Opening a Relationship Online
- An Analysis of Openings of MSN Conversation in the Shipping Business in Southeast Asia

Yuan Zhou
Supervisor: Anna Ekström
Examiner: Mathias Broth

Linköping University
Department of Culture and Communication
Master’s Programme
Language and Culture in Europe
**Acknowledgments**

I owe a great deal to many people for helping me in writing this Master thesis. I owe my thanks to Dr. Anna Ekström and Associate Professor Mathias Broth for their supervision, many thanks to their professional guidance, advice, and suggestion. Their enthusiasm to conversation analysis leads me to the amazing world of language and communication, and they have shown me new perspectives in seeing things which brings me a new vision of the world.

I want to thank Mr. Justin Zh., Mr. George Z., Mr. Rick H., and Mr. Hilton Zh. who helped me a lot with the analyzing data.

I am thankful to the fellow members of Interaction Analysis Essay group. I enjoy the meetings with the supervisors and the group members, which were very interesting, inspiring, and productive. Thanks to the Department of Culture and Communication of Linköping University. It has been a great opportunity to study here.

I am grateful to my parents. Though they might not be able to read this thesis as they do not speak English, they are always proud of me. And thanks to my sisters. My family has been very supportive to my study in Sweden.
Content

Acknowledgments --------------------------------------------------------------- 1
1. Introduction --------------------------------------------------------------- 3
2. Previous research ---------------------------------------------------------- 5
   2.1 CMC and IM ------------------------------------------------------------- 5
   2.2 IM and telephone conversation ------------------------------------------- 6
   2.3 Openings in conversations ----------------------------------------------- 7
   2.4 Greetings --------------------------------------------------------------- 8
   2.5 Interpersonal relationship and conversation ----------------------------- 10
3. Data, methodology and analytic approach ----------------------------------- 12
   3.1 Data ------------------------------------------------------------------ 12
   3.2 Methodology and analytic approach -------------------------------------- 15
4. Analysis ------------------------------------------------------------------ 17
   4.1 The admittance process ------------------------------------------------- 18
   4.2 The greetings and a special case ---------------------------------------- 23
      4.2.1 At the very beginning --------------------------------------------- 23
      4.2.2 The most frequent pattern: the opening mark with greetings ------ 27
   4.3 Addressing but no greeting: being efficient and professional --------- 30
   4.4 Some special cases ------------------------------------------------------ 34
      4.4.1 Openings without preludes ---------------------------------------- 34
      4.4.2 Open and reopen again: the problem of availability -------------- 38
5. Discussion and conclusion -------------------------------------------------- 41
References ------------------------------------------------------------------ 44
1. Introduction

This is a thesis about the emerging of an interpersonal relationship between professionals in shipping business in Southeast Asia. The participants are strangers in the same trade and located in different parts of the region but gradually get to know each other and cooperate in business through the use of a computer chatting software. In this study, the opening of conversations of computer mediated communication is investigated with a focus on signs of a developing relationship.

The application of computer mediated communication (CMC) in workplaces has long been noticed, studies have been done on its characteristics as well as social consequence. Using CMC as a frequent communication channel to do business is a significant phenomenon in the shipping industry in Southeast Asia. The participants who work in the same trade in different countries/places get to know each other online, and after period of time of communication on business as well as on personal life, they become business partners, and even friends. The conversations between the participants witness the growing of their business/friendly relationship.

Conversation plays a significant role in interpersonal relationship. Svennevig (1999) claims that: "conversations are important for the relations that are subsequently established between interlocutors" (p. 1). Shotter (1993) observes that people are not simply putting their ideas into words, they are in fact also: "[...] responding to each other's utterances in an attempt to link their practical activities in with those of others around them; and in these attempts at coordinating their activities, people are constructing one or another kind of social relationship" (p. 1). People can establish, develop, and change interpersonal relationship in face-to-face conversations as they can see each other and hear each other and there are a large number of visual and auditive cues for them to make decisions on how to communicate with one another, and what kind of relationship they would like to build between them. In CMC, communication recurrently builds on textual contributions, and the participants have no
visual or auditive cue as in face-to-face encounter or telephone communication, textual words that they exchange with one another are their only channel getting to know each other. It is interesting and worth exploring that how two persons who have never met or heard from each other one day start talking online, and gradually grow a relationship through textual conversations.

Conversations bring people together. The start of a conversation contributes to the determination of nature of relationship to be developed. In studying the openings of telephone conversation, Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) observe that how the participants initiate the first utterance will at the same time "reveal how they categorize themselves in relation to the other" (p. 152). And "[t]his categorization issue is a key one in conversation analysis, because categories of personal identity and of reference to others are necessarily selective" (ibid.). The same goes for CMC in a business setting. Opening sequences in the data stream demonstrates participants' identities. The specific focus of this thesis is the opening sequences of CMC in shipping business interaction in Southeast Asia. The opening sequences refer to the first several lines of the dialogue between the two participants at different times which might lead to further conversations. A number of questions are directed as part of this study: How the two participants use CMC as a working tool of communication in a business setting? How do they initiate their dialogue? Why do the participants use different kinds of openings in their continuous conversations online at different times.

The thesis consists of five parts, starting with the introduction, following which is the outline of previous theoretical framework on the topic. The third section is about the data and methodology. It explains the setting of the current data; displays how the empirical material is collected, how the data has been translated and used as analytic resource, and what method that is going to apply in the analysis. The fourth section is the main part of the thesis. Where it discusses extracts of openings of conversations in the current data, analyzes how the participants set up a connection, and shows various ways that they initiate their conversations through CMC in a business setting. In the fifth section of discussion and conclusion, the study in the previous sections is
summarized. With detailed analysis of various openings of conversations in the current data, this thesis is aiming to discover the clues that indicate the emerging of a relationship between the participants.

2. Previous Research

This section provides an overview of previous related studies on computer mediated communication, instant messaging and telephone conversation, opening sequences, greetings, and interpersonal relationship in conversations is introduced.

2.1 CMC and IM

Research shows that Internet has significantly changed the way people converse and socialize.

CMC has brought human communication beyond face-to-face meeting. It "has emerged as an important new communication modality that is increasingly permeating everyday life in industrial societies" (Herring, 1996, p. 2). "Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) is communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers" (ibid. p. 1). CMC brings people together and people in different places can meet online and communicate with one and other through internet and internet has been a global communication network (Danet and Herring, 2007, p. 1).

CMC takes multiple forms ranging from bulletin boards, chat rooms, email to instant messaging (IM), web blog, etc. Studies were conducted on CMC from perspectives such as language, culture, and a sociology committed to characterize the form of the communication in the dynamic social environment (Herring, 1996; Danet and Herring, 2007; Frehner, 2008; Anglemark, 2009; Baron, 2010; Garcia et al, 1999). CMC has been characterized as a communication style which has characteristics of both spoken and written language, but in Herring's words, it is "more like spoken conversation"
Lamerichs and Te Molder (2003) notice that recent researchers have shifted their focus on the characteristics of CMC into its "social context factors" (p. 366). They realize that "talk and text are analyzed as part of sequences of interaction" (ibid. p. 458). Their analysis shows a more dynamic view on the participants' identities and social norm on CMC which indicates a variable relationship between participants. Many researchers have done pragmatic investigations on the use of CMC/IM in a workplace as a communicating/working tool, displaying the application, frequency of usage, and topics of the IM in different groups of people (Nardi et al, 2000; Handel et al, 2002; Isaacs et al 2002; Muller et al, 2003). Nardi (2005) claims that the study of IM in a business setting is "a study of personal social networks in the workplace" (p. 94). It draws the attention to how IM becomes a common channel of relating people, and discovers that people connect each other in dimensions of affinity, attention, and commitment through communication via IM. The study has associated the IM with a deeper meaning on the societal reflection in CMC. It is not merely one of the popular communication media in modern society, by using this conversational channel, people also change their ways of social interaction, which may cause the change of social structure around the world.

2.2 IM and telephone conversation

Both IM and telephone conversation are intermediary communication, one through computer, the other through telephone. In IM, a message travels by textual words; while on the telephone, by speech sounds, neither has visual cues that as in face-to-face encounter. These visual cues are "embodied resources for interaction (gesture, posture, facial expression, physically implemented on going activities, and the like" (Schegloff, 2002, p. 288). The current data is the exchange of IM between participants, who are not working in the same location and are connected to one another by internet. In this case, it is similar to the telephone conversation as "[part] of the telephone's practical significance is that it extends occasions for speaking. Using the telephone each of us
can speak across distance, across social barriers, across barriers to mobility" (Hopper, 1992, p. 3). IM and the telephone break the spatial distance between the participants, whose conversations via different media display different features in various situations.

Schegloff (2002) notices the asymmetrical information of caller and receiver in telephone conversation as the participants cannot see each other. In Hopper's words, "Caller hegemony is most obvious at the opening of each phone call. The caller knows whom she is calling, and why" (Hopper, 1992, p. 9). While the receiver might not know who is calling, and why. Schegloff finds four core sequences in his large-scale study on the openings of telephone conversations, which are: the summons/answer sequence (the telephone ring - the summons, and the answer's first 'Hello'), the identification/recognition sequence, the greetings sequence, and the initial inquiries sequence. They characterize the telephone openings in Western or some non-Western cultures (Hutchby and Woffitt, 2008, pp. 117-118). Schegloff (1968) also observes the "nonterminality" of the summons/answer sequence that: "the summons is a particularly powerful way of generating a conversational interaction" (p. 1091).

2.3 Openings in conversations

How do we start talking to someone, for example, to a stranger, to an acquaintance, or to a friend? Svennevig (1999) discusses the settings and participants first before coming to the "establishment of interpersonal relations in conversation" (pp. 7-8), which indicates that where, when and how we meet people affect the way that we open a conversation with them. He further argues that people get to know each other by conversations, and conversations between people are constrained by certain social rules and are proceeded with certain social ritual under different circumstances. The openings of conversations indicate how we identify ourselves and others, or how one refers to another in a conversation. In other words, the way a person opens a conversation with another may show the relationship between them, no matter if the conversations place face-to-face, over the telephone, or via CMC. Zimmerman (1998) further stresses in his study of telephone conversation that the opening sequence helps
the participants to establish the implicative identities of both parties, while the implicative identity of one participant to another will help to shape what kind of conversation the two parties will lead to (p. 98).

The way a conversation is opened affects the way that the participants are going to formulate, or attempt to organize their conversation. Schegloff (2002) points out that: "Each utterance bore the marks of orientations to its prior, and each prior utterance posed the task of providing some analytic characterization of it, so as to have some sense of how it constrained the talk that had followed it" (p. 289). It not only explains that conversations between people are contextually shaped, but also indicates the importance of the openings of a conversation. The openings have an influence on how the participants continue their conversations later on. Schegloff finds that his study on openings in telephone conversation "[...] explicating how great a variety of practices of talking in interaction, and efforts to carry through a variety of courses of action, get organized and packaged in well-structured sequences of turns of talk" (ibid. p. 321). The study on the openings of conversations will help to display various ways that people initiate their dialogues, and show how the participants take turns to contribute to their conversations.

2.4 Greetings

The exchange of greetings is one of the social rituals that often lead to polite opening of a conversation. Collins cites Goffman's definition of interaction ritual as:

I use the term "ritual" because this activity, however informal and secular, represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him (Collins, 2004, p. 17).

This echoes Svennevig's idea that: "[t]here are rules and conventions regulating the rights and obligations of social actors to engage in conversation with one another" (Svennevig, 1999, p. 9). Collins (2004) goes on talking about the main types of rituals that Goffman finds in everyday life: "[t]here are the salutations, compliments, and stereotyped verbal interchanges that make up the polite or friendly routine of verbal
interaction” (p. 17). Greetings, such as good morning/afternoon/evening, hi, hello, farewells, etc. are the most common salutations.

Greetings are words or gestures people showing welcome to one another. Schegloff (2007) describes the exchange of greetings as minimal adjacency pairs in conversation (p. 22), which points out the general form of the exchange of greetings between people under a social situation. Jacob and Jackson (1993) stand in the same line and state the concept of adjacency pair as: "[...] conventional utterance pairings such as greeting/greeting, question/answer, request/grant (or refusal), and invitation/acceptance (or refusal)" (p. 48). Thus, in regular situation, when one greets another, the other usually returns the greeting; if one wants to receive a greeting, he/she may have to greet the other first (Silverman, 1998, p. 105). The exchange of greetings characterizes certain features of adjacency pairs in conversational analysis study: 1) it is usually composed of two turns of talks by different interlocutors, one greets another, the other returns; 2) the turn-taking of it is one after another, when one presents the first pair part of the greeting, the second pair part of returning the greeting is expected or requested; 3) it "describe[s] the sequential relevance of the two consecutive speaking turns to one another" (Hopper, 1992, p. 14).

Regarding greetings and social relationships, Goffman (2005) observes:

Greetings provided a way of showing that a relationship is still what it was at the termination of the previous coparticipation, and, typically, that this relationship involves sufficient suppression of hostility for the participants temporarily to drop their guard and talk (p. 41).

It indicates that the exchange of greetings on the one hand shows that there is a connection between the participants, and the connection is reminded and sustained by the interaction of the exchange of greetings; on the other hand, it might lead to further conversations of the participants. That is, the exchange of greetings not only brings people together, it also shows the attempt and guarantee of further conversations between the participants.
2.5 Interpersonal relationships and conversation

Interpersonal relationships are not only formed through, but also changed with interaction. Austin (1962, 1975) demonstrates that people do things with words, and social acts are performed in talks of speech acts. Duncan (1967) illustrates the relation of communication and relationship between people that: "we don't relate and then talk, we relate in talk" (p. 249). In other words, people relate to one another in-and-through conversations, while conversations help in the construction of interpersonal relationship between people. Svennevig (1999) observes that: "[s]ocial relations between people are in part a result of their positions in institutional networks. However, the relations have to be established in interaction between these individuals and they may then be redefined and developed" (p. 25). This means a relationship between one person and another is constructed by their interaction, and the continuous interaction between the two might change their relationship accordingly. Before that, Svennevig has shifted his perspective from individual to the interaction between people and finds that: "relationship formation may be viewed as a process of constructing compatible identities rather than revealing one's 'true self'" (ibid. p. 21). Thus, an interpersonal relationship is an ongoing constructing course, in this course, people might play different roles in different stages of their relationship. To find out what kind of identities the two participants refer to one and another in their communicative interaction may indicate what kind of relationship they are in.

Identification plays a significant role in forming a relationship. Tracy (2007) observes that people reveal various identities in their conversations. She tries to recognize people's different identities in certain social setting and discover their relationship in that setting. She finds that the key issue of conversation between people is "considering which aspects of communicative exchanges accomplish social actions, and, particularly, how the social meanings are constructed" (p. 23). In her earlier work *Everyday Talk*, Tracy (2002) has pointed out that talk, that is, conversation, does "Identity-work", which refers to the questions of: "What kind of person is each communicator? How does each one regard the other? What kind of relationship do the two have?" (p. 13). In
studying naturally occurring conversation in detail, how people identify one another will be shown, which displays their interpersonal relationship within the setting where the conversation takes place. However, Tracy adds that: "[r]elationship, [...] change[s] over time" (Tracy, 2007, p. 27).

Interpersonal relationship changes with the flow of conversation. Giles and Ogay (2007) talk about strategies people used in their conversations so as to change, or say, adjust their "social distance" - relationship in the society. They emphasize that "[c]ommunication is not only a matter of merely and only exchange information about facts, ideas, and emotions (often called referential communications), but salient social category memberships are often negotiated during interaction through the process of accommodation" (p. 294). It points out that there are social relating interactions in conversations, and the social relationship between the participants is changeably achieved through this communicative interaction. Moreover, Tracy (2002) claims that: "[i]n large measure, relational change is accomplished through beginning to do, or, refraining from doing, particular speech acts" (p. 67). That is, when a change happens in the way of their conversation, there might be a change of the interpersonal relationship between the participants.

Besides, Wilson (2007) discusses conversational constraints by citing Kellermann's idea that communication between people is regulated by two overarching constraints of social appropriateness and efficiency. "Appropriateness refers to whether a message is 'nice, civil, pleasant, proper, and courteous' as opposed to 'rude, uncivil, nasty, improper, and ill-mannered'"(Wilson, 2007, p. 87). While "[e]fficiency refers to whether a message is 'direct, immediate, and to the point, wasting neither time, energy, step, or effort'" (ibid.). It not only distinguishes the social constrained feature of communication between people, but also indicates that how people communicate with each other might display the characteristics of their conversations (being appropriate/efficient or not). Moreover, it shows what kind of image/identity (be nice or be rude etc.) one participant would like to show to another in their conversations, which might also have an influence on the building of an interpersonal relationship.
between them.

In sum, previous research indicates that CMC/IM becomes a common communication channel not only in people's everyday life but also in workplaces. CMC/IM and telephone are similar media with which people can communicate with one another across the spatial distance, though CMC/IM is the transferring of textual message while telephone conversation is carried out by speech sound. People might have different ways in initiating their conversations through different media, the way people open their conversations affect the way that how people are going to organize their conversations afterwards. In various openings, the exchange of greetings between the participants is a common mark of opening a conversation. People reveal different identities in their conversations, how one refers to another in their conversations indicates their interpersonal relationship. The constructing and changing of an interpersonal relationship between people is accomplished in their continuous conversations. In these studies, the CMC/IM in a special setting such as in the shipping business in Southeast Asia in the current data has never been discussed, which makes it a split-new and very interesting topic.

3. Data, Methodology and Analytic Approach

This section explains the source of the data analyzed in the study, the work that has been done to make the original material applicable for the analysis, and the way the analyses have been carried out.

3.1 Data

The current data is a track record of three pairs of one-to-one conversations using MSN as chatting software between three pairs of participants in a business setting. The original material is provided by a shipping company with the approval of the principal and the participants. To obtain the data, I explained to the company's principal and the participants the aim of my study and what I would do with the material. I showed them
the *Ethical Principles in Research in the Arts and Social Sciences by the Swedish Research Council*, which I will follow in my study in this thesis. The data is private record, and was collected as personal text files of reference to specific clients or business cases according to different interlocutors in a particular period of time. It is naturally occurring conversation online, which is for the first time taken as communication analysis data.

"SA" is a name made up for the company from which the current data was collected. The SA is a Chinese company that deals with shipping business, and its staff are Chinese. It is important to point out that in the shipping business, English is the working language and most of the contracts are in English, or in both English and Chinese in some cases. The names of the interlocutors are also specially made up so as not to reveal the real identities of the participants. In some situation, "*" is used to replace certain letters of names or phone numbers to obscure the true information of the participants. The main business of the SA company is as broker of cargoes and ships (vessels). The "market" of the shipping business is constructed by a large number of emails sent by ship owners, cargo owners, as well as brokers everyday which contain information of open tonnage (vessels that available for shipping cargoes) and cargo offer (cargoes that need to be shipped). The brokers' job is to find a suitable cargo to an open tonnage, or a suitable vessel for a cargo shipment, concerning the specification of the vessel and its opening time and site; the cargo quantity, possible layday, loading and discharging port, freight, etc. elements. It is very similar to the job of a matchmaker. Communication between ship owners, cargo owners, and the brokers is needed to find out if the matchmaking of a specific vessel and a cargo shipment is workable for both parties. Thus, the ship owners, cargo owners, and brokers in the business spend much time staying in office with their computers and checking the market of emails and making contact with their colleagues, clients and will be clients (see Figure. 1.).
MSN has long been chosen as a common tool for people in the shipping industry to communicate with one another besides telephone, fax, email, etc., at least in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia region. It is an economic communication tool comparing to the phone calls, it can hold on a whole day's contact when both parties are logging online; it is efficient and convenient as long as the participants stay at their working stations, and they can chat whenever they want. The chatting on MSN makes up a great part of the communication in the trade of the region. To log on MSN everyday during the office hours is the routine of many people in the shipping business in this region. The same is true for the SA company's staff, and some of them have the habit of keeping the MSN logs for future reference. In the shipping business, the result of the bargaining or negotiation of relevant parties need to be confirmed by formal emails or fax documents, in this case, the MSN log is not an official approved confirmation but a kind of informal conversations between the participants.

Three specific files of cases of MSN logs are chosen as study data of this thesis. Two of the cases happened in 2011, the other happened in 2010, in which case 1 is a track record of twenty-five days of dialogue, case 2 of eleven days, and case 3 of twelve days. The three cases are one-to-one communication between two persons (case 1: George and Li; case 2: Rick and Xu; case 3: Anh and S) who have not known or met each other before at the very beginning of their dialogue. In case 1, the two persons who keep on talking through MSN finally meet each other after they sign a contract for business in their day six's conversation, but not for the pairs of case 2 and case 3. In case 2, the participants sign a contract in their day nine's conversation. While in case 3,
the participants are operators who represent different parties in a business case. In each three cases, the two participants start talking as strangers and then become acquaintances, they gradually get to know each other better and later become business partners or even friends. The sequenced conversations in the three cases of MSN logs during the period of time record the process of making acquaintance of the strangers and the growing business/friendly relationship between the participants.

In the current data, the turns of talks that the participants take in every day's conversation are numbered. In case 1 and case 2, the interlocutors are Chinese and they type and chat in both English and Chinese. The Chinese content is translated into English, firstly in a gloss word-to-word translation, and then into the idiomatic expression accordingly. In the main part of the thesis, extracts of logs are showed with the original text and the idiomatic expressions only, as the focus of the analysis is in opening sequences of the conversations. Case 3 is a communication between a Chinese and a Vietnamese, they type and talk in English. Furthermore, the shipping business has its commonly understood abbreviations for business terms and expressions, which are largely used in the trade. The abbreviated terms and expressions are also frequently showed in the current data in the communication of the participants. Notes are made for these abbreviated terms and expressions in the dialogue for a better understanding of the context. Besides, the dates and interval of response of the interlocutors are kept and showed in the transcript as in the original MSN logs.

3.2 Methodology and analytic approach

This thesis applies the conversation analysis (CA) approach in the study. First of all, CA "combines a concern with the contextual sensitivity of language use with a focus on talk as a vehicle for social action" (Drew and Heritage, 1992, pp. 16-17). It takes conversation as reciprocal interaction between people, which accomplishes social activities, and interaction is the object of CA. The study of CA is not only focus on the language itself but rather what the language is doing, or can do in people's everyday life. The CA approach takes the ordinary conversation as the basic social interaction
between people (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990; Heritage and Clayman, 2010), and by studying this basic interaction between people, we can find out how people are relating to one another, and how the human being society is organized. In this case, the CA approach is in accord with what this thesis is interested in the current data. This thesis is focusing on analyzing the openings of the participants' conversations online, so as to trace the emerging of their relationship in-and-through their communication, and discover how people relate to one another by their interaction. Second, the CA researchers insist that their study is based on naturally occurring data, which pragmatically reveals the reality of conversation. The naturally occurring data provide the true interaction between participants, which helps in displaying the "real life" of human beings comparing to the partially usable data of experimental situations and role-play data (Heritage and Clayman, 2010, p. 13). Third, CA "consistently and insistently asks a single question about any action (or indeed any component of any action): why that now? And in response to this question CA examines what the action does in relation to the proceeding action(s), and what it projects about the succeeding action(s)" (ibid. p. 14). It means that CA has a focus in studying the sequential interaction and its organization. For example, when a greeting occurs, the CA is interested in why it occurs, in what kind of situation, and what consequence the greeting brings about later on between the participants. CA pays attention to what kind of prior context which leads to the present dialogue of the participants, as well as what happens afterwards, that is, the inner organization of the conversation and the interpersonal relationship between the participants. Fourth, CA "has worked to avoid premature and idealized theory construction in favor of the empirical identification of diverse structures of practices" (ibid.). It is an open-minded study attitude; it focuses on the description and interpretation of various communicative practices, and gives warning to the preconceived or taking-for-granted approach to the study data.

This thesis traces the emerging of an interpersonal relationship by tracking the exchange of textual words on MSN. Herring (1996) writes that: "[CMC] is typed, and hence like writing, but exchanges are often rapid and informal, and hence more like spoken conversation" (p. 3). The current data of CMC is a modality of conversational
communication in written form. The specific focus of this thesis is the opening sequences in the current data. Careful investigation is needed in the study to look for the clues and hints of the beginning, developing of the relational communication story. Inevitably, the translation of the MSN logs of the current data will lose many linguistic elements and culture features in the content of the dialogue. However, the process of the communication as well as the sequence of the interaction, or, in other words, what the language is doing, or, can do in a particular workplace is accessible. Thus, the CA approach can be largely applied in the analysis, though it lacks visual or auditive cues as in face-to-face meeting and telephone conversation.

The CMC/IM in current data is compared to ordinary conversation in face-to-face encounter and the telephone conversation as it shares a few features of both: (a) the conversations in the current data are naturally occurring and in an informal situation which is similar to ordinary conversation between people; (b) though it is textual material, it combines and shows both characteristics of written and spoken language; (c) in either CMC in the current data or telephone conversation, there is no visual access and the participants rely on other channel instead of facial expressions, gestures, etc. to make contributions to their conversation. The comparison may also find dissimilarities in CMC, ordinary conversation, and telephone conversation, signifying the uniqueness of CMC in a business setting.

4. Analysis

This section takes a close look at the opening sequence in the current data and tracks how the participants relate to one another through MSN conversations in a business setting.

The analysis section consists of four parts. First, the admittance process of MSN is introduced (4.1). In the second part of the analysis (4.2), the most common way of opening a conversation on MSN by exchanging greetings will be displayed. The focus
of the third part of the analysis (4.3) is the opening sequences with significant business efficiency. In the fourth part of the analysis (4.4), some special cases where the opening sequences of conversations in the current data that are very different from those in the first three parts will be discussed.

4.1 The admittance process

The admittance is the process where the participants pair each other up as communicators on MSN. When two persons start typing and talking to each other in a window on MSN, it is actually their second time of encounter. To use the MSN as chatting software, one needs to be on another's contact list to be able to talk to him/her. One needs to know a person's user name of MSN and add the person on one's own contact list, and then ask for the person's admittance to be on his/her contact list. As mentioned earlier, in the shipping business in Southeast Asia, the market is constructed by emails sent by ship owners, cargo owners and brokers. Usually at the end of the email, the contact details of the person who is in charge of the business will be attached, which usually includes the person's MSN user name as it is a common chatting channel. Generally, one will type some words of greeting such as "hello", "good morning" etc., with a brief introduction to oneself and ask for another's permission to set up a connection. When the other person complies with the request and clicks the option "yes", the two persons then can see each other on their MSN contact lists. For example, the contact list on MSN looks like in Figure 2 (some contact information is deleted on purpose). The little green square in front of the a person's name means that the person is available and free for talk, the yellow one means that the person is not at his/her working station at the moment. If the person is busy and do not have time for talk, the square will be red. There are icons of smiley face, sad face, etc. or like the red heart in the seventh line of Figure 2 in the MSN system for people to express their emotion. These names, words, and icons offer some information of who the person is, what company he/she works for, or what kind of status he/she is in. The phone icon in the last line of the picture means that the person is online via his/her mobile phone. The name on the contact list may or may not be the true name of the person.
Though the MSN log has no record of the admittance process, the admittance process itself can be seen as the first adjacency pair of communication between the two participants. When a user of MSN types words and asks for the permission of another MSN user to enter his/her contact list, he/she is making a request to the other; while the other clicks "yes", he/she is actually granting the former's request. The fact that the participants are able to talk to each other after the admittance process of MSN is the accomplishment of the interaction of their first adjacency pair of communication.

Usually people do not add someone to his/her contact list only to see a long list of people's name on his/her MSN screen, one try to get another's permission to be on his/her contact list so as to be able to talk to him/her for some purpose. For instance, in the current data, in case 1, George makes contact with Li because he is interested in Li's vessels; in case 2, Rick keeps talking to Xu seeking for chances to do business with her; in case 3, Anh is operating a business case with S through MSN conversations. The admittance process is a goal-orientated procedure for conversations; the participants go through the process and then start to communicate on MSN.

When using MSN as communication forum for shipping business, people usually admit only friends, colleagues, or people who work in the same trade, a.k.a, potential clients to their contact lists. Because there is high risk of bringing virus to the computer, or some boring people might disturb you on work if you are not careful with the admittances. The brief introduction of someone is usually attached with the applicant's name, his/her company's name, and the company name usually will give hints on the
business that it deals with. One can account on this brief introduction to make decision on admittance of someone. For example, people might sometimes get a MSN message which says: "Hello, this is L* from ** company. We are dealing with cargo shipments from South China to Europe ..." Such information shows that the person is in the same trade of shipping business, perhaps he/she is a potential customer, thus there might be serious business to be discussed, and therefore the admittance is preferred for further communication.

The admittance process could be compared and contrasted to the way contact is made by telephone. In telephone conversation, Schegloff (1968, 2002) observes the general "distribution rule for first utterance" that one who receives the call speaks first, which holds in most cases in telephone conversation. While in the admittance process in the current data, the one who first wants to set up a connection with another type(s) first, he/she is the one who calls up the other's attention and asks for the permission to make a contact, the "caller" speaks first here. In other words, in the admittance process in using MSN, the one who self introduces himself/herself to the other and seeks for the other's approval of entering the other's contact list is similar to the caller in the telephone conversation, the "caller" here speaks first. If the other person who receives the request grants the permission by clicking the option of "yes", he/she is the "receiver" and he/she is responding to the "caller"'s request.

In ordinary conversation when two strangers meet somewhere and are about to talk to each other, one may start by saying "Excuse me" first to bring the attention of the other. It seems to be a "regular" way of initiating a conversation to a stranger. It can also be taken as one requests the "co-present" (Schegloff, 2002, p. 290) of another as interlocutor in a conversation that: "Excuse me, I would like to have a word with you." When the other responds, the permission for a conversation is granted. The admittance process is the first encounter of the participants, which is the procedure that they need to complete so as to be able to communicate with one another on MSN. By going through the admittance process, the two participants make an affiliation and set up a connection on MSN. They are on one another's contact list, and are now potential
interlocutors online.

The CMC/IM in the current data is more like telephone conversation than face-to-face meeting because there is no visual cue. However, there are differences. Asymmetry of information is found between caller and receiver in telephone conversation about whom the other party is (Schegloff, 2002, p. 290), no matter with the old fashion, wired, fixed telephone, or with a mobile phone, as modern technology can help to block a caller's information (number) easily. The caller who uses an old fashion, wired, fixed phone may know which number he/she is dialing and who he/she wants to reach, but he/she will not be certain who will pick up the phone on the other side; while the receiver does not know who the caller is until he/she picks up the phone and starts to talk to the other party. For those who receive phone calls on a mobile phone, the situation may be a little complicated. If the caller's number is on the receiver's contact list, when the phone rings, the caller's name may be displayed on the receiver's screen, in case the caller dose not block his/her number on purpose and both the caller and the receiver may have symmetrical information: the caller knows who he/she calls and the receiver knows who is calling. If the caller's number dose not on the receiver's contact list, the number of the caller will be displayed on the receiver's screen, if the receiver recognizes the number, he/she might know who is calling, if not, he/she thus does not have the information of who is calling until he/she answers the phone. In case that the caller blocks his/her calling out number on purpose, the receiver then will have no idea who is calling and he/she needs to answer the call to figure out who the caller is. Thus, the caller and the receiver who use mobile phones might or might not have symmetrical information of each other, it depends on how the caller makes his/her phone call. The admittance process of MSN is like the exchange of phone numbers between strangers, when you get someone's number, you can call him/her up. In the contact list of MSN, a person can display his/her name, his/her company name, or any information about himself/herself so as to identify himself/herself to one another on the other's contact list; or, one can edit the name of his/her contact and the result will be showed on his/her own screen only (see Figure 3. Some details are obscured on purpose. The first person's profile is edited as "Mr. Steven"; while the second person
calls himself "SH K" and he works in a shipping company named "ARK"

![MSN Contact List](image)

*Fig. 3. Edited information in a MSN contact list.*

MSN participants identify potential communicators during admittance process by the listed names. When a person types in a window to talk to someone, his/her name (either self-displayed or edited by the MSN user), his/her company name, as well as any information he/she wants to display will be showed on the header of the window, in this case, the "caller" and the "receiver" in CMC/IM know who the other conversational party is and have symmetrical information of one another (see Figure 4. SH K from ARK Shipping company is one of the interlocutors, the other is the one who opens this talking window and types word in the lower square).

![Talking Window](image)

*Fig. 4. A MSN talking window.*

At the same time, a flashing window on the computer screen will notice the participant that someone is talking to him/her, or if the participant opens the speaker of his/her computer, there will be a short sound reminding the participant that someone is talking to him/her. The sound reminding of an IM on MSN is short and it rings only once. While the flashing window will keep on flashing until the participant clicks the window to read the message, it may be taken as a summons of one participant to another. Now the participant can click the flashing window on his/her computer and start to talk, or type to respond and contribute to the conversation with the other party, if he/she likes to. The summons/answer and the identification/recognition sequences
may happen in turns of talk in telephone conversation, while the summons/answer and
the identification/recognition sequences in MSN conversation happen at the same time.
The summons/answer sequence leads to further conversation of the participants in both
CMC/IM and telephone conversation.

The admittance process enables the participants to make up a connection online. Going
through the admittance process is the starting point of the participants to make contacts
and communicate with one another.

4.2 The greetings and a special case

The extracts of opening sequences in this section show the participants initiating
conversations by greetings. Greetings in different situations might have different
implications in the interaction ritual. When first meeting as strangers, an exchange of
greetings is a strategy of making a polite attitude for further communication between
participants; when greeting acquaintances, the salutation indicates a reminding as well
as sustaining of a former relationship between the participants, which might also lead
to further communication.

4.2.1 At the very beginning

The very beginning refers to first words typed in a window by the participants on their
computers and truly begins to talk online after the admittance process of MSN. The
greetings of the two participants as the openings at the very beginning of their
conversations are to make contact with one another in a business setting, with which
they have further conversations and "formally" display their business identity and
seeking chances to do business, or set up a business relationship with one another in
the future.

According to Schegloff (2002), the exchange of greetings is a proper way of opening
conversations (p. 341). The following examples show how the conversations on MSN
are normally initiated by an exchange of greetings between the participants.
(1) Case 2  
Day One 2010-10-19
   "Hello, there."
   "Hello."
3. [16:02:58] Xu: 请问您是？～
   "Who are you please?"
4. [16:04:05] Rick: 我是 SA 公司的，我姓黄。之前有跟你家合作过租船
   "I am from SA company and my surname is Huang. (Our company) have worked with your company on chartering before."

(2) Case 3  
Day One 2011-6-7
   (Note: gd=good)
2. [16:44:11] S:  hi
   (Note: vsl=vessel)
   (Note: u=you)
5. [16:44:31] Anh: u got it?
6. [16:45:07] S:  YES

As shown in extracts (1) and (2), conversations between participants on day one in case 2 and case 3 are opened with an exchange of greetings. In extract (1), Xu says "hello there" to Rick, and Rick returns in turn 2: "hello". In turn 3 and 4, another adjacency pair is presented as Xu asks Rick who he is (turn 3) and Rick replies by giving the information about his surname, company name, and the kind of business he is doing (turn 4.).

In extract (2), Anh says "good afternoon" to S and S returns with a "hi", which is a regular phenomenon of starting a conversation with polite greetings. In turn 3, Anh introduces herself to S by directly telling her identity as the owner of a specific vessel. There are a greeting sequence and a self-introduction of Anh to S. In turn 4 and 5, Anh inquiries that if S has received her email, and S gives a positive reply in turn 6.

Rick returns the greeting to Xu and S returns the greeting to Anh are expected
responses to the former's greetings, and the exchange of greetings in the first two turns of talk between the participants leads to further conversations in the following turns. In an ordinary face-to-face conversation, one can recognize or identify his/her interlocutor by eyes; in a telephone conversation where there is no visual access, by voice and manner (Schegloff, 1979, p. 34). While in the current data, both participants can see each other's identity information on the header of their talking window (see Fig 3. in section 4.1). It is worth noticing that in extracts (1) and (2) of current data, the participants ignore the introduction in the admittance process and the visible information of one another on the header of their chatting window, they start talking like they have never been in touch before. The participants politely exchange greetings and introduce one to another again in a relatively "formal" way, as if they do not know anything about each other. Actually, this is the first conversation of the participants that showed in the logs of the current data. The opening sequence of the above two extracts is very similar to two strangers who exchange business cards in a first time face-to-face encounter in a business setting, or the additional "self-identification" (Schegloff, 1968, p. 1078) in telephone conversation in Schegloff's words to identify one another their occupations. On the one hand, the introduction of one to another in the above extracts displays the unacquaintance of the two participants; on the other hand, it shows that they are starting the process of getting to know each other.

In their talk-in-interaction in the above opening sequences, the participants inform one another of their names and job occupations by typing words communicating on MSN, or displaying the information on their talking window header. They get acquainted with one another's professional identities, and their conversations may lead to business related topics, which creates a business conversational reality on MSN.

The openings of conversations in the previous cases are ordinary. The analysis of the next case, however, will show an unexpected opening of a conversation between two participants.

(3) Case 1
Day One: 2011-9-16

   LOA/BEAM 189.80/32.26 M GRAIN ABT 63,000 CBM BALE ABT 60,690
   CBM 5 HO/5HA 4X30 MT CRANES PLUS 4X12 CBM GRABS HATCH
   OPENINGS:1/17.60X17.96 M 2-5/20.24X17.96 M ALL
   (Note: Description of a vessel, including vessel's name, deck type, what kind of
   flag it is flying, in which year it is built, carrying capacity, sea gauge when full
   loaded, length and beam of the vessel, different capacity for grain and bulk
   cargo, hold number, hatch number, crane number and their capacity, grab
   description, measurement of the hatches, etc.)
   DETAILS ABOUT
   (Note: The data about the vessel is probable, there might be discrepancy)

2. [14:51:25] Li: 怎么样?
   "What is it?"

3. [14:51:33] George: 李先生，这条船的 DEMURRAGE 最少能到多少?
   "Mr. Li, What is the lowest DEMURRAGE of this vessel?"

The conversation between George and Li in their first day's conversation in extract (3)
is not opened by an exchange of greetings but seems to come from nowhere. George
gives a description of a vessel to Li at the very beginning of their dialogue in turn 1 in
quite an unexpected way without efficient information to show his intention. Li does
not understand the action of George and his question in turn 2 shows his puzzle. It is
not until we come to turn 3 that we have clues on the situation. George has inquiry on
the vessel that he attaches in turn 1 and wants an answer from Li.

The sequence talk of George to Li in turn 3 explains the confusion George arises in
turn 1 and at the same time clarifies the identities of both participants: Li must be the
owner or the handler of the vessel that George presents in turn 1, George is a potential
charterer or broker who has inquiry on the vessel and Li is supposed to know the
answer. The introduction of both parties in this case is presented in an indirect way.
Li's response to George's opening of talk is quick, in less than one second. He does not
greet George, ask who he is, or self-introduce himself to George but directly responds
to the content that George presents in turn 1. As a shipping business professional, Li
may recognize his own ship immediately when George presents it, and his quick
response points directly to the business but not to greet his interlocutor in the first place.
Considering the admittance process, the opening of the conversation here does not
seem abnormal or impolite if there are greeting and brief introduction in the admittance process of one to another. The opening in the above extract (3) might happen right after the admittance process. Both parties may take the admittance process as their introducing section, and also from the header of their talking window, they already have some knowledge of whom the other party is. The way that George goes straightforward into business, as well as Li's quickness and directness in responding to business emphasize their professional identities. It may be because that this is their very first conversation, none of the parties knows much about the other, and Li is puzzled on George's way of opening a conversation. As will be showed in some of the following extracts, Li does not show his confusion or surprise when George initiates conversations to him in a similar way in the following few days by giving him cargo offers instead of greetings.

The opening sequences in this section show the very first step when the participants start their conversations on MSN. They introduce their occupations to one another and set up a business connection in a direct or indirect way. In the admittance process, the two participants are only members on one another's contact list, they barely know about each other. In the extracts (1) and (2) at the very beginning of their conversations, the participants are almost strangers to one another; they start to talk to each other by exchanging greetings, and then introduce one to another to get acquainted. In extract (3), the participants introduce one to another as professionals in the same trade of shipping business in an indirect way; they refer to one another as potential clients or potential business partners.

4.2.2 The most frequent pattern: the opening mark with greetings

Openings of conversation are commonly marked by greetings. In Collins's words: "'Hello' and 'goodbye' and their equivalents are used to open and close situations; they are transition rituals marking when a certain kind of encounter is starting and ending" (Collins, 2004, p. 18).

The conversations between the participants continue, every time (day) the two parties
start talking again, there is an opening sequence. There are two kinds of everyday openings, one is the opening on a new working day's conversation, and the other is the resuming of an interrupted or suspended conversation in the same day. The interrupted/suspended conversation occurs when the two participants stop talking on MSN for a period of time, they might have just finished talking a business task, being occupied by other work, or one of the parties is not available for further conversation, there is no record of conversation in the logs. When a new topic appears, or both parties are available for conversations, the participants may restart their conversation again, and the logs of conversations resume after a period. The chances for the participants to do business and sign a contract on their first day of encounter on MSN are rare; both parties need to know each other better before they can work together.

Participants in the next extracts open their conversations with greetings. This kind of opening sequence is the most frequent way of initiating a conversation in the current data, as in the total forty-eight days of logs of conversations, more than 45% of a new day's conversation on MSN is opened by exchanging of greetings of the participants. It is similar to the face-to-face encounter of people who greet the other interlocutor to bring the attention of another person, and the other person will return the greeting accordingly as social conventions under normal circumstance.

(4) Case 2
Day Seven 2010-11-3
1. [9:32:34] Xu:  gd morning  
   (Note: gd=good)
   "Morning"
   ...
76. [12:11:52] Xu:  嘿嘿
   (Note: onomatopoeia for laugh)
   "(The) cargo owner has not finished (his) lunch yet~?"
79. [14:38:30] Xu:  hi
80. [14:39:46] Rick:  hi，货主下午 3 点才上班呢。会主动联系的，有消息马上通知你哈
   "Hi, the cargo owner will not be on duty until three o'clock. I will take the initiative to keep on contact, and will inform immediately if"
(5) Case 3
Day Two 2011-6-8
   (Note: gd=good)
2. [9:23:05] S:   Good morning
   (Note: abt=about; vsl=vessel)
   (Note: cgo=cargo)

Day Three 2011-6-9
2. [16:24:05] Anh: yr agt that u nominated to working not fast
   (Note: yr=your; agt=agent; u=you)
3. [16:24:12] Anh: i send u email frm morning
   (Note: u=you; frm=from)
4. [16:24:26] Anh: untill now he not reply me anything
5. [16:35:50] S:   hi. Anh. If you sent email to agent you may copy to me. I wl push them to
   reply you. what did you sent to them?
   (Note: wl=will)

In the above extracts of openings, the participants do not introduce themselves again as
they have already made a contact and exchanged some information in their first day's
communication, and they can recognize one another through the information on the
header of their talking window. In extract (4), the participants exchange greetings by
saying "good morning" and "morning" to each other to open their dialogue. The
conversation is suspended at around noon of the day at 12:11:52 after turn 76 and
resumes at 13:22:10 with turn 77. In turn 77, Xu again greets Rick with a "hi" and then
makes an inquiry about the shipper in turn 78. There is no response from Rick for over
an hour, and it seems that he is not available for the conversation. Xu tries to reopen
the dialogue again in turn 79, she greets Rick again with a "hi". Rick is available now.
He returns Xu's greeting and answers her question in turn 80.
The participants in extract (5) open two days’ (day two and day three) conversations with greetings. Although in day three, S's return of greeting is a bit delay in turn 5. In day three, Anh greets S, in about three minutes, there is no response from S. Anh then continues and takes the next three turns of talk telling S about the business she is concerned. S may not be available for talk, or is occupied with other business, he does not reply until over ten minutes later according to turn 4's talk (day three, turn 4 happens at 16:24:26, turn 5 happens at 16:35:50). On the one hand, when S does reply, he greets Anh first, which fulfills the greeting adjacency pair Anh initiates in turn 1. That is, the first pair part of the greeting adjacency pair in extract (5) day three happens in turn 1; the second pair part happens in turn 5. Though the returning of the greeting is delay, it is completed at the end. On the other hand, S's response to Anh is corresponding to Anh's order of talk: Anh greets S as the opening of their conversation, she then goes into business, accordingly, S returns Anh's greeting first, and then responds to her later talk about business.

The extracts above follow the idea of greeting and social relationship of Goffman. It shows the connection between the participants: they have already made some contacts and known something about each other. The greetings in opening a conversation here indicate a reminding of the acquaintance of each other of the participants, and the exchange of greetings is also the beginning of further communication between them, which will help them to get to know each other better.

4.3 Addressing but no greeting: being efficient and professional

In the above discussion, the extracts of openings with exchange of greetings are in accordance with the social appropriateness constraint. Both participants are trying to be polite to one another so as to open a pleasant conversation with courtesy on MSN in a business setting. In this section, some examples which show the efficiency constraint in conversation will be discussed.

The following examples show openings where one participant addresses another and
starts to talk without greetings.

(6) Case 2  
**Day Three 2010-10-21**
1. [10:15:37] Rick: 小许，你的 MV C*L*怎么样了。找到货了吗
   "Little Xu, how is your motor vessel C* L*? Have you found cargo (for it?)"
2. [10:16:31] Xu: 还在谈关丹到长江口的货~
   "(I am) still trying for a cargo (shipping) from Guantau to the mouth of the Yangtze River."

(7) Case 2  
**Day Four 2010-10-22**
   "Little Xu, (it is) weekend now, (have you) fixed the cargo to the mouth of the Yangtze River for MV C* L*?"
2. [14:31:52] Xu: 恩，就等合同回传了
   "Yes, (I am now) waiting for the return of the contract."

In the above extracts (6) and (7), Rick opens his conversation to Xu by addressing her "Little Xu", which is a polite way to address young people in China; it shows a more intimate relationship of the two. Then Rick asks a question each time inquiring about the movement of a vessel (MV C*L*).

There is no exchange of greetings first in these days of openings, but directly inquiry of business information. It displays the characteristic of efficiency of the conversations in a workplace. The polite addressing of Rick to Xu might show his courtesy instead of the greetings and is accepted by Xu. Xu responds or replies to Rick's inquiries in a short time with no evidence of being offended. In the above two days' openings in case 2, the participants open their conversations in a similar pattern, they seem comfortable with the openings of dialogue where Rick addresses Xu in a relatively more intimate way instead of greetings, their dialogue continues.

(8) Case 3  
**Day Ten 2011-6-22**
   (Note: hv=have)
The opening in extract (8) happens at a later time (17:48:20) of the day, S does not
greet Anh but addresses her "dear", and then asks directly for the update information of
the berthing plan of a vessel. Anh answers S's question without hesitation in turn 2 and
provides more detail information in turn 3.

In each of the initial turn in the above extracts of openings of (6), (7) and (8), one
participant asks a question in turn 1 and the other replies in turn 2 and/or 3. We can
identify the question-answer type of adjacency pairs here as what Schegloff (1968,
2002) and Hutchby (2009) point out in their studies of openings in telephone
conversations, as well as the initial inquiries sequence. One participant might ring,
address another, and then pose a question, and the other answers relevantly. In the
above extracts of openings, the summons/answer sequence and the initial inquiries
sequence appear at the same time in turn 1’s talk. When one of the participants types to
address another and initiates an inquiry, and then pushes the "Enter" key, a flashing
window will be seen on the other's computer screen. The summons here comes
together with the initiation of the inquiries. When the second party replies, he/she is
offering answers to the inquiries.

Moreover, another feature of summons/answer (SA) sequence in Schegloff (1968)
work is that: "A is conditionally relevant on the occurrence of S" (p. 1084). In the
above extracts, when Rick repeatedly asks Xu the situations about a vessel, Xu replies
in extract (6) that a shipment is under negotiating, while in extract (7), she replies that
she is signing a contract for the vessel. In extract (8), S asks Anh the news of the
berthing plan of a vessel, Anh replies in two turns. In turn 2, Anh responds to S's word
"update" in turn 1 and says that there is no change of the plan; her adding information
in turn 3 responds to the "berthing plan" in S's inquiry, which gives the estimate time of
the berthing of the vessel. In both Xu and Anh's replies in extracts (6), (7) and (8), the
messages are relevant to the questions in the first turns talk with direct answers. The
inquiries and responses are brief and clear to the point.
What is worthy to note is that about 28% of the openings for a new day's conversations in the current data are initiated by one participant addressing his/her interlocutor and then starting the conversation with inquires. This kind of opening is "direct, immediate, and to the point, wasting neither time, energy, and/or effort" (Wilson, 2007, p. 87) according to Kellermann's efficiency constraint which regulates people's conversation. For the one who initiates the conversation in turn 1, the address brings the attention of the other party for a talk, the inquiry after that goes directly into business. While the other interlocutor catches the initiator's aim and intention immediately and replies in the same manner accordingly. The address terms of one participant to the other might show politeness of one in a certain level, and the lack of greetings in the openings is received by both parties as acceptable behavior, there is no evidence showing that one is offended or displeased. The participants continue their communication day after day.

Direct opening as stated above happens after the participants are acquainted, as opposed to as strangers. As we can see in the earlier section's discussion (4.2.1 ) that in many cases, especially at the earlier stage when they just get acquainted to one another, the participants open their conversations by following the social interaction ritual of exchanging greetings. The participants change their way of initiating their conversations on MSN here. Collins (2003) observes that: "Changing from one kind of greeting, small talk, or departure ceremony to another is the most palpable means of changing the character of social relationship" (p. 18), which echoes Tracy's idea that relational change between people is achieved when people change their way in conversations. The change of that the participants skip the exchanging of greetings and open their conversations in a more efficient way may indicate that the relationship between the participants are not just acquaintances in the same trade, they are getting to know each other better these days. They know that they can talk to one another in a relatively more "impolite" way of omitting the greetings, and they will not offend one another because of the omitting. The opening sequences between the participants here are more than inquiries and responses, the participants are making business contact and updating their business information, and are on the process of being potential clients or
business partners.

4.4 Some special openings

In the following extracts of conversations on MSN, some different openings are shown with significant business characteristics in the shipping industry in Southeast Asia.

4.4.1 Openings without preludes

As previously discussed, the participants on MSN have symmetrical information of one another; they can see their interlocutor's name and other information on the header of their talking window. Thus, the identification/ recognition sequence in the telephone conversation or in ordinary conversation is not necessary in CMC/IM like MSN. In this section, examples of openings which seem that there is no prelude such as greetings, addressing or other small talks will be shown, and the conversations between the participants go straightly into business.

(9) Case 1
Day Fourteen 2011-11-18

1. [10:08:25] Li: WORKING REPORT A. VESSEL NAME/CGO NAME, Q'TY AS PER SHIPPER'S OR BS/L FIGURE MV S*** T***/NICKEL ORE, 56560MTS B. THE Q'TY LDGD/DISCHD ON THE DAY/SUB TTL Q'TY HV BN LDGD/DISCHD 202MT/4284MT C. WORKING HOUR/SHIFT, HOW MANY GANGS WORKED 1h40m/FM0700LT-16TH TO 0700LT-17TH/ONE D. BALANCE CGO TO BE LDGD/DISCHD (HATCH-WISE) 52276MTS E. ANY SPECIAL COMMENTS WAITING FOR CARGO F. ETCD NON (Note: CGO=CARGO; Q'TY=QUANTITY; BS/L=BILLS OF LADING; MV=MOTOR VESSEL; SUB=SUBJECT; TTL=TOTAL; HV=HAVE; BN=BEN; LDGD=LOADED; DISCHD=DISCHARGED; MT=METRIC TON; H=HOUR; FM=FROM; LT=LOCAL TIME; ETCD=ESTIMATED TIME COMPLETE LOADING)

2. [10:08:48] Li: 上 24 小时，装了 202 吨，太少了哥们

"Brother, only 202 tons of cargo has been loaded in the last twenty-four hours, that is too little."

3. [10:08:58] Li: 他们没有货了吗?

"Don't they have (any more) cargo?"

4. [10:11:16] Li: 这个装法装到啥时候去了?

"The time for (complete loading) could never be estimated if it keep
In extract (9), Li starts talking first. He presents in turn 1 the working report of a vessel, and comments on the situation in turn 2. Li addresses George "Brother" in turn 2, which sounds a more meaningful address than calling his name. On the one hand, it might be a makeup addressing of Li to George which he does not say in turn 1. On the other hand, the address indicates a more intimate relationship of Li and George, as Li regards George not only as a business partner but also as close as a family member. Li then brings forward questions on the working situation in turn 3 and 4 to the problem that the loading speed is too slow for the vessel. George gives a short response in turn 5 and tells his solution of the problem. George's brief reply in turn 5 shows his understanding of what Li is talking about, as in the working report that Li presents in turn 1, the vessel's name and cargo that indicate a special business case (MV S*** T*** and NICKEL ORE, 56560MTS), and the problem of the slow speed cargo loading can be easily seen. In addition, Li's complaint in the following turns of talk emphasizes the severe situation of the case. As shown in extract (3) in the discussion of section 4.2.1, Li works as a ship owner or a ship handler, his concern on the loading speed of the vessel in extract (9) reiterate his business identity here. On the other hand, Li's talk as well as his complaint to George again shows George's professional identity as a charterer to Li's vessel. The two participants open their dialogue in extract (9) by talking their joint business straightforwardly. In this conversation, one participant shows his attempt to promote his relationship with another by calling him a kinsman, while the other shows no declining of that.

The following extract (10) shows how the participants resume their conversation without a "regular" opening like a greeting or by addressing each other by using their names.

(10) Case 2
Day Six 2010-11-2
At 12:21:03 in the above extract (10), Xu says farewell to Rick in turn 31. Over two hours later at 14:38:45, Xu initiates another conversation in turn 32. Xu's words in turn 32 are mixed with Chinese and English (full style). She does not greet Rick or address him, but ask directly and imperatively for the contact details of Rick. The mixed use of two languages here on the one hand reveals the nationality of the two participants as Chinese, they type and talk in Chinese, while English is the working language of shipping trade and Xu is familiar with the language. On the other hand, it shows that Xu is certain that as a professional in the same trade, Rick will understand what she says in the two mixing languages. The imperative sentence Xu uses in turn 32 furthermore indicates that the two participants are sort of knowing each other well, and Xu is sure that Rick will not be offended. Rick responds a minute later in turn 33 with relevant information. Moreover, Xu's request for "full style" - all contact details of Rick also means that Xu would like to have a close contact with Rick, and she wants to communicate with him via other channels other than MSN. By asking for Rick's full style, Xu is ready to put Rick on her potential client list that need to be "keeping in contact" closely.

Participants in the above extracts go directly into business without greeting or addressing. It seems that the initiators well aware the business identities of their
interlocutors and there is no need for courtesy or small talk as prologue leading to the main topics of their conversations. The participants go straight to the subject of business. In the current data, in case 1, George and Li sign their first contract in day six's talk, and in extract (9), their conversation happens in day fourteen, when their contract is at the operating phase. In the shipping business, the operating of a business case follows with everyday reports of update situation of cargo and vessel from relevant parties. The contract parties are supposed to work together for the smoothest operation of the case. In other words, both parties are committed to help to load/discharge the cargo on the vessel in the shortest time with the least problem. Extract (10) is part of the conversations in case 2 day six, when Rick and Xu are about to do further negotiation on a specific business case. There is a very promising chance for the cooperation of both parties, as we can see in the following extract (11) of words of Xu in the same day's conversation:

(11) Case 2
   Day six
41. [14:52:27] Xu: 我对你的货很感兴趣
   "I am really interested in your cargo."
42. [14:52:33] Xu: 如果货很实在
   "If (the) cargo is truly verifiable."
43. [14:52:36] Xu: 还是很有希望合作的
   "(It) is very promising that (we) could work together."

Xu expresses her interest in Rick's cargo offer directly in extract (11), and she is willing and expecting to do business with Rick. Xu and Rick later sign a contract on day nine. In the openings in extracts (9) and (10), the identities of both parties here are business partners (9), or promising business partners (10), they are at a different stage of their relationship that is more than acquaintances in the same trade. The more efficient way of going straightly into business without greetings or addressing as discussed in section 4.3 shows a strong awareness of the business identities, as well as business relationship of both parties.

Tracy (2002) claims that: "Talk does identity-work. Through a person's choices about how to talk, identity-work is accomplished" (p.7). The above extracts of conversations
in which exchanging of greetings or addressing someone is left out happen in a business setting, where both parties know their professional identities well. They choose to go directly into dealing business as professionals who work efficiently. The way that the participants open their conversations at the same time emphasizes their business identities as well as their business relationship. Moreover, there seems a change of relationship of the participants when Li calls George "Brother" in extract (9), and Xu talks to Rick in an imperative tone in extract (10). The former implies a more intimate relation of the two, while the later shows a well-knowing of one another of the participants and there is no worry of offense. The relationship of the participants is moving into a further stage as business partners or will be business partners, and the participants associate one another in a business activity with a common interest.

4.4.2 Open and reopen again: the problem of availability

The following extracts show openings of MSN conversations with late responses. In these openings, the time of the response of the second interlocutor to the first one plays an important role in the opening sequence.

(12) Case 1

Day Two: 2011-9-21
(Note: cargo offer, including quantity, quality, extent of more or less amount, need vessel type, loading and discharging port, possible loading days, workable loading and discharging rates, freight, commission rate, etc)
2. [17:43:51] Li: Hi
3. [17:44:08] Li: 出去跑了一天，才回来，不好意思
"(I am) sorry, (I was) out (for business) for a whole day and just come back"

(13) Case 1

Day Four: 2011-10-25
1. [17:07:06] George: Dear Mr Li, Please advise any interest
   - 50000MT-65000MT NICKEL ORE IN BULK ( SF : 1.1WOG )
Day Five: 2011-10-26

1. [10:10:23] Li: 昨晚比较晚看到您的短信，所以没有回信 您，
   "Last night (when I) saw your message it was a bit late, so (I did) not reply you."
2. [10:10:36] Li: 这个货是你们做租家吗?
   "Are you the charterer of this cargo?"
   "Yes"

In extract (12), George starts to talk to Li by presenting a cargo offer to him. Li responds about fifty-two minutes later by greeting George "Hi" in turn 2. Though Li's response is expected, his reply in turn 2 is not relevant to George's cargo offer in turn 1, but a response to his attempt to initiating a conversation. Li greets George in the first place and it seems that he is the one who initiates the conversation with greeting. Or, Li is checking whether George is available with a quickly typable greeting. As a conversation is exchanging of words, during the period of time when Li gives no response to George's words in turn 1, he is not available for a conversation with George. It seems that George does not open a conversation successfully. As in CMC in the current data, there is no visual access and one might log on MSN and show available online but in fact is not working in front of his/her computer. George does not sure if Li is available on the other side of the computer; he tries to open a conversation with Li. When Li does not respond on time, it is assumed that Li is not available for a conversation. When Li finally responds to George in turn 2, a conversation between the two is set up, and George's initiating of a conversation to Li with a cargo offer in turn 1 is accomplished. The late response of Li to George in extract (12) makes both turn 1 and turn 2 opening actions for this day's conversation. Li then explains his late reply in turn 3 that he has been out and was not able to reply in time. Li's explanation shows his temporarily absent for the conversation that George tries to initiate.
Extract (13) includes two days (day four and day five of case 1) openings of conversations. George again tries to open a conversation with Li with a cargo offer in day four. The cargo offer is presented in the form of an email with an address of "Dear Mr Li" at the beginning and a salutation of "Best regards" and the signature George at the end. Most probably, George copies an email as an IM and presents it here, which makes a formal business email into a comparatively informal business inquiry on MSN. It shows that the two participants not only communicate on MSN but also send emails to one another, they keep contact through various media. There is no response by Li in day four to George's message, but only one turn of talk by George. Thus, there is no conversation that occurs in day four though George attempts to open one. It seems that George's words in this day are both opening and closing deals at the same time. Li gives his reply in the next day (day five). He opens the conversation with an explanation of his not replying on time to George's inquiry in day four. In turn 2 and 3 of day five, the two participants talk about the cargo offer that George presents in day four. The opening of day five is the response of Li to George's words the day before. Li's words in day five turn 1 not only initiate the conversation in day five but also a late reply to George's inquiry in day four. Here the extract shows a phenomenon that an initiating sentence acts as both opening of a new day's conversation as well as a response to the former day's talk. It works as a bridge of the succession of two days' conversations. The opening of day four does not successfully opens a conversation between George and Li as Li is not available on day four. However, the relevant response happens in the next day, and it helps to open the conversation on day five.

The above extracts show late responses by the second party to the first participant who tries to initiate a conversation. During the time when the second party gives no response, he/she is temporarily not available for the conversation. When the second party finally responds, there is a continuity, and the conversation is set up. In each case, the late response of the second party acts as another opening of the conversations. While it at the same time shows the willingness of the second party responding to the first party's words as well as his/her willingness to open another conversation with the
initiator. It also indicates the close relation of the participants that one is important to another and his/her words are not to be ignored, and both are willing to keep in contact with each other.

The analysis section tracks the emergence of a relationship between the participants. It shows how the participants connect to one another online as strangers, they set up an affiliation by going through the admittance process, get acquainted by politely introducing one another. Through their continuous MSN conversations, the participants get to know each other better and better. The way they open their conversations online changes as time goes by, and the participants gradually grow a business/friendly relationship. Different openings of their conversations indicate different stages of the participants' interpersonal relationship at different times.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The thesis studies various kinds of openings of CMC/IM via a chatting software MSN which happens in a business setting of shipping industry in a special region. It has similarities as well as dissimilarities compared to ordinary conversation and telephone conversation. The study delivers the emergence and growth of a relationship between the participants while they change their ways in opening their conversations online.

Current data is constituted by logs of continuous conversations in a relatively long period of time between the participants. In the three cases, Li and George in case 1 later meet each other in person, they exchange lots of personal information of themselves to one another in their MSN conversations, talking about their private live, interests and hobbies, etc., and become friends; Xu and Rick in case 2 are happy for their first business contract and continue seeking for their second chance of cooperation; while Anh and S in case 3 work their way on and keep in contact regularly as business partners. The conversations between the participants go on beyond the current data; the relationship between the participants may also change as time goes on.
as they continue making more contacts online.

This thesis finds several interesting interactional phenomena in the current data of CMC/IM. Firstly, the admittance process of MSN which has no record in the current data can be seen as the first adjacency pair of conversation between the participants. There is a request made by one participant and a positive responding made by the second, which together achieve the making connection of the two participants. In result of the admittance process, the participants can talk to one another on MSN, which is the proof of the accomplishment of the interaction of their first adjacency pair of conversation of requesting and answering. The admittance process is important and should not be ignored as it is the first encounter of the participants and their starting point of talking online on MSN. The participants are actually starting their communication in the admittance process but not after it. There might be a brief self-introduction of one participant to another in order to gain the permission of the other to enter his/her contact list in the admittance process, the introduction may offer the preliminary identity of the participant, which may help in setting the subjects and the style of their conversations between the participants later on, and the subjects and the style of the conversations may then affect the interpersonal relationship between them. For instance, if a person introduces himself/herself as a professional in the same trade to another person, the conversations between them after the admittance process will most probably be related to the industry, though other topics might be involved as well, and the business related topics may cause the building of a business relationship between the participants. In this case, the admittance process of MSN establishes the fundamentals of the interpersonal relationship of the participants. However, the participants' relationship may change over time as their communication continues. Second, the gradually emergence of a relationship between the participants can be traced through their exchange of textual words online as in the current data, though as mentioned earlier in the previous research, there might be other media involved in the communication of the participants in a workplace when using CMC/IM as conversational channel, such as email, fax, telephone, etc.. By studying the openings of their conversations on MSN, the process of the emerging relationship between the
participants is shown. Through the different ways that the participants open their conversations online in the current data, this thesis catches a glimpse of how the participants first make a connection online, how they start talking to one another and get acquainted, and how they get to know each other better, how they change or promote their relation day by day in their continuous conversations. Third, in the process of growing a relationship in-and-through their conversations, the participants have no visual or auditive cues as in face-to-face encounter or in the telephone conversation, the exchanging of typing textual words are the most powerful communication factor which not only exchange information, ideas, feelings of the participants, but in fact support and accomplish the emergence of a relationship between them.
References


Issacs, Ellen; Walendowski, Allan; Whittaker, Steve; Schianno, Diane J.; and Kamm, Candace (2002). The Character, Functions, and Style of Instant Messaging in the


Press.


