Mood – Expressing Instant Messaging Client

Michael Parmakis

CS 465 – project proposal (second draft)
One of the limitations of instant messaging is the difficulty of expressing a user's mood or emotions. Early attempts to convey mood in text-based communication include the ASCII emoticons “:-)” and “:-{“. These were later converted into graphical images like “😊” and “😢” to give them a more human look. More recently, IM users have developed a system of abbreviations such as “LOL” to express emotional actions, in this case “laughing out loud”. While these are useful, they are all limited by the fact that they are somewhat detached from the message; that is, in order to express the emotion, you must add something in addition to the message you are trying to send.

Instant messengers are used by a wide audience, both professionally and recreationally. Presumably a “moody” client like the one I propose would be more appropriate for recreational IM users.

The project I am proposing is an instant messaging client that allows users to express moods and emotions in a message rather than in addition to a message. This could be done by something as simple as changing colors, fonts, backgrounds, changing the direction of the flow of text (for example, making a line of text curve downward to mimic a smiley face to express happiness), or a combination of these. Animations could also be used, for instance words could move around slightly in the middle of a sentence to represent nervousness. When designing these expressions, it will be important to ensure that they convey the correct mood or emotion, they are easy to apply to a message, and they do not make the message difficult to read (admittedly, readability will be affected, but hopefully it will be minimal).

Potential problems with this idea include the difficulty of working with
several colors. The interface will have to maintain a 10:1 contrast ratio so the text is readable, but it cannot send a mixed message in terms of the mood that the user wishes to convey. For example, if we use a red background to express anger, the text in front of that background will have to be contrasting without conveying a different mood. In the cases, the changing of colors may have to be abandoned altogether in favor or some other approach.

Another problem is that different colors mean different things to different cultures. Red, for example, means something completely different in America than it does in China. In a larger scale project, using localized settings could easily solve this problem; the same mood or emotion in the US version would be translated to a different effect in the Chinese version. However, we will probably ignore this problem since we are working on a small-scale research project.