Assessing information literacy instruction in the virtual sphere

Paula R. Dempsey
Research Services & Resources Librarian

Introduction
Research question: How do relational cues such as greetings, introductions, softeners, and courtesy in IM chat openings influence engaged learning?
Why it matters: Awareness of how opening bids shape IM chat interactions empowers librarians to seize the teachable moment.
Theory: Relational cues frame opening bids as conversation and establish mutual roles of participants.

Data & method
- Transcripts (n=411) from one week of IM chat reference at two academic libraries (figure 1)
- Detailed, turn-by-turn qualitative analysis with NVivo software
- Coded students’ opening bids and librarians’ first responses for relational cues
- Ranked top 50 words longer than 4 characters (figure 2)
- Calculated duration from time stamps (figure 3)
- Assessed librarians’ efforts to engage students in learning (instruction) or to provide information (service) (figure 4)

Results
2. Word frequency of opening exchanges showing relational cues

3. Chat duration comparison

4. Percentage of chats in which ...

Discussion
- Librarians at Purple U. return more greetings (89% vs. 24% at Green U.) (figure 2).
- Chats are longer on average (29% at Purple U., 22% at Green U.) when students enter the conversation with relational cues (figure 3).
- Relational cues correlate with longer chats, more instruction, less direct service, and more enthusiastic gratitude (figure 4).

Conclusions & next steps
Students who open without relational cues display an instrumental understanding of the interaction. Librarians should recognize abrupt openings as an opportunity to clarify mutual goals. Librarians need strategies – and time to focus – to re-frame instrumental openings as collaborative learning.

Further information
For data samples, coding definitions, and relevant literature, please see: http://researchguides.uic.edu/dempseyLAC

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References