this participant above. After a short “pause” between lines 221 to 233 the second series of turns occurs, initiated by *Chief3212*. The topic is as follows; how they look in their picture and their nickname. Suddenly, their conversation finishes, without any obvious cause, when *FatalisticHomeRun* leaves the chatroom. We can only speculate about the reasons why she had to leave as there is no obligation to continue discussing in CMC; however, it may be seen as inappropriate in this particular ongoing interaction. The size of the circles is the same signifying the same effort placed in the ongoing interaction: *Chief3212* made 17 responses and *FatalisticHomeRun* replied 15 times. The topics are controlled by both. The thickness of the arrow suggests a strong and intensive interaction. It can be noted from the whole interaction that there is no struggle for power from either chat participant.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The central idea behind the presented research is that language is not only used to convey information, but it is utilized as an interactional device and it can also shed light on interpersonal and social relations. The main hypothesis set above claimed that status and power change quickly throughout chatting and are highly dependent on other cues such as address, non-verbal action displays, punctuation marks and so on. In other words, there are very few means of exercising power and holding it in this continuously changing and anonymous environment. The analysis of the three consecutive sub-groups in the corpus confirmed the above assumptions. One particular chat participant called *FatalisticHomeRun* (FHR) is traced throughout chatting to show how her status and power may change. As we could see in Sub-group 1, *FatalisticHomeRun* is only a peripheral member making irrelevant statements trying to contribute to an interaction, repeating what other chat participants say to gain attention, albeit unsuccessfully. Her status within the group is thus very low and the circle is also small. In Sub-group 2, which overlaps with Sub-group 1, a kind of tension generated from the inappropriate conduct of *Tweakdup1* is noted. *FatalisticHomeRun* starts some social talk but gets inappropriate responses from *Tweakdup1* and after a few exchanges stops chatting without actually leaving the chatroom. She becomes a mere peripheral member; the circle is smaller than in the previous sub-group. It must be stressed that this interaction is only one-way, from *Tweakdup1* to *FatalisticHomeRun*. The power displayed by *Tweakdup1* involves multiple

exclamation marks, repetitions of letters and words. The arrows in the sociogram are weak, signifying a low intensity of exchanges.

Sub-group 3 overlapping with Sub-group 2 is dominated by two chat participants, *FatalisticHomeRun* and *Chief3212*. Both seem to have equal status. Nevertheless, as the initial conversation opens it is noteworthy to observe the suggestion that *FatalisticHomeRun* and *Chief3212* knew each other from previous interactions under possibly unpleasant circumstances – for *Chief3212*, at least. They clarify their positions and then have similarly strong status. The topic is controlled by both chat participants equally. The thickness of the arrows and the size of the circles signify strong and intensive interaction. It must be noted that there is no competition for power. It can be gathered from these observations that status and power in the interaction are also influenced by the organizational structure of individual sub-groups and its composition as we can see in the example of *FatalisticHomeRun*, our research chat participant. To conclude, it must be stressed that this article was able to uncover only a small part of the findings related to power and status in the CMC environment. The way individual chat participants behave and gain various degrees of status and power throughout chatting is remarkable and would deserve further detailed research.

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