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Speech Analysis of Italian iTV SMS

This paper reports a study of the speech acts in relation to gender of users in SMS messages sent to a public Italian interactive television (iTV) channel. Written and publicly archived iTV SMS corpus available on the iTV channel's web page (www.allmusic.tv) allows to investigate spoken properties, in particular speech acts, of the Italian language by gender. Speech act analysis has been employed according to Bach and Harnish's (1979) speech act taxonomy. Moreover, a particular focus has been attributed to gender differences in use of the language of iTV SMS.

Previous research on computer-mediated communication (CMC), including SMS, has identified differences according to user gender. This study investigates differences in writing SMS (Short Message Service) on a public domain - interactive television (iTV) known as a phenomenon of convergence known as iTV SMS or iTV SMS chat.

Contrastingly, there are claims characterizing CMC as a universal phenomenon conditioned only by the constraints of media (e.g., Crystal, 2001). Such view suggests that male and female users would use similar way of expressions in iTV SMS.

In this paper, I evaluate this hypothesis using Italian iTV SMS data. Earlier studies of Italian iTV SMS are limited to one observational review of a corpus of 21 private and public Italian SMS (Zarantonello, 2002). The few studies that have mentioned gender in relation to SMS show that the phenomenon, including iTV SMS, is as popular with females as with males, and is especially popular among young users (Ling, 2005; van Dijk, 2003). This study contributes to the studies of the new phenomenon of iTV with the particular focus of gender differences in speech acts.

Preliminary results reveal gender differences in such a way that females use more constatives, however male users use more directives. Employing a more fine grained analysis, it appeared that women use more claims and male users used more direct and indirect requests. Interesting results have been found in a use of acknowledgements. It appeared that male users used more greetings than female users did. I conclude by interpreting the findings in relation to cultural gender roles in Italy and considering their implications for communication via SMS and iTV more generally.

These findings demonstrate that contrastingly what has been stated previously, there are gender differences in and it has been revealed in employing the analysis of the speech acts.

