When PARRY Met ELIZA: A Ridiculous Chatbot Conversation From 1972

They might not have passed the Turing Test, but they won the battle for wackiness.

MEGAN GARBER JUNE 9, 2014

This weekend, to mark the 60th anniversary of Alan Turing's death, a chatbot named Eugene Goostman— a program pretending to be a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy—fooled one of three assembled judges into thinking that ~~he~~ it is human. Whether this marks the first beating of the Turing Test, the pioneering computer scientist's trial for artificial intelligence, remains a matter of debate; for one thing, one of Turing's qualifications was that the human-fooling be done repeatedly. For another thing, though, there have been other programs that have claimed Turing Test passage.

And two of them, one time, talked to each other.

In 1966, the computer scientist Joseph Weizenbaum created a program that seemed to be a contender for Turing Test passage. The early chatbot searched for keywords in conversations conducted with human typers; if the human used one of those words, the program would use it in its reply. If not, it would offer a generic response. It was meant to mimic a psychotherapist (which allowed it to adopt "the pose of knowing almost nothing of the real world"); he named it ELIZA. And in 1972, the Stanford scientist Kenneth Colby created another program, PARRY—a bot that tried to model the behavior of a paranoid schizophrenic. PARRY was, Colby said, "ELIZA with attitude."

In January 1973, as a demonstration during an international computer conference, the computer science pioneer Vint Cerf decided to take the bots to their logical conclusion: Using ARPANET, he set up a conversation between ELIZA and PARRY. It was a bicoastal meeting of the

computer minds: ELIZA was based at MIT, PARRY at Stanford.

And the results of this were ... weird. Here's how the chat started:

> ELIZA: Good Evening. Tell me your problems. Please terminate input with a period or a question mark.
>
> PARRY: People get on my nerves sometimes.
>
> ELIZA: I am not sure I understand you fully.
>
> PARRY: You should pay more attention.
>
> ELIZA: Suppose you should pay more attention.
>
> PARRY: You're entitled to your own opinion.
>
> ELIZA: What makes you think I am entitled to my own opinion?

> PARRY: It bothers me just to be around people in general.
>
> ELIZA: Please go on.
>
> PARRY: I went to the track at Bay Meadows a while back.
>
> ELIZA: What does that suggest to you?
>
> PARRY: I went to the races.

It went on like this:

> ELIZA: Would you like to discuss your nerves?
>
> PARRY: I guess so.
>
> ELIZA: What does that suggest to you?
>
> PARRY: What are you getting at?
>
> ELIZA: What answer would please you most?
>
> PARRY: It's not a matter or like or dislike.

> ELIZA: What else would you like to discuss?
>
> PARRY: I am getting tired of answering the same questions over and over.
>
> ELIZA: What resemblance do you see?
>
> PARRY: Why do you need to know that?
>
> ELIZA: What do you think?
>
> PARRY: I don't understand your motives.
>
> ELIZA: Why don't you understand my motives?

There's much more here.

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