Summary

(T2A)

MultiChat: A Multi-Person, Browser-Based, Real Time Text-as -You-Type Chat System Designed to Facilitate Face-to-Face and In-Class Interaction Between Deaf and Hearing Students

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Multichat is a multiple-person chat utility that operates within a Web browser. It differs from other chat clients in that

- It transmits text as you type (rather than when you hit a "send" button), and therefore permits much tighter conversational interaction.

- It is cross-platform and operates within a standard-issue Web browser.

- Text is displayed in virtual "post-it notes" into which users can type, rather than in a single sequential transcript. This keeps everything one person has typed in a single location, and accommodates up to 10 people without falling prey to the "scroll into oblivion" syndrome that occurs in conventional chat systems when more than 3 to 5 users are actively participating.

- Multichat's original prototype was designed by deaf and hearing students in a course on interface design to facilitate face to face conversations between deaf and hearing students. We have used a prototype software developed in the last 5 months with encouraging results in several classroom scenarios:

- Real-time, "natural" conversation in mixed classrooms with deaf students and hearing students and/or faculty.

- Projected on the wall, as a way of conducting class discussions and exercises so that all students can participate (and read each other's contributions) in parallel on equal footing.

- A third possible application scenario would involve delivery of real-time captions, video and/or PowerPoint's to adjacent panels in a Web page. This would allow deaf students to have multiple information streams encompassed within a single field of view.

Our presentation will explain the design considerations that led to this software, demonstrate the system, discuss our experiences in the classroom, possible extensions and applications, and solicit suggestions and collaborations that will improve utility and increase adoption.